

## PROTECTING, MANAGING, AND SUSTAINING CULTURAL ROUTES AND THEIR SETTINGS: CULTURAL CONSISTENCY AND DIVERSITY

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### **Introduction**

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Today, cultural heritage is a very charming but serious topic that attracts much attention in an international wide, especially when concerning the high-speed modernization and greatly changing social, economic and cultural environment versus the long-term heritage conservation and sustainability. The problem is that on the one hand the cultural consistency, diversity involved in cultural routes and their setting should be preserved to be passed down to the future generations so as to be responsible for the ancestors and descendants, on the other hand some new socio-economic uses must be found in order to satisfy the increasing demand for cultural heritage or to promote the local economic development especially in the developing countries, and what's more important is that the proper use is crucial to maintain them in sustainable activity cycles. So we are often placed in the dilemma.

The protection of cultural heritage is presently addressed by a large number of global or regional charters, conventions, resolutions, declarations and principles such as the Venice Charter of 1964, the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage of 1972, the Burra Charter of 1999, the Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China of 2002, etc. and is paid much more attention to in the decision-making process of both public authorities and developers.

Cultural routes constitute an important part of our cultural heritage, though some routes have an international worth, whereas the scope of impact of others is more limited, just national, regional or local. As a means of communication and transportation in the past or even today, cultural routes organically connect many different kinds of cultural-related monument, sites, buildings, and landscapes (natural or cultural) accompanied with colorful intangible cultural phenomena and elements in linear systems and within much broader overall settings that possess and witness cultural consistency and diversity. With these very different characteristics from other individual cultural heritage, cultural routes turn out to be a highly specific field within

the theoretical framework of cultural heritage conservation

Based on discussing the definition and characteristics of cultural routes and their settings, this paper will analyze the consistency and diversity of cultural routes and their settings from three dimensions of space, time and cognition (of both local communities and visitors), and then put forwards some measures and suggestions in order to improve the way we conserve and manage cultural routes in their settings and to achieve the sustainable development finally.

### **Definition and characteristics**

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In the conference "Routes as a Part of our Cultural Heritage" held in Madrid in November 1994, the following definition was proposed: "A heritage route is composed of tangible elements whose 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."<sup>[1]</sup> In the meeting of experts held by the CIIC<sup>1</sup> in Madrid in May 2003 the concept of a cultural route is defined as "a land, water, mixed or other type of route, which is physically determined and characterized by having its own specific and historic dynamics and functionality, showing interactive movements of people as well as multi-dimensional, continuous and reciprocal exchanges of goods, ideas, knowledge and values within or between countries and regions over significant periods of time, and thereby generating a cross-fertilization of the cultures in space and time, which is reflected both in its tangible and intangible heritage"<sup>[2]</sup>. Compared with the definition in 1994, the one in 2003 includes much more content such as intangible elements, and emphasize both the movement of people and the transmissions and exchanges of intangible cultural heritage such as ideas, values, belief and knowledge. From the development of the two definitions, we can see that it's culture that acts as a crucial role and that connects the different individual heritage elements of the cultural route in its setting and integrates them into the whole route (including the setting).

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<sup>1</sup> CIIC: the International Committee on Cultural Routes of ICOMOS created in 1994.

The concept of setting is mentioned in the Venice Charter of 1964: "The conservation of a monument implies preserving a setting which is not out of scale. Wherever the traditional setting exists, it must be kept."<sup>[3]</sup> Setting evaluation is also a key criterion in assessing the potential World Heritage Sites. Many other international or national charters, principles and documents further developed the importance of setting. In Burra Charter of Australian ICOMOS 1999 states "Setting means the area around a place, which may include the visual catchment."<sup>[4]</sup> Considering cultural routes' specific linear characteristics and corresponding much broader settings, this paper defines the setting of a cultural route as: the area along the route, which may include the tangible physical components and the intangible cultural elements in space, time and cognition that testify and affect the cultural consistency and diversity of the whole route in its setting as well as contributing to the significance of the route

### **Cultural consistency and diversity**

Cultural routes can't be separated from their settings in which they develop and maintain for the interdependent and interactional relationship existing between them. Conserving cultural routes means protecting their cultural consistency and diversity under the whole setting.

The key criterion of defining the setting of a cultural route is the consistency and diversity and how it contributes to the significance of the whole route. Besides, the spacial integrity and visual catchment should also be considered.

