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ARTICLE



Comparing landscape values and heritage stakeholders: a case study of West Lake Cultural Landscape of Hangzhou, China

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ABSTRACT

In the World Heritage nomination process, the UNESCO World Heritage Programme has historically privileged the discourse of international experts and downplayed that of stakeholders. Taking *West Lake Cultural Landscape of Hangzhou* as an example, this paper compares and analyses the perspectives expressed by international experts, Chinese heritage professionals, local residents and domestic tourists. In the World Heritage nomination and evaluation processes for West Lake undertaken between 2007 and 2011, international experts did not appear to fully comprehend the values articulated by Chinese authorities due to the differences between Chinese and Western cultural histories, philosophies and heritage value systems. The discourse of tourists and local residents, on the other hand, not only engaged with the traditional and contemporary Chinese cultural values embodied in West Lake, but also linked them to personal emotions, experiences and memories, thereby constructing diverse expressions of social value. The case example supports the position that the nomination of World Heritage sites take into account the knowledge and experience of all stakeholders, especially with regard to constructions and justifications of heritage value.

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Situating West Lake Cultural Landscape

Since China became a signatory to the UNESCO *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (hereafter *World Heritage Convention*) in 1985, the UNESCO World Heritage programme has pushed Chinese heritage practice to constantly review conservation concepts and practices, innovate conservation techniques, and move towards higher standards (Luy 2008). Zhang (2020) has argued that, under the impetus of the World Heritage programme, the concept of heritage conservation and management in China has gone through three stages – exploration, familiarity and active participation. During the ‘exploration stage’ (1985 to the early 2000s), Chinese citizens became increasingly aware of ideas of heritage, and local governments began to promote the identification, nomination and listing of heritage places (Yan 2018). In the period until 2000, 24 Chinese properties were inscribed on the World Heritage List – four ‘mixed sites’, three ‘natural sites’ and 17 ‘cultural sites’; and China actively explored how cultural and natural heritage protection could be aligned with international approaches and standards.

The ‘familiarity stage’ in China’s engagement with World Heritage extended from the World Heritage Committee’s adoption of the *Cairns Decision*¹ in 2000 to the successful inscription of the *West Lake Cultural Landscape of Hangzhou* on the World Heritage List in 2011 (Du and Zhou 2019). The *Cairns Decision* aimed at improving representation on the World Heritage List, and included the

requirement that the number of nominations submitted by each State Party (i.e. country) be limited to one per year. Due to this change, China's nomination strategy began to be adjusted. Standards for heritage practice began to be developed, including the adoption of the China ICOMOS *China Principles* in 2000 (revised in 2015) – premised on a holistic approach to the preservation of heritage sites and adopted by China's National Cultural Heritage Administration (NCHA) (Li 2019). However, new trends in World Heritage processes and practices, including the adoption of new cultural site categories such as 'cultural landscape', 'cultural route' and 'industrial heritage', were not actively engaged with by China in its World Heritage nominations during this period. For example, both *Lushan National Park* (inscribed 1996) and *Mount Wutai* (inscribed 2009) were initially nominated by China as 'mixed sites' to the World Heritage List, although China was subsequently persuaded by World Heritage experts to change the listing category to 'cultural landscapes'.² As scholar Feng Han (2012) comments, these listings were seen as problematic by China because 'cultural landscape' is a sub-category of 'cultural site', whereas 'mixed site'³ was seen to better embrace both natural and cultural heritage and, thus, better recognise the essential nature-culture relationship as expressed in Chinese Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. It was only after 2009 that Chinese heritage scholars and practitioners found ways to adapt the 'cultural landscape' category to better represent Chinese perspectives (Han 2012).⁴

Du and Zhou (2019) and Zhang (2020) recognise the 'active participation stage' as beginning with the inscription of *West Lake Cultural Landscape of Hangzhou* (see UNESCO 2011a) as a Chinese 'cultural landscape' – that is, the first World Heritage nomination that China adapted and applied the 'cultural landscape' category so as to incorporate Chinese worldviews. In 2014, China successfully nominated two 'cultural routes': *Silk Roads: the Routes Network of Chang'an-Tianshan Corridor*⁵; and *The Grand Canal*. In 2019, the successful inscription of *Migratory Bird Sanctuaries along the Coast of Yellow Sea-Bohai Gulf of China (Phase I)* reflected China's determination to protect globally endangered species in line with its obligations under the *Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance*. At the present time, China is actively submitting heritage nominations, promoting community participation, focusing on living heritage, and actively engaged in the work of the World Heritage Committee (China is one of the 21 members of the World Heritage Committee and the current Chair is a Chinese official – Mr. Tian Xuejunand). China hosted the 44th session of the World Heritage Committee from 16–31 July 2021.

In 2011, *West Lake Cultural Landscape of Hangzhou* was successfully inscribed on the World Heritage List as a 'cultural landscape', which was a milestone in the transition from the 'familiarity stage' to the 'active participation stage' in China's World Heritage practice (Du and Zhou 2019; Zhang 2020). In the World Heritage nomination process for West Lake, China expressed the relationship between culture and nature through the Chinese philosophy of 'the harmony of people and nature' (UNESCO 2011b), despite the listing being recognised in the World Heritage system as a cultural site only (Han 2012; Brown 2018). Given, and in part because of, this complex categorisation and 'pigeonholing', there remain a number of significant heritage values related to West Lake that have not been recognised or understood by international experts. This paper will analyse the discourses between Chinese heritage specialists and international heritage experts during the World Heritage nomination and evaluation processes for West Lake (i.e. in the period 2007–2011). We also compare the similarities and differences between expert heritage discourses with the perspectives and sentiments of local residents and tourists in understandings of the significant values associated with West Lake.

