

The Lost Voices:
The Impact of Development and Preservation Policies
upon the Local People of Wudang Shan

In completion of the Luce Foundation Grant for Undergraduate Research in Chinese
Studies

Christopher Rene Hakkenberg van Gaasbeek

November 19, 2004

We were very poor here and life was hard, but now look we have many new things - we have electricity! The change has been welcomed. It suits us well.

-- Xia Liqing

These days most locals from the surrounding area no longer come as regularly as they did before. It's a much larger burden for them to come to Wudang Shan and burn incense in the temples.

-- Pang Huaguo

Wudang Shan is now a World Cultural Heritage Site. As such it represents ancient Chinese culture and its people likewise represent modern Chinese culture. We should work hard to raise our level of civilization (wenhua shuiping).

-- Yang Hua

We support the policies for the development of Wudang Shan but now that we've been mistreated and forgotten such development means nothing. It's not a balanced development and is certainly not fair. If they were fair to us, then I'd be in full support of their policies.

-- Li Rui

When discussing the recent history of the Wudang Shan Scenic Area (*Wudang Shan Fengjingqu*) in northwestern Hubei Province the term 'development' appears again and again, as the continuing goal and promised panacea for the region's ills. Though the pervasive ideology of developmentalism has succeeded in many cases in permeating the world-view of people local to the area being developed, development as argued, more often reveals the inherent bias of the developer rather than serving as an expression of the

perceptions of those being ‘developed’. Though harboring the promise for material improvements and a rise in the standard of living, the methods employed in development programs often possess a tone of superiority premised upon the assumption of cultural and material sophistication. Arturo Escobar notes:

To see development as a historically produced discourse entails an examination of why so many countries started to see themselves as underdeveloped... how ‘to develop’ became a fundamental problem for them, and how, finally they embarked upon the task of ‘un-underdeveloping’ themselves by subjecting their societies to increasingly systematic, detailed, and comprehensive interventions.¹

Interventionist, top-down strategies for the development of regions like Wudang Shan seen as geographically remote (from armchairs in the West and Beijing) have produced contradictions between the goals of development, the preservation of traditional culture and the wants and needs of local peoples. Failing to fully construct a balanced compromise, several development policies in Wudang Shan have had simultaneously beneficial and detrimental effects. UNESCO has played an integral role in the preservation of these buildings, yet labeling as a UNESCO World Heritage Site has likewise been exploited for its marketing value by local tourism officials. Negative impacts of recent development plans upon the local populace and pilgrims include, among others, forced relocation programs, the propagation of a pejorative image of local peoples through ‘civilizing projects’ and exorbitantly high entrance fees. Many such policies have come into conflict with the UNESCO mandate that states “social policy activities must provide opportunities and empowerment for all”.² It is these ‘contradictions’ that have rendered many of Wudang Shan’s present development policies inadequate in balancing the needs of all parties involved, especially those of the

local people whose voices are more often than not drowned out by the marching drum of progression.

Development of a holy area entails a transformation both physical and spiritual, influencing not only the landmarks of a place, but likewise its the memories of inhabitants and the feelings of sacredness perceive worshippers. What the commodification of Wudang Shan's religious sites, the rise of tourist infrastructure and the diminished access for pilgrims has done to its image in the eyes of worshippers is a topic well worth careful study, even if uncondusive to any clear-cut conclusion. These greater changes expressed not so much by easily recordable facts but in peoples' impressions are underrepresented in the literature of Wudang Shan. In an attempt to ameliorate problems created by the paucity of information relating to local concerns, I have chosen to focus specifically on the words of locals - a representation of a cross-section of local society including officials, monks, workers and agriculturists.

In this essay, I will analyze a portion of two months of field-work and research at Wudang Shan and specifically - prevalent themes from interviews conducted there. I will first further expound on the reasoning behind the prioritization of first-hand interviews, the methods used in conducting them and the advantages and disadvantages in such a method. I then move on to contextualize Wudang Shan's significance in Daoist and Chinese history with a brief introduction of its history up until the commencement of preservation efforts as a World Heritage Site. After this, the primary section of this essay will be concerned with addressing particular issues where conflict has arisen between seemingly beneficial environment and cultural relic protection policies and the UNESCO social policy seeking the 'empowerment of all'. Issues in this section are arranged

topically with fragments of policy guidelines from various UNESCO and local government sources juxtaposed with interview excerpts on the respective topic.

The present research, conducted with the help of a Luce Chinese Studies Grant, has as its focus twelve interviews located at the start of this website. These transcripts represent the most relevant and poignant interviews of the over forty interviews conducted over my two months at Wudang Shan. Though this essay aims to analyze several of the more prominent themes of these interviews, it is nonetheless of secondary importance to the transcripts themselves. It is not my ambition to exhaust this topic in all its complexity, but to simply contribute to the debate on methods of international development projects. At best I hope to sufficiently address the issues most important to the local community and provide a record for future generations of the polyphonous voices of the proud and hopeful, yet powerless and disenfranchised residents of Wudang Shan.

