

UNESCO'S EFFORTS IN IDENTIFYING THE WORLD HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SILK ROAD

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Introduction

The UNESCO World Heritage Centre is working together with the Chinese Government on a methodological approach for the preparation of a nomination to the World Heritage List for the cultural properties along the Silk Road. Although the network passed through China, Western/Central Asia and beyond, China is the only country that has placed the Silk Road on its national 'Tentative List' of cultural and natural properties considered worthy of nominating for World Heritage status.

In August 2003 and July 2004, UNESCO sent expert missions, sponsored by the Netherlands Funds-in-Trust at the World Heritage Centre, to the Chinese section of the Silk Roads in order to research and improve understanding of 'Cultural Routes', with a view to its possible candidature for inscription on the World Heritage List. The missions also sought to develop a systematic approach towards the identification and nomination of the Chinese section of the Silk Road, in particular the Oasis Route, which, with the Steppe and the Maritime Routes, is one of three intercultural routes along the Silk Road, relating the story of the Silk Road in a comprehensive manner.

This paper, as a result, has as its main objective to discuss and propose a systematic approach towards the identification and nomination of the Silk Road, in particular the Chinese section, then possibly to be extended to sections in other countries in Asia and Europe.

"As regards the Silk Roads, a scientific appraisal had already been prepared by the Japanese National Commission [for UNESCO] on the occasion of the International Symposium on the History of Eastern and Western Cultural Contacts (October-November 1957). This served as a guide, while the presentation brochure listed the very many examples of research work already undertaken. Some twenty Japanese specialists enumerated all their problems with the aid of a bibliography of over 750 titles, amounting to an appraisal of the situation in 1957. Out of these endeavors emerged the notion of three intercultural routes: the Steppe Route, the Oasis Route, and the Maritime Route."

There are an impressive number of monuments and sites along the Oasis Route, which extends over some 4,450 km from Xi'an in Shaanxi Province to Kashgar in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. However, almost the entire original road has disappeared—assuming that it ever existed, as much of it consisted of no more than tracks through the desert— and replaced by a four-lane highway. Some uncertainty remains about the best way to proceed and the missions sought to cooperate in the development of an approach and methodology for the identification and nomination of a Cultural Route.

Given the scope of this initiative and subsequent resources needed, and taking into account the long-term planning nature and the complexity of World Heritage listing in general, it seems imperative to properly structure this process to avoid a situation in which cultural-historic important places are randomly selected and overview and context are lost in the process. As such, a first step should involve the definition of the concept of a Cultural Route and subsequently to determine the significant elements that constitute the Chinese Silk Road. With these in place, it will be possible to sketch a broad picture of meaning and impact of the route, and establish where essential aspects have condensed and materialized, which should be the focus of a nomination process.

It seems that the identification and protection of Cultural Routes, in addition to Cultural Landscapes, will prove to be the right context for such an approach. In this respect, Cultural Routes may be regarded as the latest development in a trend of an expanding scale and complexity of heritage properties, which requires a separate approach and framework to foster understanding and serve as a tool for informed decision-making regarding the recognition and effective management of these properties.

Considering this objective it becomes clear that this paper will not contain detailed descriptions of monuments and sites to be found along the road – this remains the task of the relevant Chinese authorities in their preparation of the nomination dossier. This report aims to make a contribution to the theoretical and methodological underpinning, taking

the Chinese section of the Silk Road as a case study, and thereby to facilitate the identification and nomination of other Cultural Routes in different parts of the world to the World Heritage List.

Point of departure should be a holistic approach that focuses on the identification and justification of those aspects and elements that will ‘tell the story’ of the Chinese Silk Road in a comprehensive manner. More than referring to the presentation of heritage sites, this would mean that in order to understand and appreciate the Silk Road and its cultural-historic significance to its full extent, inclusion of a wide variety of elements would have to be considered: next to the evident ‘grand sites’, perhaps also supplementary structures and landscapes that support the storytelling. In addition to evident properties, such as buildings and settlements (living or fossilized), the mission took into account the widest possible spectrum to discuss inclusion of other elements as well (engineering, military, transportation). Since research and documentation on the Silk Road have been abundant, what is needed is the definition of a vision and proper methodology pertinent to the concept of Cultural Routes, with a re-packaging of existing information and proposition for a framework to facilitate the preparation of an incremental serial nomination: a phased nomination of a series of clusters linked by, and representing, the Silk Road.

