

Social values and rock art tourism: an ethnographic study of the Huashan rock art area (China)

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Abstract: The rapid expansion of cultural tourism has led to increased numbers of visitors to rock art sites throughout the world. The rise of rock art tourism has affected not only the preservation of rock art sites, but also the social values attributed to the sites by communities in the immediate vicinity. Social values refer to the social and cultural meanings that a place of heritage holds for a particular community. This article aims to discuss the influence of tourism on the social values that uphold local communities' emotional attachment to rock art heritage, using the Huashan rock art area in China as a case study. Huashan is the first rock art heritage in China proposed to be inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List and officially obtained the World Heritage status in July 2016. This article argues that many of the changes generated by the endeavour towards tourism promotion by the authorities in their pursuit of World Heritage designation have contributed to the reinforcement of the social values under discussion. However, negative feelings among the communities in response to the undesired consequences of the designation campaign might have resulted in the attenuation of such values. The ultimate goal of the research is to prompt further reflection on existing rock art heritage management mechanisms both in China and worldwide.

Keywords: heritage; social value; rock art tourism; Huashan; China; UNESCO; World Heritage Site

Introduction

In the past three decades, the rapid expansion of cultural tourism has led to increased numbers of visitors to rock art sites throughout the world (Duval & Smith, 2014). As an immensely popular economic phenomenon, tourism has affected not only the preservation of rock art sites, but also the social values attributed to the sites by communities residing in the immediate vicinity. The values of rock art sites, as with all other places of heritage, reside in the significance and meanings ascribed by different individuals and groups. Since values are projected expressions instead of inherent qualities, they can be shaped by varying circumstances. Social values refer to the social and cultural meanings that a place of heritage holds for a particular community (Australia ICOMOS, 2013), and thus can evolve over time subject to the changes in social, economical, and cultural contexts. Based on a review of recent rock art studies, it is recognized that in many parts of the world where rock art has become a tourist attraction, the social values ascribed to rock art sites by local residents are under the influence of a dynamic interplay among a wide range of stakeholders over their divergent interests (e.g. Chirikure & Pwiti, 2008; Ndlovu, 2009; Taçon, in press).

The consideration of social values that inspire local residents' attachment to rock art heritage has never been high on the list of either academic or governmental priorities, even though in recent years scholars have underscored the role that local communities can play in rock art management (Deacon, 2006; Smith, 2006a; Mazel, 2012). This is because in practice, when establishing tourism development strategies for a rock art site, local communities are usually marginalized in the decision-making process, allowing social values to be overshadowed by other matters. However, the identification and conservation of social values have long been argued to be effective towards protecting heritage sites, because such a practice is believed to help encourage community initiatives in creating and maintaining meanings and life for the sites

(Johnston, 1992). To understand social values and how they change with the rise of tourism, one needs to probe into individual perceptions and attitudes that influence the ways in which local community members view the heritage. The very process of gauging community level changes in perception and attitude lays the foundation for apprehending the social impact of rock art tourism.

Set against this background, this article aims to calibrate the social values attributed to rock art heritage by local communities, and to explore changes in those values under the influence of tourism, using the Huashan rock art area in China as a case study. The Huashan rock art area recently obtained the World Heritage status at the 40th session of UNESCO's World Heritage Committee held in July 2016 in Istanbul. Huashan is the first rock art heritage in China proposed to be included on the World Heritage List and the pre-nomination campaign has largely affected its tourism development. In fact, UNESCO has had a double-edged role in reshaping the relationship between local communities and rock art tourism, through the promotion of the World Heritage List. On the one hand, it creates opportunity for local residents to economically benefit from the exploitation of World Heritage properties. On the other, it promotes conservation ethics that are geared towards privileging expert voices over local ones, thus disengaging local populations from active use of the heritage (Smith, 2006b: 29; Chirikure & Pwiti, 2008: 474). This article examines the impact of tourism on the social values that local communities ascribe to the Huashan rock art heritage in its process of becoming a World Heritage Site. By doing so, it first explores the developmental background out of which the Huashan rock art area has transformed from a local cultural property to a World Heritage Site. Secondly, it scrutinizes the social values attributed to the rock art heritage by its local communities. Thirdly, an in-depth analysis is made of the changes in the perception and attitude of the views of local

residents on the development of rock art tourism using an ethnographic study. Finally, the analysis is used to discuss how the social values have been affected by tourism promotion efforts by local authorities. The ultimate goal of the research is to prompt further reflection on existing rock art heritage management mechanisms both in China and worldwide.