A Note on Methodology

Full access to the inner workings of the complex relationship between the UNESCO Beijing office and the local, provincial and national government in creating development and preservation policy and ensuring its thorough implementation at the local level remains occluded. Though there are numerous publications concerning the subject, only a few are available to non-governmental researchers and of these, an idealistic description of efforts both past, present and future obscures an objective vision of the changes in the area beyond the pervasive propaganda. I therefore have chosen the liberty of emphasizing not the written material on the preservation of this site, but rather

that aspect more within my grasp: local perceptions through a series of interviews. During the course of my interviews I was reminded again and again of the disparity in official rhetoric and local perception in the history and transformation of the Wudang Shan region since its inscription as a World Cultural Heritage Site.

A methodology prioritizing the spoken word can solve some of the more pressing problems in analyzing the local effects of development and preservation, while giving birth to a whole range of others. Though such a methodology seeks to circumvent the opacity prevalent in official publications, it may nonetheless be subject to some of the same weaknesses in approach and expression. Just as these official documents often work backward from pre-conceived results to the specific issues themselves and their factual justification, so too may my research have commenced with pre-conceived understandings in need of justification. Furthermore, questioning in the interview format inevitably reflects the inherent biases of the interviewer, as it is they that control the questioning and the direction which the interviews follow. Questions were often raised with the intention of searching out specific topics and may therefore not necessarily reflect issues on hand and most important to those interviewed, but that of the person conducting the interview. Yet regardless of the possible problems created in such an interview format, it nonetheless served to concentrate on issues most relevant to the debate on international development organizations and policy, while allowing room for the profound digressions and anecdotes of those being interviewed.

There is no way to fully gauge the effect of my role within the Wudang Shan community as researcher and the influence this may have had upon the answers obtained. Despite attempts to lessen my influence and role as an outsider, that barrier no doubt

remained, to some extent, intact. Though I attempted the most accurate translation possible, the difficulties in transcending a language barrier defined by not one but often two separate stages of translation (Wudang dialect, Mandarin, and English) likewise may have adversely affected the outcome of the interviews. In addition to this language barrier, the format of the interviews may have further exacerbated the difficulties in attaining the most accurate rendition of the interviewees' statements. Fearing a tape recorder might detract from my ability to acquire candid and sincere answers, especially concerning more sensitive topics of which fear of reprisal was an ever-present obstacle, I chose instead to take written notes and only later to record them in their entirety. For the same reasons, I likewise have used pseudonyms wherever fitting to protect the identity of those interviewed.

Although the final transcripts have neglected to include the entirety of the conversations, this format nonetheless helped create an atmosphere where our 'interviews' could become 'conversations'. There are instances where, upon my own discretion, inessential and superfluous comments are intentionally excluded from the final account. Given the need for a comfortable atmosphere while conducting the interviews and my proclivity towards a laconic rendering of those statements, the transcript as such precludes an all-encompassing account of the interviews conducted, in favor of the most practicable rendition for the present purpose.

Many of the answers given during interviews contradict those of other interviewees as well as the 'factual' information provided in various materials concerning the site. Taken as a whole, these answers can be seen as fraught with inconsistencies and therefore questionable in the academic context. But this is primarily the point. The

diversity in the expression of peoples' perception reflects the range of the interviewees' background, personal experiences and hopes for the future. The disparate views and convictions reflect the complexity of the topic and the challenge confronting any wholesale analytical interpretation of the changes occurring at Wudang Shan.

Rather than representing an authoritative and permeating understanding, these interviews can be read as individual viewpoints, each reflecting the idiosyncrasies of the person interviewed. It is my intention to give voice to these differing opinions and to attempt to both empower those whose voices have been left out of the official canon on development and preservation in China, as well as to construct a balanced articulation of this topic by incorporating all of the players at the local level. Interviews of this sort aren't as concerned with the 'facts' *per se*, but with the manner, method and intention behind the expression of those facts. In other words, *what* people said interested me as much as *how* and *why* they said it. Needless to say, such an approach opens the door to what could be argued as 'non-informed' subjectivity. But again, this is precisely the point. It is my hope that in the lacuna provided by these subjectivities, contradictions and inconsistencies lies a more balanced and realistic picture of the effects of development upon local peoples than that available solely from official sources.

