

พลวัตเชิงสนามของภูมิทัศน์ทางวัฒนธรรมและการแปรเปลี่ยนเชิงสัญลักษณ์ : การวิเคราะห์เชิงสหประกอบของภาววิทยาธรรมชาติและสัญลักษณ์วิทยา ทางวัฒนธรรมของภูเขาไฟฟูจิในภาววิทยาข้ามภูมิภาค

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บทคัดย่อ

ภายใต้กรอบทฤษฎีของการศึกษาภูมิภาค บทความนี้ตรวจสอบความสัมพันธ์เชิงสหประกอบระหว่างความสำคัญทางธรรมชาติและอัตลักษณ์ทางวัฒนธรรมของภูเขาไฟฟูจิ ผ่านมุมมองพลวัตเชิงสนามของภูมิทัศน์ทางวัฒนธรรม โดยบูรณาการรากฐานเชิงแนวคิด กลไกการดำเนินงาน และกระบวนการปรับโครงสร้างเชิงสัญลักษณ์ งานวิจัยนี้ระบุกลไกสามส่วนที่ภูมิภาคฟูจิสร้างการบูรณาการระหว่างธรรมชาติและวัฒนธรรม ได้แก่ (1) การทำให้รูปแบบทางธรณีวิทยามีความศักดิ์สิทธิ์ (ปรากฏในพิธีกรรมทางจิตวิญญาณ Tainai ที่ใช้แม่พิมพ์ต้นไม้จากลาวา) (2) การทำให้การแทนภาพเชิงศิลปะมีระบบ (Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji ของคัตสึชิเกะ โฮกุไซ) และ(3) เครือข่ายทางสังคม – ศาสนาที่คงอยู่ผ่านระบบอุปถัมภ์การแสวงบุญของ Oshi ท่ามกลางบริบทโลกาภิวัตน์ ญี่ปุ่นใช้กลยุทธ์การขึ้นทะเบียนมรดกโลกขององค์การยูเนสโก (UNESCO) เทคโนโลยีการอนุรักษ์มรดกดิจิทัล และรูปแบบความร่วมมือข้ามภูมิภาค เพื่อปรับโครงสร้างภูเขาไฟฟูจิให้เป็นสัญลักษณ์ที่มีความหมายหลากหลาย (polysemic symbol) ซึ่งทำงานพร้อมกันทั้งในฐานะเสาหลักของอัตลักษณ์ชาติ และสินค้าเชิงวัฒนธรรมข้ามชาติ เส้นทางนี้สะท้อนกระบวนการทัศน์ของการแปรเปลี่ยนเชิงสัญลักษณ์ จากการอ้างอิงเชิงธรรมชาติไปสู่การเป็นตัวบ่งชี้เชิงวัฒนธรรม และบรรลุถึงการเป็นสัญลักษณ์ทางภูมิรัฐศาสตร์

ผลการศึกษานี้ให้ข้อคิดสำคัญต่อการกำกับดูแลมรดกโลก โดยเฉพาะการเจรจาความตึงเครียดระหว่างการอนุรักษ์และการใช้ประโยชน์ การใช้กลยุทธ์การไกล่เกลี่ยเชิงเทคโนโลยีทางวัฒนธรรม และการสถาปนาการบูรณาการทางวัฒนธรรมข้ามพรมแดน

คำสำคัญ: ภูเขาไฟฟูจิ พลวัตเชิงสนามของภูมิทัศน์ทางวัฒนธรรม การศึกษาภูมิภาค มรดกทางธรรมชาติ
การทำให้วัฒนธรรมมีระบบ

Introduction

World cultural and natural heritage represents significant achievements in the development of human civilization and the evolution of nature, serving as an essential medium for promoting mutual learning and exchange among diverse civilizations (Xi, 2024). Cultural identity is the deepest form of identity, constituting the root of ethnic unity and the soul of ethnic harmony (Xuexi Qiangguo, 2025). Within the tension between globalization and localization, the natural value of world cultural heritage lies not only in the uniqueness of its geological landscapes but also in its dynamic interplay with local cultural identity.