The Huashan Rock Art Area: from Anonymity to World Heritage Nominee

Before discussing the Huashan rock art area, a brief examination of the World Heritage nomination in China and its impact on tourism is necessary to contextualize what happened in this special case. In 1985 China ratified the World Heritage Convention and began nominating sites to be inscribed on the World Heritage List. Twenty-one years later, in 2016, China has managed to include fifty World Heritage properties on the list, among which, thirty-five were cultural sites (UNESCO, 2016). The World Heritage nomination in China is a highly politicised process. In practice, the constitution of sites on both the World Heritage List and the Tentative List is a result of power negotiation among authorities of different levels and regions. Due to current UNESCO regulations, each year state parties like China can only propose one cultural site from its Tentative List to be considered for designation. Therefore, the Chinese central authorities tend to choose the candidate that has the highest guarantee of success and will also help maintain balance among the provinces (Zhou, 2014; Yang, 2012). China's enthusiasm towards World Heritage nomination in recent years has had a huge influence on the touristic commercialization of cultural sites. This has much to do with a series of successful World Heritage inscriptions in the late 1990s, which effectively triggered the transformation of a few previously unknown sites into top tourism destinations in the country (Gao, 2016a). The potential promise of economic benefit from World Heritage designation has encouraged regional authorities to pursue

international accreditation for sites located in their territories. In preparing for nomination, local governments usually launch a number of projects to enhance the conservational status of these sites. Such projects often include plans to renovate and establish infrastructural and tourist facilities around the sites, thus boosting the development of cultural tourism.

The Huashan rock art area is a place of heritage whose tourism development has been predominantly affected by World Heritage nomination. The area consists of eighty-one rock art sites located in what is today a sparsely populated region of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous region (Gao, 2013). Distributed along the Zuojiang River Valley, the sites are scattered in a picturesque landscape featured with green limestone peaks, meandering water, and interspersed tablelands. Most of the sites are located on the water-facing cliffs near the river bends, with reddish motifs painted high-way up a rock surface. The figures are highly standardized in style. Approximately 95% of them are interpreted as anthropomorphs, depicted in either frontal view or profile with the same posture: arms stretched up at the elbow and legs semi-squatted (Qin et al., 1987). It is generally believed that the rock images were created between the Warring States Period (403-221 BCE) and Eastern Han Dynasty (26-220 CE), by an ethnic group named Luo Yue, believed by scholars to be ancestors of the present-day Zhuang people (Gao, 2013). It should be noted that the Huashan rock art area is named after the eponymous Huashan rock art site, arguably the most magnificent site of the area and the only one opened to public visitation. The site is situated on the sloping cliff of a limestone peak facing the Mingjiang River, a tributary of the Zuojiang River, and covering a painted area of more than 4000 square meters (Liu, 2006; Gao, 2013). The potential of the Huashan rock art site was acknowledged back in the late 1980s, when the site was granted the status of ‘Important National Cultural Property under Special Preservation’

by the state authorities (SACH, 1988). A few years later, the local government constructed basic tourist facilities at the site, including an observation pathway and fences, making it feasible for public visitation (Ma, 1994: 178). However, opening the site as a tourist attraction accelerated the deterioration of the rock images, because of direct contact from tourists walking under the painted cliff (Yin, 2009).