The UNESCO missions to China concluded that a cultural route could be defined in terms of space (the route ran through sites, monuments, constructions, buildings, ways and areas of influence), time (the beginning and end of its use, its frequency, intensity and variations) and cultural criteria (impact of spiritual and/or material exchanges; impact on human memory or experience, impact of the volume and nature of the exchanges). The mission recommended the establishment of a Silk Road Nomination Task Force management body to coordinate studies and the preparation of the World Heritage nomination.

Ultimately, the endeavour should result in an incremental, multinational, transboundary serial nomination: the protection of several clusters of properties, sites and landscapes, both cultural and natural, from Xi’an in China to the coastal regions of the Mediterranean Sea, in a phased process according to the pace of the various countries involved, linked by a shared vision and set of values, and formalized in unified conservation approaches and management plans, to preserve for future generations of all humankind the extraordinary legacy of the Great Silk Road.

As a regional follow-up to and extension of the Chinese Silk Road nomination, ideas and concepts will be shared with neighbouring countries, particularly those in Central

Asia, that pursue the connection of their most significant properties to the Silk Road to further develop this nomination of serial national and/or transboundary properties.

Furthermore, UNESCO ensures the protection of important archaeological sites along the Silk Road of Central Asia, including sites in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. This work has been made possible thanks to the general support of the Government of Japan, which set up a special Funds-In-Trust Cooperation at UNESCO dedicated to the safeguarding of such Silk Road sites, particularly those in Central Asia and China.

Four types of heritage routes are currently inscribed on the World Heritage List. These include ‘Transportation Routes’ such as the Semmering Railway (Austria), the Canal du Midi (France) and the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway (India); ‘Trade Routes’ such as the Frankincense Trail (Oman) and ‘Religious Routes’ such as the Routes of Santiago de Compostela (separately nominated by Spain and France). To these should be added the ‘Linear Monuments’ such as The Great Wall (China), the Defence Line of Amsterdam (Netherlands) and Hadrian’s Wall (United Kingdom).

UNESCO has been studying the Silk Roads for many years. Between 1988 and 1997, it carried out a far-reaching programme of research entitled ‘Integral Study of the Silk Roads: Roads of Dialogue’, to raise awareness of the common roots of civilizations and promoting the concept of a plural World Heritage. This project has helped increase our knowledge of the key role played by different peoples in the process of dialogue between the civilizations along the Silk Road. Many aspects of this study have been integrated into the ‘East-West Intercultural Dialogue in Central Asia’ project. In 2001 UNESCO, the National Institute of Informatics of Japan and the Japanese National Commission for UNESCO, launched an innovative ‘Digital Silk Roads’ initiative to explore the possibilities of digital technologies for the preservation and maintenance of cultural artworks, masterpieces, archaeological sites and monuments in Silk Road countries. In November 2002, UNESCO held the International Symposium on the Silk Roads in Xi’an, organized on the occasion of the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage and the 30th anniversary of the World Heritage Convention. The Xi’an Declaration was adopted, which reiterated UNESCO’s message for the promotion of understanding and the conservation of irreplaceable World Heritage elements of the ancient Silk Road.

CULTURAL ROUTES AS WORLD HERITAGE: TYPES AND FORMS

What constitutes a Cultural Route is a topic that has not yet been properly described. The subject is part of ongoing debates, in particular by the International Scientific Committee on Cultural Routes (CIIC) of ICOMOS, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (UNESCO's Advisory Body for cultural heritage). The CIIC was created out of a meeting on the topic of Cultural Routes held in Madrid in November 1994, sponsored by the Spanish Ministry for Culture and attended by experts from ICOMOS and UNESCO, following the inclusion of the Pilgrim's Route to Santiago de Compostela on the World Heritage List. The conceptual premises of the CIIC emerged from the contents and conclusions of this meeting, and its creation was a direct result of the conclusion that more in-depth studies were needed to enhance its conceptual and operational development. Since its official creation as part of ICOMOS in 1998, eight international scientific meetings have been held. The references and a large part of the contents of these meetings have been included in various publications. The CIIC currently has 60 members from different countries all over the world, while eight candidates are seeking membership.

Among the definitions which were adopted by the CIIC at its meeting in Tenerife in September 1998, the following was included:

“The concept of a cultural route or itinerary refers to a set of values whose whole is greater than the sum of its parts and through which it gains its Meaning; Identification of the cultural itinerary is based on an array of important points and tangible elements that attest to the significance of the itinerary itself. To recognize that a cultural itinerary or route as such necessarily includes a number of material elements and objects linked to other values of an intangible nature by the connecting thread of a civilizing process of decisive importance at a given time in history for a particular society or group.”

