The dilemma of architectural conservation policy and practice versus sustainable tourism: The case of the Great Shangqinggong Temple in Jiangxi Province, People's Republic of China

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Abstract

This qualitative research addresses the dilemma of architectural conservation policy and practice versus sustainable tourism goals through a case study of the Great Shangqinggong Temple. The goal is to determine how local agencies manage heritage places such as archaeological ruins to fulfill the demands of sustainable tourism, retaining authenticity in architectural conservation policy while presenting heritage to attract tourist consumption. Whether to commercialize an archaeological site for tourist entertainment or focus on interpretation and education is a question central to site management. Data was gathered by a literature review of Chinese Taoist history and participant observation of the Great Shangqinggong Temple compared to the Xiandu Female Taoist Temple, Magu Mountain. The result was that an architectural conservation policy, practice, and sustainable tourism requires authenticity to maintain equilibrium.

Keywords: sustainable tourism, architectural conservation policy

1. Introduction

This paper aims to address the gaps in architectural conservation policy and practice versus sustainable tourism, utilising the ruins of the Great Shangqinggong temple as a case study. Authenticity is a part of architectural conservation policy; however, the practice of authenticity in the Chinese context has been compromised in general. The Great Shangqinggong temple ruins were found in 2014, and the excavation finished in 2017. The east side of the archaeological ruins of the central part, which includes Wenchang Hall, Tianhuang Hall, Wuyue Hall, and Sanguan Hall, were excavated, while the central west part, which includes Guansheng Hall, Ziwei Hall, Sidu Hall, and Sansheng Hall, was left unexcavated. The excavation of the archaeological ruins took place in half of the ruins, which are composed of Sanqing Hall, Houtu Hall, Yuhuang Hall, and Longhu Gate. March 2023 marks the completion of the current protection programme, which began in June 2019. However, it opened to the public on November 19, 2023 (Chinanews, 2023). Numerous interventions were used in the project's preservation, including the roofed structure parts that are reminiscent of ancient Chinese architecture, the addition of new ground (or building base) portions, and the creation of a new central west part. The preservation and protection aspects of this endeavour are overshadowing authenticity.

The paper reflects on this broader question of lost authenticity in architectural conservation in China through the example of a decidedly more complex case.

2. Purposes

This research aims to address the gaps in architectural conservation policy and practice versus sustainable tourism utilising the ruins of Shangqinggong Temple and the Xiandu Female Taoist Temple, Magu Mountain as case studies.

3. Literature review

3.1 Architectural conservation policy and practice

National economic and social development are very important to every country in the world. For this purpose, the Chinese government made it a national policy, naming Outline of the Five Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China, or the Five-Year Plan in short. Yingtan City's Five Years Plan emphasises the need to strengthen and rely on the brand image of "Mount Longhu is unique", fully utilise the scenic

area of Longhu Mountain, deeply explores Taoism's cultural undertones and restoration and reconstruction of the Great Shangqinggong Temple. It also encourages that builds well-being tourism for aged people encircling Taoism culture, and establishes multiple exhibition bases for wellness and senior citizens care in Longhu Mountain (Yingtan Municipal Bureau of Culture, Radio, Television, Press, Publication and Tourism, Jiangxi Fuxin Ecological Engineering and Tourism Research Institute Co., Ltd., 2021, p. 58).

3.2 Sustainable tourism

Sustainable tourism could be divided into two parts: one is sustainable, and the other is tourism. Sustainable definition in Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary is 'of, relating to, or being a method of harvesting or using a resource so that the resource is not depleted or permanently damaged' (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, n.d.). In the Cambridge Online Dictionary is 'able to continue over a period of time'; and sustainable is also a specialized word in environment: 'causing, or made in a way that causes, little or no damage to the environment and therefore able to continue for a long time' (Cambridge Online Dictionary, n.d.). Collins Online Dictionary states 'You use sustainable to describe the use of natural resources when this use is kept at a steady level that is not likely to damage the environment' (Collins Online Dictionary, n.d.). Overall, with all definitions from above, we can see that sustainable is a specialised word that is used to describe the continuing state in nature. Later on, this word, or this environmental method, was applied to many fields; tourism is one of them. Apparently, sustainability describes the method of how we deal with resources.