To the Huashan rock art area, the World Heritage pre-nomination campaign is undoubtedly the most significant factor in developing tourism plans in the last few years. The campaign initiated around the turn of the new millennium, when the government of Ningming County, where the Huashan rock art site is located, proposed to nominate the site for China's World Heritage Tentative List. The proposal was endorsed by higher levels of authorities, and in 2004 the site was officially included on the list. The success had two opposing effects. On the one hand, the conservation of the paintings was taken more seriously (figure.1). As a direct result, in the same year the local government took the decision of forbidding tourists from using the pathway under the painted cliff, in order to mitigate its continuous deterioration. Since then, visitors have only been able to see the pictographs from a distance by taking a boat. On the other, the successful inscription of the site on the Tentative List encouraged both governments and private sectors to commercialize the unique cultural resources, potentially putting it at risk. The Ningming County government, for instance, launched several commercial projects to transform the site into the centrepiece of a range of tourist attractions, such as a theme park and a hot spring resort (lv, 2011: 194). However, most of the projects were stopped, because in recent years the provincial authorities have placed more restrictions on commercial plans intended to be carried out within the buffer zone of the Huashan rock art area, so as to safeguard its opportunity of becoming a World Heritage site.

The Huashan rock art area has received a better chance of getting nominated for World Heritage inscription in the past few years, due to the fact that it would become the first rock art World Heritage in China and would bring celebration and attraction to Guangxi, one of the few provinces that still lack World Heritage status sites. In 2010, the provincial authorities decided to promote the entire rock art area, instead of just one site, to become a World Heritage nomination, under the name of 'Huashan rock art cultural landscape'. Therefore, since 2010 the Guangxi government has launched a range of pre-nomination projects on the heritage, preparing for its designation in 2016 (Pang & Zhou, 2016). Those projects have an extensive influence on the development of rock art tourism in many aspects. They resulted in a modest renovation of tourist facilities around the Huashan rock art site, such as pathways, interpretation boards, piers and viewing platforms. They also led to the establishment of a monitoring station close to the site, and a grandiose museum in the downtown area of Chongzuo, the administrative centre of this region. Plans were put into place to improve the protection of the surrounding environment, through restoring vegetation on the riverbanks, putting up posters for public education (figure.2), and banishing local businesses that were considered harmful to the integrity of the landscape, such as sand-digging and quarrying companies. Lastly, they prompted the invention of a series of cultural festivals and events, organized by the local government, as a way to publicize the heritage and gain local support for the campaign. The annual Huashan Cultural Festival, as an example, started in 2011. The event consists of a variety of traditional activities associated with the Huashan rock art, including ancestor worship ceremony and 'frog dancing'. Whereas local rituals dedicated to the rock art sites have been discontinued for decades in most parts of the region, the newly invented tradition has become a tourism attraction

itself (observation and personal communication. March 2013, July 2014, and May 2015).

The efforts made in the World Heritage pre-nomination campaign was finally rewarded in July 2016, when the Huashan rock art cultural landscape was added to the World Heritage List during the annual session of the UNESCO's World Heritage Committee. In addition, those efforts have facilitated the rise of rock art tourism in the region as well as reshaped the social values ascribed to the heritage by communities adjacent to the sites. The social values that local communities attribute to the rock art heritage represent their collective attachment to the rock art sites. Such an attachment is the reason why the sites have become emotionally important to them in the first place. Before probing into the impact of tourism on the social values, the following section presents a discussion of the social and cultural meanings of Huashan rock art area to the local communities.

Huashan Rock Art Area and Social Values

Social value as referred to here, has recently been defined as 'the associations that a place has for a particular community or cultural group and the social or cultural meanings that it holds for them' in the updated Burra Charter (Australia ICOMOS, 2013: 4). It should be noted that the meaning of social value is still open to debate and is more complex than what is proposed by Australia ICOMOS. However, in this article the argument concerning social value is framed within the definition made in the updated Burra Charter. The concept of social value was first proposed by the Burra Charter in 1979, and later elaborated by a series of publications in the field of heritage (e.g. Johnston, 1992; De la Torre, 2002; Smith, 2009; Díaz-Andreu, 2016; Gao, 2016b). In literature discussing the relationship between rock art sites and local communities, this concept has only been used in a limited number of cases (e.g. Luz Gutiérrez et al., 1996;

Ndoro, 1996; Hitchcock, 2005; Duval & Smith, 2014). In accordance with the general understanding of social value, this article argues that the social values ascribed to a rock art site by its local community lie in the social and cultural meanings embodied in the site which inspire the community's collective sense of attachment to it. Such meanings include a traditional connection that links the present to the past, an essential reference point in constituting group identity, and a functional quality that responds to cultural practices and activities. Inspired by those meanings, the collective sense of attachment is expressed in local residents' feelings and activities, sometimes unconsciously. It is the shared attachment that makes a rock art heritage 'alive' to the local population.

