

**In Joint Stewardship of the Treasures of  
Human Civilization: China's Philosophy  
and Practice of Cultural Heritage  
Protection in the New Era**

Xinhua Institute



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## Preface

Cultural heritage is a resplendent treasure of human civilization. It carries the glorious history and splendid culture of a country, and sustains the emotional identity and spiritual legacy of a nation. Amid the historical tide of the modernization process in the world today, cultural heritage serves not only as a spiritual compass for nations to strengthen cultural confidence, but also as a beacon of wisdom which inspires countries to root themselves in traditions while exploring new paths to modernization. Protecting cultural heritage is both a tribute to history and a commitment to our future.

China boasts over a million years of human history, ten thousand years of cultural history, and over five thousand years of civilization. Its cultural heritage is found across its vast expanse of magnificent landscapes. Since its 18th National Congress, the Communist Party of China has, from the strategic vantage point of national rejuvenation and civilization continuity, comprehensively stepped up efforts to improve the protection and inheritance of cultural heritage. Adhering to the principle of "prioritizing protection", the Party pushes ahead with holistic and systematic protection, handles properly the relationship between preservation and development, continuously improves the capacity and level of cultural heritage protection, has good stewardship of the cultural treasures of the Chinese nation, and empowers the Chinese modernization drive with cultural heritage protection.

This report comprehensively reviews China's living practices in cultural heritage protection and inheritance in the new era and distills an innovative "OPEN" paradigm comprising four parts: Originality Contribution, Prioritizing Protection, Enhancing Collaboration, and Necessary Guarantee. The report also expresses the view that countries should join hands to safeguard the shared cultural heritage of humankind with reverence, uphold the diversity of world civilizations with an inclusive and broad mind, and foster mutual understanding and affinity among peoples so as to promote exchanges, mutual learning, and enrichment among civilizations.

Chinese civilization always enshrines appreciation of mutual understanding and respect among different cultures. China participates in global governance on cultural heritage with a responsible attitude. We are confident that Chinese civilization will, alongside the diverse civilizations created by people around the world, enable joint stewardship of the treasures of human civilization, the joint promotion of cultural prosperity, heritage protection, and interaction among civilizations, and the implementation of the Global Civilizations Initiative. Together, we will inject profound and enduring cultural strength into the effort to build a community with a shared future for humankind.

## Chapter One

# China's Philosophy of and Stance on Cultural Heritage Protection

**Historical and cultural heritage not only vividly describes the past, but also profoundly affects the present and future; it belongs not only to us, but also to future generations. Protecting and inheriting historical and cultural heritage is being responsible to both history and the people.**

——Xi Jinping

Cultural heritage refers to cultural wealth created, inherited, and retained by humankind that holds historical, artistic, and scientific value. It comprises two main categories: tangible cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage. Cultural heritage carries the brilliance of civilization, history, and culture and represents both a nation's cultural identity and a country's cultural label. It is also a shared treasure of humankind. The protection, inheritance, and utilization of cultural heritage hold profound significance for the advancement of ethnic solidarity, reinforcement of cultural confidence, consolidation of national cohesion, maintenance of national unity, and prosperity of world civilizations.

## 1.1 Meeting the Needs of the Times

China is a powerhouse of cultural heritage. The country's surveys have registered over 760,000 immovable cultural heritage sites, 108 million pieces (or sets) of state-owned movable cultural relics, and a total of close to 870,000 items of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) resources. These items of cultural heritage provide direct evidence for tracing the origins of Chinese civilization and the historical evolution of the Chinese nation. They vividly illustrate the developmental features of Chinese civilization—its continuity, creativity, unity, inclusiveness, and peaceful nature. Systematic and comprehensive advancement of the protection and inheritance of cultural heritage is a prerequisite for national development, a shared aspiration of the people, and a proposition of the world community.

**—A prerequisite for development: an inherent need for Chinese modernization.** China's cultural heritage is a tangible embodiment of the finest of traditional Chinese culture and carries the genes and lifeblood of the Chinese nation. From the logical perspective of history, the effective protection,

inheritance, and utilization of cultural heritage form a vital foundation for the sustainable development of the Chinese nation and the continuous transmission of Chinese civilization. From the logical perspective of value, the intellectual wisdom, humanistic spirit, and moral ideals embedded in cultural heritage remain of significant value in modern times. From the logical perspective of practice, the protection and inheritance of cultural heritage not only involve a systematic excavation and in-depth study of the outstanding traditional Chinese culture, but also serve as a crucial pathway for promoting coordinated material and cultural-ethical advancement.

