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**Shepherd, Robert J. 2013. *Faith in Heritage. Displacement, Development, and Religious Tourism in Contemporary China*. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press. 179 pp. Pb.: \$34.95. ISBN: 9781611320749.**

In his study Robert J. Shepherd analyses the process of heritage construction and its numerous actors and segments, giving examples of diverging and sometimes quite opposite voices, showing positive as well as negative meanings people ascribe to it. Instead of a self-understood term 'heritage' or perceiving it as a straightforward, agreed upon and positive construction, as we observe happens in public discourse, the author shows all its complexity, its multiple layers and ambivalence. The different positions of power or the lack of it that heterogeneous groups and individuals possess direct their actions and reactions in regard to the naming of the heritage: they either enable them to make decisions and ride the wave of beneficial circumstances or they demand that they use sly tricks and transform themselves into at least temporary winners or they turn them into victims of the decisions coming from local and state centres of power or distant centres of world organisations.

The author focuses his analysis on Wutai Shan (Mount Wutai), one of China's four sacred Buddhist mountains. In this area, which has been a Buddhist site since the fifth century, with the Communist Party rising to power in 1949, projects of heritage protection are starting to be developed (with the initial denial of the religious significance and in the last two decades gradually with greater religious freedoms, redefining Wutai Shan as an economic source of a relatively marginalised region and including it on different national and provincial lists), that culminated in the proclamation of Wutai Shan a national park in 2005 and receiving the status of a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2009. Wutai Shan currently has 47 functioning monasteries and temples, with nine temples being inscribed on the UNESCO list. Most of the approximately two million annual visitors are Chinese citizens, primarily of the Han nationality, while there are hardly any foreign visitors. The author builds the ground for his analysis by giving a highly informative and concise insight into UNESCO's most important documents and strategies. He also points to the contradictions they contain (e.g. insisting on variety and non-homogenisation, but at the same time relying on a particular set of values elevated to a universal level) and a shifting relationship to tourism. Special place is given to the questioning of the term 'world heritage', as a cornerstone of UNESCO's program, in relation to specific social, political, economic, religious and other realities of each separate locality on the UNESCO list. The author incorporates his specific research into the context of Chinese history and contemporaneity, from which he, with great expertise, extracts the most salient points, making thus possible the understanding of the political circumstances and the government's changes of attitude towards the concept of heritage (after the introduction of the neologism in 1982 as much as before that).

At the centre of his research stand the multiple meanings that various actors ascribe to the transformation of Wutai Shan into a UNESCO World Heritage site. Shepherd sheds light on the support and investment of the Republic of China and the Chinese Communist Party for and into heritage programs, through which ideas of development

and modernisation are inscribed into Wutai Shan, making this locality part of an ‘ongoing moral and spiritual campaign to shape Chinese citizens into proper modern subjects’ (p. 68). Alongside these official state narratives, the author presents many other voices: those of the representatives of local government, official guides, licensed and unlicensed salesmen, local residents, monks and nuns, visitors, etc. In this way, he creates with extraordinary care an image of this place within a dynamic relationship between heritage, tourism and religious practices. The complex management of Wutai Shan on the state, provincial and municipal level, a whole array of laws and regulations and the various uses and meanings ascribed to it by the various users make this locality an unfinished story about UNESCO’s program and its implementation in the Chinese context. ‘Demarcation of space’ (p. 37) and the plan to create a central zone free from commercial and residential functions (from 2005) make the sharpest cut into the living fabric of this space that the process of the construction of the world heritage site brought about (what is planned is the removal of 417 households with 1,309 residents from Taihuai and its surroundings and the demolition of 36 guesthouses and 108 shops). The displacement of residents from the Taihuai area, where most of the protected buildings are situated, into a planned housing complex 23 km away (designed for 1,857 households and 6,500 people), initiated at the end of 2007, physically inscribes new features into the landscape and speaks loudly about the contested points and problems, demonstrating what happens when strategic documents begin to take their shape in space and in people’s lives: demolishing homes in Taihuai and unfinished planned green surfaces on site of previous houses, shops and farmland, uncertainty, questioning and resignation, non-transparency and corruption in distributing compensation money, building on top of existing buildings as an effort to enlarge those sums, the astounding emptiness of the newly built housing complex, various renovations and building of some religious objects and the neglect of others, etc.

Wutai Shan as ‘the sacred space of the secular world heritage movement’ (p. 118) and ‘the sacred space of Buddhist aura and power’ (p. 150), appears thus as a space of ‘contested histories’ and a space of ‘exercise of power’ (p. 119), an arena of diverse creations and recreations of landscape, different interests and tactics. At the end of his study, the author sees this variety as a promise of a possible dialogue, which could contribute to the recognition and acceptance of ‘social landscape’ and ‘social vibrancy’ of Wutai Shan (p. 152). Instead of demarcation and creation of ‘clean’ zones in which all former complexity and vibrancy are erased, the author suggests a need for a greater sensibility to concrete social reality, which would prevent the informing of the world heritage sites following the same principles and the suppressing of the variety that lies in the very foundation of UNESCO’s agenda.

Shepherd’s study is a remarkably analytical, detailed and inspiring representation of one concrete case of heritage construction. His knowledge of Chinese circumstances and multiple field research that allowed him gaining insight and meeting the actors of this process have created a text that is informative and which tries to represent equally a variety of voices. I find especially valuable the extracts of conversations with the local population and visitors and the vivid descriptions of field situations he found himself in. The author in this book gives strong examples of the fact that he also emphasises

that ‘heritage programs, policies, and campaigns are inherently political’ (p. 47). By discovering various layers and cracks in the narratives about heritage, Shepherd writes out the multiple aspects of ‘faith in heritage’, which (in my opinion) can be extremely motivating for those for whom heritage and its connection to tourism, religious practices, development policies, human rights, etc. are interesting in the sense of research, but also for those who live with and in heritage.

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