A Brief History of Wudang Shan

Wudang Shan possesses an illustrious history as a holy Daoist mountain, the central site of worship for Zhenwu the Emperor of the North and the disputed birthplace of *taijiquan*. Though it's not one of the Five Peaks (*wuyue*) orienting traditional Daoist cosmology, Wudang Shan is instead known as the Great Peak (*dayue*) anchoring the

other five; an appellation that by the late Ming imbued it with an air of superiority over China's other Daoist holy mountains. Wudang Shan has historically maintained prominence in its role as a nexus for Daoist religious activity and as a consistent recipient of imperial patronage throughout the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties. Unlike other peaks, Wudang Shan is dedicated primarily to the cultic worship of one Daoist deity: Zhenwu, or the Perfect Warrior. As such it is the only holy mountain whose iconography is thoroughly integrated into the tale of a single deity.³

Originally known as Xuanwu, or the Dark Warrior, and depicted by the tortoise and the snake,⁴ the image of Zhenwu first attained prominence in the Eastern Han dynasty among the iconography of tomb engravings. According to legend, sometime in the distant past Zhenwu wandered to Wudang Shan from the North where after forty years of toil and self-refinement he eventually attained immortality. Since then he and the tortoise and snake have forever been associated with the mountain. But it wasn't until 1412 that the Ming emperor Chengzi (Zhu Di), after having attributed his successful usurpation of the throne to the blessings of Zhenwu, elevated him to a status surpassing even Laozi among deities comprising the Daoist pantheon.⁵ So as to return the favor, Chengzi ordered a massive construction campaign on Wudang Shan in 1412 in commemoration of the god's blessings. Zhenwu "became the object of one of the few truly 'national cults', involving all levels of society from the humblest butcher right up to the emperor",⁶ with Wudang Shan as its cosmological center.

Though the earliest evidence for the existence of practicing Daoists on the mountain comes from the second century BCE, there weren't established temples on the mountain until that of Five Dragon Hall built in the mid Tang dynasty. It wasn't until the

Ming and emperor Chengzi however that Wudang blossomed into the sprawling complex of Daoist monasteries, temples and shrines which it still resembles today. With around three hundred thousand corvée laborers assigned to this massive construction project, Wudang Shan became home to nine palaces, thirty-six monasteries, seventy-two cliff temples, numerous bridges, residences and shrines within six years. While laborers worked furiously on the Forbidden City in Beijing, so were engineers and workers dispatched to Wudang Shan to build a parallel Forbidden City at the apex of the central mountain. Renowned religious leaders were summoned from around the country to serve in the larger monasteries and temples and by the 1420s Wudang Shan became deserving of its appellation ‘The Great Peak’.

In the six hundred years since its establishment, Wudang Shan has maintained a turbulent historical tradition including skirmishes among rival schools of Daoism and *gongfu* who fought for supremacy over the centuries, bandits and rebels who periodically claimed and reclaimed the mountain as base and stronghold, and finally the heavy damages incurred from the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution. Yet despite such setbacks, Wudang Shan has retained its role as one of the central sites for Daoist pilgrimage in China, a destination for affluent tourists over the centuries and today a treasure house for traditional Daoist culture, architecture and relics.

Though the ravages of the twentieth century certainly took its toll on the monuments of the mountain, efforts to protect the mountain from further damage finally materialized in 1953 when special funds were allocated to the region, and then in 1961 when the Golden Summit Shrine was listed as one of China's Major Cultural Relics. The state of conservation nonetheless remained dismal ending in the disastrous setbacks of the

Cultural Revolution. But by 1982, preservation efforts took a turn for the better when 'general protection' was extended to the entire region. But nonetheless, evidence of inadequate preservation efforts by the late 1980s abounds. Even in Wudang Shan's body evaluation for World Heritage Site inscription it understatedly reports that, "serious problems remained to be tackled".⁷ After an exhausting eight-year process Wudang Shan was inscribed as a World Heritage Site in 1994 and has since undergone an enormous transformation to implement protection plans, enhance preservation efforts as well as opening up the mountain to tourism.

The Development and Preservation of Wudang Shan

Yardsticks for the development of a region are many. Chief among them are statistics such as the rise and fall in median income as well as population growth and decline. In this manner, the Wudang region can boast of a precipitous growth in mean income from 50 yuan per annum in 1984 to 10,000 yuan per annum for city residents by 2004. The region has likewise experienced a 37% population increase over the last twenty years that is, according to Shu Tao of the Special Administrative Region Government, attributed to the fact that "people have moved here from other poorer areas. If one region is poor and the other rich, then the poorer residents will want to come to the richer area in hopes of getting rich themselves".⁸ As for the scenic area itself, visitors have been arriving in growing numbers, an almost 25% increase in visitors every year in fact. Such statistics, at least on paper, seem to portray a robust economy and growing potential. Yet underlining these figures are the contradictions between preservation and

social policy as well as the growing disparities in rights and privileges of the people of Wudang Shan.

