

## World Heritage Sites

### Protected Areas and World Heritage



## MOUNT TAISHAN SHANDONG, CHINA

*Mount Taishan (Great mountain) is the most venerated mountain in China, the sacred object of an imperial cult and pilgrimage for some 3,000 years, and the artistic masterpieces found there are in perfect harmony with the natural landscape. It has always been a source of inspiration for Chinese artists and scholars and is an iconic symbol of ancient Chinese civilization and beliefs*

**COUNTRY** China - Shandong

**NAME** Mount Taishan

### MIXED NATURAL & CULTURAL WORLD HERITAGE SITE

1987: Inscribed on the World Heritage List under Cultural Criteria i, ii, iii, iv, v and iv + Natural Criterion vii.

### IUCN MANAGEMENT CATEGORY

III (Natural Monument)

### BIOGEOGRAPHICAL PROVINCE

Oriental Deciduous Forest (2.15.05)

### GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION

Mt Taishan is located in central Shandong Province, immediately north of the town of Tai'an, about 40 km south of Jinan city and 354 km south of Beijing. Its highest point (Jade Emperor Peak) is at 36°16'N by 117° 06'E. The whole area lies between 36°11' to 36° 31'N and 116° 50' to 117°12'E.

### DATE AND HISTORY OF ESTABLISHMENT

This symbolic mountain has been fairly well protected throughout history

1982: Mt Taishan was established as a Zone of Scenic Beauty and Historic Interest; it is also a Forest Park.

### LAND TENURE

State. Managed by the Tai'an City Administration Committee of the Taishan Scenic Spot (ACTSS).

### AREA

25,000 ha. The base of Mt Taishan covers an area of 42,600 ha.

### ALTITUDE

From about 150m to 1,545m (Jade Emperor Peak).

### PHYSICAL FEATURES

Mt Taishan rises abruptly near the eastern edge of the vast north China plain. It has a great number of peaks, valleys, pools and caves and is scenically impressive. Geologically, it is a tilted fault-block mountain, higher to the south than north. It is the oldest and most important example of the paleo-metamorphic system representative of the Cambrian Period in eastern China known as the Taishan

Complex. It comprises magmetised, metamorphic, sedimentary rock and an intrusive mass of various origins that were formed in the Archean Era 170-200 million years ago. Subsequently, in the Proterozoic Era, the Taishan region began to rise, becoming part of the continent by the end of the era. Uplift continued until the middle of the Cenozoic Era. The gneiss which emerged in the Taishan region is the foundation of all of North China. Cambrian strata, fully exposed in the north, are rich in fossils. Six streams flow from the summit. The water is renowned for its relatively high oxygen content (6.4 mg/l), slight acidity (pH = 6.3) and extremely low mineral content.

## CLIMATE

The area falls on the edge of the warm temperate monsoonal zone of hot wet summers with southerly winds and cold dry winters with northerly winds. Mean temperatures range from -1°C in January to 28°C in July but at the summit are lower. The annual rainfall is on the lower side between 500-1,000mm

## VEGETATION

Vegetation covers 81% of the site, which is densely wooded, but detailed information about its composition is lacking except that oriental arborvitae *Platycladus orientalis* dominates below about 700m and Chinese red pine *Pinus tabulaeformis* above it. The flora is diverse and known to comprise 989 species, of which 433 species are woody and 556 herbaceous. The mountain is nationally renowned for its medicinal plants which total 462 species in 113 families and include multiflower knotweed, Taishan ginseng, Chinese gromwell, Asian puccoon and sealwort. Some trees are very old and famous, notably the 'Han Dynasty Cypresses' planted 2,100 years ago by Emperor Wu Di of the Han Dynasty, the 'Tang Chinese Scholar-tree' (*Sophora japonica*) planted 1,300 years ago, the 'Welcoming Guest Pine', 500 years old and the 'Fifth Rank Pine' named by Emperor Qin Shihuang of the Qin Dynasty, replanted some 250 years ago.