World Heritage programme and international discourse

On 16 November 1972, the General Conference of UNESCO adopted the *World Heritage Convention*. The Convention expressed the appreciation of and concern by the international community for the recognition of the world's most outstanding examples of cultural diversity and natural wealth. The Convention came into force on 19 December 1975, with the first General Assembly of State Parties taking place in 1976. The *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (hereafter *Operational Guidelines*), first drafted in 1977 and subsequently regularly revised, provide the 'rules' for the implementation of the Convention (UNESCO 2021). For example, they establish criteria for

Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), evaluation in relation to authenticity, integrity and protective measures, and the processes for nomination, evaluation and listing. The World Heritage programme has achieved remarkable results in its 49 years of operation. At December 2021, there were 1,121 properties inscribed on the World Heritage List (869 are cultural, 213 are natural and 39 are mixed cultural and natural sites), across 167 States Parties. The UNESCO World Heritage programme has become influential worldwide and is justifiably recognised as a 'flagship programme of UNESCO' (Cameron and Rossler, 2013, xiii).

Heritage scholar Sophia Labadi (2013) argues that UNESCO's emphasis on 'universal' values is Eurocentric because, firstly, the World Heritage programme defines heritage too narrowly, describing cultural heritage as monuments, groups of buildings and archaeological sites and natural heritage as natural features, geological and physiographical formations and natural sites, the latter including constructs of 'natural beauty' (UNESCO 1972, articles 1 and 2). Secondly, the discourse on the assessment of the value of World Heritage properties is dominated by disciplinary experts within the *World Heritage Convention* Advisory Bodies – the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM). The experts within these international conservation bodies have traditionally been from Europe and/or countries influenced by Western heritage approaches (e.g. the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) (Logan 2001), although this situation has changed markedly in recent years.

International experts (including heritage and landscape architects, archaeologists and art historians) continue to have considerable authority in the formulation of heritage values (cf. Avrami et al. 2019), and the ways in which criteria for OUV are justified. The fact that close to 50% of World Heritage listed sites are located in Europe is a consequence of the concept of heritage being based on a Western philosophical mindset that creates a Eurocentric bias (Yan and Xie 2020). The UNESCO World Heritage Committee has been aware of this problem for almost three decades and has sort to make the World Heritage List more representative, balanced and credible, as well as responsive to changing constructs of heritage. China's role in this process is evident through its influence as a World Heritage Committee member, although the nature of the Committee's decision-making processes has been subject to considerable scholarly critique. For example, heritage scholar Lynn Meskell (2018) notes that, over the last decade, the power relations in the decision-making processes of the World Heritage Committee have shifted from the dominance of Western states and their reliance on particular framing discourses to the political 'soft power' exercised by State Parties such as China (see also Meskell et al. 2015; Liuzza and Meskell 2021). Meskell argues that China (as well as Brazil, India, South Africa and the Russian Federation) uses its position to counter the privileging of Western heritage discourse at Committee meetings.

In December 1992, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee adopted the concept and category of cultural landscape (Brown 2018). In part, the aim was to address the imbalance between the numbers of cultural and natural properties inscribed on the World Heritage List, although the 'imbalance was exacerbated by the decision to consider cultural landscapes as cultural sites' (Cameron and Rossler, 2013, 70). The *Operational Guidelines* define cultural landscape as 'combined works of nature and humankind' and classify cultural landscapes into three categories: 'designed landscapes'; 'organically evolved landscapes'; and 'associative cultural landscapes' (UNESCO 2021, paragraph 47). The recognition of the cultural landscape category illustrates the willingness of the World Heritage system to incorporate new ideas – in this case, expanding the categories of World Heritage properties. The category of cultural landscape has enabled increasingly diverse expressions concerning the relationship between human and nature in the creation of heritage places.

The concept of cultural landscape has played an important role in enabling World Heritage nominations and management processes to align with different worldviews, including some Asian philosophies and the value systems of First Nations peoples. Nevertheless, a number of issues have emerged. Some scholars have pointed out that the justifications for assessing the values of cultural landscapes are still dominated by Western experts, while the discourse and perspectives of other heritage users, such as tourists, local people, minorities and women, remain marginalised (Smith and Waterton 2009), and that every country has distinctive regional cultural landscapes which hold diverse values for their local

community(s). To understand these values, heritage practitioners need to engage with local people. Zhang and Taylor (2020) argue that cultural landscape is a process and a tool or method for bridging culture and nature and, thus, assists in framing and understanding heritage values. The challenges to achieving this outcome include the range of methods to be used, the processes needed to evaluate the values of cultural landscapes, and the ways in which stakeholders are engaged and equitably participate in developing World Heritage nominations.

Research on heritage discourse

At the beginning of the 21st century, the field of critical heritage studies came into being. The field expanded the scope of 'heritage studies' to emphasise cultural heritage as a political, social and cultural phenomenon (Gentry and Smith 2019). A key concept in critical heritage studies is the 'Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD)', a construct proposed by heritage scholar Laurajane Smith (2006). AHD is a phrase used to describe a 'dominant Western discourse about heritage' that 'privileges expert values and knowledge about the past and dominates and regulates professional heritage practices' (Smith 2006, 4). AHD is used to explain the practices of assessing, protecting and preserving historic buildings, sites or landscapes from an expert perspective, by emphasising historical, aesthetic and scientific values and viewing material heritage as finite, fragile and non-renewable. In World Heritage terms, AHD describes the transmission of OUV through a series of Western-dominated, top-down norms, standards and global systems. The focus of authorised discourse tends to be on historic, aesthetic and scientific values whereby values are recognised as inherent – rather than ascribed by stakeholder communities. Therefore, a key theme of critical heritage studies is to critique and undermine the monopoly of the AHD, dominated by Western expertise, and to embrace more democratic and diverse community conceptions of heritage. In other words, critical heritage studies focus on groups that are marginalised in heritage discourse and practices and, thus, seeks to interpret the meanings of heritage from new perspectives (Cameron and Rossler 2013, xiii).

