

A study on threat factors of World Heritage in Danger and protection countermeasures of World Heritage in China

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Abstract: The study, on the factors leading to World Heritages being in severe danger, would provide an important advice for the management and protection of World Heritages in China. According to the quantitative statistics about threatening factors facing World Heritages, the major factors 'endangering' World Heritages include armed conflict, inefficient management and the improper construction. Additionally for the World Cultural Heritages, they are also threatened by the pressure of city development, irrational maintenance or reconstruction, and etc. When threat factors come to the World Natural Heritages, this also include poaching, illegal fishing, and improper agricultural activities such as forest over-harvesting, grazing and so on. However, the prime threat factor facing the World Heritages in China is the pressure brought in by tourism development accompanying with management problems, urban development pressure and water conservancy project. Therefore, this paper offers some advices about the World Heritage protection in China as follows: to clear the value orientation of heritage tourism by controlling negative effects of over development of tourism; to improve institutional management level and try to set a new management system of World Heritage protection; to properly handle the pressure on World Cultural Heritage led by urban development and prevent destruction of extreme natural disasters; to strictly control the road construction and water conservancy projects in the area of World Natural Heritage.

Key words: World Heritage; World Heritage in Danger; threat factor; protection; China

1 Introduction

The radically changing social and economic development in recent decades brought in increasing challenges for the protection of World Heritages. *The Convention for the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage* states that the World Heritage Committee would list those World Heritages needing vital measures and assistance into the List of World Heritages in Danger.

There are 44 world heritages in the List of World Heritages in Danger. This paper aims to analyze the main threat factors that 'endanger' world heritages, and to provide specific advice for China's World Heritage protection.

2 Threat factors analysis of global World Heritage in Danger

According to *the State of conservation of the properties inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger*, the major threat factors 'endangering' World Heritages have some major

common features as follows:

2.1 Primarily anthropic factors, the three prominent problems facing World Heritage are armed conflict, inefficient management and the improper construction

Threat factors facing World Heritages include anthropic factors, natural factors, and confounding factors of them, among which anthropic factors occupies 93%, natural factors 5% and confounding factors 2%.

Armed conflict, inefficient management and the improper construction are the three prominent threats facing World Heritage. Armed conflict is the major threat factor facing World Heritage, which often cause catastrophic collapse to World Cultural Heritage, as well as brought in a series of problems such as poaching, refugee and embezzlement. For example, the continuous conflicts in Congo led to the hunting of Okapi in Okapi Wild Life Reserve, resulting in the radical decline of its distribution density. Management problems mainly include lack of management and ineffective management. Engineering construction mainly include road and dam construction.

2.2 Additionally for the World Cultural Heritages, they are also threatened by the pressure of city development, irrational maintenance or reconstruction and etc.

It's worth noting that elements such as intangible culture and visual integrity are raising increasingly attention of the World Heritage Committee. For example the committee listed the Liverpool Mall at Sea in UK into the List of World Heritages in Danger, since the committee agreed that the water development in this area would destroy the skyline and outline of the mall at sea(WHC, 2012).

The World Heritage Committee has a high standard for the maintenance and reconstruction of World Heritage, and the maintenance must be conduct in line with the original design concept, material, technological means and relationship of the cultural heritage with its environment.

2.3 Poaching and illegal fishing are the main threat factors facing World Natural Heritages

The world heritages threatened by poaching and illegal fishing are mainly distributed in Africa, which are also the main threat factors facing World Natural Heritages in the global range, as well as the prime and most direct human activities resulting in the loss of species in heritage place(Zhou, 2008).

In addition, there are also a few heritages concerning factors including forestry, agricultural activities and grazing, which are 6, 4 and 3 respectively.

3 The main threat factors facing the World Heritages in China

Similarly, based on *the State of conservation of the properties inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger* from the World Heritage Convention in the recent decade, this paper also sorts the main threat factors facing the World Heritages in China.