The cultural cohesion of a cultural landscape field is the hallmark of its existence and the reason why elements form an integrated whole. Where this cohesion dissipates marks the boundary of the cultural landscape field. Within such a field, human actors, motivated by shaping or altering cultural cohesion (e.g., fostering its formation, growth, enrichment, or decline), modify the natural environment in accordance with their own habitus under the influence of institutional and cultural contexts to manifest cultural cohesion. This process constitutes the production of cultural landscape space and is often accompanied by the dissemination of its outcomes through other media forms, such as texts or visuals. The transformed landscape and its associated media are materialized symbols. Conversely, cultural cohesion also directly influences the mental and spiritual dimensions of human actors through these symbols (including both material and immaterial aspects). Social structures mediate this process through relationships among human actors, with those in higher positions dominating the process, controlling more resources, and even leveraging power to influence the actions of others (Liang, Xia, & Du, 2025). Mount Fuji, as both a national symbol of Japan and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is not only a product of volcanic geological activity but also an assemblage of indigenous religious beliefs, artistic symbols, and social networks, vividly illustrating the complex interplay between natural value and cultural identity.

Symbolic interactionism explores the meaning individuals derive within society, emphasizing that such meaning emerges through mediated interactions with people, objects, and events via symbols. It is a sociological theory that examines human group life by studying the environments and influences of interacting individuals (Mead, 2013). Symbolic reconstruction refers to the re-expression of one symbol's meaning through another. This paper aims to investigate how Mount Fuji, as a regional entity, achieves symbolic reconstruction through the interaction of natural and cultural fields, thereby influencing Japan's cultural identity and national image construction. Particularly from the perspective of area studies, it seeks to explore the implications of this process for heritage conservation and the dissemination of cultural symbols.

Existing research has examined Mount Fuji from multiple dimensions. In geology, scholars have focused on its volcanic activity and geomorphological features, highlighting its scientific value and tourism potential. In cultural studies, most research has addressed aspects such as religion, history, art, and lived experiences. However, treating Mount Fuji as a "multidimensional field" and analyzing it through an integrated framework encompassing geology, culture, society, and technology remains underexplored. Current studies lack systematic analysis of Mount Fuji's role in cultural identity construction and global cultural dynamics, especially from the perspective of area studies. There is an urgent need for theoretical breakthroughs in understanding how the mutual

construction of natural value and cultural identity can serve world heritage conservation and cultural symbol dissemination. This constitutes the primary motivation for this study.

The Natural Co-construction of Geology and Culture

Cultural heritage refers to monuments, architectural complexes, and sites of historical, aesthetic, archaeological, scientific, ethnological, or anthropological value. Natural heritage encompasses outstanding physical, biological, and geological formations, habitats of endangered species, and areas of scientific or aesthetic significance (UNESCO, 2000). Culture, while closely intertwined with nature, also stands in opposition to it. There is no culture divorced from nature, for culture is born of nature; nor is there nature untouched by culture, as since the emergence of humanity, no natural state remains unaffected by human influence (Cai, S., 2016). The interaction between humans and nature inevitably constructs cultural identity within a given region, whether consciously or unconsciously.

(1) Lava Tree Molds and Taibai Belief: Symbolic Reconstruction in the Interaction of Cultural Landscapes
From the perspective of regional and national studies, the lava tree molds of Mount Fuji serve as a prime example of the mutual construction of geological phenomena and cultural beliefs, embodying the process of field interaction and symbolic reconstruction. During the eruption of Mount Fuji in 937 (the 25th year of the Jōhei era), ejected magma enveloped large trees, with several trees fused together within the lava flow, leaving behind hollow tree-shaped molds. The burned-out trunks formed cavities, and these remaining caves, known as "lava tree molds," were metaphorically likened to the female "womb," thereby linking them to Taibai (womb-related) beliefs.

Practitioners of Fuji-kō, while ascending the mountain for worship, would circle these hollows to purify themselves - a practice that transformed geological features into sacred ritual spaces, exemplifying field interaction. The caves housed altars to Asama Daigongen, the deified form of Mount Fuji (Konohanasakuya-hime), further cementing the sacred status of lava tree molds within Taibai beliefs. These molds became spatial carriers and fused symbols of natural value and cultural identity, embodying human perceptions and emotions regarding the origins of life, natural forces, and divine worship. This process realized the reconstruction of geological landscapes into cultural symbols (Yamaguchi, 2018).

