Memories and Mountains: 
A Historical Analysis of the Impact and Implications of the UNESCO presence at Wudang Shan, Hubei

A proposal for a Luce Foundation Grant for Undergraduate Research in Chinese Studies

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My name is Chris Hakkenberg and I’m a Chinese major currently completing my junior year at Reed College. I’m a conversational speaker of Mandarin Chinese and have focused my studies on Chinese ancient philosophical thought and religious practice, as well as modern political and cultural movements in mainland China.

I propose a research project exploring the relations of the international organization UNESCO with those of the villagers and pilgrims of Wudang Shan, in northwestern Hubei Province. Specifically I want to look at how the transformation of the Wudang complex, through the destruction of the Cultural Revolution to the present day protection efforts under the stewardship of UNESCO, has effect ed the local people, Daoist pilgrims and monks as well as non-pilgrim visitors both domestic and international. In seeking an accurate picture of the dynamics of this site, I hope to break through the political rhetoric, both of the Chinese officials and UNESCO officials, in the hopes of piecing together a coherent vision of the impacts of this recent insurgence of money and tourism upon those who live and worship there.

The implications of UNESCO funding go far beyond the simple preservation of buildings. The inevitable impacts upon daily village and monastic life have had a simultaneously constructive and detrimental effect. To explore the nuances of these impacts and understand how they relate to the greater context of the turbulent twentieth century, I plan on a diachronic approach including a close examination of historical records, the first hand investigation of the UNESCO site, and a series of interviews with locals, visitors and officials. In addition, my secondary goal is to explore the interplay between the formulation and expression of collective memories (i.e. through oral interviews) and traditional historical discourses propagated both in China and abroad. In
an evaluation of the inconsistencies in the two methods of the consciousness of the past, I hope to shed light on how both memory and historical record may contradict, yet remain equally relevant in reconstructing popular conceptions of the historical transformation of Wudang area from the Cultural Revolution to the present.

Outline
Wudang Shan is both the reputed (and still debated) birthplace of taijiquan and a holy Daoist mountain housing almost a hundred Daoist temples and numerous shrines. Since it’s inscription as a UNESCO cultural heritage site, it’s undergone several profound changes for the good and for the bad. UNESCO has played an integral role in the preservation of these building, yet labeling as a UNESCO World Heritage Site has likewise been exploited for its marketing value by local tourism officials. Negative impacts upon the populace and pilgrims include the marked upsurge in tourist activity resulting in a newly built chairlift, unprecedented amounts of trash and litter, and numerous shops and stalls catering to the tourist masses. What the commodification of this site, regarded by Daoists as holy, has done to its image and legitimacy in the eyes of worshippers presents several profound questions likewise in need of exploration and analysis.

Conversely, without UNESCO help, the Wudang temples might still be in the same state of disarray it found itself in when numerous shrines and temples incurred the wrath of a decidedly anti-religious social force during the Cultural Revolution. UNESCO funding was crucial in the protection of the Yuan, Ming and Qing style buildings after the damage from the 1998 floods, as well as exerting a strong influence upon people’s conceptions of the value of cultural preservation. And as Wudang Shan’s tourism
industry blossomed as a result of the cosmetic preservation of temples like the Purple Cloud Hall (which practically reduced to rubble by the final days of the Cultural Revolution), so did this outside money filter in the surrounding community. The extent to which local villagers actually benefit from this income is questionable, yet there’s been an marked boom in retail stores and goods, as well as greater access to global information and technology through internet cafes, now easily accessible even in the village of Laoying (also called Wudang) at the base of the mountain complex.

Yet such rigid distinctions of constructive and destructive far overlook the subtleties of the effects of the UNESCO presence. The transformation of local market areas into tourist souvenir markets catering to domestic and international visitors has had both positive and negative impacts. Contradictions between traditional fireplace and sanitation systems with those imposed by UNESCO has attracted applaud by environmental organizations, while aggravating the local populace whose traditional customs have now been forced to comply with these new rules. Another strong example of this phenomenon as explained in the 1998 State of Conservation Report is the transfer of the local residents inhabiting the ancient buildings to areas outside the site, at once protecting ancient buildings and displacing people from their home. Although definitive answers to such questions remain well beyond the scope of my proposed research, a methodical investigation of these disparate effects should provide a foundation through which judgments as to the merits of such proposals can be contextualized.
Methods

In my proposed project I hope to sort through the political rhetoric and regional biases to get a broader picture of the historical transformation of these sites through the Cultural Revolution to the present. A methodology incorporating a thorough examination of historical records both in the US and in China, a first-hand investigation of the site, as well as a series of oral interviews with local residents, monks, pilgrims and tourists, could present just such a picture.

