

# CHINA Lijiang



ACHR

PRESERVATION FOR PEOPLE PROJECT

## **ACHR Asian Heritage Project Visit to Lijiang, China**

Lijiang mission report by André Alexander with input from Maurice Leonhardt

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Mission participants: Maurice Leonhardt (ACHR), Larencuo (translator), Somporn Boonyabancha (support), André Alexander (heritage coordinator).

### **I General Description**

The city of Lijiang is an important historic trade center in north-western Yunnan province of China. Lijiang Municipality covers an area of 20,006 square kilometers and has a population of 1.12 million (source: UNESCO). The town dates back over 800 years, and was founded and still is dominated by the Naxi nationality, who have their own distinct pictorial script and blend of religion called Dongba, which is related to Tibetan Buddhism. The Naxi, together with some smaller minority groups, constitute about 57% of the total population. Lijiang was an important stage on the tea route to Tibet, where Tibetan and Chinese traders would come to buy and sell tea (made in Yunnan for Tibet), salt (harvested in Tibet exported to China), meat and furs and leather (all from Tibet) and Chinese-made goods such as porcelain. The town also had a tradition of producing leather goods, of papermaking and other crafts. In 1986, very early on, it was designated an important cultural and historic cities by the authorities, and so, unlike the majority of China's historic towns and cities, its historic center has survived the economic boom of the 1990s remarkably well. It also survived an earthquake (scale 6.9) in 1996.

In 1997 it was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The UNESCO's evaluation committee at the time stated that:

The Old Town of Lijiang, which is perfectly adapted to the uneven topography of this key commercial and strategic site, has retained a historic townscape of high quality and authenticity. Its architecture is noteworthy for the blending of elements from several cultures that have come together over many centuries. Lijiang also possesses an ancient water-supply system of great complexity and ingenuity that still functions effectively today.

The Committee decided to inscribe this site on the basis of cultural criteria (ii), (iv) and (v). Lijiang is an exceptional ancient town set in a dramatic landscape which represents the harmonious fusion of different cultural traditions to produce an urban landscape of outstanding quality.

Since then, Lijiang has become one of China's most important tourism destinations, mainly for local tourists who flock here from all over China. There have been 3 million visitors here in the last year, and the number seems to be still growing. 2004 annual "ticket" income was 200 million yuan (\$24 million) (Beijing Review).

As a result, great changes have taken place, and the entire inner city district is dominated by shops, restaurants and guest houses.

### **Physical description**

The town consists of the historic town, which, together with two surrounding historic villages, constitutes the World Heritage Site. About one-third of the old town, the central area, is the first-level protected zone, with the remainder being second-level protected according to Chinese regulations. Architecturally, the two zones closely

resemble each other, but land-use is very different. We estimate that almost all of the first-level protected area and some of the second level area are now primarily a tourist area, where buildings are primarily either entirely for commercial purposes (with some mixed commercial-residential use). The predominantly touristic area may include between 35% and 50% of the total old city area. According to government regulations, in the first-level protected zone (i.e. the tourist zone) all commerce must be connected to tourism, which means there are no local convenience or grocery stores.

Scenically, old Lijiang is a place of great beauty. The historic grain of the old town has been kept, so that there are two- to three-storey traditional houses with tiled roofs lining winding alleyways interspersed by canals, rivers and bridges. The alleyways are paved with natural stone, and infrastructure (electricity, sewage, water) is hidden underneath. The streets are kept immaculately clean, and there are abundant garbage receptacles and incredibly sophisticated public toilets (which serve locals for 5 fen, ca. 0.6 US cent; and tourists for 50 fen, ca. 6 cent). All buildings in the centre have traditional features, even if many are recent conversions into restaurants or shops, and many, particularly along the Li river, are recently erected and sometimes are out of scale.

### **Observations**

However, it appears that few locals live in the central area around the Si-fang Square and along the river. Investigation on one typical shop street in the old town yielded the information that only 1 or 2 locals operate shops there, most were ethnic Chinese migrants. This is despite government encouragement for locals to remain the center. However, the encouragement mainly consists of a monthly subsidy of 10 Yuan (1.3 US\$). One local shopkeeper (d) said that most Naxi people (locals) prefer to collect money from rent paid by outsiders for their houses and live elsewhere. Two of the local interview partners said that it was difficult to get help from the government to keep up their homes (b,g). Some of the people interviewed also said that tourism was getting out of hand, and that it now was too troublesome to live in the old town (a,b). The government's decision to relocate the local market and to ban local grocery and convenience stores from the area (only tourist items may be sold there). Generally, we found two somewhat conflicting views.