(2) The Sacred Spring Narrative of Oshino Hakkai: Cultural Transmission in the Interaction of Cultural Landscapes
Located in the highland basin of Oshino Village at the northern foot of Mount Fuji in southeastern Yamanashi Prefecture, Oshino Hakkai is a group of springs formed by snowmelt from Mount Fuji filtered through underground lava. The snowmelt, purified by subterranean lava, emerges from eight distinct outlets, creating the unique natural landscape of Oshino Hakkai. Oshino Hakkai is not only a pilgrimage site for Fuji worship but also a place where the guardian deity "Hachidai Ryūō" (Eight Great Dragon Kings) is venerated. Ascetic practitioners use the waters of the eight springs to cleanse themselves of worldly dust, viewing it as sacred water that purifies body and mind. This practice highlights the pivotal role of natural landscapes in religious belief, demonstrating field interaction (Yamaguchi, M., 2018).

Designated as a national natural monument, the sacred spring narrative of Oshino Hakkai underscores the centrality of "nature" in religion, culture, and folklore. Through the flow and filtration of its waters, it connects

the natural power of Mount Fuji with the local community's belief systems, serving as a vital site where nature and culture interweave and mutually ascribe meaning. It showcases the core role of nature as an objective existence in regional cultural construction, achieving the symbolic reconstruction of geology and culture through field interaction.

Cultural Symbols and the Construction of National Identity

National identity refers to an individual's recognition of a nation's political authority, pride in their citizenship, and emotional attachment to the country. Cultural identity, on the other hand, denotes an individual's identification with their cultural environment and values. Cultural identity serves as the source of cohesion and centripetal force among members of a nation, forming the root of national unity. The two are closely intertwined: cultural identity is the foundation of national identity, while national identity is the ultimate goal of cultural identity. However, cultural identity is not synonymous with national identity. Under the market economy, the diversification of interest groups, along with cultural exchanges and collisions in globalization, has led to a pluralistic cultural landscape. While national identity remains singular, cultural identity can be multifaceted (Wang, J., 2021). From the perspective of regional and national studies, the reproduction of Mount Fuji's artistic symbols fosters cultural diversity, playing a pivotal role in the construction of cultural symbolism and national identity, while also providing opportunities for cross-cultural exchanges that enhance Sino-Japanese friendship.

(1) Reproduction of Artistic Symbols: Mount Fuji's Role in Cultural Symbolism and National Identity Construction as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Mount Fuji holds profound symbolic significance in the arts. Throughout history, it has been a wellspring of inspiration for artists, and through the reproduction of various artistic forms and symbols, it has continually reinforced cultural identity and strengthened its role in national identity construction.

In traditional art, Katsushika Hokusai's Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji stands as a classic ukiyo-e series depicting the mountain, showcasing its diverse landscapes through unique perspectives and techniques. These works have not only been widely celebrated in Japan but have also exerted a global influence, becoming iconic representations of Japanese culture. Additionally, Mount Fuji's majestic image frequently appears in literary works such as tanka and haiku, where poets extol its beauty, further enriching Japan's cultural heritage. For instance, Natsume SŌseki's haiku, "Though ill on the journey, I press on to see autumn's Fuji," (Natsume, S., 2017) conveys the determination to behold Mount Fuji despite adversity. Through concise yet evocative language, it intertwines the mountain's natural splendor with human emotion, deepening its cultural significance, strengthening social bonds among the Japanese people, and reinforcing its role in national identity construction. Continuously reproduced and reinterpreted in cultural contexts, Mount Fuji has become an integral component of Japan's national identity. Further exemplifying its symbolic status, Mount Fuji was featured on the reverse side of the 1,000-yen banknote issued in 2004, and the newly designed 1,000-yen note in 2024 also incorporates Hokusai's Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji (Azuma Arare Honpo, 2020). These designs underscore Mount Fuji's role as a cultural symbol, highlighting its importance in Japanese culture and its contribution to national identity construction, serving Japan's political and economic development.