In a recent meeting in Madrid on 30 and 31 May 2003, experts and representatives of ICOMOS and UNESCO got together to discuss a draft of proposals and guidelines with a view to ensuring the inclusion and proper treatment of Cultural Routes in the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention. During the ICOMOS General Assembly, which took place in December 2002 in Spain, the recommendation was put forward that Cultural Routes are independent from Cultural Landscapes both in concept and substance. A draft proposal for a definition of cultural routes, as well as proposed amendments to the revision of the Operational Guidelines, have been prepared by using the conclusions of earlier CIIC congresses.

Definition in the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention

“The concept of heritage routes is shown to be a rich and fertile one, offering a privileged framework in which mutual understanding, a plural approach to history and a culture of peace can all operate.

A heritage route is composed of tangible elements of which the cultural significance comes from exchanges and a multi-dimensional dialogue across countries or regions, and that illustrate the interaction of movement, along the route, in space and time.

In this context, the following points should be considered when determining whether a heritage route is suitable for inscription on the World Heritage List:

(i) The requirement to hold outstanding universal value should be recalled.

(ii) The concept of heritage routes:

- is based on the dynamics of movement and the idea of exchanges, with continuity in space and time;

- refers to a whole, where the route has a worth over and above the sum of the elements making it up and through which it gains its cultural significance;

- highlights exchange and dialogue between countries or between regions;

- is multi-dimensional, with different aspects developing and adding to its prime purpose which may be religious, commercial, administrative or otherwise.

(iii) A heritage route may be considered as a specific, dynamic type of cultural landscape, just as recent debates have led to their acceptance within the Operational Guidelines.

(iv) The identification of a heritage route is based on a collection of strengths and tangible elements, testimony to the significance of the route itself.

(v) The conditions of authenticity are to be applied on the grounds of its significance and other elements making up the heritage route. It will take into account the duration of the route, and perhaps how often it is used nowadays, as well as the legitimate wishes for development of peoples affected.

These points will be considered within the natural framework of the route and its intangible and symbolic dimensions.

In principle, it was argued that a definition of a Cultural Route should make references to some key aspects at least. As such, Cultural Routes could be defined as physical or perceived representations of frequent and repeated

movement over a significant period of time, linking places in time and space, over land and/or water, or otherwise and generating, next to an exchange of goods and ideas, a cross-fertilization within or between cultural regions of the world.

Within such a definition, a road would be a physical representation of a route, while a sea lane, for instance, would be a perceived one (as it usually constitutes a dotted line on a seafarer's map only). The material elements or artefacts along a route can be considered as 'condensation points', where exchange of ideas and goods materialized, or where the route actually became a road. Cultural Routes as "linear landscapes", as referred to in the Operational Guidelines, may not always be lines; when they take the form of a matrix, or a network, it would be more appropriate to refer to them as a **system**. It was furthermore agreed that continuity and a dynamic nature –as opposed to the far more static nature of a landscape–, are also essential aspects of a Cultural Route.

Since a clear nomination model for Cultural Routes does not exist at present, the following section aims to discuss, in short, some core aspects of inscribed World Heritage properties with typological and/or physical similarities to Cultural Routes for clarification and guiding purposes. Several heritage routes have been inscribed on the World Heritage List already, often as "a linear nomination". If a road is considered as a (segment of a) line, with a start and end point, a considerable length and limited width, then theoretically a heritage route as a linear nomination constitutes a continuous nomination, where every point along the line is proposed for inscription. The following typology of heritage routes, many of which were inscribed as linear nominations, gives an indication of how this was applied in practical terms.

1 Transportation

(all feature under the category Industrial Heritage)

Railways

- Semmering Railway (Austria, inscribed in 1998): linear nomination, including several properties (mostly villas) along the railway;
- Darjeeling Railway (India, inscribed in 1999).

Canals

- Canal du Midi (France, inscribed in 1996).

2 Trade Routes

- Frankincense Trail (Oman, inscribed in 2000): linear nomination, including a serial nomination of 4 archaeological sites.

3 Religious Roads

- Camino de Santiago (Spain, inscribed in 1993): linear nomination, including several properties along the road;
- Camino de Santiago (France, inscribed in 1998): linear nomination, including a serial nomination with around 70 properties inscribed.

4 Linear Monuments (e.g. Fortifications /Defensive Structures)

- Great Wall (China, inscribed in 1987);
- Hadrian Wall (England, inscribed in 1987): linear nomination, including several properties along the wall;
- Defense Line of Amsterdam (Holland, inscribed in 1996): this property falls also into the canals classification.