## FAUNA

There are over 200 species of animals recorded in addition to 122 species of birds, but precise details are lacking. Its avifauna may be influenced by its position adjoining the coastal migratory flyway. The large-scaled fish *Varicorhinus macrolepis* is found in running water at 300-800m. Considered a delicacy in the Qing Dynasty, it is one of the five most famous edible fishes in China

## CULTURAL HERITAGE

Mt. Taishan has an extremely rich cultural heritage. It is one of the birthplaces of Chinese civilisation and in the words of Guo Moruo, a modern scholar, is "a partial miniature of Chinese culture". Evidence of human activity in the area dates back 400,000 years to Palaeolithic Yiyuan Man. By Neolithic times, 5,000-6,000 years ago, it had become a significant cultural centre for two flourishing cultures, the Dawenkou to the north and the Longshan to the south of the mountain. The first recorded flowering of cultural creativity occurred in the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 B.C.) of the Zhou Dynasty (1100-221 B.C.) with the emergence of two rival states, Qi to the north and Lu to the south of the mountain. During the Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.), the state of Qi built a 500 km long wall as protection from possible invasion by the state of Chu. The ruins of this earliest of great walls in Chinese history are still evident.

According to the doctrine of five elements, the east signifies birth and spring. Standing at the eastern edge of the North China Plain, Mt Taishan has therefore always been regarded as pre-eminent among China's five sacred mountains. It was first officially recognised during the reign of Emperor Wu Di of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.- A.D. 220). For over 3,000 years, 72 Chinese emperors of various dynasties are said to have made pilgrimages to Mt Taishan for sacrificial and other ceremonial purposes, activities which acquired political significance. Intricately carved memorial inscriptions, stone tablets and temple complexes bear testimony to such visits. The mountain is covered with archaeological sites of outstanding importance: 22 temples, 97 ruins, 819 stone tablets, and 1,018 cliffside and stone inscriptions. In one valley the entire Buddhist Diamond Sutra has been carved on rock. Renowned scholars, including Confucius whose home town, Qufu, is only 70 km away, also left poetry and prose in their calligraphy on the mountain.

The way in which the mountain's cultural monuments are integrated with the scenery is considered a precious legacy. Its religious significance started with Taoism, but it later acquired Buddhist and other

temples. In 351 B.C. a monk named Lang was said to be the first to build on the mountain, setting up the original Lang and Divine Rock temples. During the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-589 A.D.), Jade Spring Temple, God's Treasure Temple and Pervading Light Temple were built. Prime Minister Li Jiefu of the Tang Dynasty regarded the Divine Rock Temple as first among China's four temple wonders. Taoist temples included the Temple to the Heavenly Queen Mother, the Palace of Goddess Doumu, Azure Cloud Temple, Rear Rock Basin Temple and Supreme Lord of Heaven Temple. The Temple to the Heavenly Queen Mother, built before the period of the Three Kingdoms (220-280 A.D.) is the earliest, while the Azure Cloud Temple near the top of the mountain is the most influential, its influence extending over more than half of China. Architecturally, most of the temples were restored in the rococo style of the Qianlong period (1736-95). Taishan Temple, built at the foot of the mountain is a major palatial complex.

### **LOCAL HUMAN POPULATION**

The surrounding valleys are well populated. The mountain's temples are staffed and people have built houses on the mountain itself. These are now being removed although commercial structures remain.

### **VISITORS AND VISITOR FACILITIES**

Historically the mountain has always been a place of cultural pilgrimage. During the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) for instance, Azure Cloud Temple is said to have received several hundred thousand worshippers a year. Between 1996 and 2001 annual visitors totalled 2.1million, with 18,000 foreigners. (ACTSS, 2003). The mountain is heavily visited by Chinese and has a strongly evident commercial presence even near the summit, with until recently, many unsightly billboards and barbecue shacks. The nearby town of Tai'an has ample accommodation and a tourist information centre. Access, which is well signposted, is by cable-car or by foot up two long stairways west and east, one being the famous Eighteen Bends route of 1,630 steps from the Red Gate to the South Heaven Gate. There is an annual Climbing Festival.