In contemporary cultural symbolism, the reproduction of Mount Fuji's artistic symbols has taken on diverse forms. Beyond traditional paintings and literature, it appears in modern photography, digital art, films, and other media, reinforcing its cultural significance through varied artistic expressions. In 2023, the Shizuoka Fujisan World Heritage Center introduced the "Fujisan VR Theater," offering immersive experiences through 360-degree projections (Yamanashi Prefecture Official Tourism Information, 2024). Moreover, in the Japanese film *Rebirth*, Mount Fuji's serene ambiance complements the narrative, illustrating its role not only as a natural landmark but also as a vessel for Japanese emotions and memories, reflecting its function in cultural symbolism and national identity construction. The Japanese TV drama *Hot Spot*, premiering on January 12, 2025, is set in a town at the foot of Mount Fuji, infusing the story with a distinct cultural atmosphere and showcasing the mountain's symbolic importance in Japanese life and culture. These artistic works provide novel experiences while enhancing Mount Fuji's cultural and national resonance in modern society.



Figure 1 Poster of the Japanese drama *Hot Spot* (Douban Movie, 2024)

Furthermore, Mount Fuji is widely featured in cultural and tourism products such as souvenirs, postcards, stamps, and apparel. These items integrate its artistic symbols into daily life, allowing people to continually engage with its cultural allure, thereby reinforcing its role in national identity construction. Through the reproduction of artistic symbols, Mount Fuji has become not only a quintessential emblem of Japanese culture but also a cornerstone of Japan's national identity, making significant contributions to cultural heritage and national image-building.



Figure 2 Mount Fuji amulet pouch (Shizuoka Tourism Guide, 2025)



Figure 3 Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji (Selected), Hokusai's One Fortune (Azuma Arare Honpo, 2020)

(2) The Social Network of the Oshi System: Constructing Faith in Mount Fuji and Social Relations. The oshi system is a vital component of Mount Fuji's religious framework, playing a key role in its cultural symbolism and national identity construction. In regional studies, a "community" refers to a collective bound by high levels of trust among its members (Jiang, Guo, et al., 2019). The oshi system fosters a tight-knit social network, connecting believers, shrines, and clergy to form a community centered on Mount Fuji worship, fostering collective identity and reinforcing Japanese cultural and national identity.

As "prayer masters," oshi provide guidance and services to devotees of Mount Fuji's deities. Affiliated with specific shrines, they offer prayers for Fuji-kō adherents, as well as lodging and guidance for pilgrims, serving as

lower-ranking clergy (Yamaguchi, 2018), In spreading Mount Fuji's faith, oshi organize religious activities and rituals, attracting numerous pilgrims and tourists, thereby boosting local tourism. For example, during the climbing season, oshi lead worshippers in ascetic rituals (Fuji Guide., 2022) providing lodging and guidance. This not only fulfills religious needs but also strengthens community faith in Mount Fuji, creates employment opportunities, and enhances social welfare, enabling locals to participate in the mountain's cultural legacy. Such practices foster cohesion and belonging, contributing to Japan's social stability and regional economic growth.

Simultaneously, the oshi system facilitates cultural exchange and interaction across regions. Due to its influence, Mount Fuji's faith extends beyond its locale, spreading nationwide and drawing pilgrims and visitors from across Japan. In this process, oshi act as bridges, disseminating Mount Fuji's faith and culture through interactions with diverse groups, thereby promoting cross-regional cultural integration. Such exchanges strengthen regional connections, enable efficient information dissemination, and amplify Mount Fuji's role as a cultural symbol in fostering cultural and national identity.

The Global Discourse Power Struggle over World Heritage

The "Authorized Heritage Discourse" has become one of the principal theoretical tools in Critical Heritage Studies. Samuel points out that diverse social groups can utilize heritage, which serves not only in nation-state building but also in advancing other causes that promote social progress. Heritage is not merely a material entity requiring preservation but also a cultural phenomenon deeply intertwined with national identity, local sentiment cultivation, cultural and memory transmission, and the construction of public identity (Ma & Zhang, 2021), Nationality is shaped by space and is a product of social interaction. Mount Fuji, a World Heritage site, along with its surrounding natural environment, has profoundly interacted with local communities, giving rise to the existing Fuji worship that serves the Japanese nation.