In the case of the Huashan rock art area, the local communities are the residents from villages located near to a rock art site, normally within a distance of one kilometre. Almost all of the villagers are from the Zhuang ethnic group, who are believed to be the descendants of the Luo Yue people, producers of the pictographs (Liu, 2006). The local residents are mainly engaged in agriculture, and a sizeable proportion of population live in poverty. The social values attributed by them to the rock art heritage were analyzed through combining information from the extant literature of Zhuang ethnography, and data from my own fieldwork conducted in the area, discussed in the next section. The analysis shows that the local communities perceive the Huashan rock painting as a unique and divine feature, closely associated with the Zhuang ethnic culture and capable of inspiring feelings of awe, reverence and pride. The previous ethnographic studies reveal that, regarding the meaning of the paintings, the local population have a variety of interpretations derived from an abundance of folklores and stories (see Qin, 2006; Liao, 2002). An examination of those stories shows that the Huashan rock art is deeply associated with different aspects of the Zhuang ethnic culture, such as history and cosmology. This is further supported by the fieldwork data, which demonstrate that

many local residents believe the rock paintings were created by either their ancestors or celestial beings. For this reason, they considered the rock art sites as sacred places in need of deference and homage. In fact, such a belief can be traced back to possibly the Song dynasty (BCE 960-1279), during which a book named 'Xu Bo Wu Zhi' mentioned that in a region of what is present-day Guangxi, there were ghost-like painted figures in a deep valley, and when local people passed by in boat, they paid tribute to the figures, believing them to be images of their ancestors (Qin et al., 1987: 15).

In a personal conversation with Zhu Qiuping, a local scholar who has conducted research with the local Zhuang community for over 20 years, Zhu confirmed that an important reason why vandalism has been almost entirely absent from the Huashan rock art area is because the local population sees it as a divine legacy related to their ancestors. Zhu also mentioned that the locals traditionally conducted many activities which are believed to be culturally related to the rock art, including ritual singing and dancing with bronze drums. However, such traditions have mostly disappeared as younger generations are less interested in them (personal communication, July 2014). During my fieldwork, a local Zhuang villager, who was in his seventies, commented on a traditional activity that used to be conducted at one particular rock art site:

I remember when I was a young kid, on the first and fifteenth of every month I always went with my dad to pay homage to a rock cave with paintings. We normally offered up cooked meat and burnt incense on a large rock, which is no longer there due to some natural causes. Sometimes we also recited special 'prayers'. Such a tradition was common among the locals back then. Nowadays as the older generations passed away, the tradition died with them. I would like to continue paying homage to the paintings in the traditional way, but I am too

old and fragile to do the climbing. However, every time I look at the cave, it still reminds me of the old memories.

From the discussion above, it appears that the social values attributed to the Huashan rock art heritage by the local communities refer to perceived meanings that embody a connection between the current Zhuang people and their ancestors, a reference point of ethnic and regional identity, and a quality that resonates in traditional activities. The local residents' attachment to the area can be further interpreted as a feeling of regional pride and nostalgia, as well as a sense of ethnic belonging because of these meanings.

Articulating Changes in Social Values

Through elaborating on the social values attributed to the Huashan rock art area by its local population, this section aims to explore how tourism efforts have affected those values. To determine the influence, ethnographic fieldwork was undertaken beginning in March 2013, with a follow up survey in July 2014. Qualitative data were collected through interviews, participant observation, and casual conversation, with the former acting as primary data, and latter information being more supplementary. In total seventy-nine local residents were interviewed individually. The interviews were conducted in an informal, open-ended manner. The questions asked what the Huashan rock art area means to them, what changes were generated by rock art tourism since the beginning of the World Heritage pre-nomination campaign, and how they personally feel about the changes.