The UNESCO Influence:

As a World Cultural Heritage Site, Wudang Shan has accelerated protection and preservation efforts under the guidance of UNESCO under the program established in the 1972 World Heritage Convention, in the process attaining worldwide notoriety as a cradle of Daoist culture and history. But as stated in the introduction, the inner workings of the relationship between the UNESCO Beijing office and the local, provincial and national government in creating development and preservation policy and ensuring its thorough implementation at the local level remains unclear. Judging from UNESCO reports like the 1998 State of Conservation Report several measures including the general management of the site, enhancing the protection of relics and the incorporation of “sustainable tourism development strategies within the site management”,⁹ remain underdeveloped if one can excuse the pun. Reported criticisms in UNESCO documents allude to the fact that local implementation of UNESCO policy has not been fully actualized. The UNESCO influence seems to be decidedly little or at least that is how it is often perceived. According to one affluent local with government ties,

UNESCO has almost no influence on the actual implementation of laws. Their pressure existed while Wudang Shan was still a candidate, but not really much afterwards. Several years ago when Wudang Shan had just become a World Cultural Heritage Site the Secretary General of the United Nations, then Boutros Boutros-Ghali, came here amid big fanfare and announced all the changes that would start taking place. But after the celebration was over, there’s been little if any perceptible changes in the way things are done.¹⁰

It nonetheless remains near to impossible to gauge the extent of this disparity in government materials reporting steady progress in several fields relating to UNESCO guided development from the perception of locals of the UNESCO influence. Some of these policies have met with widespread approval, while others have proved to adversely affect the lives of local peoples and have since become the source of debate, controversy and even legal battles. Chief among these is the issue of the relocation of mountain inhabitants.

The Program for the Lawful Relocation of Residents from the Scenic Area:

I feel angry sometimes, but anger doesn't help. What choice do we have but to obey? It is like moving a tree: you dig up its roots and plant it in a new place. It won't actually die, but it will never fully adapt.¹¹

The program for the lawful relocation of residents from the scenic area (*dui hexin jingqu nonghu yilv banqian*) is probably the most contentious 'development issue' for the residents of the Wudang scenic area. According to a government representative, the policy to forcibly relocate inhabitants was intended in the hopes of marketing:

Wudang Shan as a commodity product (*shangpin*). Just like marketing and selling a product it needs to look good to appeal to customers. If you want guests, both Chinese and from abroad, you want the place to look good, to look authentic.¹²

He goes on to state environmental reasons behind this project:

We hope to protect the natural environment for future generations. The locals have had a very bad effect on the local environment in areas such as waste disposal, illegal poaching and the retrieval of firewood from protected forests. By moving these mountain residents to the city we are aiming towards ecological protection.¹³

And though the ultimate goal of the development of Wudang Shan remains supported by the entirety of the residents interviewed, issues surrounding its implementation have left several disgruntled and in pursuit of legal remedies.

Since its inception in 1993, the guidelines dictating this policy have remained conspicuously vague and increasingly generalized regarding the question of which residents are to be moved, and when. In Wudang Shan's body evaluation for World Heritage Site inscription, it states the need for the "removal of units occupying those buildings ["the sites of cultural relics"]",¹⁴ and in the 1998 State of Conservation Report states "the transfer of the local residents inhabiting the ancient buildings to areas outside the site".¹⁵ However by 2004, in addition to those inhabiting ancient buildings, locals surrounding such buildings, those near the entrance area to the mountain as well as those along the public and 'ancient' road, were all to be summarily moved.¹⁶

Despite the apparent hardships of leaving home and transplantation experienced by locals, most of those interviewed remained supportive of the government's plans, even if many felt embittered by the methods and manner of implementation. Wang Peng states that forced relocation is "simply a necessity for the development of tourism.... It's meant to protect the forests and is good for the visitors and tourists".¹⁷ But many of those interviewed complained of the little notice given before their moves (in some cases just one week) and all felt the compensation package inadequate. "We understand and obey such decisions by the Communist Party leadership," says Li Rui, "I don't speak just for myself when I say that we support the plan for protection of the scenic area – it is logical. Our only real complaint is with the compensation package".¹⁸ The majority of those interviewed stated that they viewed such relocations as essential to the progress of the

area, though the process was riddled with corruption, and deceit. Wang Xiaolong remarks:

The program began with much fanfare, but has now been upset by corrupt officials. I'll give you an example: When they demolish a home, the local officials handle the compensation money. They are the middlemen between the national government and the local residents who handle the distribution of funds to the villagers. But somewhere along the process they [the local officials] end up with the majority of the money in their own hands. No one knows exactly how much they take, but we do know that they have authority at the local level and they use it to enrich themselves. Corruption is a major problem holding back the development of the Wudang Shan area.¹⁹

It is these cases of endemic corruption that seem to be that which most frustrates efforts to launch a successful campaign for relocating residents. Despite unanimous support for development policies, inadequate compensation has left hundreds unemployed, homeless and living well below the poverty line. Jiang Heqiang notes that the local government only gave her “120 yuan per square meter. But this pitiful sum wasn't enough to cover moving and buying a new house.” With a tinge of sorrowful anxiety she relates, “They should have supplied us with housing but they deceived us”.²⁰ In addition to insufficient compensation per square meter, Liang Zhiqiang notes,

What upset me most was that not only were we given so few yuan per square meter, but the measurements themselves were often skimpy. When they came to the house to take measurements, they didn't include areas of the house like porches and balconies. We complained and said these were legitimate parts of the house, but they didn't listen.²¹

Frustration over the present situation and anger over such conspicuous inequities are sentiments shared by every relocated resident interviewed.