Some people thought that everything was better before Lijiang became a famous tourist sites 10 years ago, because it made everybody money-minded, and made it difficult and expensive to live in the town (a,b).

Others said that their live had improved compared to 20 years ago, and that many people would prefer to live off the rents of their ancient houses (d).

Regarding government policy...

## **II Our assessment according to the project criteria**

### ***1 People's participation in the heritage project***

*a) Have the residents (poor and other) participated early in the planning phase?*

NO, according to information obtained by the management office, it was a top-down process. However, sometimes the government would hold town meetings at unspecified intervals to consult with residents.

*b) Who are the main actors? Who initiated the conservation project and why? Who is the main driving force of the process – government, private sector, external agencies, universities or community groups?*

THE main actors are government agencies – the Management Office and the Municipal Government (including the Tourism Administration). The provincial government seems to merely approve of proposals coming from Lijiang but shows little initiative. The UNESCO and the American Non-profit organisation, Global Heritage Fund, have also tried to bring new ideas and initiatives.

*c) Participation in the implementation?*

There seems to be little of that. Residents cannot or only with great difficulties apply to get government assistance for house repairs. Instead, their homes are chosen by government agencies, who then knock on the doors and inform the residents that they will get some assistance. The assistance comes in the form of a government team, who will carry out repairs determined by the chief local planner or architect, with no input from residents (a source of complaint that we heard). There is no participation in planning, infrastructure management etc. as can be found in other countries. However, according to the Chinese system of government, there are the so-called Neighbourhood Offices that, as the lowest level of government, serve as important link between local people and higher levels. While it is difficult for local people to approach higher levels, they may present their views to these Neighbourhood Offices (which consist of paid officials, often recruited from within the neighbourhoods they serve). However, it has never been known that top-down policy was challenged or modified through intervention from these Neighbourhood Offices, so their function appears limited. We also heard that there was a feature not commonly known from other Chinese cities, the so-called street leader. However, at this point we have no further information about this phenomenon.

*d) Participation in maintenance?* NO, mainly top-down per regulations and by-laws except through Neighbourhood Office.

*e) Participation in overall management of project / district government?* NO, only through Neighbourhood Office.

*f) Existence of community-based organisation?* MAINLY restricted to shopkeepers and bar owners associations, representing the interests of migrant entrepreneurs. The Street Leader that we heard seems to be a kind of one-man representative, similar to a village chief.

*g) Existence of savings groups?* NO.

Rating: 2 out of 5

## **2 How are the urban poor / low-income residents affected?**

*a) To what extent do they depend on the historic area for cheap housing?*

RENTS have increased considerably, according to one source ten-fold in ten years. This is a great advantage for house owners. Renters will have been negatively affected. There is alternative housing outside of the old town, but we have no information as to how affordable it is. However, it is certain to be more affordable

than rooms in the central area, where rents have increased ten-fold over the past 10 years. People that relocate voluntarily can get homes at subsidized prices from the government.

*b) Have there been resettlements and relocations?* SO far only voluntary relocation. However, according to an article published in the Chinese magazine, Beijing Review in 2004 (CHEN 2004), the government is investing 6 billion yuan (\$725 million) to build a new city next to Lijiang. "Covering an area of over 330 hectares, the new city will help accommodate residents and enterprises relocated from the old city". The Management Office has informed us on site that a new plan has been approved that would see poor and low-income families from the old town resettled, freeing their home areas for increased tourist development. This is in line with standard Chinese practice, for example in the World Heritage Site city of Pingyao, the government's declared aim is to almost halve the population of the old town (CHEN 2004).

*c) Population figures of low-income residents 10 years ago / before any heritage initiative started, and today?* WE only have figures indicating a strong overall population growth: The 1990 population figure is 51,129 (source: [www.citypopulation.de/China-Yunnan.html](http://www.citypopulation.de/China-Yunnan.html)), while the 2006 figure is 1.12 million (source: UNESCO).