In order to select the members of the community I worked with, I first drafted a short list of key-informants whom I interviewed with the help of local government officials, scholars and personal friends. Those interviewees were the ones identified as both eligible and willing to participate in the research. Thereafter, the approach of

snowball sampling was used (Babbie, 2010), meaning that the key-informants were asked to assist in bringing more participants with diverse backgrounds in to contact with the researcher. All the interviews were recorded in personal notes. Since approximately seventy percent of the villagers did not speak Mandarin Chinese, the language in which the interviews were made, these interviews were conducted with the help of three voluntary interpreters. Themes were identified and codes were defined to generate descriptive statistics for each of the open-ended questions.

The analysis of the data has brought to light local communities' understanding of the changes engendered by rock art tourism. An examination of their understanding reveals that, among those changes, there are six themes affecting local resident perception and attitudes towards the rock art heritage. These themes are (1) a boost in pride as the result of the World Heritage pre-nomination campaign, (2) heightened awareness of environmental issues, (3) enhanced public representation, (4) revival of ethnic traditions, (5) concern over costs and outcome, and (6) mistrust of government motivation.

The first theme recognized that the pride-boost effect of the World Heritage pre-nomination campaign was a major influence on local residents' perception and attitude towards the rock art heritage. Most of the respondents (eighty-two percent) expressed a mainly positive attitude towards the campaign, as they saw it as an opportunity for achieving regional advancement in general. Many of them expressed the expectation of tangible benefits, such as an increase in the number of tourists and job opportunities, from the rock art area's potential success in obtaining the World Heritage title. It is also believed by a few residents that the campaign itself would enhance the awareness and visibility of not only the rock art heritage but also the whole region. As perceived by some respondents, the region where the Huashan rock art area is located lacked any

obvious advantage for competing with other tourist attractions in Guangxi, because they all share a very similar type of landscape. As one respondent remarked:

We have the unique landscape of karst topography, but so do the rest of Guangxi. There are other regions in Guangxi which are far more popular among tourists for their natural settings. We need something special, something that can only be found here. There is no better recognition or promotion than World Heritage inscription. (Male, age between 30-39, 2013)

From the respondents' general support for the World Heritage pre-nomination campaign, the second most frequently mentioned theme was the main contribution of the campaign towards increasing higher awareness of environmental issues. Seventy-nine percent of respondents agreed that the pre-nomination projects had improved the surrounding environment of the rock art area to various degrees. Many of them further commented that the publicity efforts of regional authorities helped to enhance local resident awareness of the need for environmental protection, as locals had become more environment-friendly in their day-to-day activities. For instance, one respondent mentioned that local villagers used to dump wastewater and garbage into the river, a behaviour that is more self-disciplined in these days. Furthermore, a few respondents pointed out the local government's endeavour to banish the sand-digging business at the Zuojiang River:

As local villagers we felt fed up with the sand-digging workshops for years. They damaged our fields, polluted the water, and made a mess of the surrounding environment. They used to threaten us, claiming that they had powerful government support behind their back. It is good to see them being shut down. (Male, age between 40-49, 2014)

The increased environmental consciousness went hand in hand with enhanced public representation, which was the third most widely identified theme recognized by respondents as a benefit of the campaign-driven tourism development. Sixty-three percent of respondents expressed their happiness regarding the renovated infrastructural and tourist facilities which were constructed as part of the campaign. A few of them also made reference to the newly established Huashan museum and the interpretation boards erected around the sites. Those facilities were considered contributions to an informative and pleasant environment for the public representation of the rock art sites. When the respondents were asked about their personal impression of the tourism renovation, two recurrent sentiments expressed by them were that the work was 'appropriate' and 'not extravagant'. It should be noted that the relatively modest renovation of the tourist facilities was a direct result of the pre-nomination campaign. As mentioned above, in recent years the local authorities have applied more restrictions on tourism projects carried out around the rock art area in order to ensure its success in the coming World Heritage designation. A conversation with a local government official in August 2014 confirmed that, since 2014, the Chongzuo City government has forbidden its subordinate counties to sign any new tourism development contract with private sectors within the designated buffer zone of the rock art area.