Taking a closer look at the inscribed properties above, it can be determined that all the routes have a formal, materialized linear element as its core property. This rather narrow definition of a Cultural Route, as opposed to a network or system that not necessarily has a physical linear structure as its core (e.g. maritime route), has certainly limited the identification and nomination of other properties. Furthermore, all the routes (including linear monuments) have structures and settlements associated with it. This is most apparent in the cases of:

- The Camino de Santiago, which is inscribed as a linear nomination having a protected 30 meter strip on either side of the road. This protection zone is broadened in certain places to include towns, villages and buildings that are already protected for their cultural value under Spanish law;
- The Semmering Railway, where construction of the 41 km long railway across the Semmering pass between 1848 and 1854 led to the creation of a cultural landscape with villas and hotels over much of its route, that is an outstanding example of a sympathetic insertion of buildings of high and consistent architectural quality into a natural landscape;
- The Hadrian Wall, with almost 100 monuments associated with the wall, including forts, ditches, roads and rampart walks, forming an outstanding ensemble of defensive constructions and settlements in an archaeological zone that is the largest in the UK.

As such, a proper inventory of the structures and settlements along the route seems essential to establish the nature of the route and the most appropriate way of inscription, be it linear (one continuing property), serial (a property consisting of clusters of sites, which can be discontinuous), or mixed. Furthermore, a route cannot be dissociated from its context, e.g. the landscape. For this reason, a good analysis of ancient and modern topography, utilizing historic maps, is essential to assess the value of this aspect of the property to be nominated.

THE SILK ROAD: STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Silk Road was the longest overland trade route on earth. It stretched some 12,000 kilometres (7,500 miles) across the mountains, deserts and steppes of Central Asia, joining the markets of China with those of Europe and the Middle East. The Silk Road was much more, however, than just a trade route. Above all it was a great channel of communication – a means of contact between peoples and places, and a conduit for the two-way transmission of art, religion and technology. Out of China came paper making, printing and gunpowder – technologies that changed the Western world. While from the West new developments in mathematics, medicine and astronomy spread to China. By this route Islam, born in the Middle East, expanded into Central Asia and India, while Buddhism spread from India to China and Japan via the Silk Road.

The expression ‘Silk Road’ is largely a symbolic one. For although silk gave the route its name, many other cargoes, including spices, gems, perfumes and furs, were carried along it. Nor was it a single ‘road’ but rather a shifting network of desert trails and mountain tracks that were used more heavily or less as empires and markets flourished or declined.

Originating at Xi’an, the ancient capital of China, one route followed the Great Wall westward, skirted the Taklamakan Desert, passed through the Ferghana Valley to the caravan cities of Samarkand and Bukhara, and then around the Caspian Sea to Turkey. Other routes climbed the Pamir Mountains and crossed Afghanistan and Iran to the ports of the eastern Mediterranean, or crossed the Great Wall to Mongolia and traversed the steppes of Kazakstan and southern Russia to Europe.

Many Cultural Routes have linked great civilizations and shaped world history. Fernández-Armesto points out that “avenues across the Gobi and Taklamakan were part of the web of silk roads that linked the civilizations at either end of Eurasia. [...] Chinese science and technology were diffused across Eurasia partly by maritime routes but also, vitally, via the deserts which the silk roads crossed”.

The global significance of the Silk Road hardly needs to be debated anymore, indeed, as it has been for more than a decade as part of UNESCO’s Project on the Integral Study of the Silk Road: Dialogue among Civilizations. In his introduction to the UNESCO publication on the Silk Road Project, Vadime Elisseeff explains that “these roads, regardless of how they were called, have been known to humanity for many centuries and, as far as the major routes

are concerned, for several millennia. Most of them are the descendants of natural roads following patterns of vegetation whose ecological qualities enabled man and beast to thrive in the days when paleolithic hunters tracked their game. These historical routes are also terrestrial and maritime, running from east to west and corresponding to waterways that run from north to south. They introduced sedentary and nomadic populations, and opened up a form of dialogue between the cultures of East and West”.

Concerning the significance and impact of the Chinese Silk Road, he makes the following statement:

“Until the last three hundred years, most of the inventions and technical advances which made a real difference to people’s lives came from China – including, most notably, paper, the printing press, the blast furnace, competitive examinations, gunpowder, and –among many critical innovations in marine technology– the ship’s compass. Long sustained Chinese initiative depended on the availability of routes of transmission”.