The research work of this paper sits within the field of critical heritage studies. In line with this field, we resist views of heritage as a thing, place or material object, although recognise the important role of material elements. Rather, we view heritage as a dynamic social and cultural process in which multiple layers of values and meanings are attributed by individuals and cultural groups to heritage items. Heritage as social and cultural process is inclusive of expertise – as in World Heritage policies and practices – as well as the contemporary users of heritage, including local residents and tourists. These latter groups are not simply passive receivers of 'official discourse' (e.g. World Heritage narratives), but also actively construct contemporary social and cultural values of heritage. Through visiting heritage sites, local residents and visitors intermingle their personal experiences and knowledge with feelings, emotions and memories to create their meanings for heritage (Zhang, Wang, and Brown 2021). Taking West Lake as an example, this paper compares and analyses the similarities and differences between the views of World Heritage authorities (i.e. World Heritage Committee, Advisory Bodies and World Heritage Centre) and those of the Chinese professionals engaged in the West Lake nomination process. We also consider the discourses constructed by local residents and tourists during their visits to West Lake; and argue for such perspectives being incorporated into World Heritage nomination and management processes.

Research Methods

Documentary sources

For this study, we have reviewed two key sources: the *ICOMOS Report for West Lake Cultural Landscape* (ICOMOS 2011) and *West Lake World Heritage Nomination Dossier* (NCHA (National Cultural Heritage Administration) 2011). Our review analyses the similarities and differences between the discourses applied by ICOMOS experts (the ICOMOS report) and Chinese heritage professionals (the *Nomination Dossier*).

Interviews with government officials and experts

This study also draws from in-depth interviews undertaken between November 2013 and October 2018 with: a national official (coded as GO002) from China's National Cultural Heritage Administration (NCHA); a local government official (WL141) from the Cultural Heritage Monitoring and Management Centre of West Lake (CHMMCWL), the group responsible for developing the West Lake World Heritage nomination); and three experts (WL142, WL143 and WL144) from the Chinese Institute of Architectural History (IAH), who were directly responsible for the preparation of the *World Heritage Nomination Dossier*. The advantage of using in-depth interviews is that they can garner detailed information on processes, issues and challenges, provide informal anecdotes related to participant's experiences, and enable the interviewer to appreciate the contexts within which the work was undertaken. The interviews were semi-structured around questions that included: 1) What were the reasons for applying for World Heritage status? 2) Were there challenges in the nomination process for West Lake? and 3) Did international organisations, particularly ICOMOS and the World Heritage Committee, understand and appreciate the values elaborated by Chinese specialists?

Interviews with local communities and tourists

Between 2013 and 2018, one of the authors (RZ) interviewed 125 tourists and 83 Hangzhou residents visiting West Lake. Semi-structured interviews were used and are characterised by informal questioning conducted according to a predetermined format, where the interviewer has the freedom to ask questions related to the research topic according to the actual situation at the time of the interview, and has the flexibility to adjust the interview in response to each interviewee's interests. The interviews were conducted in public spaces (苏堤Su Causeway, 柳浪闻莺 Orioles Singing in the Willows, 雷峰塔Leifeng Pagoda, and West Lake Museum).

The framing questions for *tourists* included: 1) What are your reasons for visiting West Lake? 2) What experiences do you value when visiting this site? 3) What messages about the heritage or history of the site do you take away? 4) What aspects/values of West Lake are most valuable to you? The key questions for *local residents* included: 1) What aspects/values of West Lake are most valuable to you? 2) What are the messages or experiences that you hope visitors take away from their visits to West Lake? 3) Has the inscription of West Lake on the World Heritage List brought about changes in the way you use and understand the site?

The duration of interviews averaged about five minutes for tourists and 10 minutes for local residents. All interviews were conducted anonymously and were audio recorded – where interviewer consent was given – and transcribed by RZ. Where interviews were not recorded, detailed notes were made following the interview. The interviewees were numbered at the same time as the interviews to facilitate later analysis (coded as WL001, WL002, etc.). The interview format was generally one-on-one interviews. When group and household interviews were conducted, each interviewee was numbered separately.

Chinese heritage discourse versus international authorised discourse

West Lake Cultural Landscape is composed of a landscape pattern described as: 三面云山一面城 (mountains on three sides and the Hangzhou City on one side). The place incorporates a large number of structures and other cultural elements from the Sui Dynasty (AD 581–618) to the present (NCHA 2011). Since the Tang Dynasty (AD 618–907), the beauty of the West Lake landscape has been celebrated by countless literati and scholars. From the Southern Song Dynasty (AD 960–1279), the notion of 西湖十景 (Ten Poetically Named Scenic Places) of West Lake has been regarded as an idealised landscape in Chinese poetry and painting, and is said to illustrate the perfect blending of human and natural elements (Figure 1). In the Yuan Dynasty (AD 1271–1368), the Italian traveller

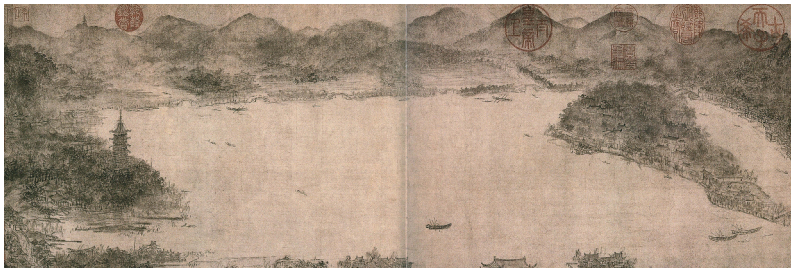


Figure 1. West Lake by Li Song, Southern Song Dynasty (AD 1127–1279). The aerial view from Hangzhou City looks west and shows the surrounding undulating mountains. 雷峰夕照 (Leifeng Pagoda in the Evening Glow) can be seen at the lower-left. First built in AD 977, the original Leifeng Pagoda collapsed in 1924 and was subsequently rebuilt in 2002. The red markings are the seals of Chinese Emperors from the Ming and Qing dynasties and are examples of the Sphragistics culture (the study of seals and signets) associated with West Lake. (Source: Collection of Shanghai Museum. Credit: NCHA (National Cultural Heritage Administration) 2011, 199).