The fourth dominant theme to emerge from the interviews was the revival of ethnic traditions through the promotion of cultural events related to the Huashan rock art. As already discussed, organizing cultural events to rejuvenate ethnic practices could be seen as inventing tradition. Nevertheless, in the case of Huashan, from the perspective of local residents, the invention did, to some extent, succeed in resuscitating grassroots support and reviving other ethnic traditions. Fifty-eight percent of respondents associated the events with a feeling of ethnic pride. Many of them

acknowledged that events like the ‘Huashan Culture Festival’ assisted in strengthening the emotional bond between the local Zhuang people and the rock art. According to one respondent:

I think if the rock art can thrive, so can our culture. It (the Huashan Culture Festival) does make me feel proud of being a Zhuang because it is the Luo Yue, our ancestors who made the paintings. (Female, age between 20-29, 2013)

The data analysis showed that, even though the majority of respondents expressed a positive attitude towards the changes generated by the campaign driven promotion of the rock art as a venue for tourism, there was, nevertheless, an undercurrent of dissonance most often expressed when respondents were questioned about the political aspect of the development plans. The fifth most highlighted theme for many respondents (forty-three percent) was concern over the cost of the campaign. They commented that the local government saw the campaign as the priority of the whole region and had invested too much money in it. Their main concern regarded three questions: how long would it take for the investment made in the pre-nomination stage to start making profit; where did this huge amount of investment come from; and would it be all worthwhile in the end? As one respondent put it:

Some villages in the region still do not have running water. The money could have been spent on more imperative needs of the people. (Female, age between 50-59, 2013)

Apart from concern over the cost and outcome, twenty-seven percent of the respondents also questioned the reasons behind local government officials’ enthusiasm for the World Heritage request. The mistrust in government motivation is related to a well-known fact that the current evaluation and promotion system is conducted in such a way that it encourages officials to seek instant political achievements, for immediate

effect and recognition, rather than considering the long term consequences of their decisions (Li et al., 2008: 315). A few respondents pointed out that the lack of trust was amplified by the lack of transparency in the policy-making process:

We do not want to see uncontrolled development change the area entirely. Isn't that normally what happens to a Chinese site once it gets inscribed as a World Heritage? (Male, age between 20-29, 2014)

Discussion

What has been the effect of tourism on the social values attributed to the Huashan rock art area by the local Zhuang people? The social values ascribed to the rock art heritage by the local residents are closely related to community feelings of regional pride and nostalgia, as well as their collective sense of ethnic belonging. Therefore, any variation in those emotions may possibly affect the social values under discussion. Regarding the effects of tourism on social values, it is not surprising to find that most of the respondents expressed positive attitudes towards the changes generated by the campaign. This is because many of them perceived the local government's tourism promotion efforts in the campaign as a way of keeping the traditional values that the rock art sites stood for alive. That is to say, such efforts were seen by many as not just a means of maintaining the fabric of the pictographic sites, but also a constructive process through which the significance of Zhuang ethnic culture is underpinned; their regional pride honoured, and their memories refreshed.

In order to understand the way social values have been reshaped by campaign-driven rock art tourism, the impact of authoritative recognition must be taken into consideration. The Authoritative recognition in the case of the Huashan rock art area refers to the fact that it was selected among a large number of competitors by the Chinese central government to become a World Heritage nomination. As seen in the

remarks recorded through interview, the region was confined by a rural frontier setting and the lack of an obvious advantage in competing with its neighbours for tourism. Therefore, the prominence given to this unique cultural asset was not only a strong affirmation of the culture in which the value was created, but also a validation of the local population's regional prestige. The local communities' cultural identity and ethnic pride was also built up through a sense of esteem that they drew from increased environmental consciousness and the enhanced public representation of the rock art sites. As mentioned by the respondents, one major change engendered by the development of tourism was the pleasant, modest and informative environment in which the rock art is exhibited to the public. Such an environment was the result of both the promotion and the restriction of rock art tourist exploitation from the pre-nomination campaign. The added tourist features and the relatively modest renovation of tourist facilities, which took place under the normative pressures applied by UNESCO World Heritage List criteria, have created an enhanced representational environment for the rock art sites. The wellbeing generated by this environment helped local residents to feel that their culture, values and position in society were respected. Such wellbeing also encouraged local community members to explore, express and reflect on the cultural significance that the rock art heritage had for them.