*d) Changes in economic patterns for the poor – has their traditional livelihood been affected adversely (closing of markets, workshops etc), unintentionally positively (fringe benefits) or intentionally positive (new jobs, new markets for local products)? Had the project design promised these things?*

THE World Heritage Application initially seems to have had no picture of the ensuing effects except the desired increase in tourism income. Since then official policy is given preferential treatment to local (original) residents of the town, but there seem to be no specific policies for helping the poor except the monthly subsidy of 1.2 US\$ and assistance for house repair in the average of 250\$. The traditional livelihood must have been impacted by the shifting of the local vegetable market and closing of local grocery and convenience stores. Not every poor person can switch to selling high-quality tourist goods, most of which are produced not in Lijiang. So we think that the poor have been disadvantaged and not taken enough into account by official policies. There is no easily-accessible channel for approaching authorities available to them.

*e) Have living conditions improved (infrastructure – access to safe drinking water, better waste management, better drainage etc.)?* THEY have improved considerably, we found very high-quality infrastructure. The Li river running through town had crystal-clear water. However, we did not find information about the existence of a sewage treatment system, and how the toilet system worked.

Rating: 2 out of 5

### **3 The impact of tourism**

*a) Which impacts can be observed?*

THERE has been a major impact. Initially, the economic impact has led to one of China's best urban conservation policies, with a high degree of authentic traditional

building styles and materials and intact historic streetscape. However, there is increasing construction of fake architecture for large-scale investments that destroy the original scale and grain of the old town. According to the Management Office, the by-laws cannot be always correctly enforced, and even the by-laws are not very detailed on this. The biggest impact has been on land use – every building in the centre of the old town has been converted for tourism use, giving it the appearance of a theme park. Residents have complained about rising prices and that people are now too much "driven by money".

*b) What gains / interests for the tourist industry have negative / neutral /positive impacts on communities? Which interests of the tourist industry might result in conflicts with community interests?*

THE house owners have benefited enormously, it seems many no longer need to work and can simply live off the rent collected by outside entrepreneurs. The poor seem to have been overall affected more negatively than positively, but this is just an initial assessment. A conflict has arisen in that the government wants to increase tourism in the old town and begin to relocate poor families. The closure of local markets and shops in favour of tourist goods (mostly produced elsewhere) is also clashing with residents' interests (loss of jobs, inconvenience).

There has been an official effort to preserve local culture, in that the government has helped to set up a painting studio in the historic home of a painter, a calligraphy workshop, a weaving studio and helped to find a location for a paper-making workshop. We visited them and they have been very impressive, but it was also obvious that these projects are overwhelmed by competition of hundreds, probably thousands of shops selling mass-produced souvenirs. If the government would be more serious about promoting local culture, further intervention (for example a tax on outside products sold in the old town) would be necessary. Local people have also said that their traditional Naxi language and script are no longer taught in schools, so that only a small minority know the script well. So the cultural preservation seems to be a mixed picture.

Rating: 3 out of 5 (assuming majority of locals benefit economically)

#### **4 Physical Aspects of Heritage Conservation**

*a) Were the results of heritage work carried out positive (good quality work, authenticity of place preserved)?*

Overall there is a strong feeling of authenticity because original materials, scale and grain are dominant, and streets are still cobble-stone paved and there are no cars. Advertising is restricted. Nevertheless, several alleys appear more like a theme park than an 800 year old trading town, because local people no longer live there. But the infrastructure work is very high-quality, and in the context of contemporary China, the scale of the preserved historic city is amazing.

*b) Was there a significant loss of historic structures over the past 10 years?*

It seems that in the center of town, which seems to be between one third and half of old city, large numbers the historic buildings have been replaced by shops and restaurants built in pseudo-traditional style, many using traditional materials and respect the original grain, but some built to different scale and crudely disguise the building as traditional. This seems to continue, endangering the authenticity in the medium term.

Rating: 4 out of 5

## **5 Finances**

*How much money for historic conservation work came from tourism? How much from external sources? How much from the private sector (or from public-private partnerships), how much from government, how much from the communities?*

THE management office said repeatedly to our surprise that the government had no money and was dependent on national funding for their work, and was also looking for outside assistance. This seems incredible, as clearly there is a lot of money being made from tourism. It seems the government does not utilize this source of money.