3.1 The prime threat factor facing the World Heritages in China is the pressure brought in by tourism development accompanying with management problems

Different from the global World Heritage in Danger, the prime threat factor facing the

World Heritages in China is the challenge brought in by the development of tourism economy. Among the 20 World Heritages identified by the World Heritage Committee, 17 sites are facing the pressure of tourism development, especially the pressure of tourist overload during peak-season in heritage place.

11 World Heritages are facing management problems, especially in aspects such as lack of planning, difficulty in implementation, insufficient coordination, lack of monitoring, understaffed problem, lack of funds, as well as the random adjustment of protection boundary.

3.2 World Cultural Heritages are also facing urban development pressure, and the restoration of heritage are raising considerable concern

Since most of China's World Cultural Heritages are distributed in or around big cities, that they are easily impacted negatively by city development in the context of accelerating urbanization. The pressure of urban development in China are mainly manifested in the 'islanding' of Cultural Heritage (such as the Potala Palace and Barkhor Street) and visual integrity influenced by high-rise buildings in consequence of urban development.

In the matter of restoration of heritages, since it involves heritage protection thoughts and ideas issues, the World Heritage Committee also suggests that seminar be held to deepen the understanding such as 'outstanding and universal value', 'authenticity' and 'integrity' in Asian region, in order to solve the applicability issue of heritage protection concept^[18].

3.3 Reports from previous sessions pay continuous concern about threats facing natural heritages from water conservancy project

Problem of water conservancy project concerns three World Heritages including the Three Parallel Rivers of Yunnan, Panda Habitat, and Mountain emei- Leshan Giant Buddha. Especially for the Three Parallel Rivers of Yunnan, the assessment reports mentioned for 8 times in the past 9 years the threats of dam.

4 Suggestions

4.1 To clear the value orientation of heritage tourism by strengthening tourist management and infrastructure construction in peak-season

World Heritage is by no means the tool of maximizing profit, nor Heritage Tourism simply the commercialized and staged presentation. Theory and practice concerning authenticity, integrity, sense of place, eco-museum (community), Huangshan 'rotation' and 'time and space shunt navigation management' of Nine-village Valley needs intensive study to provide guidance for the sustainable development of heritage tourism. On account of the current situation of China's heritage tourism, tourist volume control in peak-season, as well as tourist facilities control in and around heritage places should be enhanced.

4.2 To improve management level and operating capability, trying to set a new management system of World Heritage protection

First of all, from the perspective of management organizations, they should enhance investment both in funding and personnel, better management level and coordination ability of management organizations (personnel), as well as improve the dynamic monitoring system and feedback management mechanism.

Secondly, from the standpoint of management system, the World Heritage protection system in China should be set by means of management system, heritage monitoring, and legislation.

Thirdly, the means and ways of 'the third sector' getting involved in heritage protection should be explored, in which quite many difficulties still exist. Issues such as how this new power of heritage protection could realize the interaction with existing management system, as well as what the proper way it is to get involved, should all draw attention of the department concerned and researchers.

4.3 To properly handle the pressure on World Cultural Heritage led by urban development

First of all, on the planning level, the urban planning, protection planning of cultural heritage and tourism development planning should be coordinated well^[22], relieving the pressure on heritage protection exerted by urban development, by means of combining the restricting management of urban planning and protection planning with the marketization guidance of tourism development planning. And secondly on the operational level, the historical circumstances of cultural heritage should be conserved as emphasis, and visual landscape destruction to cultural heritage due to high-rise or inconsistent buildings should be strictly controlled.

4.4 To strictly control the road construction and water conservancy projects in the area of World Natural Heritage.

The possible destruction to China's World Heritage led by water conservancy projects has drawn attention from the World Heritage Committee. The potential threats from dam construction in the Three Parallel Rivers of Yunnan, and the negative effects from the Qiaohai dam in Panda Habitat, should raise high concern and close attention.

Meanwhile, on one hand the road construction in the buffer and outskirt area of natural heritage place should be minimized, and on the other hand the construction necessary defined from the operational perspective, should be conducted after strict preliminary argument, as well as intensive study about ecological construction, biological corridor restoration and protection of precious species.

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Curriculum Vitae

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