Japan achieved industrialization earlier than other Asian nations, becoming one of the world's most economically developed countries. However, it now faces pressures such as an aging population and industrial hollowing-out, while its comprehensive national power has been surpassed by China, leading to a crisis of national confidence. Although economic revitalization remains necessary, it is not the historic mission; instead, Japan's historic task is to become a major political power. Under these circumstances, the entire Japanese nation harbors a collective drive to re-engage in competition with China, aspiring to earn respect from the international community, including China. (Jiang, Guo, et al., 2019). This is determined by Japan's national conditions. Thus, in this context, the construction and dissemination of Mount Fuji as a cultural symbol are crucial for Japan's urgent desire to consolidate cultural identity, strengthen national cohesion, shape a positive national image, and secure discursive power in global competition.

(1) Cultural Politics in Heritage Nomination Strategies. The nomination process of Mount Fuji as a World Heritage site was a meticulously orchestrated cultural-political campaign by the Japanese government, aimed at enhancing Japan's international cultural influence and national image by inscribing Fuji on the World Heritage List. Japan officially began preparations for Fuji's nomination in 1994. This process not only affirmed the mountain's natural and cultural value but also served as a significant move to showcase Japan's cultural soft power on the global stage (People's Daily Online, 2013).

Culture and ideology share conceptual overlaps and interact synergistically. Within a specific timeframe, culture serves as the premise and foundation for the formation and development of ideology (Wang, J., 2021). For instance, during the nomination process, the Japanese government emphasized the importance and uniqueness of Mount Fuji as a Japanese cultural symbol. Through various channels, it domestically reinforced the cohesion and centripetal force of the Japanese people as a collective, fostering widespread political and value consensus within society. Internationally, it propagated the value and significance of Fuji's natural-cultural interplay to gain global recognition and support. This nomination strategy reflects the Japanese government's meticulous planning and proactive measures in cultural politics, as well as Mount Fuji's pivotal role in constructing national identity.

The successful inscription of Mount Fuji offers valuable lessons and insights for other countries. First, as Japan's 17th World Cultural Heritage site, its nomination process and success provide a reference for other nations in heritage nomination, particularly in highlighting cultural value, formulating effective strategies, and more. Second, Fuji's inscription has prompted other countries to re-examine and prioritize their own cultural heritage, encouraging more active efforts to explore and preserve national heritage to enhance cultural influence and global image. Furthermore, Fuji's success has fostered international mutual understanding and respect for diverse cultures, contributing positively to the protection and transmission of world heritage. However, post-inscription challenges and countermeasures must also be addressed. On one hand, visitor numbers surged significantly after Fuji's inscription. To mitigate environmental pressures from overtourism, Yamanashi and Shizuoka Prefectures implemented management measures such as trial climbing fees and access controls. On the other hand, as a World Heritage site, Fuji faces the dilemma of development versus preservation. The Japanese government must balance promoting tourism with safeguarding Fuji's cultural and natural value. According to NHK, Fujikawaguchiko Town installed black screens around convenience stores in May 2024 to block views of Fuji, only to remove them on the 15th of the same month (MOJi Dictionary, 2024). This reflects the mixed outcomes of Fuji's successful cultural symbolization, necessitating careful consideration of trade-offs and responsive measures.

(2) International Comparative Perspectives

In contrast, China's Mount Lu was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1996. As the country's first World Cultural Landscape, Mount Lu is revered as the "Sacred Mountain of Humanities" due to its profound history and culture. Its cultural extensions span literature, art, religion, reclusive traditions, as well as historical, political, educational, and urban development dimensions, playing a pivotal role in China's historical and cultural evolution (Chen, S., 2019). In February 2016, President Xi Jinping inspected Jiangxi Province, praising Mount Lu as "the epitome of China's leisurely charm" and emphasizing, "Green ecology is Jiangxi's greatest asset, advantage, and brand. It must be protected well, with efforts to harmonize mountain-water governance and showcase natural beauty, forging a path where economic development and ecological progress complement each other, creating a 'Jiangxi Model' for Beautiful China." (Jiang & Liu, 2016). During the 2025 Qingming holiday, Mount Lu welcomed visitors from Pakistan, Malaysia, and other countries. In 2025, Mount Lu will focus on key tourist demographics, establish overseas platforms, organize international influencer tours, design tailored inbound travel routes, publish inbound travel guides, produce the overseas promotional film Hello! Mount Lu, enhance visitor incentives, and deploy marketing teams to Southeast Asia, Hong Kong, and Macau to achieve annual targets of 2.4 million core