Marco Polo described Hangzhou as the most beautiful and luxurious city in the world, the first of many international accolades that made West Lake globally famous (NCHA 2011). In 2011, at the 35th Meeting of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, *West Lake Cultural Landscape of Hangzhou* was successfully inscribed on the World Heritage List in recognition of its outstanding values in relation to World Heritage criteria (ii), (iii) and (vi) (UNESCO 2011a).

The success of the West Lake inscription on the World Heritage List is, to a large extent, the result of the efforts of Chinese professionals in striving to share understandings of traditional and contemporary heritage values in international heritage affairs (Chen, Fu, and Liu 2012). However, owing to cultural differences, it is our contention that experts from the World Heritage Committee and ICOMOS did not fully comprehend or appreciate the essence of the heritage values attributed to West Lake by Chinese heritage professionals. In this part of the paper we outline the ways in which Chinese professionals expressed the values of West Lake, such as ‘poetic sense’, to understand how these values were misrecognised by ICOMOS experts during the evaluation process; and to compare the differences between the World Heritage experts’ and the Chinese professionals’ positions in terms of diverse cultural history, contemporary and evolving meanings of West Lake, and the exclusion of 龙井茶园 (Longjing Tea Garden) from the nominated area.

The ‘poetic sense’ of West Lake

On 24 June 2011, *West Lake Cultural Landscape of Hangzhou* was inscribed on the World Heritage list. Zhang Jianting, Deputy-Mayor of Hangzhou, who oversaw the West Lake nomination process, wept with joy because he had been concerned that the misunderstanding of widely held local, national and regional values ascribed to West Lake would result in the nomination being rejected (China Daily 2011). Chinese professionals who prepared the West Lake nomination dossier stated that the process was extremely difficult, even though the nomination was successful. One interviewee said:

I stood in the 苏堤 (Su causeway) [Figure 2] with an UNESCO expert and explained to him the Chinese view of ‘poetic and artistic sensibility’. I said that Chinese poetry was originally intended to convey feelings by being read aloud, and that particular paintings must also be viewed to understand what certain poetry means. The Chinese philosophy is that humans stand in nature, and therefore can feel the emotion of poetry and the meaning of paintings from the [sounds of] water beating on the shore, the wind blowing and the birds singing. I think I explained this cultural meaning very clearly, but the UNESCO expert said that he didn’t feel anything!

(WL144, an IAH expert)

An official in charge of the West Lake nomination at the NCHA commented that:



Figure 2. The View from 苏堤 (Su Causeway) with a flowering camellia (right side of image). The 雷峰夕照 (Leifeng Pagoda in the Evening Glow) can be seen in the centre distance. Culturally symbolic plants, dating from the Song Dynasty, grow along the shores of West Lake and include the ‘Four Seasons Flowers’ – spring peach, summer lotus, autumn osmanthus and winter plum – which are associated with some features of the 西湖十景 (Ten Poetically Named Scenic Places). (Photo credit: Rouran Zhang).

After visiting West Lake, an ICOMOS expert from northern Europe did not understand the value of the West Lake at all, and asked: ‘Where is the OUV of West Lake when there are a number of lakes in my county that are larger and more beautiful than West Lake?’

(GO002, an NCHA official)

In response to the perceived inability of ICOMOS expert(s) to understand the Chinese values associated with West Lake, Chinese heritage professionals worked conscientiously to craft a response to the questions raised during the World Heritage evaluation process. One of the experts engaged in this work stated:

When I prepared the response to the World Heritage evaluation questions for West Lake, I studied the German psychologist Theodor Lipps about his theory of aesthetics, particularly the concept of ‘empathy’. I wanted to learn how to interpret nature from a European perspective in order to respond to ICOMOS’s questions. However, I found that Chinese people’s thoughts and ideas have never been divided into subject and object [as in European philosophies]; rather, there is a holistic idea of ‘harmony between humans and nature’ in Chinese philosophy. Therefore, we carefully studied the *Operational Guidelines* to more fully understand the criteria for World Heritage listing and set up a number of columns of research topics for West Lake, with the aim of distilling the core values of the West Lake according to the World Heritage criteria.

(WL144, an IAH Director)

This quote highlights the challenges of fitting non-Western, including Chinese, philosophies into the Western-oriented criteria for establishing OUV. We note that this matter is complicated in the World Heritage system because ‘natural beauty’ is a criterion applied to ‘natural sites’ and, thus, separate to ‘cultural sites’ and ‘cultural landscapes’. Furthermore, the cultural landscape category is a sub-category of cultural site, thus perpetuating a division between cultural and natural and, consequently, working against the harmonious intertwining of humans and nature – integral to historical and cultural understandings of West Lake. It is not surprising therefore that cultural contexts are necessarily mediated through the criteria in ways that necessitate the re-framing of non-Western philosophies.

