

Study on the Frequency of World Heritage Properties Mentioned in Online Travel Reviews by Tourists: A Case Study on Mount Taishan in China

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Study on the Frequency of World Heritage properties mentioned in Online Travel Reviews by Tourists : a case study on Mount Taishan in China

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ABSTRACT

Tourists' awareness of outstanding universal values of World Heritage sites and detailed experiences on the sites are important to both tourism sustainability and heritage management. The purpose of this study is to investigate the frequency of World Heritage properties mentioned in the travel reviews posted online by visitors to Mount Taishan and analyze their awareness of World Heritage properties. The study is based on literature surveys of Mount Taishan's properties and data analyses of tourists' travel reviews from the largest review website in China. The study has shown that the mentions of properties are vastly different and the most mentioned properties are not the properties that are most recognized by government and international organizations.

1. INTRODUCTION

Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, known as the World Heritage Convention, is aimed to protect World Heritages and to convey outstanding universal values of World Heritages. But with the development of tourism industry, the vast amount of tourist population may destroy the World Heritage sites. The former Director-General of UNESCO, Koichiro M. (2008) said, "If every tourist could understand the values of World Heritages, they might not damage those cultural heritages and natural heritages." So it is significant to provide tourists with detailed experiences and to make them understand the outstanding values of World Heritage. The purpose of this study is to show the difference of the frequency of World Heritage properties mentioned in the travel reviews posted online by visitors to Mount Taishan and to analyze tourists' awareness of World Heritage properties.

2. METHOD

This study is based on literature surveys and data analyses of tourists' travel reviews, using the reviews of Mount Taishan as the data source. First, the study reviews Mount Taishan's nomination documents for World Heritage and identifies World Heritage properties as tourist spots to create a database. Next, the study collects the online travel reviews from the largest Chinese travel website "mafengwo.cn". Focusing specifically on the frequency of identified properties, quantitative data analyses will be made. Finally, the features and frequency of properties will be compared and discussed.

2.1 Object of Study

2.1.1 MOUNT TAISHAN

Mount Taishan, located in Tai'an (a small town at the foot of Mount Taishan), Shandong Province, east of the vast North China Plain, is one of the most famous mountains in China (Figure 1). Since ancient times, Mount Taishan, the head of the five holy mountains in China, has been worshiped by emperors and people. In 2015, approximately 5,800,000 tourists visited Mount Taishan. Mount Taishan was listed as a place of interest under state protection in 1982, and in 1987, it was inscribed as a World Cultural and Natural Heritage by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, matching all the six criteria of Cultural Heritage. Moreover, it was inscribed as a World Geopark in 2006. Hence, Mount Taishan has various values for all humanity.

The inscribed scenic zone of World Heritage "Mount Taishan" is between 36°11' - 36°31' N, 116°50' - 117°12' E, covering an area of 242 square kilometers. The height of the main peak, Jade Emperor summit is 1545 meters. The scenic zone consists of 8 districts and others (Figure 2). Since Mount Taishan was listed as the National Scenic Area, infrastructure construction has been started. Ropeways, stone stairs and circular routes are available for tourists visiting Mount Taishan. Since 2011, CRH (China Railway High-speed) was also available in Tai'an. (Figure 2).

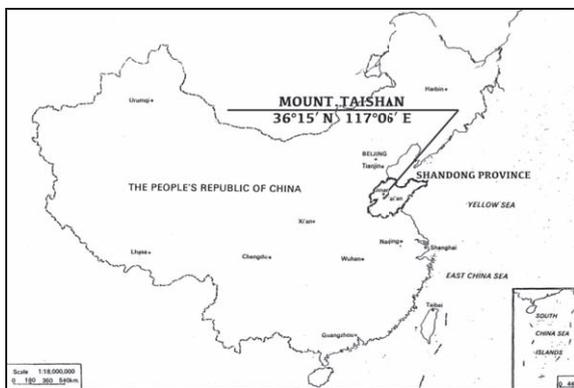


Figure 1: Location of Mount Taishan

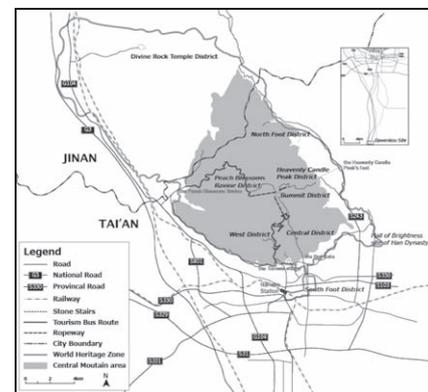


Figure 2: Map of Mount Taishan Zone

2.1.2 ONLINE TRAVEL REVIEWS

Online travel review is a reflection of visitors' memory to the trip. While visitors are writing the reviews, they will only write down what has left the most impressions on them. By investigation of those reviews, a wider and more precise understanding of tourists' awareness of properties can be acquired. This study reviews online travel reviews from the travel website "mafengwo.cn" in China. Although its travel review service started in 2013, it has the most number of users among travel review websites in China in 2015.¹