The revival or reinvention (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2012) of ethnic tradition should be considered another aspect of change that is beneficial to the conservation of social values. When community members were questioned about their personal impressions from participating in such events, the persistent theme in their answers was a feeling of ethnic pride. Such a feeling was tied to the privilege of not only being able to understand the cultural messages embedded in the events, but also knowing the ethnic connection between themselves and the people who created the paintings.

Additionally, the feeling of ethnic pride also demonstrated a cultural link that was considered special between the local Zhuang people and the rock art area. Therefore, the cultural events that assisted in reinforcing Zhuang ethnic identity also played an active role in transcending and conserving the social values associated with the rock art heritage.

The data analysis shows that even though respondents expressed generally positive feelings towards the promotion of the Huashan rock art area for tourism, those feelings were also tempered by varying degrees of doubt, concern and distrust towards the development process. These negative sentiments were closely linked to underlying social messages in response to the undesired consequences brought about by the pre-nomination campaign. Over time, those messages might lead to an attenuation of the strength of social values attributed to the rock art area. The most conspicuous social message was the fear of witnessing disagreeable changes upon the development of the heritage while having no power to stop it. Such fear not only referred to people's general reluctance towards change, but also indicated local residents' discontent regarding the lack of community participation in the decision-making process. Therefore, the sense of impotence for local communities having their opinions excluded from the tourism development process of the Huashan rock art area endangered the very bedrock of meanings upon which these social values were constructed.

Conclusion

In recent years, it has generally been agreed that places of heritage are worthy of preservation because of the values they are deemed to represent (Poulios, 2010). Since those values are perceived diversely by different individuals and groups, the significance of a place also resides in the social values recognized by communities living close to the place. The social values attributed to a heritage place by its local

residents refer to the meanings expressed in their collective sense of attachment to the place. The consideration of social values has become increasingly imperative in the management of rock art sites, due to the impact generated by the rise of rock art tourism on the lives of people living in close proximity to the sites (Sanz, 2012). In China, the development of rock art tourism has had much to do with international heritage organizations such as UNESCO through the promotion of the world Heritage List. Such development also has an effect on the social values attributed to rock art sites by communities in the immediate vicinity.

Based on the results of ethnographic fieldwork, and a general literature review, social values attributed to the Huashan rock art area by the local communities have been shown to refer to meanings that embody a connection between the current Zhuang people and their ancestors, a reference point for ethnic and regional identity, and a quality that resonates with traditional activities. It has also been revealed that many of the changes generated by the endeavour towards tourism promotion by the authorities in their pursuit of World Heritage designation have contributed to the reinforcement of the social values under discussion. Those changes include the boost in pride from the World Heritage pre-nomination campaign, the increased environmental conscience, the enhanced public representation, and the revival of ethnic traditions. However, it is also proposed that negative feelings among the communities in response to the undesired consequences of the campaign might have resulted in the attenuation of the social values. Furthermore, it indicated that the lack of community participation in the decision-making process might have endangered the very foundation upon which the social values are constructed.

In this article, the exploration of the values that uphold local Zhuang people's emotional attachment to the Huashan rock art area and the tourism influence on those

values has contributed to a better understanding of the challenges in heritage tourism. Therefore, such a discussion should help prompt policy-makers to reconsider the role of local communities in the touristic exploitation of rock art sites with greater pause for reflection. In practice, the economic and political values of rock art heritage often outweigh all the other qualities, making it very difficult for community participation to live up to its rhetorical potential. The article therefore appeals to the establishment of an alternative management paradigm that stays sensitive to public feelings and has the ability to genuinely incorporate the consideration of social values into the planning process of heritage tourism. In the present global context, giving priorities to maintaining emotional connections between people and place as a primary means of conservation is nearly impossible. Nevertheless, increasing the visibility of this fundamental dimension of heritage to both the public and the authorities is a necessary step towards the employment of a community-involved managerial approach. This is not only desirable, but also one of the current requirements of the World Heritage Operational Guidelines (WHC, 2012: para. 12).

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Figure 1. The conservation of the Huashan rock art site during the pre-nomination campaign (photo taken by the author in March 2013)

Figure 2. A poster in Huashan Tun village saying 'Huashan has picturesque scenery, and everybody has the responsibility to protect it'. (Photo taken by the author in July 2014)