In the end, the efforts of Chinese experts and government officials were successful to the extent that international ICOMOS expert evaluators came to recognise and appreciate the cultural essence of ‘nature as paintings’ and to ‘project one’s feelings onto the landscape’; or at least a distilled version of

this worldview. However, the successful inscription of West Lake does not mean that international experts fully understood the multiple values of West Lake from Chinese perspectives. There remain clear differences between the narrative of OUV as understood from the perspectives of the World Heritage experts and the Chinese authorities with regard to three aspects: West Lake's diverse cultural history; its contemporary, continuing and dynamic meanings; and its association with the Longjing Tea Garden.

The diverse history of West Lake

In the *West Lake World Heritage Nomination Dossier*, the Chinese experts argue that West Lake bears witness to a more than 1,000-year history of Chinese culture and tradition. Its diverse cultural history relates to Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, loyalty and filial piety, hermit life, collections of books, Tea-Zen,⁶ and Sphragistics⁷ (Figure 1) (NCHA 2011). West Lake's Buddhist landscape bears witness to the spread of Buddhism in southern China in the 12th century, from the time when the city of Hangzhou became a Zen shrine. West Lake's 'Ten Poetically Named Scenic Places' reflect the fusion of Buddhist thought and landscape. The tombstone of the hermit 林逋 (Lin Bu⁸) bears witness to the spread of hermit culture in East Asia. The cultivation of Longjing tea is thought to have influenced the culture of Tea-Zen in East Asia. 抱朴道院 (Baopu Taoist Temple) is the most important Taoist temple in China and the Temple of 岳飞 (Yue Fei⁹) is a symbol of loyalty and filial piety (NCHA 2011) (Figure 3). Collectively these features give meaning to West Lake on both tangible and spiritual levels.

飞来峰石刻梵山仙隐汪庄断桥残雪.

The diverse cultural history of West Lake was argued by Chinese specialists to be of outstanding universal value. However, international experts disagreed with the assertion of the Chinese professionals on this matter. The *ICOMOS Evaluation Report* treated each of the different strands of West Lake's cultural history (as summarised above and in Figure 3) as separate. The report argued that Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism could not be used as special proof of the outstanding universal value of West Lake because more extensive and important testimonies exist at other heritage sites, both nationally and internationally; and, equally, that West Lake does not carry OUV with regard to loyalty and filial piety, hermit culture, book collecting, Tea-Zen and Sphragistics (ICOMOS 2011, 145). As one local government official argued:

The ICOMOS experts did not understand the interlinked cultural dimensions of West Lake. They privileged the 'poetic' significance of West Lake and its influence on East Asian landscape design; the ICOMOS experts broke down the Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, loyalty and filial piety, hermit culture, collection of books, Tea-Zen and Sphragistics elements of West Lake's associations into separate historical strands, while our Chinese culture views these elements as a whole – and together form the cultural character of West Lake.

(WL141, CHMMCWL official)

The contemporary and continuing meanings of West Lake

The *West Lake Nomination Dossier* argued that the history of West Lake unfolded over 1,000-years – from the Tang Dynasty to the present day – and is an outstanding example of continuing cultural practices and worldviews with regard to re-making an ancient lagoon to create an elegant, designed landscape that contributes to quality of life (NCHA 2011). The significance of West Lake to contemporary Hangzhou is that it delivers ecological services, provides open space for recreation and contemplation, and supports tourism in the context of rapid urbanisation (NCHA 2011).

However, the *ICOMOS Report* indicates that international experts did not recognise West Lake as a continuing or living cultural landscape. Rather, the report took the position that the outstanding universal values of West Lake are associated with classical literature, art and culture, and creativity – attributes that emerged from the time of China's feudal empire and into the Qing dynasty (AD 1636–1911). The report did not consider the changes at West Lake after the Qing dynasty to be associated with OUV (ICOMOS 2011, 145). In response to this assessment, a Chinese specialist considered that:



Figure 3. Composite images that reflect the diverse cultural history of West Lake. 1. 飞来峰石刻 (Feilaifeng Rock Carving), Buddhist stone statues from the Five Dynasties (AD 907–960) to the Yuan Dynasty (AD 1271–1368) periods in China. 2. Lingyin Temple, which represents the hermit culture of West Lake. The memorial arch at Linying Temple is inscribed with the phrase: 梵山仙隱 (Seeking immortality in seclusion in the deep mountains). 3. 汪庄 (Wangzhuang) is located at the northern foot of the Leifeng Pagoda on the South Ping Mountain and is now used as a hotel. 4. 断桥残雪 (Lingering Snow on Broken Bridge) is one of the 'Ten Poetically Named Scenic Places'. 5. Longjing Tea Garden. 6. Yue Fei's sculpture in West Lake Museum, representing Chinese practices of loyalty and filial piety. Collectively these attributes convey the outstanding values of West Lake. (Credit: Rouran Zhang).

West Lake is constantly evolving and inherited, and our classification of West Lake as a cultural landscape is intended to reflect its continuous evolution and absorption of new cultural elements, with new values gradually taking shape. For example, the 'Ten Poetically Named Scenic Places' did not take shape overnight. From the Republican period (AD 1911–1949) to contemporary times, we have produced the 'New Ten Poetically Named Scenic Places of West Lake' based on historical records and local community input [Figure 4]. I believe that the process of continuous development is the essence of reflecting the cultural landscape; and that the ICOMOS experts reluctance to recognise West Lake as an evolving cultural landscape is incorrect.