No one interviewed had any clear idea of the guidelines dictating the removal of residents nor the timescale with which this was to be accomplished. On the subject of who and when residents were to be moved, Liang Zhiqiang relates: “It's hard to say.

Some are given more leniency and others not. Those who know to give generous gifts (*songli*) to the right people often get by better than others".²² Others simply stated that they've observed no distinct pattern in the relocation efforts, but rather a capricious attitude among local officials whereby no one knows when they'll be asked to leave, though they all expect it soon.

A group of eight relocated residents have appealed for a more equitable compensation package before the provincial and national courts, but have so far not resolved the issue. Though the expression of the corruption of local government officials is at best a risky ambition, many have remained undeterred in their efforts despite pressure to drop the matter. Li Rui proudly states that "when we try to resist their most unfair policies, they threaten to disturb our business... But I am not afraid. I will speak my mind".²³ There is an atmosphere of defiance in light of pressure to concede and an attitude of hopefulness for future resolution. Unshaken, Chen Liqin says: "We'll start a war and we'll keep going back to Beijing until the dispute is resolved".²⁴

There have recently been several questionnaires distributed in the hopes of gauging the strengths and weaknesses of the Wudang tourist infrastructure. Among questions about services, prices, souvenirs and transportation are two questions relevant to the above discussion. The first: "What aspects do you like least about Wudang Shan?", has 'residents' as one of the possible answers. The second: "Would you prefer to have residents leave the mountain altogether?" speaks to an overall pejorative representation and opinion of local residents by those responsible for making policy decisions.²⁵ Residents' needs have been subordinated to those of the tourists and with

survey questions such as these it is not hard to understand their feelings of marginalization and disenfranchisement.

These sentiments of dissatisfaction and protracted court battles are most often predicated not on hopes for more money *per se*, but simply adequate replacement for their old homes. Chen Liqin goes on to say, “This is really not a question of money as it is about our basic need for housing and food”.²⁶ Having received promises of pre-arranged housing, micro-loans and job-seeking education and assistance, most of those interviewed reiterated the fact that money could only go so far, while a new home and a steady job replacement could last them for a lifetime. More than willing to sacrifice themselves for the overall development of the Wudang Shan scenic area, those interviewed unanimously felt they were deceived and forgotten about in the face of endemic corruption and poor implementation of a UNESCO social policy seeking the ‘empowerment of all’.

The Civilizing of Mountain Residents:

A commercial on a local TV station depicts a young skateboarder picking up litter and an old woman repositioning a fallen sign. In the next scene a group of well-dressed and hip travelers emerge out of the forest appearing lost. But their calm is restored when they see the sign just recovered by the woman and with smiles and cheers, these happy tourists find their way and continue on their tour. The commercial ends with the words: “Help us make a civilized country”.

Another alarming issue in the analysis of the development of Wudang (though not necessarily for those interviewed) is the implied ‘backwardness’ of local culture by developers and by extension the urgent need of its repair for the sake of progression.

Escobar refers to terms like ‘backwardness’ and ‘progression’ as comprising “the regimes of representation” of development discourse.²⁷ Such terms have permeated the discourse on Wudang Shan’s development as well as the locals’ view of themselves as inferior. In all interviews, the term ‘backwardness’ (*luohou*) appeared again and again and was treated as a dangerous predicament in urgent need of alteration. Wang Peng reaffirms this notion, stating, “Local customs in this area are backward. Transforming them is a must for development”.²⁸ It is curious to note the use of the terms ‘us’ and ‘them’ in the interviews when addressing this issue as nobody admitted themselves to be among those in need of civilizing.

Probably the most aggressive attempt to facilitate the ‘civilizing of mountain residents’ is the local government’s publication of the booklet entitled *Trustworthy People of Wudang* (Chengxin Wudang Ren). Meant as an educational brochure, this booklet has been printed in large quantities and handed out to local residents as mandatory reading in a “campaign for trying [sic] to be a civilized Wudang resident”.²⁹ The brochure relies on peremptory and arrogant rhetoric to frame its argument. As the booklet is meant to correct the present culture, the term ‘trustworthy’ in the title assumes Wudang residents to be anything but. The phrase “making residents civilized” is used on several occasions throughout the booklet under the assumption that the present culture is in need of repair and such brochures are a suitable means for accomplishing this task. The booklet is written in a patronizing tone based on pejorative images of the local culture and is riddled with the rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution employing platitudes such as “oppose feudal customs and feudal superstitions”.