Shaped through time or as vast construction, cultural routes, such as Tea-horse Trade Route, Silk Road and the Great Canal in China, may turn out to be variously of local, regional, national, international or even transcontinental extent. For the existing geographical and cultural difference, in changing cognition of various people as well as the movement of space and time, of the area that the route goes through, it certainly experiences the richness and variety of the culture, and at the same time the route connects all the individual heritage and relational cultural components along the route and integrates them into a common structure with the characteristic of cultural consistency.

Having been existing and developing under the interaction between natural and cultural forces for so long a time, cultural routes and their settings always change gradually or even sometimes vanish obviously with the vicissitude of natural environment and society. Such changes are natural and unavoidable, but in recent years under the impact of social and economic pressures, rapid modernization and tourism development, the current changes are often

characterized by the loss of cultural consistency and diversity of the routes in their settings. We concern about such threat.

Cultural routes and their settings exist in specific space, time and cultural context, and perhaps will be different in the eyes of different people for their dissimilar cultural background and identity. For example, the local residents and some certain tourists may hold very different or even conflicting opinions on the culture involved in the route and its setting. So it is the problem of cultural cognition, which is very difficult and complex to delimit.

The three dimensions of space, time and cognition mentioned in above paragraphs in analyzing cultural consistency and diversity existing in cultural routes and their settings can be generalized as follows:

#### 1) Spatial dimension:

- a consistency that reflects the relationship between the individual heritage components; an ecological and natural coherence that supplies the connectivity between similar or different ecosystems<sup>2</sup>; a cultural consistency that identified the linkage between different parts with like or diverse cultural context.
- a diversity of individual heritage elements and ecosystems; a diversity of inhabitants groups and moving visitors or travelers with various culture along the routes and within their settings;

#### 2) Temporal dimension:

- a consistency of function from the beginning to a specific period (in the past or in the future); a consistency of culture with the long-time development of the route in its setting; a consistency of every individual heritage and the whole route with its setting.
- a diversity of heritage elements that appeared, vanished or still exist during the evolution of the route in its setting; a diversity of landscapes in different year, season and day; a diversity of culture during different period (such as the beginning, booming or declining period); change of the function or role may also reflect the diversity in temporal dimension, for example from a route of

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<sup>2</sup> The cultural routes in their settings are the expression of the dynamic interaction between natural and cultural forces in the environment, and the natural components certainly influence the cultural element. For example, the exploration of cultural routes was always influenced by natural element. Therefore, when analyzing the cultural consistency and diversity involving in cultural routes and their settings the natural ones are also included.

transportation or communication in the past to just a deserted routeway or a tourist attraction later.

3) Cognitive dimension:

- a consistency of cultural cognition that reflects the relationship between various local communities with regards to the identity of the route in its setting; a consistency of cognition to the significance of the route in its setting among the visitors, travelers, residents and inhabitants.
- a diversity of cultural cognition of different people with various cultural context.

## **Conservation and management**

The conservation and management of a cultural route includes preserving and managing the setting for that the route can't be separated from its setting that it arose from and evolved in, and the objective to be achieved is to develop a strong cultural consistency whilst, at the same time, preserving the cultural diversity, and furthermore, to sustain the route in their setting. This is a great challenge especially when it comes to the linear characteristic, long evolving history, broad spreading area, colorful and various kinds of culture presenting and implying along the route and within its setting at different time or of different people. Meanwhile, we have to consider the influence and threat of urbanization, globalization, economic pressure, tourism development, and etc. Confronted with such a challenge and reality, this paper holds that the following aspects require attaching importance to for the aim of protecting, managing and sustaining cultural routes in their settings effectively and properly.

1) Cooperation

The cooperation, which may be local, regional, national, or international, is very necessary and essential in achieving the objective of conservation and management for that the cultural route in its setting, as a common heritage of all humanity, goes through linear areas and connect many different parts along the route and within its setting such as the local pilgrimage route to Censer Peak<sup>3</sup>, transprovincial Tea-horse Trade route, transnational Great Canal and transcontinental Silk Road in our China. All the stakeholders, such as local communities, visitors, public authorities, professionals, NGOs, developers, and so on, involved in the route and the setting should be cooperative on the conservation and management, but in the process potential discord or even conflict really exists for that the different

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<sup>3</sup> It's in Shaoxing, Zhejiang province, China. Many believers, mainly local old ladies, always travel along the specific route to the censer peak to offer incense and make wishes.

understanding and attitude to the route in its setting and various pursuit of interest among the stakeholders. Therefore, what's we should do is to create proper cooperative mechanisms among the stakeholders for the exchange of ideas, information and experience.