(WL141, CHMMCWL official)

Longjing Tea Garden

The proposal by ICOMOS experts to remove Longjing Tea Garden from the 'core area' of the World Heritage property was a source of dismay and disappointment to the Chinese officials involved in the nomination process. In the *Nomination Dossier*, the authors argued that the Longjing Tea Garden represents the combination of Chinese tea and people's daily life and this historical and cultural association had a profound influence on the concept of Tea-Zen in East Asia. The Garden, they argued, is an important carrier of the regional culture of West Lake and an important component and expression of the 'integrity' of West Lake culture (NCHA 2011, 16). However, the *ICOMOS Report* considered the Longjing Tea Garden to be a 'farm' landscape with no cultural or aesthetic association with West Lake and, thus, to the OUV of West Lake (ICOMOS 2011, 145). The Report took the view that the tea plantations are overshadowed by the hills to the west of the Lake, implying that the visual disconnection was also a disconnection to OUV. Hence, the Report proposed that the boundary excluded the Longjing tea plantations area, including the associated villages, from the World Heritage 'core area' (ICOMOS 2011, 145–146).

In 2017, six years after the successful World Heritage inscription of West Lake, one of the experts involved in preparing the *West Lake Nomination Dossier* said:



Figure 4. One of the ‘New Ten Poetically Named Scenic Places of West Lake’ – 龙井问茶 (Searching Tea in Longjing Tea Garden). The houses, with white walls and tiled roofs, are traditional Hangzhou-style residences. Together, the houses, their settings and the tea plantations are significant for their deep cultural associations with the West Lake landscape. (Credit: NCHA (National Cultural Heritage Administration) 2011).

Drinking Longjing tea and visiting West Lake is a tradition in China since ancient times. We named it ‘Longjing-West Lake Cultural Landscape’ in the initial World Heritage nomination document. However, it was clear from the feedback from ICOMOS specialists that they did not understand the poetic meaning embodied in West Lake and thought the focus would be on the Longjing Tea Garden landscape. This was certainly not our intention, so – following approval by Hangzhou city leaders – the name of the nomination was agreed to be *West Lake Cultural Landscape of Hangzhou*; and we focused our nomination on demonstrating the poetic meaning of West Lake with the Longjing Tea Garden as a significant cultural element. While the international experts eventually recognised the poetic meaning of West Lake, they insisted that the Longjing Tea Garden had nothing to do with the poetic meaning embodied in West Lake. We then gathered evidence that showed the Longjing Tea Garden is a part of West Lake’s cultural significance, but the ICOMOS experts still disagreed and required that we remove the Longjing Tea Gardens from the World Heritage ‘core area’ to its ‘buffer zone’.¹⁰ We argued against this action many times, but to no avail. In order not to delay the submission of the nomination for West Lake, and with considerable regret, we chose to exclude the Longjing Tea Garden from the core area of the World Heritage site.

(WL144, IAH director)

Differences between Chinese heritage discourse and international authorised discourse

The analysis above describes how Chinese heritage professionals tried to demonstrate the essence of the values of traditional Chinese culture carried by West Lake, but found it impossible to satisfactorily explain the concepts to Western experts (especially in English). Subsequently, the Chinese authorities worked more closely with international documents, such as the *World Heritage Convention* and the *Operational Guidelines*, in order to explain and justify the values of West Lake – necessarily in the language of World Heritage (again in English). Ultimately, the World Heritage nomination evaluators recognised the ‘poetic and pictorial’ nature of the long-standing Chinese cultural expressions represented by West Lake, and its important role in landscape design and cultural influence on East Asian countries and beyond. However, the heritage narrative and discourse adopted by ICOMOS did not comprehend or appreciate the diverse cultural history, contemporary and continuing meanings, and the significant associations and interconnections between the Longjing Tea Garden and West Lake. These experts, who hold considerable power in the evaluation and inscription processes, gave Chinese authorities the impression that they did not understand the full suite and

interconnectedness of cultural landscape meanings. Consequently, Chinese authorities felt they had to acquiesce to ICOMOS's views on West Lake's OUV, thus – from their perspective – resulting in the World Heritage narrative of West Lake being misleading and incomplete.

Globally, some scholars have found that the World Heritage systems assessment of OUV (a form of AHD) can be at odds with the worldviews of local communities and the ways in which they value such places (Smith 2020, Zhang and Smith 2019). For example, Indigenous people from Madagascar consider the most important heritage value to be their spiritual connection to their ancestors through the land – a value aligned with World Heritage criterion (vi). However, the World Heritage Committee inscribed the *Rainforests of the Atsinanana* as a World Heritage property for its outstanding biodiversity values and not its interconnected spiritual values (Evers and Seagle 2012). This case exemplifies how the UNESCO World Heritage programme, shaped by a particular Western authorised discourse can, in some cases, fail to fully understand and be inclusive of cultural and natural values as held in local, national and regional contexts.

To this point, we have discussed the different perceptions of OUV as held by specialists from China and ICOMOS in the case of the West Lake World Heritage nomination and evaluation. However, whether the reasons for the different perceptions are associated with academic debates or a 'clash of discourses' warrants further exploration. We note that even in the case of cultural landscapes located within Europe, for example, there can be controversy in terms of which criteria they meet and which values they embody. A purpose of this paper is to highlight the challenges to the current World Heritage evaluation system with regard to cultural differences in valuing heritage places. For example, the interviews with Chinese professionals who participated in the West Lake nomination did not consider the exclusion of Longjing Tea Garden from the World Heritage 'core area' as a rational or culturally informed argument, but rather as a result of an unequal and Western-privileged heritage discourse.

We turn now to describe and discuss the ways in which Chinese tourists to and local residents of West Lake understand and express values associated with the World Heritage property.