scenic area ticket sales and 200,000 inbound visitors (Jiujiang News, 2024) Mount Lu integrates aesthetics and literature, boasting a long history, stunning landscapes, and rich cultural heritage that attracts global tourists. In today's deepening globalization, Mount Lu, as a composite cultural symbol, demonstrates sustained and stable progress in advancing the "creative transformation and innovative development" of Chinese traditional culture, holding immense value in cross-cultural exchange, cultural confidence, and major-country diplomacy. However, the current development model of Mount Lu's cultural tourism remains relatively extensive, lacking coordinated planning, which hinders the rational and effective protection and utilization of its natural and cultural resources (Liu & Ding, 2022) impacting the sustainable development of the scenic area to varying degrees.

Universality resides in particularity, and particularity encompasses universality. Japan's Mount Fuji and China's Mount Lu each possess distinct particularities, yet in an era of emerging technologies and multicultural dynamism, the challenges they face in development are universal. For China, cultural exports have become a vital bridge for dialogue with the world and a key engine for promoting mutual learning among civilizations and building a community with a shared future for humanity. Recently, the State Council's *Several Economic Policies for Promoting High-Quality Cultural Development* proposed to "accelerate the cultivation of internationally competitive cultural export enterprises and facilitate the 'going global' of cultural products and services." In this context, cultural exports are not only a strategic choice for disseminating Chinese culture overseas but also a concrete pathway for civilizational exchange (Xuexi Qiangguo, 2025) Moreover, China's recent visa-free policies for multiple nationalities aim to attract high-quality foreign tourists as ambassadors of Chinese culture, helping to establish and consolidate China's rising image in the new era. For Japan, Mount Lu's earlier inscription offers lessons worth studying. Simultaneously, China's policy measures have diverted tourist resources, creating competitive pressure for Mount Fuji and compelling further development of its cultural symbol and its reconstruction as a political symbol. At its core, the comparison between Mount Lu and Mount Fuji reflects the competition between China and Japan in comprehensive national power. Japan will continue leveraging Mount Fuji as a cultural landscape to bolster national pride domestically and project cultural superiority and influence internationally, striving to regain respect on the global stage.

The World Heritage List itself is an expression of human civilizational achievements, reflecting the extent to which diverse civilizations are recognized and understood globally, and embodying their contemporary value and significance (Lü, 2024). Through international comparative perspectives, we can better grasp the referential significance of Mount Fuji among World Heritage sites and its strategic implications for Japan's nation-state development. This deeper understanding of the interplay between nature and culture, and the mutual reinforcement of cultural identity, not only fosters introspection regarding China's World Heritage but also illuminates the vital importance of cultural diversity and the transmission of human civilization.

Challenges and Responses: Tensions in the Context of Globalization

As noted by the World Heritage Committee, Mount Fuji's cultural value lies in its embodiment of Japanese mountain worship and its representation as a national symbol in numerous artworks, such as ukiyo-e. However, an editorial in Japan's Asahi Shimbun points out that while climbing Mount Fuji has deep-rooted religious significance in Japan, the influx of tourists is gradually eroding its sacredness (Communist Party Member Network, 2013), In

other words, human activities have, to some extent, a destructive impact on nature, and as natural values diminish, the cultural identity constructed through interaction with nature also weakens.