Spanning a quarter of the globe, the Silk Road was responsible for more than just transporting goods such as silk and spices to the western world, and objects of gold, glass and other prized Roman creations to the elite of the Orient. Being the first route joining the Eastern and Western worlds, the Silk Road can also be given a spiritual identity – along the Silk Road technology travelled, ideas were exchanged, and friendship and understanding between East and West were experienced for the first time on such a large scale. The importance and value of the Silk Road can therefore be related to the unity it brought about, which led Zekrgoo to state that “the great Silk Road may be counted as the most important route in the history of mankind”.

Furthering this statement would be to argue that the immaterial aspect of Cultural Routes is more important than the material aspect, i.e. the Silk Road as vehicle for cross-cultural exchange. In doing just so, Sugio writes “...the present Silk Road is not found to have been preserved in its perfect form up to the present, but the intangible heritage, such as the characteristics of surviving race surrounding the route and the minority race, their figures, the genes, languages, cultural properties, clothings, living styles, agricultural methods, city structures, architectural styles, customs, manners, political systems, religions, traditional skills, industries, arts, music, etc. are continuing distinctly still now. Therefore even though it is not necessarily existing or is preserved as a road in a clear form, its existence and value as a cultural route becomes evident when the existence of intangible heritage is traced back”.

It seems that Cultural Routes, even more than Cultural Landscapes, can be considered a halfway station between tangible and intangible heritage, containing a significant part of each domain. Therefore, in order to preserve the legacy of the Silk Road in a comprehensive manner, more than just monuments and sites need to be taken into account. More pertinent, therefore, would be to adopt an approach that recognizes the immaterial and diffuse nature of a Cultural Route, as well as the dynamic effects of transmission and impact, including all fields of human activity connected to the road, such as politics, commerce, science, religion and culture. Elements and aspects to consider should include oases and agricultural systems, engineering and transportation, caves for shelter and prayer, open landscapes for contemplation and spiritual motivation, vistas for orientation, resting places with bazaars and caravanserais, but also transit points between different realms of power, with military garrisons, fortifications and communication towers. In this way, a better representation through significant aspects and elements as part of the nomination can be guaranteed; hence the guideline that the significance of a Cultural Route can be assessed through technological, economic, social and landscape factors.

CULTURAL ROUTES: CONDITION OF INTEGRITY AND TEST OF AUTHENTICITY

Initially, the condition of integrity applied to natural sites primarily, while the test of authenticity was reserved for cultural sites. As of lately, and initiated by the introduction of Cultural Landscapes, integrity is also increasingly used in reference to cultural sites. Von Droste explains that “the notion of ‘integrity’, even in its common use referring to ‘wholeness’, has an ecological basis. Integrity relates to the maintenance of functional relationships between components of a system. When applied to World Natural Heritage Sites, one can describe conditions which are essential for the maintenance of the integrity of particular World Heritage values”. This issue seems relevant to Cultural Routes as well.

During the 2001 Thematic Expert Meeting on Asia-Pacific Sacred Mountains in Wakayama, Japan, it was argued that “...integrity implies a balanced state of ecological systems, aesthetic, cultural, religious or artistic associations.” Parallel to sacred mountains, for protecting the integrity of cultural routes evolving cultural practices, including traditional ecological, engineering, and construction knowledge, it may be necessary to take into account – “an enhanced appreciation of the interface between ecology and culture as a dynamic basis for maintaining the integrity” of a cultural

route.

While it may be obvious to many that for Cultural Routes the condition of integrity should apply, the question exactly how to deal with the test of authenticity remains a dilemma. Even though the original function of the route has usually disappeared over time, the cultural sites, properties and natural areas along the route are still often of historic and scientific importance, authentic and therefore worthy of protection and conservation. The current Operational Guidelines state that the authenticity of a heritage route can be assessed on the basis of its significance, the duration of the route itself, as well as of “the legitimate wishes for development of peoples affected.” What does this mean?

Addressed as well during the Asia-Pacific Sacred Mountains Expert Meeting, is that authenticity as defined in the Operational Guidelines and the Nara Document on Authenticity (1994) is applicable to Cultural Routes, and that it “should encompass the continuation of traditional cultural practices” to be found along the Cultural Route. “This authenticity, however, must not exclude cultural continuity through change, which may introduce new ways of relating to and caring for the place”. Furthermore, in order to determine the degree of authenticity and to protect it, it is necessary to examine in detail the distinctive character and components of both tangible and associated intangible values, which together represent the outstanding universal significance of the Cultural Route.

THE SILK ROAD: IDENTIFICATION

All this involves the protection and conservation of a series of elements of various nature, incorporating both tangible and intangible values linked by a physical or perceived artefact, like a string of pearls. The pearls, essentially, are significant places of memory which together constitute the main story line: they are sites that contain Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), the main criterion required for World Heritage listing.

