

World Heritage Sites in China

# The Old Town of Lijiang

Text & Photography by Xu Ji  
English Translation by Ma Hongjun

丽江古城

LIJIANGGUCHENG



New World Press



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## World Heritage Sites in China

Based upon research findings from archaeology, anthropology and other related disciplines, this series of books aspires to bring a tangible experience of China's heritages to the readers. All of them have put specific emphasis upon the following points:

- Full and accurate description of each heritage site, assisted with the both instructive and inviting illustration provided by photos, pictures, maps and diagrams.
- Expatiation of the cultural and historical significance of each site, tracing the origin of a miscellany of "myths" in Chinese beliefs and traditions.
- Management and reconstruction of Chinese heritage in the modern context, and the challenges and problems involved.



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# World Heritage • China

This is a series of books about the contents and grace of the World Heritage sites in China. It is also a splendid chapter that records the remarkable achievements made by China in cooperation with the rest of the world in advocating world peace, seeking long-term benefit for mankind and protecting the common homeland of human beings around the world.

In China today, World Heritage protection has become an enlarged and deepened concept of environmental protection. Taking World Heritage protection as an integral component of the sustainable development of human society has become a public consensus. As the top-rated group of the targets placed under heritage protection, World Heritage sites in particular have won the universal care and affection of all people, with their high universal values, their scientific and strict protection concepts and mechanisms, and their fine state of conservation and management. Meanwhile, World Heritage protection has played unique, noticeable roles in improving the people's livelihood, building a harmonious society, protecting the heritage sites and environmental landscapes, and providing the best examples for modeling.

China is a country with a vast territory, numerous ethnic groups, a long history and colorful cultures. The natural environment of all shapes and forms and the cultural traditions of profound meanings constitute a rich World Heritage resource. The 10-year Cultural Revolution prevented China from becoming the earliest member of the Convention concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritages that came into force in 1972. But since the country signed the convention in 1985, World Heritage has made great progress in China. Of all the 830 sites that have been included on the World Heritage List, China claims 33, comprising 24 cultural sites, 5 natural sites and 4 mixed sites. While these sites have greatly enriched the World Heritage treasure-house and made outstanding contributions to worldwide heritage protection, environmental protection and sustainable so-



cial development, they have also promoted the understanding, friendship, cooperation and common prosperity between the Chinese people and the people in the rest of the world. In addition, they have truly stimulated the love of homeland, the sense of pride, the self-confidence and the creativeness of the people at the heritage sites. They have also promoted social harmony and progress, spurred homeland beautification, deepened conservation concepts, and improved protection techniques and management expertise.

World Heritage's work in China has demonstrated all the latest progress in this field. For example, the deepening understanding of World Heritage's emphasis on sites' universal values, authenticity, completeness and state of protection and management, the exploration and improvement of sites equilibrium and representativeness, the advocacy and respect for cultural diversity, and the continuous exploration and expansion of site varieties can all find expression in World Heritage's efforts in China.

While the cause of world heritages develops, the publicity and demonstration of these heritages should also continue to develop. The World Heritage·China series, which now sets its sail, will not only cover the 33 heritage sites already included on the List by 2006, but also bring in one new beautiful face after another. Along with the existing sites, the new comers with unique images and contents and representing different ethnic groups and regions will further enrich the heritage treasure-house of the Global Village. Cultural sites, industrial sites, scientific sites and agricultural sites will appear one after another. The world heritages in China will make greater contributions to the cooperation and development between the people of various countries and to the harmonious coexistence between man and nature. Presenting them to the whole world in a continuous, timely, vivid and truthful manner and making them available for the common admiration, love and enjoyment of human society has apparently become a glorious mission for the series of books.

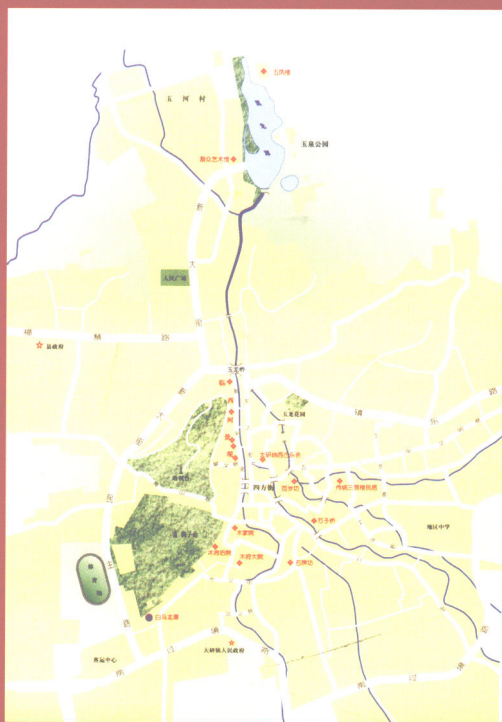
**Guo Zhan**  
**ICOMOS Vice President**  
**ICOMOS/China Vice President & Secretary-General**