To gain some of the necessary research materials not easily available in mainland China and to greater contextualize my research, I hope to conduct some preliminary historical and architectural research here at Reed including, among others, the works of Ronald Knapp and James Cahill’s work on pilgrimage to Wudang Shan in *Pilgrims and sacred sites in China*. Addition materials not available in Portland, I hope to be able to acquire at the impressively large Chinese Collection at the East Asia (Meyer) Library at Stanford University. Though research at the Meyer Library is by no means an imperative, it wouldn’t add much cost to the overall project as all expenses would be covered by a relative in the area with whom I plan to stay with. Upon arrival in Beijing I plan to start gathering initial materials needed for my stay at Wudang, especially those on architecture at the Beijing Research Institute of Architecture. During my last two weeks, I’ll be able to work on the translation and compilation of my data with the help of my research assistant, Wang Tao. A native speaker of Chinese and student of Capital Normal University, Wang Tao’s understanding of Chinese libraries should prove to be invaluable in my final days of compilation of the data.
Understanding the impacts of the UNESCO project upon the local community will require a broad inspection of local surrounding villages, focusing on the village of Laoying at the base of the mountain. While the study of one particular building, such as the famous Golden Hall atop Tianzhu Feng, could easily limit an understanding of the greater changes occurring at Wudang Shan, so could a study whose scope was far too broad. As a meticulous and detailed study of each temple and shrine, at a site containing almost a hundred, would be impossible in one summer, I propose to first widely investigate the site as a whole. After this initial investigation and a preliminary analysis of the results, I’ll be able to reduce the scope of my study to a few monuments representational of these broader changes taking place.

Thirdly, interviews with various people on the site will help me to gauge the interplay of the accounts of the introduction of UNESCO to Wudang Shan with those from my own research. These voices, the voices comprising the collective memory of locals and visitors alike, are inextricably tied to architectural monuments and natural landscape. “The transmission of memory through architectural design, religious sites, familiar landmarks, and historical monuments is pivotal to the meaning of history in non-Western societies”.

Memories of those who’ve personally witnessed the impacts of religious (and cultural) persecution and then the switch to ardent cultural preservation will be particularly informative in comparison with the information contained in historical records. Close examination of these accounts and the historical record should make clear the subtleties of the Wudang transformation, as well as bringing to light possible embellishments of those I interview.

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Desired Educational Outcome

Though this research won’t have any specific relevance for my thesis, it will certainly help to form fieldwork and historical research skills, invaluable to the thesis project. Conducting oral interviews in Chinese will have obvious benefits for my speaking proficiency in mandarin, as will translation work of historical records and temples seals will aid my progress in literary Chinese. The implementation of this project will provide me the opportunity to formulate and conceptualize the impacts of cultural preservation projects. Not only will I further familiarize myself with traditional architecture styles and ancient artifacts of China, I hope to attain a deeper understanding of the dynamic relations of the state and international organizations such as UNESCO upon rural villages and religious sites. Furthermore this experience will help me make invaluable future contacts which may possibly lead to internship positions after graduation or even the start of a potential career involved in cultural preservation with such organizations.

Proposed Itinerary and Contacts

• 5/29: Fly to San Francisco
  o Retrieve visa
  o Conduct research at Stanford University
  *there won’t be any expenses to report during this period, as I’ve relatives in the area I can stay with and eat with for free. Furthermore, flying out of San Francisco will be cheaper than Portland.

• 6/4: Fly into Beijing
  o Meet with Beijing research assistant Wang Tao
  o Meet with UNESCO China representatives under Mr Zhang Xinsheng and Mr Tian Xiaogang at 37 Damucang Hutong, Xidan, Beijing 100816. tel # (8610)6609-6844. email: natcomen@public3@bta.net.cn
  o Conduct preliminary research
Visit Prof. Hu Yihong at the Beijing Research Institute of Architecture
tel. # (8610)6303-9762
Prepare for trip to Wudang Shan