Chief among the indicators for a high level of civilization according to the booklet are manners, morals and hygiene. These ‘ethical imperatives’ underlining the ‘progression of culture’ are based on a world-view enframed by a colonizing system of representation, subordinating local custom to a marginalized status. Under an idealized development ideology, the intervention of ‘civilization’ (most often as dictated by the West) can ensure the growth of the region as well as the satisfaction of visitors in the name of development. So pervasive is this regime of representation that no one interviewed disagreed with the presumptive need to raise the level of civilization. Yang Hua remarks:

I think our government ought to try its best to raise the level of culture of the mountain inhabitants... Wudang Shan is now a World Cultural Heritage Site. As such it represents ancient Chinese culture and its people likewise represent modern Chinese culture. We should work hard to raise our level of civilization (*wenhua shuiping*).³⁰

What is often repeated is the need to improve the ‘level of civilization’ not necessarily for the sake of those seeking such an education on their own terms, but for the benefit of visitors to further enforce a particular image of China especially in the mind of foreign visitors and hence the rest of the world. Zhong Xuechao notes, “I think that teaching people to be civilized - English and hygiene - is necessary for the development of Wudang Shan and a requirement if we hope to give a good impression to tourists”.³¹

But despite government efforts to propagate the booklet throughout the community, few of those interviewed had even heard of it, much less seen and read it. There are several possible reasons for this, among them are the brochure's recent publication only a few months before the time when the interviews were conducted as well as the fact that despite assurances from government representatives that the booklets

were to handed out free of charge, they nonetheless carried with them a price tag of ten yuan - a fee most mountain residents wouldn't pay if it weren't a necessity.

Other Development Issues:

Contradictions in the urgency of preservation and the needs of local residents on Wudang Shan abound. Seemingly beneficial environmental policies such as the reforestation of farmland and the banning of traditional interior fireplaces have been dictated from the top down, ignoring residents' pleas for assistance and compensation and so runs antithetical to the UNESCO mandate mentioned in the introduction which states, "social policy activities must provide opportunities and empowerment for all".³² Take for instance Pang Huaguo, who relates that "the new policy returning the forests to old farmlands has essentially prohibited us from growing crops. At least we can no longer grow crops commercially".³³ He is now jobless and received no opportunity for training in another profession nor adequate compensation for the loss of his livelihood.

Fundamental policies dictating environmental preservation and the accommodation of the tourism industry often conflict. This has been the case in several World Heritage Sites around China like Dunhuang in Gansu Province where Buddhist cave murals almost two-thousand years old are fading as a result of increased numbers of tourists.³⁴ The environmental reasoning behind the resident relocation program seems ironic at best when considering environmental transgressions like the glaring presence of a monstrous chairlift carting tourists up to the Forbidden City at the Golden Summit. Once a place considered too sacred for regular pilgrims after their two-day climb, today

this Forbidden City only prohibits those unable to afford the chairlift and entrance fee.

Shu Tao of the regional government states the need for such infrastructure:

In the past, tourism infrastructure in the area was far too backward (*luohou*), so we have worked to improve the situation. This is necessary for the development of tourism in the area. We will expand tourist facilities at the base of the mountain. Tourists will be able to eat, drink, seek entertainment and lodging in Laoying and then ascend the mountain for daily excursions.³⁵

This expansion of tourist facilities at the base of the mountain is curiously at odds with the mandate that states that there are to be no additions within the scenic area. The unsatisfactory retort of a Cultural Relics Bureau representative doesn't help to clarify the issue: "Well, it's all right to use a little bit of land (*yi diandian mianji*) for such purposes, but generally no additions are allowed".³⁶ These examples are a few among many that illustrate the discord between efforts at preservation and those of the tourist industry and the unstable ground informing the attempts at their compromise.

Infrastructural improvements such as the construction of a new two-lane public road connecting the major sites has for the most part been met with approval by the residents. Improved transportation has, according to those interviewed, greatly enhanced the quality of life, while making goods cheaper and access to the town of Laoying that much easier. But with such improvements comes the incumbent transformation of the area into one dependent on vehicular transportation. Where Wudang Shan had once been oriented on the sacred footpaths (*shendao*) leading to the Golden Summit, now this high-speed road has forever altered the area's layout and by extension the performance of the act of pilgrimage. Where there had once been pilgrims throughout the area arduously climbing the steep hills between the hundreds of shrines, temples and villages dotting the

countryside and forest, these days there are only a few small areas of concentrated tourist activity connected by buses and cars running up and down the road. The change has been profound as Jin Renfu recalls,

Well, there used to be many houses throughout the valley, but most of these have been torn down and reclaimed by nature since their residents were moved... Since they fixed the public road last year the demographics of mountain inhabitants has shifted markedly. Most of the houses along the old road as well as some of the villages connecting the ancient footpaths have been dismantled... Now visitors take a car or bus to the main sites without bothering to stop here at the bottom of the valley.³⁷

Though fond recollections of a Wudang arcadia don't justify serious criticism of such infrastructural additions, they do shed light on the greater transformation of Wudang Shan, not just physically, but in the minds of those who live on and have been visiting the mountain for years. In recent years Wudang Shan has become more a tourist destination, than a site for worship. Such transformations have profound implications upon the ways in which people form memories of a site. "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".³⁸ While through preservation efforts landmarks which have stood for centuries will stand for centuries more, the commodification of the area and incumbent demographic shifts have rendered some earlier focal points for worship obsolete.