There are partnerships with private developers in two villages outside of Lijiang (which are part of the World Heritage Inscription), Beishan and Suhe. There, companies can get the rights to develop entire areas or even the entire village for tourism. The negotiations have taken place without community participation, and this seems an unfortunate practice, a view somewhat shared by Mr. Zhu from the Management Office, who thought that it was not perfect but "inevitable".

The management office has in the past worked together with an American sponsor for building repair on a modest scale, and may expand looking for external rather than internal sources of funding. This seems to be the wrong direction.

How much in relation to the overall was spent on low-income communities?

Very little, poor house owners have complained that they received too little assistance.

Rating: 2 out 5

## **6 The Image of the city**

*Has it changed / improved as a result of heritage conservation work? Is the heritage district a main factor for the image of the city or a lesser factor?*

The Heritage status is the single most important recognition factor for Lijiang, and the city seems to be on the verge of losing some of its traditional identity to become a theme park.

Rating: 3 out 5

## **7 Who were the conservationalists and where had they received their training?**

Initially conservation planners seem to have come from the provincial capital of Kunming. Today, at the management office, the chief architect is Mr. Liu Shi Chen, a native of Lijiang (Naxi), who studied architectural design at Yunnan University in Kunming. The management office is headed by Ms DING Wen from Sichuan province, her assistant Mr. ZHU is from Shanghai. None of them are trained in conservation, but Mr. ZHU is currently pursuing a degree in heritage management in Germany (though he might not come back to Lijiang afterwards).

*The names of the schools and conservation courses that are available in the city / country and their nature and orientation.*

In Lijiang there is a new college that has a course on tourism management.

Architecture and conservation studies can only be pursued at provincial level in the capital, Kunming, or elsewhere in China. Yunnan University in Kunming has courses in Architectural Design and Conservation.

*Conservation and relocation laws, zoning regulations and procedures in the city/country, building by-laws and zoning regulations and the manner in which they*

*impinge on conservation-related development.*

We obtained a copy of the Old Town Protection Guidelines, which focuses on building conservation and upgrading, traffic and waste management, and generally are very much engineered to achieve a maximum of urban conservation.

Rating: 3 out of 5 (no local education in architecture/conservation available, only one local architect for conservation of entire town, but by-laws are good).

**Overall rating: 2.5 out of 5.** The conservation work is impressive both in scale and detail, but there is an almost total lack of local participation. In a few years the town could become hollowed-out if the remaining original residents move away. The decision to move the local market and close the local shops has caused a significant loss of authenticity and character. Many streets feel already like little more than a tourist theme park.

### **III Ideas and Suggestions:**

Unfortunately, during our visit the leader of the management office, Ms DING, was not there (she was in another province of China). She has been working closely with UNESCO. Any future contact should involve her. Mr. ZHU has been interested in our ideas and views and seems a keen learner, but will soon go to Germany for studies. We also need to identify a local community representative, who authentically represents the different views of the residents and contrasts with the top-down approach of the management office. Recommendation for invitation to Bangkok workshop: Ms DING or Mr. ZHU, and as-yet-to-be-identified local community person. We will also request the Management Office to make a special report for us on the areas that interest us, like community participation and economic policies.

### **IV Sources**

Persons interviewed:

Taxi driver (ethnic Naxi)(a)

Ms SHI, member of residential family who lived since generations in old home in central Lijian (ethnic Naxi)(b)

Mr. ZHU Yujie, assistant to Ms DING Wen at the Lijiang Heritage Management Office (ethnic Chinese from Shanghai)(c)

Shopkeeper Mr. NIAN (ethnic Naxi)(d)

Architect Mr. LIU Shi Chen at Management Office (ethnic Naxi)(e)

Calligrapher at Calligraphy workshop

2 fruit-and-vegetable sellers from a nearby village (Naxi)(f)

Low-income owners-occupiers of a house restored by government (g)

Owners-occupiers of a house restored partly by government and partly by themselves (h)

Ms Heather Peters, Unesco Asia-Pacific Bangkok office, China expert, Lijiang liason person (i)

Sites visited:

new town, old town: all major alleyways in central area (mostly touristic), two monasteries (one Buddhist, one mixed Taoist\_Buddhist-local Dongba), main square, residential area to the east, courtyard that participated in rehabilitation program



## Source materials

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LI Fan: Tourism and urban conservation: Heritage management in the old town of Lijiang, China, 1994-2004, and future directions (thesis for MA in Heritage Studies, Cottbus, Germany)

LI Fan, Hans D. Kammeier: Urban Conservation and Tourism, Heritage Management in the Old Town of Lijiang, China (article submitted to International Journal of Heritage Studies).