As was argued before, it will be necessary then to look beyond properties and sites of Outstanding Universal Value alone, to consider support sites that are needed to fully understand and appreciate context and relationship, in order to complement the picture – they give the story more depth and character. While some people in this regard argue that “routes are, par excellence, the sum of their parts –[...] no site in isolation perhaps crossing the threshold for heritage listing– but a combination of sites forming a powerful and significant cultural experience [...]”, perhaps the issue is more pertinent. For example: What does the World Heritage site of Mogao Caves (listed in 1987, under criteria i, ii, iii, iv,

v, iv) actually reveal of the Silk Road? Except for wall painting depictions, such as at Cave 103 showing Xuanzang's journey to India traversing the Pamirs in search of Buddhist scriptures, the answer would be: very little.

While the caves' extraordinary collection and quality of Buddhist art are unquestionable, and indeed of Outstanding Universal Value, it can be argued that the site gains even more significance if one properly understands the conditions under which this outstanding art was produced, by whom, where and why. Picture-practicing monks in an oasis, providing a haven for travellers, both physically and spiritually, at a remote location along the Silk Road in the incredibly harsh environment of the Taklamakan, one of the most fearsome deserts in the world, which in Turki means "go in and you will not come out": these all provide an essential contribution to appreciating this site to its fullest extent, through which it gains even more value. It is the beauty in juxtaposition to the alien setting provided for doomed souls braving a journey of incomprehensible proportion – indeed, this context constitutes one of the intangible values of the site. But, is it protected and properly cared for nowadays?

With the current pace of development everywhere in China, there exists a serious danger that soon only the formal World Heritage site will remain, i.e. the caves with Buddhist art, and that its context and relationship with the Silk Road can only be understood through means of a one-liner in a presentation brochure. The physical experience of visiting a site in the desert will have disappeared, and with it the link to one of its important aspects. This means in practice that, in addition to the caves themselves, a wide area should be protected, maintained and presented in order to provide the most complete setting possible: the oasis, including caves that were the "living" quarters of the monks (without art), with unobstructed vistas into the surrounding, never-ending desert, where the ancient Silk Road used to traverse. Any kind of development should be located outside a wide perimeter around this expanded heritage site.

Apart from considerations related to intangible aspects, the physical setting of cultural heritage is a factor that is taken increasingly into account. In this respect, already a decade ago Hiroyuki Suzuki remarked that "traditional villages were built among rice fields, and farmers' houses and surrounding rice fields are inseparable". For Cultural Routes this seems of particular importance, because in principle a Cultural Route was formed, or guided, by geological formations; it crossed both natural and cultural landscapes. In this regard, a concept of significance in defining cultural sites in their context and setting, and the

extent of their significance in direct relationship to a Cultural Route, could be *shakkei* or "borrowed scenery". *Shakkei* is used in the Japanese garden design as "a technique for enlarging the visual scale of the garden beyond its actual physical boundaries by incorporating a distant view as an integral part of the garden". Borrowed scenery (借景) was one of the important techniques used in the planning and design of Chinese gardens as well, where it was not only scenery that could be borrowed, but forms, sounds, colours and fragrances were also incorporated into gardens.

The significance of the surrounding landscape in the context of the Silk Road becomes apparent when realizing that silk, as a commodity, was valued in ancient times in particular because of the hardships merchants had to go through in order to transport it to the markets in the West.

"The early trade in silk was carried on against incredible odds by great caravans of merchants and animals travelling at a snail's pace over some of the most inhospitable territory on the face of the earth – searing, waterless deserts and snowbound mountain passes. [...] Blinding sandstorms forced both merchants and animals to the ground for days on end [...] and altitude sickness and snow blindness affected both man and beast along cliff-hanging and boulder-strewn tracks. Death followed on the heels of every caravan".

For the Chinese Section of the Silk Road (in particular in the area around the Taklamakan Desert) the oasis towns were of paramount importance, as they allowed the caravans to fulfill, and survive, the overland journey. Very few caravans, including the people, animals and goods they transported, would complete the entire route that connected Rome and Xi'an, the capitals of the two great empires. These oasis towns, providing the caravans with fresh merchants, animals and goods, became important trading posts and commercial centres. In view of this, preserving the urban and architectural heritage of these towns alone would not allow to comprehend their significance – even if of Outstanding Universal Value. Preserving the traditional agricultural practices, as well as supportive engineering structures such as those that provided water, are at least as important in telling and understanding the story: one could say they constitute "borrowed scenery".