**Beijing, September 6, 2006**



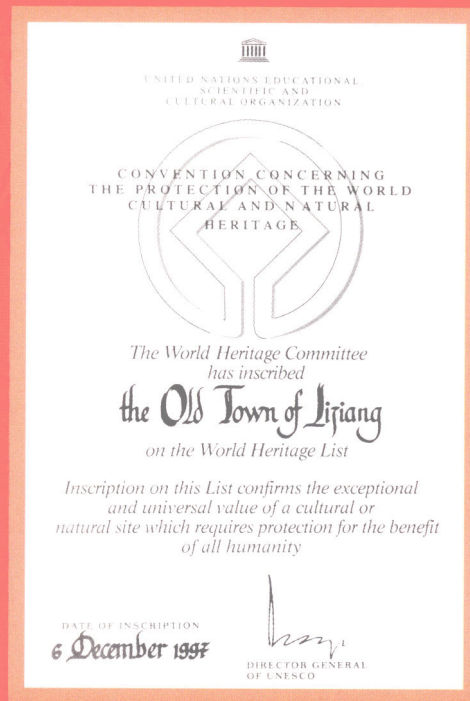
### Location of Lijiang in China

Lijiang Naxi Autonomous County, Lijiang  
Prefecture, Yunnan Province Geographical  
coordinates: 26°52' N100°14' E



Map of Lijiang City





## World Heritage Certificate

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION  
CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION  
OF THE WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

The World Heritage Committee has inscribed *The Old Town of Lijiang* on the World Heritage List.

Inscription on this List confirms the exceptional and universal value of a cultural or natural site  
which requires protection for the benefit of all humanity.

DATE OF INSCRIPTION December 6, 1997

DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF UNESCO Federico Mayor

### Justification by State Party

Lijiang is a famous historical and cultural city. It is a unique embodiment of the history and culture of the region as are its ethnic customs and habits, as well as an illustration of the essential features of social progress.

Lijiang is different from other Chinese historical and cultural cities in several ways — townscape, water system, coordinated architectural complexes, rationally spacious dwellings, pleasant climate, unique national artistic styles and contents. The old city, which responds to nature, emphasizes utility, respects simplicity and seeks compatibility, represents a crystallization of the creativity and progress of mankind in specific historical conditions. It provides valuable data for the study of the history of urban construction and the development of nationalities.

### Justification by World Heritage Committee

The Committee decided to inscribe this site on the basis of *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.





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## **Date of Inscription on the List :**

A Historical Moment Forever Frozen in Time



**D**ecember 4, 1997 — a date that the people of Lijiang will remember forever, and a date that has been immortalized in the long river of human history.

On December 4, 1997, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee convened in Naples, Italy, to examine the nominated sites to its World Heritage List. All 12 participants of the 21st Session unanimously agreed to inscribe "The Old Town of Lijiang" on the *World Cultural Heritage List*. On December 6, UNESCO Director-General Federico Mayor formally presented the World Heritage Certificate to Lijiang. From that day onward, the treasures of the Old Town belong not only to Lijiang alone, but also to all humanity and the whole world.

Having endured ups and downs for 800 years, the Old Town of Lijiang now unveils her blushing charms to the whole world. History has never forgotten or rejected Lijiang. She has survived for hundreds of years, springing back to life from heaven-splitting and earth-shaking upheavals, revived under the clouds of war and turmoil, managed to escape untold catastrophes, and dodged numerous brutal and forced removals and alterations. With the passage of time, thousands of ancient towns have fallen into ruin, and millions of new towns have replaced them. But Lijiang has kept her unique charms to this day, living on and on by the Jinsha River and Yulong Snow Mountain, breeding generation after generation of Naxi people, and retaining her unparalleled beauty and grandeur.

At 19:14 on February 3, 1996, a destructive earthquake measuring 7.0 on the Richter scale struck Lijiang, causing extensive damage and widespread ground rupture. The Old Town of Lijiang suffered a heavy setback on her way to becoming a World Heritage Site. The people of Lijiang responded to the natural disaster and rebuilt their homes soon afterwards. The Old Town passed the harsh test of Nature. The land where man and nature are as one has presented herself, once again, before the world. The life of harmony and peace has returned to the Naxis. And, thanks to Heaven, the Naxi people made it to the World Heritage List.

The rebirth of the Old Town of Lijiang has proved worthy of the laurel of a World Heritage Site.













**Physiographic Features :**  
Shangri-La Born out of Water and Mountains