Tourism especially mass tourism is a modern concept, it originated around the period of the Western Industrial Revolutionary. At this time, Thomas Cook was first launching the travel agency as the birth of a modern tourism business company (Hunter, 2004). Modern tourism is a new mode of people's lives, and why do people travel in modern times, what do people get from travel activities? Pearce and Lee (2005) said motivation can explain the reasons why we travel, especially in the way of psychological motivation, both physical needs and psychological needs (pp. 228-227). By combining Tourism and sustainability, Sustainable tourism could be explained as a destination place that could provide resources that satisfy the needs of tourists in terms of physical needs and psychological needs, and use these resources in an undestroyable way.

3.3 Preservation, restoration, reconstruction and adaptation

Four different approaches to heritage place protection were defined in the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter: Preservation: keeping a place in its current condition and preventing future damage; Restoration: the process of restoring a location to a known previous state by clearing off accretions or putting existing components back together without adding any new ones; Restoration involves bringing a place back to its previous state, whereas reconstruction involves introducing new material if there is enough evidence for it; Repurposing a place to accommodate a new or intended function is called adaptation (p. 2). At the beginning stage of the work, the concept of choosing is a fundamental direction which decides the fate of the architectural building places.

Table 1 The conceptual framework of preservation, restoration, reconstruction and adaptation

Items	Preservation	Restoration	Reconstruction	Adaptation
The state of the place	maintaining	returning	returning	changing
Method purposes	Retarding further deterioration (p.2)	Removing accretions or reassembling existing elements without the introduction of new material (p.2)	to distinguish from restoration by the introduction of new material (p. 2)	To suit the existing use or a proposed use (p. 2)
Results	Original	Original + New assembly	New	Original + new intention or situation

Source: The information has changed from ICOMOS Australia, 2013A, p. 2.

4. Methodology

The case of the Great Shangqinggong Temple on Mount Longhu, China, is explored via a conceptual model to address the gaps in architectural conservation policy, practice, and sustainable tourism. Fieldwork is mainly based on participant observation.

The project was based on qualitative methods, with an initial review of literature on Chinese dynastic history and, more specifically, on the history of Taoism in China. Primary data were collected from participant observation as part of the author's active role concerning the Longhu Taoists Association and the comparable Xiandu Female Taoist Temple case. Discussions with other participants in the project yielded further information.
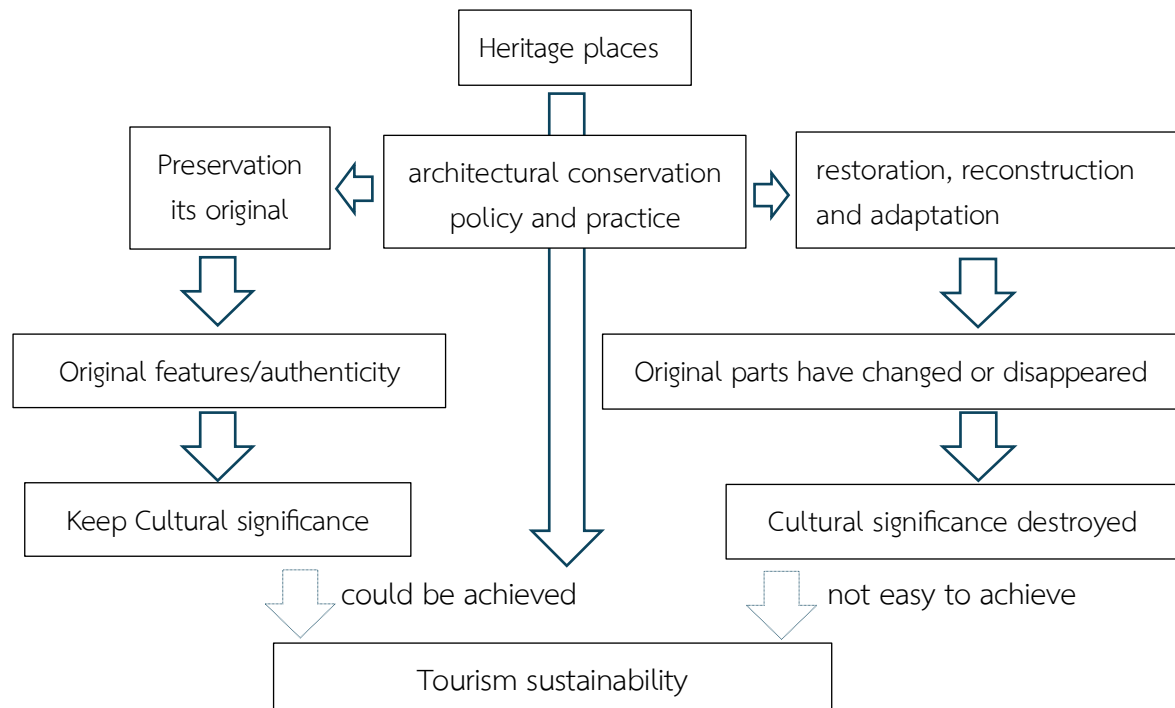
5. The conceptual framework of the paper