For identification purposes it is therefore advised to distinguish between 'anchor sites' and 'support sites or structures'. Anchors would be those sites which are considered to contain Outstanding Universal Value, while support sites or structures do not necessarily contain OUV themselves, but are nevertheless important to complement the picture. They will have to be connected therefore,

physically and/or conceptually, as a cluster to the anchor sites. Regarding protection, conservation and management however, there should be little distinction: they equally deserve care and resources in order to guarantee their preservation for future generations.

Whether physically or conceptually connected, support structures could become part of the buffer zones of core areas (the anchor sites). As a matter of principle, the establishment of core and buffer zones for the protection of a Cultural Route should be based upon thorough assessment of the varying levels of the route's heritage values. A buffer zone should ensure the conservation of the integrity of the core zone of the Cultural Route, containing the most important parts and evidence. "Such a buffer zone could also promote sustainable development, thus reducing excessive human impact in terms of environmental degradation of sites. [...] As traditional land-use and land management practices, which have ensured long-term protection of certain [sites and their settings], can be useful tools, these practices should be taken into consideration when planning [protection, conservation and] sustainable development activities".

MANAGEMENT OF THE SILK ROAD CULTURAL ROUTE

In order to oversee and guarantee a consistent high level of management of clusters of heritage sites along more than 4,000 km of roads, the establishment of a National Management Unit would be appropriate. Given China's centralized structure this would be easy to achieve. Such a National Management Unit could be entrusted with the classification of different clusters, divided into main themes that are represented by the clusters. These could include Art (Buddhist, Islamic, others), Architecture (temple, urban, vernacular), Archaeology (cities, monuments), Religion (temples, mosques, meeting points, both peaceful and violent), Military Engineering (garrison stations, forts, walls, towers), Agriculture, Trade & Manufacture (farming, hydraulic systems, markets, caravanserais), Travel & Transportation (engineering structures, resting places, orientation/beacons), etc., or combinations of several of these. Identification and management of properties and sites according to these themes would allow for a broad spectrum and subsequent representation of important aspects related to the Silk Road.

While legislation and management practices should be uniform for all clusters, separate conservation management plans should be prepared for each cluster individually, according to their own characteristics and associated values (both tangible and intangible) with a clear division into core and buffer zones (anchor and support sites). However, in

addition to all the elements that would normally be considered in the protection of Cultural Landscapes, one fundamental aspect to consider for Cultural Routes would be elements and aspects related to the movement of people and goods (transportation, vistas for orientation, beacons and communication towers, etc.). Each conservation management plan should contain parameters for conservation and monitoring purposes, for which individual, local teams would be responsible. The National Management Unit would supervise the preparation of plans and enforcement of legislation for clusters according to the highest international standards, while individual teams would ensure the inclusion of regional or local characteristics and practices, and the facilitation of consultation and community participation.

Over time, when information and resources become increasingly available, decisions can be taken at the national level that allow for the extension of sites or the inclusion of other sites that would significantly complement the picture of the Chinese section of the Silk Road from a national perspective (something that would be more difficult to achieve on a decentralized regional level). Furthermore, tested and tried concepts could be further developed in association with neighbouring countries that pursue connection of their most significant sites to the Silk Road as serial transboundary World Heritage nomination.

CONCLUSION

Cultural Routes, as a latest development in a trend of an expanding scale and complexity of heritage properties, require a separate approach and framework to foster understanding and to serve as a tool for informed decision-making in conservation. Based upon a holistic approach, those heritage sites that will explain and present the Chinese section of the Silk Road in a comprehensive manner should be the focus of identification, protection and conservation efforts. This means that inclusion of a wide variety of elements that relate to the movement of caravans with people and goods would have to be considered, in addition to the evident 'grand sites'. In this regard different clusters of monuments, sites and landscapes could be identified, comprising main themes such as Art, Architecture, Archaeology, Religion, Military Engineering, Agriculture, Trade and Manufacture, or combinations of several of these.

In addition to considerations related to **intangible aspects**, the physical setting of Cultural Routes should be taken into account, because in principle they were formed, or guided, by geological formations and crossed natural and cultural landscapes. Traditional land-use and land-management practices, which have ensured the long-term protection of

sites, should be taken into consideration as well when planning protection and conservation activities. Emerging, therefore, is a combination of ‘anchor sites’ and ‘support sites or structures’ that would allow to fully understand and appreciate both context and relationships. However, with regard to their conservation there would be little distinction, as they all would need to be protected and managed to guarantee their preservation for future generations.