• 6/11: Travel to Danjiangkou City, Hubei and then Wudang Shan
  o Visit Wudang Shan Administrative Bureau for Cultural Relics Protection:
    tel. # (8671)9566-7190
  o Meet with UNESCO representatives at the Wudang Shan site*
  o Meet with Terri Morgan, an American whose traveled to Wudang Shan many times to the area as a student of \textit{taijiquan}. She has several connections with monks, official, and other local residents and is the editor of \textit{Wudang Journal}.
  o Examine the site
  o Conduct interviews with local residents and officials
  o Explore other local villages to compare them with their UNESCO supported neighbors, as well as to gauge a sense of the impacts of the UNESCO presence upon them
*I’ve admittedly had repeated difficulties contacting individuals at the Wudang site, but with the help of Terri Morgan I hope to make some concrete connections within the next couple months

• 8/2: Return to Beijing
  o Second meeting with UNESCO representatives in Beijing
  o Meet with Beijing research assistant Wang Tao
    ▪ Organize notes and records
    ▪ Organize interview transcripts
    ▪ Work on translation and compilation of records

• 8/16: Return to San Francisco

\textbf{Budget}

\textbf{Airfare}

• Round trip to Beijing via San Francisco $1100

\textbf{Local Transportation} (domestic air flights and train fares) $350

\textbf{Visa Fee} $50

\textbf{Entrance Fees (for repeated access) to UNESCO Site} $150

\textbf{Accommodations} $438
  • $6 x 73 days
**Food** $518
- $6 x 73 days
- $80 dinner with guests

**Consultant and Translation Fees** $300
- translation help in Beijing of historical materials
- translation of Hubei dialect for interviews

**Incidentals** $94

**Total:** $3000

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**Resume**

**Education**
- 6/98 Graduated from Sidwell Friends School, Washington DC
- 8/98 Studied Buddhist Thought and Meditation (Vipassana) at the Forest Way Center, Virginia

- Reed (relevant coursework)
  - Chinese 110
  - Intro to Religions of China (Rel 154)
  - Chinese 210
  - Humanities 230
  - Intro to Anthropolgy 211
  - Rural China (Hist 324)
  - Independent Study of Modern Chinese Literature (Chin 481)
  - Early Chinese Philosophical Texts (Chin 355)
  - Intro to Art History: Ming Dynasty (Art 201)*
  - Classical Chinese (Chin 316)*
  - Chinese Pulp Fictions (Chin 350)*

- Lewis and Clark College
  - Japanese 101
  - Japanese 102*

- Capital Normal University, Beijing
  - 2/01-6/01 Chinese Language Courses

- Fujian Normal University, Fuzhou
  - 9/01-1/02 Chinese Language Courses

*indicates presently enrolled
Awards
• Received Donald Flanders Scholarship for ’99-’00 school year
• Received Starr Foundation Chinese Scholarship for ’02-’03 school year

Work
• 1/98-6/98 Part-time Server Ben & Jerry’s Ice Cream, Georgetown, Washington DC
• 9/98-5/99 Part-time Private Tutor, SE Portland
• 6/99-7/99 Full-time Landscaper, Waverly, PA
• 7/00-8/00 Full-time Waiter, Kramer’s Books and Café, Washington DC
• 9/00-11/00 Full-time Waiter, Coppi’s Vigorelli, Washington DC
• 2/01-6/01 Part-time Private English Tutor, Beijing, China
• 2/01-6/01 Part-time Middle School English Teacher, Middle School #55, Beijing, China
• 9/01-1/02 Part-time Private English Tutor, Fuzhou, China
• 9/02-present Part-time Chinese Tutor, Reed College

Travel
Growing up in the Bonaire, Netherlands Antilles I traveled often in Latin and Central America. After moving to the US, I continued such travel with my parents during school holidays. The following list will not include such travel with parents/family members, nor study abroad programs, being restricted to independent travel only.

• 7/98 Travel in Costa Rica
• 8/00-9/00 Travel in Northern and Central Argentina
• 11/00-1/01 Travel in Central and Southern Mexico
• 6/01 Travel in Northeastern and Central China
• 7/01 Travel in Tibetan Autonomous Region (helped update the Harvard-based guidebook *Let’s Go*, with a friend then attending Harvard)
• 8/01 Travel in Nepal
• 1/02 Travel in South and Southwestern China
• 2/02-4/02 Travel in Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos
• 4/02-7/02 Travel in China
  o 5/02-6/02 Studied *taijiquan* and *gongfu* at Wuwei Monastery, Dali Prefecture, Yunan, China
  o 6/02-7/02 Travel in Tibetan Areas of Yunnan, Sichuan and Gansu
• 1/03 Travel in Jamaica