(1) Conflict Between Tourism Development and Ecological Conservation

1. Over-Commercialization of the Fuji Five Lakes

The Fuji Five Lakes - from east to west, Lake Yamanaka, Lake Kawaguchi, Lake Saiko, Lake Shōji, and Lake Motosu - each attract large numbers of visitors with their unique natural landscapes. Lake Yamanaka is known for its "marimo" (algae balls), Lake Kawaguchi for the "Fuji Reflection" phenomenon, and Lake Motosu, the deepest of the five, mesmerizes visitors with its azure waters. However, as key tourist destinations around Mount Fuji, the Five Lakes face challenges from over-commercialization. With the growth of tourism, commercial activities such as hotels, restaurants, and souvenir shops have proliferated, exerting pressure on the local environment and ecosystems. Over-commercialization not only degrades the natural beauty of the lakes but may also lead to cultural homogenization and commodification, diluting their unique cultural and regional characteristics. For instance, some areas prioritize economic gains over environmental conservation, resulting in ecological damage and unsustainable use of tourism resources (Zhang et al., 2018)

2. Ecological Pressure on Aokigahara (Sea of Trees)

Aokigahara, a dense primeval forest spanning approximately 16 km near the Fuji Five Lakes (Yamaguchi, M., 2018) is also under ecological strain due to tourism. The surge in visitors disrupts the forest's ecosystem through trampled vegetation and disturbed wildlife habitats. Additionally, the construction of tourism infrastructure, such as roads and facilities, further negatively impacts the forest's ecology. These activities not only mar the natural scenery but also risk ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss (Liu, Hu, & Lü, 2024)

(2) Pathways to Reconcile Local Identity and Globalization

1. Digital Empowerment for Heritage Conservation

In addressing the conflict between tourism development and ecological conservation, digital technology offers new solutions for preserving Mount Fuji's natural values. Remote monitoring and management of the mountain's natural heritage can be achieved through satellite remote sensing, drone surveillance, and other digital tools, enabling timely detection and resolution of environmental issues. Furthermore, digital preservation and dissemination of cultural heritage can leverage the influence of overseas short-video platforms (e.g., TikTok, Instagram) and technologies like virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) to allow visitors to experience Mount Fuji's cultural and natural beauty without harming the environment (Zhang & Zhong, 2019). For example, the "Virtual Fuji Tour" project, conducted primarily online, offers 90-minute sessions for groups of 10 participants via video call. A guide presents curated videos while explaining and answering questions, and participants can also purchase local specialties. This virtual experience has gained popularity among international tourists, particularly younger generations, while minimizing direct environmental impact. Such initiatives not only promote cultural symbolism globally but also garner international recognition, reinforcing both Mount Fuji's image and Japan's cultural identity.

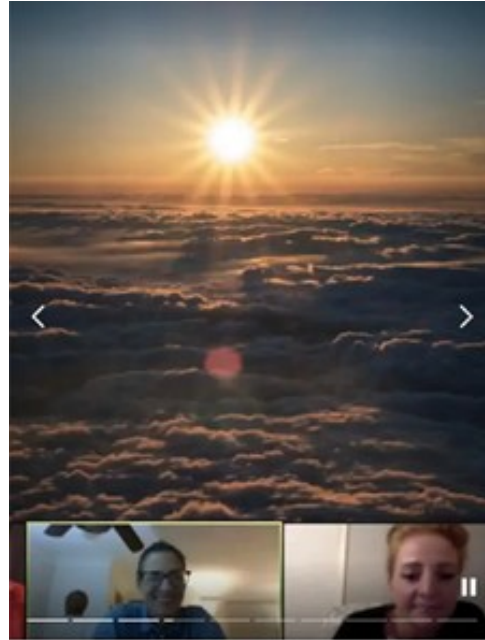


Figure 4 The "Virtual Fuji Tour" Project (Huxiu, 2024)

2. Cross-Regional Collaboration and Glocalization Practices

Cross-regional cooperation is vital for resolving conflicts between tourism development and ecological conservation at Mount Fuji. By establishing collaborative mechanisms, resources can be shared, and complementary strengths leveraged to advance sustainable development. Starting in 2024, Yamanashi Prefecture implemented a climbing toll and visitor cap on the Yoshida Trail. Similarly, Shizuoka Prefecture is considering an "entrance fee" for trails on its side of the mountain to address overcrowding and trail congestion (LetsGoJP! Japan, 2024). Reports suggest existing cooperation between the two prefectures in tourism management, with recommendations for enhanced joint planning to balance tourism and conservation (Zhang, 2022)