A Changing Religious Practice:

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 for the methods and intention of preservation efforts. There is no question that the ratio of

pilgrims to tourists has been dramatically inverted in the past years, with the latter now comprising the dominant majority. Though the difference in the terms pilgrim (*xiangke*) and tourist (*youke*) may simply be relegated to semantic disparity, in the words of those interviewed the two groups of visitors remain distinct. Today there are far fewer pilgrims visiting Wudang Shan, one aspect among many of the greater changes in the last ten years in worship upon the mountain. Reasons for the decline in pilgrimage activity are many. Zhong Xuechao points to the high entrance fee: “Although the cost of transportation is about the same as it was, the entrance ticket is at least five times as expensive [thirteen to seventy-one yuan]”.³⁹ Although those from the immediate area are exempt from this fee, those from Shiyang and Danjiangkou, though still considered local, are not exempted. Li Rui reminds us that where there were once unregulated cheap hostel rooms, often within the houses of villagers, now because of the relocation plan all visitors are forced “to stay in the larger hotels. This way the cheapest room a visitor can find is 200 yuan a night!”,⁴⁰ an amount unaffordable for the majority of pilgrims that visit the mountain. The lodging situation for pilgrims has not only changed for the well traveled sites, but likewise for the more inaccessible sites like Five Dragon Temple, a five hour walk from the nearest paved road. Zhong Xuechao recalls:

There are some instances where the transformation has been great. For example, my first time to Five Dragon Temple several years ago I stayed in a villager’s house, ate with them and slept in their guestroom. They asked for nothing from us in return. Back then you gave what you felt appropriate, however much you had or whatever you felt was fair. It wasn’t the money, but the merit incurred from housing pilgrims that let this practice continue for the poor villagers. These days they’ve received more and more tourists and have begun to charge set fees for food and lodging. It’s no longer on a voluntary basis.⁴¹

Even in these more remote locations, social interactions between villagers and pilgrims have undergone a great transformation whereby accommodations are settled most often by commercial transactions rather than barter or simple goodwill.

Declining numbers of pilgrims may also point to a decline in overall religiosity in the area and though it's difficult to accurately calculate this trend, many people interviewed experienced it. Pang Huaguo relates, "Several years ago almost everyone believed (*xinyang*), but things have changed as of late. Now that many people have gone to school, watch TV and surf the Internet they are no longer as dependent on religion".⁴² As with the relocation plan, it is the locals that bare the burden during such transformation. And though increased admission fees may be necessary to ensure the preservation of the sites, it has likewise left these locals marginalized in their own region.

Xu Ze states:

Pilgrims on the other hand are all primarily locals (from the region) and only those who live in Shiyan County get a discounted entrance ticket. These days most locals no longer come as regularly as they did before. It is a much larger burden for them to come to Wudang Shan and burn incense in the temples. At most they only come for the major holidays and festivals.⁴³

Many interviewed stressed that preservation and renovation itself was whole-heartedly welcomed, though some of the incumbent changes in the world outside the monastery walls may not be.

Conclusion

Wudang Shan is better now than before the area was opened up. Better, I guess for everyone but commoners like us. Now we have no home to return to and this is certainly a horrible feeling. It is simply not fair that we commoners have no voice and authority. It's not an equitable

situation and we commoners are not convinced with the government's efforts. The government doesn't work for the people but rather for themselves. I would support the government's plan for the development of Wudang Shan if it could likewise help the commoners - but it hasn't helped us thus far and so I don't support it.⁴⁴

So relates a relocated resident incensed over her crippled hopes for inclusion in the beneficial transformations of the Wudang Shan region. Despite such criticisms, since its inclusion in the list of World Cultural Heritage Sites Wudang Shan has made tremendous advancements in its efforts at protecting and preserving the ancient buildings and cultural relics scattered throughout its steep hills. Judging from statistics and the opinions of some of those interviewed, there has likewise been an overall rise in income and standard of living. However, there remains a number of uneasy pilgrims wary of the recent changes as well as a vocal minority of disaffected residents, worse off than before. It is for this reason that rather than contribute to the already rich body of literature concerning the preservation efforts in the region, in this research I sought instead to concentrate on what has thus far been far underrepresented in the literature: namely, local experience and perceptions.

Creating, dictating and implementing policy for the development of regions like Wudang Shan remains a tricky task. The process of analyzing this matrix of interconnected relations at the international, national and local level and then constructing appropriate policy is a challenging project indeed, but one that needs to be approached with circumspection and patient analysis before decisions can be enacted. The interests of so many players render a perfect solution well beyond the means of international organizations like UNESCO or national government bureaus.