Lijiang People's Government: Old Town Protection Guidelines (by-laws)

Protection and Management Bureau of Old Town Lijiang: Projects of Restoration and Protection of Traditional Residence from Ancient Town (official report in English to UNESCO about building upgrading in partnership with American foundation).

Protection and Management Bureau of Old Town Lijiang: Subsidization Examination and Approval Form of Restoration of traditional Buildings in old town Lijiang (internal reports on 35 intervention cases involving local residential buildings)

ZHU Yujie: Urban Conservation and Tourism, A Case study of Heritage Management in the Old Town of Lijiang, China (Project Proposal for MA in Heritage Studies, Cottbus, Germany)

[www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org) Official UNESCO Website, has information about Lijiang, particularly the evaluation report of the commission that agreed to the inscription as World Cultural Heritage ([http://whc.unesco.org/archive/advisory\\_body\\_evaluation/811.pdf](http://whc.unesco.org/archive/advisory_body_evaluation/811.pdf))

# Interviews



## Innovations



# Interviews

## Street Sellers



These two women wander the main streets of the Old Town selling fruit. The fresh market was moved from the old city and it is illegal to sell any but prescribed goods in the Old Town, making it difficult for residents in the town who have to walk out of the town to buy normal household goods. Authorities say older people can call local staff who will deliver goods to them if requested. The 2 women have adjusted their stock to suit the tourists who will buy fresh and high quality grapes and strawberries in small quantities. They say business for them is much better than before.

They sold us bags of grapes and strawberries for about 60 RMB ( US\$7 )

## Na-xi Shop Manager



One of very few locals who manage a shop in the Old town, he told us most local shop owners have rented their shops to outsiders. Locals can rent other houses outside the old city and live comfortably. Many spend a lot of time playing ma-jong during the day. He says many Naxi people do not have skills for managing shops. In his shop he displays an award he received from the government. Previously, he was manager of a government-owned company

<h1>Lijiang Impressions</h1>		China, Yunnan Province	Heritage for People Project
		11.11. - 15.11.2006	ACHR / THF



Lijiang is an ancient town in China's Yunnan province, with an important market for the tea trade between Tibet and China



The entire old town is miraculously well-preserved



The government organizes dances in the main square, meant to express "the spontaneous joy of the simple natives"



Though no longer taught in schools, the pictorial script of the local Naxi nationality is still used on signboards



The centre of town has been developed to the extreme for tourism. Every building is either shop, restaurant or guesthouse.



The tourist bazaar phenomenon has extended deep into the ancient alleyway system.

# Lijiang Impressions

	China, Yunnan Province	Heritage for People Project
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All the shops inevitably sell similar things



Very few of the souvenirs are locally produced.



Some of the sales personnel has to dress up in fake "traditional" garb in order to lend a token authenticity to the town.



The water in the old channel system is amazingly clean due to government efforts



The selling of local items such as fruit and vegetables has been forbidden, but many local women defy the ban by moving around with basket of produce for sale



Some of the outlying areas are still quite and purely residential, but there are plans by the government to extend tourist activities to here

# Lijiang Impressions

	China, Yunnan Province	Heritage for People Project
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The streets are kept immaculately clean.



Verandah of low-income, whose house was partly repaired by the government.



The owners/occupiers say that too little repair has been carried out.



Many of the historic houses not converted for tourist use are well-maintained.



Despite the changes, the townscape is well preserved, and the traditional stone paving is well maintained. Service lines are installed underground.



This building is owned by the government and turned into a weaving workshop display.

<h1>Lijiang Impressions</h1>	China, Yunnan Province	Heritage for People Project
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The public toilets are quite sophisticated, usage for local people is subsidized.



Many buildings are listed as protected sites, designated by a plaque on the gate.



Those that have received government assistance for upgrading are also marked in a different way.



At night, the entire town is lit up, creating quite a spectacle.



The streets are locally lit up by colored lanterns.



Especially pretty are stalls with candle-lit lotus boats for floating in the main canal.