West Lake: local resident and tourist perspectives

One of the authors (RZ) conducted on-site interviews with domestic visitors and residents of West Lake on four occasions between 2013 and 2018. Of the 125 *domestic tourists* interviewed, 51.2% (64) were male and 48.8% (58) were female. 25 to 34 year olds was the most interviewed age category (52.8%), followed by 18 to 24 year olds (24.8%). Most visitors had a high level of education, with 65.6% having some level of tertiary education. Of the 83 *local residents* interviewed, respondents were equally divided between male and female. 18 to 34 year olds was the most interviewed age category (53.0%), followed by 65 years and older (24.1%). The majority of local residents (73.5%) visited West Lake frequently (once a week), while 26.5% visited infrequently. The educational attainment of local residents was high, with 54.2% of residents (45 of 83) having some level of university education.¹¹

Table 1 comprises excerpts from the interviews that illustrate the values of West Lake as understood by local residents and tourists. The 'representative' quotations relate to particular values that were disputed between Chinese cultural specialists and ICOMOS heritage experts in the World Heritage nomination and evaluation processes. They relate to values discussed above, including the 'poetic sense' of West Lake, the diverse cultural history of the place, the contemporary and continuing meanings of West Lake, and the connection between Longjing Tea Garden and West Lake. These values were referenced by the majority of interviewees – local residents (74.6%) and tourists (69.6%).

The quotes in Table 1, and the interviews in general, illustrate how local residents and tourists articulated values for West Lake that, in general, align with those expressed by Chinese professionals. Firstly, local residents and tourists are influenced by Chinese philosophical thought and their words express genuine and positive emotions towards the poetic meaning of West Lake, reflecting the

Table 1. Responses to West Lake from local residents and tourists. The table comprises excerpts from interviews that illustrate understandings of the values of West Lake. (Credit: Rouran Zhang).

Local residents		Tourists
The 'poetic sense' of West Lake	I hope that visitors will come to see断桥残雪 (Lingering Snow on Broken Bridge) when the snow first melts; and to experience the meaning of三潭印月 (Three Pools Mirroring the Moon) on a bright moonlit night. (WL170, female, 55–64) I really enjoyed sitting at柳浪闻莺 (Orioles Singing in the Willows). The combination of the willows swaying in the mist and the crisp birdsong is a perfect visual and aural interpretation of the name. (WL179, female, over 65)	On the Broken Bridge and Leifeng Pagoda. I am thinking of the moment Su Dongpo and Baijiuyi were writing poetry, and I am right there drinking [wine] with them (laugh). (WL089, female, 35–44) (see also Zhang 2020, 121) Spring has a hundred flowers, autumn has a moon, summer has a cool breeze and winter has snow! A perfect representation of the four seasons of West Lake. (WL176, male, 35–44) West Lake on a rainy day, reflecting the mountains in the distance. Even with all the people around and the noisy environment, it instantly feels poetic, just like being in an ink, landscape painting. (WL182, male, 25–34) There are 36 West Lakes in the country; cultural diversity makes Hangzhou West Lake unparalleled amongst them. (WL162, male, 25–34) The Broken Bridge would be an ordinary bridge if it didn't have the cultural significance given by the White Snake Story. (WL167, male, 45–54)
The history of West Lake	West Lake is a heritage place where culture and nature are integrated. Originally there were 'Ten Poetically Named Scenic Places', but now 20 more have been added to the West Lake, making 30 views. These scenes tell the story of the cultural diversity of West Lake to everyone who visits. (WL155, male, 25–34)	When visiting the Yue Fei Temple, I was thinking why was such a good person executed because of false charges. There is good and evil in the world; sometimes good may take advantage, sometimes not. History is the best teacher. What can we learn from Yue Fei's case today? How could we know whether good or bad things happened? Why is history always repeated? These questions need deep consideration. (WL040, male, over 65) (see also Zhang 2020, 120)
Confucianism, loyalty and filial piety		In front of the ruins of 雷峰塔 (Leifeng Pagoda) I felt that at the bottom there were many social desires and I needed to find something peaceful, a Buddhist life. (WL189, female, 44–55)
Buddhist cultural influence	Connection between Tea-Zen and West Lake culture	When it comes to the taste of West Lake, the mellow aroma of Longjing tea is the best expression. (WL204, male, 45–54)
Hermit cultural influence	Hermit cultural influence	I hope one day to live in seclusion in the mountains by 林隱寺 (Lin Yin Temple) and forget the cares of the world. (WL200, male, 45–54)
Sphragistics cultural influence	If you know the 西泠印社 (Xiling Seal Engravers Society ¹²), you will also know the history of the development of sphragistics, calligraphy and painting in modern China. (WL159, male, 44–55)	When I was in my twenties, I had dreamed of these places, in particular, the 'Xiling Seal Engravers Society', which represents the earliest Chinese national academic institution on the research of epigraphy, sphragistics and seal-engraving. I am glad to see the development of this institute over the last ten years. (WL122, male, 55–64) (see Zhang 2020, 115)

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued).

Local residents		Tourists
The contemporary and continuing meanings of West Lake	West Lake has changed a lot in the past ten years. In the past, there were many fences and, every time I brought my friends here, I felt that my thoughts were blocked by fences. Now that the walls and ramshackle houses have been removed, it feels like West Lake belongs to the people again. (WL169, female, over 65)	I love the youth hostel on Nanshan Road, where different travellers exchange and share their stories. West Lake connects everyone together. (WL148, female, 24–35)
	West Lake has become even bigger. The 茅家埠 (Maojiabu area) [on the west side of West Lake], which was once full of waste land and buildings in disrepair, has now been turned into water over a 20-year period. This is the new development of West Lake. (WL174, female, 45–54) [See Figure 5]	
Connection between Longjing Tea Garden and West Lake	陆羽 (Lu Yu)'s 茶经 (The Book of Tea ¹³), which describes Longjing tea, is the earliest tea monograph in the world. Longjing tea culture has been constantly developed in each Chinese dynasty. [...] It is significant to the cultural integrity of West Lake, and enabled it to be inscribed on the World Heritage list. (WL097, female, 25–34)	Sit on the edge of the lake and taste Longjing tea, then I can feel the beauty of West Lake. (WL090, female, 35–44)