2) Interpretation and presentation

Interpretation and presentation, as a key means of transferring cultural information to local communities and visitors, is an important method of promoting an understanding and appreciation of the cultural significance of the routes and their settings as well as the need for the conservation. This will contribute to promote cultural exchanges and communications between local residents, visitors and managers and to encourage much more public awareness and support, which will facilitate the protection and management.

Interpretation should present the cultural consistency and diversity existing along the routes and within their setting as well as from the past to the present or even to the future in a popular way based on the current state. The host communities and groups should not only be encouraged to participate in the process of interpretation and presentation but also be supplied opportunities. Therefore, their cultural confidence will be strengthened and the local cultural characteristics will be maintained during the encounter with foreign cultures, especially stronger cultures.

3) Public involvement

Public participation and involvement is the best guarantee of proper heritage conservation and management. The public conservation request and support, in accordance with the protection laws and induction of national government, will promote the dissemination of the cultural significance and preservation necessities among the public, host communities, visitors to the cultural routes and their settings. In the process, the effect that the NGOs, academic groups and especially local communities perform on consultation, commentary, propaganda, education and supervision should be paid much attention to.

The participation of host communities should be advocated for that their involvement in establishing objectives, strategies, plan, policies, measures for the conservation and management would enable them to further understand and appreciate their heritage and then protect them on their own initiative, especially when new developing program (for example, tourism development) is planned and performed. Local communities should be supplied chances to participate in the development and benefit from it by means of employment, education, infrastructure improvement, or financial subsidy.

#### 4) Proper utilization

Proper use of cultural heritage will certainly promote the conservation and management. This idea has been mentioned in the Venice Charter of 1964: "The conservation of monuments is always facilitated by making use of them for some socially useful purpose."<sup>[5]</sup> Having experienced through hundreds or thousands of years, cultural routes, of which the previous function as means of transportation and communication may be weakened or abandoned with the development of society, economic and culture, are confronted with a realistic dilemma whether to let them wither away continually or to find new uses. It's impossible to isolate or freeze cultural routes and their setting from the development. This paper holds that proper use is necessary in order to maintain the cultural consistency and diversity of cultural routes in their settings in a sustainable way, and that conservation and utilization with the relationship of interactional and interdependent should be unified in the whole process of protection and management. What should be emphasized is that the use must be consistent with or be beneficial to the protection. Under the general goal the use patterns can be varied based on the quality of the routes in their settings and tourism development is one means that is popularly adopted.

#### 5) Education

The conservation and management of cultural routes in their setting is a very challengeable long-term task that depends closely on the improvement of cultural heritage knowledge of the public. Education therefore is essential and necessary, especially for the host residents, visitors, managers and developers. By this fundamental means of education the information and knowledge of cultural consistency and diversity involved in routes and their settings will be popularized, and the educatees will be aware of and then actively protect the significance of the routes in their settings. The education should be programmed for the public, beginning with children of school age.

### **Conclusion**

Cultural routes in their settings have gradually become a hot field in the whole system of cultural heritage conservation. With linear characteristics, long evolving history and broad spreading area, the cultural route and its setting identify a significant cultural consistency and diversity, which is the crucial criterion in defining the setting of a cultural route. The cultural consistency and diversity lies in the three dimensions of space, time and cognition. Preserving the cultural route in its setting means to protecting or sustaining such cultural consistency and diversity. In the process of conservation and management

cooperation, interpretation and presentation, public involvement and proper utilization as well as education are crucial and important in order to achieve the general objective of efficient conservation and sustainable development.

## **Abstract**

As a means of communication and transportation in the past or even today, cultural routes organically connect many cultural-related kinds of monument, sites, and natural and cultural landscapes in linear systems and within a much broader overall setting. Besides, just like that in the past, there still are many people with characteristic culture living here today. Therefore, the cultural consistency and diversity involved in cultural routes and their setting should be attached particular importance to in the protection, management, and development of cultural heritage so that the historical information and cultural memories can be preserved for our present and the future generation. Furthermore, concerning the cultural consistency and diversity protection of cultural routes and their setting, the cultural cognition of people living or visiting here, as well as the space and time in which they develop, are to be thought over, and so it comes to the public participation, community involvement, interpretation and presentation, proper utilization, education, and etc. which will benefit the conservation and sustainability of cultural routes in their settings.

## **References**

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2. <http://www.icomos-ciic.org>.
3. ICOMOS, 1964, The Venice Charter (International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites), Article 6.
4. Australian ICOMOS, 1999, The Burra Charter, 1.12 of Article 1.
5. ICOMOS, 1964, The Venice Charter (International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites), Article 5.