Figure 1 The conceptual framework of the paper

Source: Author

6. The comparable case of the Great Shangqinggong Temple ruins

Mountain Magu is located in the western part of Nancheng County, Jiangxi Province, with its main peak at an altitude of 1176 meters. It is named after the birthplace of Magu Fairy. According to the Taoist book of "Yun Ji Qi Jian", Mountain Magu is the 28th of the 36 Cave Heavens and the 10th of the 72 Blessed Lands. For thousands of years, it has been famous for its beautiful natural landscapes and beautiful mythological legends. The scenic area has beautiful mountains, lush vegetation, and abundant resources. Mountain Magu has resources such as the ancient Xiandu Temple, the Longmen Bridge, the Shengong Spring, one of the six major springs in China, the Qing Dynasty ancient temple Bitao An, and the Shuanglong Lake. Since the Qin and Han dynasties, it has been a summer resort in south-eastern China.[1] (see Figure 2c).

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[1] Information was extracted from the Mountain Magu introduction board.

Figure 2 Mountain Magu

Source: a). Google Maps, 2022; b). and c). Author

Magu Fairy is listed as a folk deity in Chinese Mythology, the purpose of worship is to bless and alleviate disasters and bring good luck.

Figure 3 Magu alter in Mountain Magu[2]

Source: Author

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[2] The pictures were taken by the author on 17th December 2022.

According to the rebuilding information of the Xiandu Female Taoist Temple (see Figure. 4c), there is a Magu Altar in Nanchen County, and no one knows when it was founded. It is said that Magu passed away from here, so the people established a temple here. In AD 739 (Tang Dynasty), Taoist Deng Ziyang requested orders from the court, and Emperor Li Longji ordered the construction of the Magu Temple on this mountain.
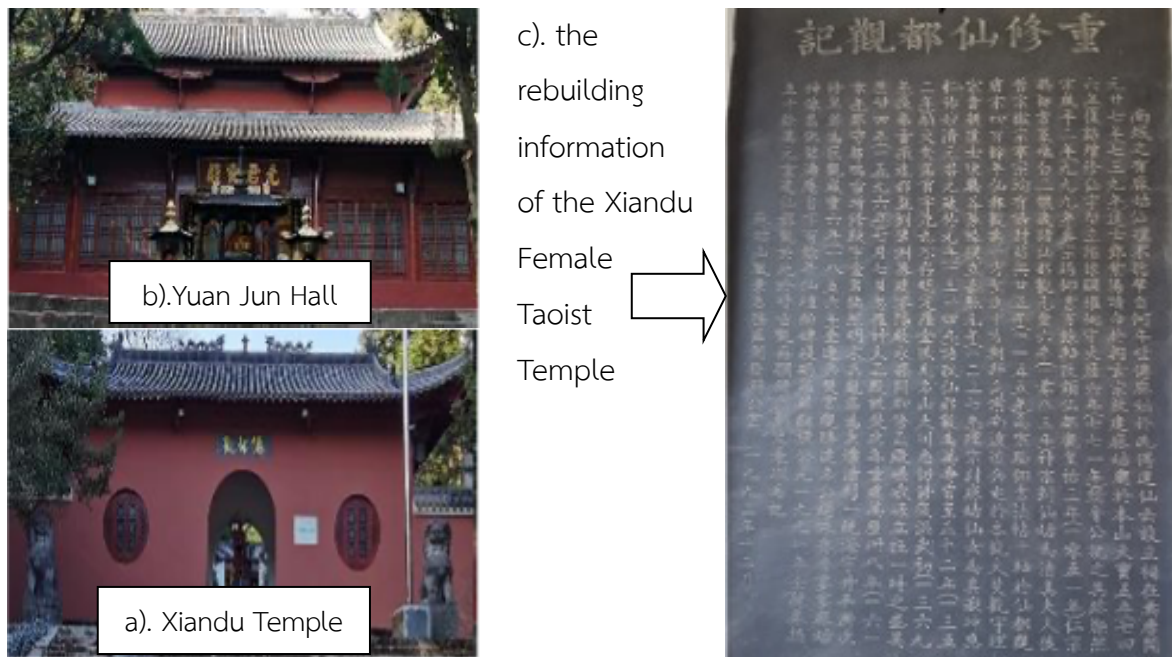