Yet in Wudang Shan, corruption and the pejorative representation of local peoples born of engrained biases against them have kept these local voices out of the discourse on development of the region. UNESCO has neither taken appropriate measures to see that the implementation of its social policies have been adequately realized nor put enough pressure on local government to see that they take the lead in combating corruption and the formulation of detrimental policies. Though there can never be a totalistic solution to the delicate compromise between these players around the world, the debate has thus far eschewed what should be the most prominent voice: the local view.

UNESCO claims, "special attention is paid to local community participation to galvanize the concept of sustainable development and heritage preservation",⁴⁵ but in reality this has not been the case. Chen Liqin laments: "I want better living conditions for today. Right now we have so many people crowded into the old school living in the classrooms. More than twenty to a room and no showers - They're very bad conditions".⁴⁶ Such is the result of a development discourse neglecting the expressions of effects on *all* people involved - people like Liang. The residents interviewed unanimously supported efforts to protect the environment and cultural relics of Wudang Shan but where conflict arises, their needs have so far yet to be adequately addressed. Chen Tao reminds us that, "All we really need is a stable income source to assure us food, clothing and shelter".⁴⁷ But there is hope, and by not only *including* but *prioritizing* local people in the polyphonous discourse on development, fruitful implementation can be actualized while 'interventionist' strategies can be transformed from colonizing dictates into avenues of empowerment for all.

¹ Escobar, Arturo. *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995. 6.

² *Social and Human Sciences Sector Overview*. UNESCO Office Beijing. 2004. <<http://www.unescobeijing.org/view.do?channelId=005>>

³ Lagerwey, John. "Pilgrimage to Wu-tang Shan," in Susan Naquin and Yü Chün-fang eds., *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites in China*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992. 322.

⁴ Tortoise and snake - the northern one of the Four Divine Animals (*siling*)

⁵ See Lagerwey.

⁶ Lagerwey, 293.

⁷ *Wudang Shan Advisory Body Evaluation*. ICOMOS. 1993. 83. <http://66.102.7.104/search?q=cache:puc2NKVRwbIJ:whc.unesco.org/archive/advisory_body_evaluation/705.pdf>

⁸ Shu Tao.

⁹ *World Heritage Committee (Kyoto): State of Conservation Reports - Wudang Mountains*. 1998. <<http://whc.unesco.org/archive/repcom98a4.htm>>

¹⁰ Wang Xuelong.

¹¹ Jin Renfu.

¹² Shu Tao.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ *Advisory Body Evaluation*, 83.

¹⁵ *State of Conservation Report*.

¹⁶ *Gongzuo Qingkuang Huibao: Wudang Shan "6 - 17" Xianchang Bangong Huiyi Yilai*. (Report on the Work Situation: Since the Wudang Mountain "6-17" On-site Conference). Wudang Shan Tequ Guanweihui. (Wudang Mountain Special Administrative Region. June, 17, 2004.

¹⁷ Wang Peng.

¹⁸ Li Rui.

¹⁹ Wang Xiaolong.

²⁰ Jiang Heqiang.

²¹ Liang Zhiqiang.

²² Ibid.

²³ Li Rui.

²⁴ Chen Liqin.

²⁵ *Hubei Sheng Guonei Lvyou Diaocha Biao*. (Hubei Province Domestic Travel Questionnaire). Hubei Sheng Lvyou Ju. (Hubei Tourism Bureau). 1998.

²⁶ Chen Liqin.

²⁷ Escobar, 10.

²⁸ Wang Peng.

²⁹ *Chengxin Wudang Ren*. (Trustworthy People of Wudang). Zhonggong Wudang Shan Lvyou Jingji Tequ Gongzuo Weiyuanhui (The CCP Wudang Shan Tourism and Economic Special Administrative Region Work Committee) and Wudang Shan Lvyou Jingji Tequ Guanli Weiyuanhui. (The Wudang Shan Tourism and Economic Special Administrative Region Administrative Committee). Feb. 2004. 7.

³⁰ Yang Hua.

³¹ Zhong Xuechao.

³² *Social and Human Sciences Sector Overview*.

³³ Pang Huaguo.

³⁴ *China's Great Leap West*. London: Tibet Information Network, Nov. 27th, 2000. 127.

³⁵ Shu Tao.

³⁶ Department Head Zhao.

³⁷ Jin Renfu.

³⁸ Jing, Jun. *The Temple of Memories: History, Power and Morality in a Chinese Village*. Stanford: Stanford UP. 1996. 172.

³⁹ Zhong Xuechao.

⁴⁰ Li Rui.

⁴¹ Zhong Xuechao.

⁴² Pang Huaguo.

⁴³ Xu Ze.

⁴⁴ Jiang Heqiang.

⁴⁵ *Social and Human Sciences Sector Overview*.

⁴⁶ Chen Liqin.

⁴⁷ Chen Tao.