While legislation and management mechanisms should be uniform for all clusters, and supervised from a national level, separate conservation management plans should be prepared for each cluster according to their own characteristics and associated values (both tangible and intangible). Local teams would then be responsible for each of these clusters, thus guaranteeing the inclusion of regional or local characteristics and practices, and facilitating community participation. Over time additional clusters could be included, in China and beyond in Western and Central Asia, linked by a shared vision and set of values to preserve for future generations of all mankind this extraordinary legacy of the great Silk Road.

Abstract

The UNESCO World Heritage Centre is working together with the Chinese Government on a methodological approach for the preparation of a nomination to the World Heritage List for the cultural properties along the Silk Road. Although the network passed through China, Western/Central Asia and beyond, China is the only country that has placed the Silk Road on its national ‘Tentative List’ of cultural and natural properties considered worthy of nominating for World Heritage status.

In August 2003 and July 2004, UNESCO sent expert missions, sponsored by the Netherlands Funds-in-Trust at the World Heritage Centre, to the Chinese section of the Silk Roads in order to research and improve understanding of ‘Cultural Routes’, with a view to its possible candidature for inscription on the World Heritage List. The missions also sought to develop a systematic approach towards the identification and nomination of the Chinese section of the Silk Road, in particular the Oasis Route, which, with the Steppe and the Maritime Routes, is one of three intercultural routes along the Silk Road, relating the story of the Silk Road in a comprehensive manner.

There are an impressive number of monuments and sites along the Oasis Route, which extends over some 4,450 km from Xi’an in Shaanxi Province to Kashgar in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. However, almost the entire original road has disappeared—assuming that it ever existed, as much of it consisted of no more than tracks through the desert— and replaced by a four-lane highway. Some uncertainty remains about the best way to proceed and the missions sought to cooperate in the development of an approach and methodology for the identification and nomination of a Cultural Route.

The UNESCO missions to China concluded that a cultural route could be defined in terms of **space** (the route ran through sites, monuments, constructions, buildings, ways and areas of influence), **time** (the beginning and end of its use, its frequency, intensity and variations) and **cultural criteria** (impact of spiritual and/or material exchanges; impact on human memory or experience, impact of the volume and nature of the exchanges). The mission recommended the establishment of a Silk Road Nomination Task Force management body to coordinate studies and the preparation of the World Heritage nomination.

As a regional follow-up to and extension of the Chinese Silk Road nomination, ideas and concepts will be shared with neighbouring countries, particularly those in Central Asia, that pursue the connection of their most significant properties to the Silk Road to further develop this nomination of serial national and/or transboundary properties. Furthermore, UNESCO ensures the protection of important archaeological sites along the Silk Road of Central

Asia, including sites in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. This work has been made possible thanks to the general support of the Government of Japan, which set up a special Funds-In-Trust Cooperation at UNESCO dedicated to the safeguarding of such Silk Road sites, particularly those in Central Asia and China.

Four types of heritage routes are currently inscribed on the World Heritage List. These include '*Transportation Routes*' such as the Semmering Railway (Austria), the Canal du Midi (France) and the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway (India); '*Trade Routes*' such as the Frankincense Trail (Oman) and '*Religious Routes*' such as the Routes of Santiago de Compostela (separately nominated by Spain and France). To these should be added the 'Linear Monuments' such as The Great Wall (China), the Defence Line of Amsterdam (Netherlands) and Hadrian's Wall (United Kingdom).

UNESCO has been studying the Silk Roads for many years. Between 1988 and 1997, it carried out a far-reaching programme of research entitled '*Integral Study of the Silk Roads: Roads of Dialogue*', to raise awareness of the common roots of civilizations and promoting the concept of a plural World Heritage. This project has helped increase our knowledge of the key role played by different peoples in the process of dialogue between the civilizations along the Silk Road. Many aspects of this study have been integrated into the 'East-West Intercultural Dialogue in Central Asia' project. In 2001 UNESCO, the National Institute of Informatics of Japan and the Japanese National Commission for UNESCO, launched an innovative 'Digital Silk Roads' initiative to explore the possibilities of digital technologies for the preservation and maintenance of cultural artworks, masterpieces, archaeological sites and monuments in Silk Road countries. In November 2002, UNESCO held the International Symposium on the Silk Roads in Xi'an, organized on the occasion of the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage and the 30th anniversary of the *World Heritage Convention*. The *Xi'an Declaration* was adopted, which reiterated UNESCO's message for the promotion of understanding and the conservation of irreplaceable World Heritage elements of the ancient Silk Road.

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