### **SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND FACILITIES**

Since 1907 when the American geologists B. Willis and E. Blackwelder first reported on the Taishan Complex, the mountain's geology has been well studied. Archaeological excavations have been carried out at Dawenkou since its discovery in 1959. To date, 133 tombs have been excavated and over 2,100 burial objects discovered. The Ministry of Urban and Rural Construction and Environmental Protection of Beijing University and the Historical Interest Zone Administrative Committee have collectively studied the geology, landforms, animals and cultural relics, also forest fires, pine disease and forest regeneration to provide a scientific basis for managing the area.

### **CONSERVATION VALUE**

The mountain is pre-eminent as a site of cultural significance and for majestic scenery. It is also geologically important and has a diverse flora and fauna. It has been the object of an imperial pilgrimage for nearly two thousand years, and the artistic masterpieces on the mountain are in perfect harmony with the natural landscape. It has long been a source of inspiration to Chinese artists and scholars, and symbolises ancient Chinese civilisation and beliefs.

### **CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT**

The Tai'an Municipal Administrative Committee of the Taishan Scenic and Historic Interest Zone is responsible for both the protection and administration of the area. Legal protection is afforded to both natural and historic heritages under the state's Cultural Relics Protection Law, Forest Protection Law, Interim Regulations Concerning the Administration of Scenic Beauty and Historic Interest Zones and various local regulations and administrative decrees. On the basis of multi-disciplinary scientific studies, the Ministry of Urban and Rural Construction and Environmental Protection, the University of Beijing and the Administrative Committee of the Mt. Taishan Scenic Beauty and Historic Interest Zone jointly revised a Management and Development Plan for the zone from 2002-2010 in accordance with the Interim Regulations issued by the State Council. The administrative structure has been modified, the local government function strengthened, scientific and technical personnel trained, facilities improved and expanded and the residents encouraged to move out. According the *People's Daily* of June 11, 2003, 12 stone quarries were closed down in 2000 and 28 structures, some 300 advertisement hoardings, construction rubbish and piles of trash were removed. In 2001 at least 500 barbecue huts and 50

houses were cleared as part of a continuing campaign to rehabilitate and recover the native character of the mountain. Tourist installations are controlled by the issue of Operation Certificates. Main scenic spots are regularly closed to allow them to recover from overuse. There is a regular monitoring program for air and water quality, plant diseases and pests and the condition of famous trees (ACTSS, 2003).

### **MANAGEMENT CONSTRAINTS**

Tourist pressures are very heavy, inundating the area during holidays and festivals, damaging scenic sites and hampering management. Incongruous modern buildings for the tourist industry detract from the scenic quality and in 2000 a cable car was built up the mountain. In the dry season the pine forest is very vulnerable to fire. Preservation and management facilities such as fire control have been inadequate in the past. Owing to inadequate water resources and poor management, the endemic red-scaled fish is on the verge of extinction. Certain cultural relics, such as the Diamond Sutra in Sutra Rock Valley, are in urgent need of restoration. Even after the mountain's designation as a World Heritage site, damage to scenic sites and rock quarrying by local farmers continued.

### **STAFF**

The staff of the Park comprises 2020: 280 in management, 1,276 technical and 444 other support (Administrative Committee of Taishan Scenic Spot, 2003).

### **BUDGET**

Funding from entry fees and special allocations is adequate, An initial US\$37,000 was given by WHF and RMB 50 million (US\$6 million) has gone to restoring ancient buildings and RMB 102 million on research (ACTSS, 2003).

### **LOCAL ADDRESS**

The Secretary, the Administrative Committee of Taishan Scenic Beauty & Historic Interest Zone, 45, Hongmen Road, Tai'an, Shandong Province, The People's Republic of China.

### **REFERENCES**

The principal source for the above information was the original nomination for World Heritage status. Books about Mt Taishan are listed in the Chinese World Heritage Site nomination. Administrative Committee of Taishan Scenic Beauty & Historic Interest Zone (ACTSS) (2003). *China (People's Republic of) Mount Taishan* Summary of the Periodic Report on the State of Conservation of the World Heritage Properties in the Asia-Pacific Region to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, Paris.

**DATE** April 1987. Updated 9-1987, January 2005.