c). the rebuilding information of the Xiandu Female Taoist Temple

b).Yuan Jun Hall

a). Xiandu Temple

Figure 4 Xiandu Female Taoist Temple in Mountain Magu

Source: Author

In AD 646, the emperor Li Longji issued a decree to renovate the temple and erect various statues to showcase the temple. In AD 771, Duke Lanlu recorded that the temple was vivid. In AD 999 (Song Dynasty), Emperor Zhao Heng bestowed more than a hundred scrolls to the Magu temple and changed the name of it to Xiandu temple. In AD 1051 (Song Dynasty), Emperor Zhao Zhen bestowed calligraphy collections to the Xiandu Temple. In AD 1083, Emperor Zhao Xu conferred the Qing Zhen Fu Ren title to Magu.

In AD 1155 (Song Dynasty), Emperor Zhao Gou bestowed ten copybooks of calligraphy to Xiandu Temple. For over 400 years during the Tang and Song dynasties, the Xiandu Temple was a sacred site drawn to come to worship from the country. Emperor Zhao Gou crossed south, and the soldiers stationed in this temple. Fire Burns the Temple during the reign of Emperor Zhao Yun, the Taoist Chen Cigu of that dynasty organised fundraising to rebuild the temple. In AD 1237, Emperor Zhao Yun conferred the title of Magu as the Zhenji Chongying

Renyou Miaoji Yuanjun (Taoist title). In AD 1314, an edict was issued to change Xiandu Temple to Wanshougong. In AD 1352, the temple was destroyed by fire, and no tiles were left.

In AD 1369 (Ming Dynasty), Lei Zhenyuan was promoted as executive officer and supervisor Liu Biyuan by the emperor Zhu Yuanzhang and raised funds to build the Liaoyang Hall, while the main hall was added during the reign of Emperor Zhu Di. The buildings in the temple were extremely prosperous for a time. In AD 1569, the main hall was suddenly burned down and rebuilt the following year. In AD 1610, Governor Wu Minglei repaired the temple, and due to the chaos of the late Ming dynasty, the temple was reduced to ashes. In AD 1856 (Qing Dynasty), the temple was burned to ash again after being rebuilt in the Qing Dynasty. There are very few famous inscriptions on temple ruins that survived. The statue of the Magu deity enshrined in Bitao nunnery has been in use for over a hundred years. The broken stele of the Mugu Altar is abandoned. In AD 1991, the entire county raised over 500,000 Yuan to rebuild the Xiandu Temple here. (see Figure 4c) The present of the Xiandu Female Taoist Temple in Magu Mountain is the new construction.

In 2019, the county of Magu Mountain absorbed 5 billion Chinese Yuan to develop Mount Magu (Jiangxi Fuzhou City Tourism Development Commission, 2019). The present Mount Magu and Xiandu Temple are the new construction.

Based on the participant's observation of Xiandu Temple, it seems like a new tourist site; it is hard to see that the place in the past is a heritage place because almost everything is new without original features or authenticity. Mount Magu also focuses on ticket economy: 35 Chinese Yuan for the ticket and 22 Chinese Yuan for transportation to the mountain, but the transportation fee is exempted during my visit on December 21, 2022. The Great Shangqinggong Temple case is similar to the Xiandu Temple case; however, the Great Shangqinggong Temple reserved the ruins part, as the paper indicated in part 1: the east side of the archaeological ruins of the central part, which includes the ruins of Wenchang Hall, Tianhuang Hall, Wuyue Hall, and the Sanqing Hall in the central part. So, the visitors can see some parts of the original ruins from the past, contrasting with the Xindu temple, which hardly can find out the ruins on the temple site.

7. Discussion

A further significant source of information that provided an institutional context for the study was the local government's Master Plan for Cultural and Tourism Development; this was read against the data emerging from the conceptual framework (summarised above) to meet

three objectives: 1) to observe instances where the authenticity and integrity of archaeological sites are actually or potentially compromised; 2) to understand the tourism potential of the Shangqinggong complex; and 3) to assess the compatibility of goals of safeguarding authenticity with goals of sustainable tourism. For the present study, sustainable tourism is understood as having the potential to attract tourists in sufficient numbers to ensure a sustaining revenue stream but not in large numbers to threaten the integrity and authenticity of the complex's sites.