sentiment of 'project one's feelings onto the landscape'. Some visitors use rhetorical metaphors to describe their emotions and aesthetic feelings, while some recite their own poems to express feelings – as did ancient poets and scholars. Some visitors immerse themselves in their own imaginary space in ways that enable dialogue with the ancients. Secondly, local residents and tourists are able to express their personal understanding of Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, loyalty and filial piety, hermit culture, Tea-Zen and Sphragistics at West Lake in the context of their own experience and personal backgrounds. Thirdly, some tourists explicitly mention the contemporary meanings of heritage and history of West Lake, while local residents express their pride in new work undertaken around the Lake (Figure 5). Fourthly, both tourists and local residents actively link West Lake to the Longjing tea plantations from their own experiences and feelings, indicating that the Longjing Tea Garden is an integral and important part of West Lake's history and culture.



Figure 5. The Hangzhou Municipal Government expanded West Lake by 70 hectares (on its west side), thus restoring the original appearance of West Lake to what it was 300 years ago. The top image is from 2002 and the lower image from 2013, the latter showing the expanded water area (lower-centre), as well as the urban development over an 11-year period. (Credit: unpublished document from CHMMCWL).

The interview data suggests that local residents and tourists share common understandings of the diverse values of West Lake, whilst incorporating their diverse personal backgrounds, emotions, memories and feelings. The discourse they provide is diverse, detailed and vivid, reflecting romanticism and nostalgia, and expressing diverse feelings – for example, related to pride and patriotism. Although tourists and local residents do not have the knowledge to evaluate heritage in ‘authorised’ terms, they are able to understand the poetic and diverse cultural history of West Lake to a greater extent than did the international experts (as presented above).

Cultural landscape in World Heritage practices

The concept of cultural landscape is a Western construct that, in part, sort to bridge the divide between cultural and natural heritage. It became ‘authorised’ and embedded in World Heritage discourse in 1992, although in ways that frame it as cultural. Despite the fixed meaning of cultural landscape in the World Heritage system, which has not changed since 1992 (UNESCO 2021, paragraph 47), application of the concept has expanded to encompass and accommodate a diversity of places, including Indigenous and Asian landscapes. Cultural landscapes are now widely recognised as dynamic and subject to constant change and transformation, comprised of multiple attributes, associated with different communities, and ascribed new values arising from the engagements between communities and places over time. Consequently, the identification, documentation, assessment, nomination and management of a cultural landscape is a complex process that requires scholars, practitioners and site managers to actively consult with local residents and, we argue, incorporate the views of local residents and tourists to develop strategies specific to their dynamic nature. Interviews, focus groups, participant observation and surveys can be used to document the understandings and emotional expressions of stakeholders, represented by local residents and tourists, about heritage values, and to distil their sense of place in the process of World Heritage nomination and management. It is also feasible to use big data to collect local residents’ and tourists’ perspectives, sentiments and comments on heritage conservation and management through social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, Tripadvisor, TikTok and Weibo, and then analyse them to derive indicators related to the human side of heritage discourse, (e.g. identity and sense of place) which can be integrated into the heritage nomination and management process. The affective and emotional engagements of local residents and tourists can also be re-examined by means of big data, which can be used in the ongoing management and monitoring of heritage sites.

Since the concept of cultural landscape is constantly evolving, it is important for heritage practitioners to not only protect and manage significant places, but also to look to their future (Wallace and Buckley 2015). Cultural landscapes are situated within larger frameworks, incorporating biodiversity, focusing on cultural contexts and the languages of each region, encouraging the transmission of traditional practices and actively engaging with change and, thus, promoting the integration of cultural and natural heritage attributes and values (IUCN and ICOMOS 2016). Many countries are actively exploring different ways to enable the integration of different naturecultures. To support this goal, heritage managers and researchers can benefit from applying bottom-up research approaches to explore the social value of heritage from the perspectives of local communities and tourists. The future development of cultural landscape can benefit from a more open and inclusive value system to achieve the integration of culture and nature in all its diverse and wonderful contexts.

Notes

1. The *Cairns Decision* is a resolution made at the 24th session of the World Heritage Committee held in Cairns, Australia, in 2000.
2. For the justifications for listing of these properties, see (UNESCO 1996, 2009).
3. A designation inclusive of cultural and natural values.

4. In using 'Chinese perspectives' and 'Chinese worldviews', we are not implying that there is a single perspective across China, but rather that Confucian, Tao and Buddhist belief systems generate commonalities across geographically diverse communities and regions.
5. A transnational nomination by China, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.
6. Tea ceremonies conducted by Buddhist Zen masters as a practice of Zen and enlightenment.
7. The study of seals and their systems undertaken in order to provide insight into the art of seal carving, the history expressed by the seal, changes in the official system, identification of documents, and the authenticity of calligraphy and painting.
8. Lin Bu (AD 967–1028), a famous reclusive poet in the Northern Song Dynasty
9. Yue Fei (AD 1103–1142), a military man, strategist, Chinese national hero, calligrapher, and poet of the Southern Song Dynasty
10. In World Heritage terms, a 'core area' consists of elements that embody the outstanding universal value of a World Heritage site, and elements that embody the integrity and authenticity of that site; while a 'buffer zone' is an area surrounding the World Heritage 'core area' that gives an added layer of protection to the site.
11. Hangzhou is one of the most developed regions in China with residents generally highly educated.
12. Xiling Seal Engravers Society, founded in 1904, is a folk art group with a long history in the study of stone seal carving, calligraphy and painting in China.
13. The Book of Tea (published around AD 758), is the earliest, most complete and comprehensive monograph on tea in China, known as the encyclopedia of tea, written by Lu Yu in the Tang Dynasty.

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