Cross-regional collaboration also fosters international exchange, allowing Japan to learn from successful heritage conservation and tourism models worldwide. Geographic proximity reduces interaction costs, while cultural similarities facilitate communication, aiding regional integration. Institutionalized cultural networks promote cultural and economic cooperation, significantly advancing regional unity (Jiang, Guo, et al., 2019)

In the context of glocalization, preserving cultural uniqueness requires building an inclusive international discourse. As a Japanese cultural icon, Mount Fuji must maintain its distinct values while engaging in global dialogue. Initiatives like the "East Asian Mountain Culture Circle" can strengthen collaboration among China, Japan, South Korea, and other East Asian nations in preserving and promoting mountain culture, contributing to regional cultural prosperity (Jin & Xia, 2024) Such cross-regional efforts not only safeguard Mount Fuji's heritage but also foster mutual understanding and friendship, supporting the vision of a shared future for humanity.

The natural-cultural co-construction of Mount Fuji demonstrates dynamic bidirectional and phased characteristics. Natural values empower cultural symbols, while cultural symbols reciprocally reinforce natural conservation. In the initial phase, geological landscapes (e.g., lava tree molds, Oshino Hakkai) were imbued with sacred meanings through religious rituals and artistic creations, transforming them into cultural symbols that consolidate regional cultural identity. In the reinforcement phase, artistic reproduction (e.g., ukiyo-e, films) and institutional networks (e.g., the Oshi system) solidified these symbols as carriers of cultural and national identity, elevating them into markers of collective national identity. In the globalization phase, World Heritage inscription strategies and digital technologies reconstructed these symbols, expanding their global dissemination pathways while simultaneously upgrading natural conservation efforts and reinforcing the sacredness and scarcity of the landscape. This process validates the cyclical co-construction logic of "culturalizing nature" and "naturalizing culture," as well as the stratification and tension inherent in the transformation from natural symbols to cultural symbols and further into political symbols.

To this end, three focal points must be emphasized: methodological innovation in area studies, the deepening of glocalization theory, and an Eastern perspective in critical heritage studies. Methodological Innovation in Area Studies. Moving beyond traditional "state-centrism," a tripartite analytical framework of "nature-culture-society" should be constructed, emphasizing interdisciplinary dialogue (e.g., geology + anthropology + communication studies). Deepening Glocalization Theory. Proposing the concept of "elastic boundaries of cultural symbols," which allows for symbolic reinterpretation in globalized contexts (e.g., VR experiences) while preserving core cultural DNA (e.g., the sacredness of Mount Fuji). Eastern Perspective in Critical Heritage Studies. Critiquing the limitations of Western "authorized heritage discourse" and proposing a "symbiotic governance" model for heritage conservation in non-Western contexts, balancing national authority, local communities, and global capital.

Various activities of the Japanese people are deeply influenced by nature. As nature changes, cultural and social activities evolve accordingly. The Japanese not only enjoy the bounty of nature but have also learned to harness it, recognizing its profound significance. Moreover, they exhibit a strong consciousness of nature conservation (Heide & Meng, 2009). Through this research, we observe that Mount Fuji, as a cultural landscape,

has undergone a process wherein its natural symbols are first reconstructed as cultural symbols and then further reconstituted as political symbols through interactions between nature and human cultural activities. Its cultural symbols strengthen national cohesion and cultural identity among the Japanese people, while its political symbols serve various facets of Japan's national politics, reinforcing ideological output. This paper elucidates the bidirectional co-construction mechanism between nature and culture - as well as its further reconstruction into political symbols under globalization - through the conceptual lens of "cultural landscape field interactions" and operational principles. Simultaneously, the "symbolic reconstruction" perspective reveals the logic behind the construction of cultural and national identity, reflecting both the uniqueness of Japanese identity formation and the universal contradictions of heritage conservation in the global era. This study not only demonstrates the methodological value of area studies but also offers practical insights for global heritage conservation.

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