The 3.1 in the paper showed that the architectural conservation policy and practice of the Yingtan City Master Plan focus on rebuilding and restoring the Great Shangqinggong Temple Ruins in the Five-Years Plan (Yingtan Municipal Bureau of Culture, Radio, Television, Press, Publication and Tourism, Jiangxi Fuxin Ecological Engineering and Tourism Research Institute Co., Ltd., 2021, p. 54). The policy determined the practice of the protection project of the Great Shangqinggong Temple, as the conceptual framework showed in part 4 of the paper. The Great Shangqinggong Temple ruins case could represent a typical case in China, in which the government tried to revive the culture and tourism via the reconstruction of the heritage places but omitted the original features or authenticity of the site. The cultural significance might be destroyed easily after the reconstruction.

'Cultural significance means aesthetic, historical, scientific, social, or spiritual value for past, present, or future generations. Cultural significance is embodied in the place itself, its fabric, setting, use, associations, meanings, records, related places, and related objects. Places may have a range of values for different individuals or groups' (ICOMOS Australia, 2013A, p. 2). The protection project of the Great Shangqinggong Temple ruins destroyed the integrity and original features or authenticity, and the visitors could see only some parts of the ruins after the protection project because too much intervention on the site was the major interfering element to the visitors.

The assessments involved in this methodology are based on the conceptual plan for sustainable heritage management. Sustainable heritage management should consider the five avoidance rules in heritage analysis and make adjustments based on the analysis to apply in tourism and architectural heritage management. The five avoidance rules are *to avoid seeing heritage places as principally revenue generators, to avoid commercialisation compromising outstanding universal value (OUV), to avoid compromising authenticity, to avoid overbalancing where the two elements (authenticity, conservation) of sustainable tourism are easy to go to extremes and to avoid elitism* (Liu, 2024, pp. 19-25).

The Sanqing Hall and authenticity

The new protective project on the archaeological ruins is a case of *violation* of authenticity. In detail, the conservation of the Sanqing Hall, statuaries were added following conservation work; this will mislead the visitors that there are Sanqing Deities in this room, but the original hall has two floors, the Shenxiao Jiuchen (神宵九辰上帝) were venerated in the first floor, the 36 thunder gods were listed in the east and west. Sanqing Daozu the highest deities in Taoism (including the Yuqing Yuanshi Tianzun, the Shangqing Lingbao Tianzun, and the Taiqing Daode Tianzun) were venerated on the second floor. The question arises: why not respect the original ruins or leave only the original ruins with roofed covering?

It's unclear why this statue was added. The fact that the Lingbao, Daode, and Yuanshi deities are historically regarded as the trinity of Sanqing gods—the divine embodiment of ultimate truth—may not be just accidental. It would seem that statuary was absent from the ruins as excavated but was subsequently and inauthentically added, perhaps to claim a different but imaginary level of authenticity- or, perhaps, merely to impress the tourists.

Figure 5 After the statues were added to the archaeological ruins of
the Great Shangqinggong Temple
Source: Author

The Dragon and Tiger Gate, the Yuhuang Hall, and authenticity

The Dragon and Tiger Gate, Yuhuang Hall, and Houtu Hall represent a more problematic example of inauthenticity. In these cases, the approach has not even satisfied the criteria of reconstruction (the Article 1, 1.8 definition in the Burra Charter, which is to *return a place to*

a known earlier state and is distinguished from restoration by the introduction of new material. ICOMOS Australia. 2013A, p. 2.). The Dragon and Tiger Gate is a novel design that combines a roof covering in the manner of traditional Chinese architecture with a recently rebuilt ground plan.

Protecting the remains doesn't only mean putting roof coverings over them; in fact, the current project reuses the original ruins—which were not protected at all—into a new building.

The placement of god statues into the Sanqing Hall may have been motivated by a desire to educate the public about Taoist culture; similarly, the arrangement of the three halls may have been motivated by the same goal, as illustrated in the above figure. Of course, the goal is probably simpler: restored "historical" structures are probably more successful in drawing tourists, as shown by the fact that many Chinese towns and villages have made it a point to rebuild or restore a historic "old street" for visitors.