2.2 Procedure

2.2.1 Step1: Reviews for World Heritage Properties

The study collects the properties which described in the chapter of "INVENTORY" and "JUSTIFICATION" from the Mount Taishan's World Heritage Nomination Documents. The study also reviews the Advisory Bodies (ICOMOS and IUCN) and World Heritage Committee's justification. Then the study assigns 1 point to each mentioned properties and makes a list as following:

¹ Ranking of usage of travel website (2015. 7) : <http://www.ctcnn.com/html/2015-08-26/15750666.html>

Table 1. List of properties of Mount Taishan(Abridged)

Category	No.	Name	District	INVENTORY	JUSTIFICATION	Advisory Bodies	World Heritage Committee	Total Points
Natural Sites	1	Drunken Mind Stone	Central	1	1			2

2.2.2 Step2: Data Collection and Summarization

The study collects travel reviews from the social community page of Mount Taishan in mafengwo.cn, posted from 31st May 2015 to 31st May 2016. Next, the study removes reviews or parts that have no relationship to the trip to Mount Taishan and merges reviews post by the same user for the same trip. Finally, the study investigates the frequency of each identified properties in step 1. Even if a property is mentioned multiple times in a review, this study counts 1 for that property.

2.2.3 Step3: Comparison between Features of Properties and Frequency

This study compares the features of properties obtained from step 1 and the frequency obtained from step 2. The study will discuss the difference between the frequency of those recognized properties and most mentioned properties, and will discuss the relationship between the districts and types of properties and its frequency.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study collected 101 properties from the nomination documents of Mount Taishan. After removing properties that have no name or a certain location, this study got 87 identified properties, including 10 properties which got the maximum 4 points (Table 2). These 10 properties can be regarded as the most representative properties of Mount Taishan.

Table 2. 4-point properties of Mount Taishan(Abridged)

No.	Rank	Name	District	Category	Frequency	Proportion
1	4	Eighteen Bends	Central	Traditional Architecture	285	62.5%

The collected data contains 456 reviews. The frequency of each property has shown that the most mentioned property is the sunrise at main peak of Mount Taishan (353 of 456)(Table 3)

Table 3. Top 10 mentioned properties of Mount Taishan(Abridged)

Rank	Name	District	Category	Frequency	Proportion
1	Sunrise at main peak	Summit	Natural Wonder	353	77.4%

The frequency of each district is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Frequency of Every District of Mount Taishan(Abridged)

Rank	District	Count of properties	Frequency	Average Frequency
1	Summit	17	1502	88
9	Divine Rock Temple	6	7	1

First, comparing Table 2 with Table 3, only 3 properties are listed in the top 10 mentioned properties. Half of the representative properties are mentioned under 10% reviews. Second, 6 properties of the top 10 mentioned ones are in the summit district and 5 of them are traditional architecture, 3 of them are natural wonders. These two types of properties are most mentioned (Table 3).

According to the results, the most recognized 10 properties by local government and international organizations do not match the most mentioned 10 properties in travel reviews. About half of the representative properties, especially those located relatively far from the central mountain area are rarely mentioned. Properties which impress visitors are concentrating in Summit District, following by Central District, South Foot District, while Divine Rock Temple District was almost not recognized (Table 4). The impressed properties are focused on traditional architecture and natural wonders, thus the ancient trees, memorial objects, and stone inscriptions are quite possibly ignored by visitors.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Based on tourists' travel reviews, the frequency of World Heritage properties that tourists recognized is uneven. It reflects that tourists' awareness of World Heritage values is unbalanced. This study also indicates that many tourists have strong impressions only on the large-scale places and vice versa on smaller properties. Meanwhile, it is assumed that many tourists mainly visit the central scenic areas and have less awareness on the importance of those properties of Mount Taishan which are located far from the center. In order to raise the awareness of World Heritage properties, this study recommends providing more information for those overlooked World Heritage properties, and to promote cooperation between different districts by exploiting new tourist routes.

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