Figure 6 The new-build of Longhu Gate (Dragon-Tiger Gate)

Source: Author

8. Conclusion

The complex of the Great Shangqinggong Temple is the case mixed with the original relics and new buildings part. The objective facts show that no buildings or architecture could stand for such a long time without physical damage. However, what should be kept and what should be changed is a question, especially in the architectural conservation behaviour. Just like in 3.3 mentioned at the beginning stage of the work, the concept of choosing is a fundamental direction which decides the fate of the architectural building places and further influences tourism of the places in a sustainable way. The historical places or cultural places might bring spiritual values via their architectural buildings or relics to people including tourists.

The key problem is that the new buildings were everywhere and a little original relics or ruins could be found in the case of the Xiandu Female Taoist Temple, Magu Mountain. The only thing that remains might be the stories of the Magu in Magu Mountain. Thus, what people or tourists might get from the Xiandu Female Taoist Temple apart from spiritual values? What is the value of the Xiandu Female Taoist Temple?

For the cases in the paper, The complex of the Great Shangqinggong Temple and the Xiandu Female Taoist Temple both are related to Chinese Taoism culture, it is necessary to discuss the Taoism culture of Yingtan City to social, economic and environmental benefits.

Economic part: The GDP categories of Yingtan City from 2015 to 2019. The data indicates an apparent yearly trend for GDP growth; in terms of total tourism GDP, 2019 has the highest tourism figure on the chart, accounting for 61.5% of the city's GDP. All things considered, the tourism industry contributes significantly to Yingtan City's GDP. In comparison, 38.5% of the total in 2019 came from non-tourism. In Yingtan City, tourism has grown to become a vital sector. (the People's Government of Yingtan City, n.d.) Longhu Mountain is a famous Taoism place in China, Yingtan is also a brand name Chinese Taoism City. Taoism as a kind of cultural resource contributes a lot to Yingtan's economy.

Social part: Taoism teaches people a way of thinking. In Taoism, Taoists believe that each Gods respectively live in human entrails, and the heart is the leader of them. People can see their hearts by only doing good deeds, and the heart has a function that objects to people doing evil things. Once people can see their heart, they will master the secret of a long life, and achieve their goals easily. In contrast, if people cannot see their heart or do evil things, they will hard to reach achievements and not have a long life. (Yang, 2013, pp. 2256-2257). Positive thinking can bring about many advantages, yet negative thinking has the power to trick the soul.

Environmental part: Taoists stress on environment a lot, because they need to cultivate themselves, in other words, they need to care about the environment of their living place.

In the book Tian Di Gong Fu Tu, written by Si-ma Cheng-zhen during the Tang Dynasty, the Dongtian-Fudi system is described in terms of Taoism. The system of Dongtian and Fudi was illustrated in this book. A system of stone caves known as Dongtian consists of 10 caves and 36 smaller caves. The term "Fudi" refers to the 72 places where individuals can acquire benefits from the environment, not only for meditation but for cultivating both mental and physical (Si-ma, 1988).

In contrast, Dongtian and Fudi are accessible safe havens that people can inhabit because they are remote from natural disasters and have rich soil and enough natural water, the places satisfy the physical needs of human life. (Tao, 1988). This is explained in the book of Zhen Gao, what the livable places for humans are.

Taoism culture is one part of heritage value to people, and how to bring this value to the public? In the text above, how do we manage the conflict between architectural conservation policy and practice versus sustainable tourism? For the heritage places, there is no room for negotiation on matters that damage the value of the site itself. Conservation should minimize damage to the original object as much as possible. In the case of the Shangqinggong complex showing, the physical evidence presents the chronological sequence from the past until now. The overall sense of history could be reflected in the visitors' minds. Protecting the heritage places well is also to protect Taoism culture.

By contrast the case of the Xiandu Female Taoist Temple, Magu Mountain, little physical shreds of evidence left from the past or without highlight for the visitors, all the things are new. Tourists must spend an entrance ticket and scenic spot transportation ticket in Magu Mountain before touring, What can the tourists get from the places? Or what values can bring us? The scenic spots should not merely focus on revenue economics, the tourist experience should focus as well, whether they are educated, entertained, etc. The most important for the site manager is to try and keep the original features or authenticity of the site as the rule because the past heritages might be lost forever; the original features or authenticity of other cases should not be destroyed in the future as development policy and practice for the architectural heritage management, and further original features or authenticity will help tourism in the way of sustainable.

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