**—A shared aspiration of the people: a key driving force for cohesion of the cultural soul.** Across China's vast expanse, the ethnic groups have, throughout the long process of history, accumulated a wealth of cultural heritage which is rich in content, varied in form, and distinctive in style. This heritage has helped shape the shared historical memory and spiritual compass of the Chinese nation, reflecting the nation's evolutionary pattern of movement toward unity amid diversity.

Cultural heritage is the emotional bond for a nation and *les lieux de memoire* (the places of memory) for its people. Proper protection and inheritance of cultural heritage can evoke the most widespread emotional resonance, enhance cultural identity, bolster cultural confidence, and inject a continuous stream of vitality into economic and social development.

**—A global call: a vital initiative for safeguarding mankind's spiritual home.** In 1972, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization adopted the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, which defines for the first time the concept of "cultural heritage". The convention highlights the threats of destruction faced by valuable heritage in the industrialization process and emphasizes the responsibility and obligation for its protection. Guided by the Convention, many countries have gradually developed and increased an awareness of the importance of cultural heritage protection and refined their action in this regard. In the face of the collisions of plural cultures brought about by globalization, enhancing international cooperation in cultural heritage protection has become a wide consensus and pressing need of countries in the world.

## 1.2 Demonstrating the Glamor of Culture

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, the Chinese government has placed the protection and utilization of cultural heritage higher on the agenda. It developed a guideline for the work related to cultural relics, i.e., "protection as the mainstay, rescue first, reasonable utilization, and strengthened management". It also set up a theoretical system with the requirements for the work on cultural relics in the new era as its core, i.e., "prioritizing protection, strengthening management, uncovering values, making

effective use, and reviving cultural relics". Historic achievements have been made in China's cultural heritage protection endeavor, with the innovative and creative genes embodied in cultural heritage continuing to be activated. A magnificent cultural scroll of the new era that depicts the glorious past and splendid present is slowly unfolding before our eyes.

**—Notable inscription successes.** In July 2025, the Xixia Imperial Tombs were successfully inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, becoming China's 60th World Heritage site. The Xixia Imperial Tombs have been preserved authentically and completely to this very day, serving as important testimony to Chinese civilization that features a pattern of unity amid great diversity and to the formation of a unified multi-ethnic nation, which explains their irreplaceable and significant position in the history of world civilization. As of July 2025, China had 44 items inscribed on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage Lists, ranking first in the world. Additionally, China has 18 documentary heritage items included in the International Memory of the World Register.

**—Protecting cultural relics according to law.** On March 1, 2025, the revised Law on the Protection of Cultural Relics went into implementation. The revision sets out "prioritizing protection" as a national will to be implemented in all sectors of the legal system, symbolizing the entry into a new stage the legal protection of cultural relics. China's introduction of cultural relics satellite remote sensing for law enforcement monitoring enabled, for the first time, full-coverage monitoring of all world heritage sites in China and major historical and cultural sites protected at the national level. Successive targeted operations were launched for the prevention of and crackdown on crimes related to cultural relics and historical objects. In 2024, over 940 cases were solved with 16,000 artifacts recovered.

**—Empowerment-activated utilization.** In recent years, a "museum craze" has been continuing its spiraling rise in China. Tours featuring cultural heritage and museums as a theme have become a new highlight on the cultural tours consumer market. The new extension of the Yinxu Museum averages 5,000 daily visits while the Taosi Ruins Museum has become a hot check-in destination for study tours to "trace China's origins".

Motifs like "phoenix crown" and "coffered ceiling" have been integrated in thematic cultural creative art products. In the whole society, the identification with the value of cultural heritage is deepening the rise in society's cognition of the significance of inheriting our cultural roots. The cultural relics stored in museums, the historic sites displayed on China's vast land, and the words written in classical books are being "brought to life".

**—Dynamic dialogues among civilizations.** With its open and inclusive nature, Chinese civilization has continued to draw on the essence of other civilizations while greatly enriching the garden of world civilizations. The Second Liangzhu Forum was held successfully. A special exhibition of "Tang China—A Plural and



Open Dynasty (7th- 10th Century)" was hosted at the Guimet Museum in Paris. "On Top of the Pyramid: The Civilization of Ancient Egypt" held in the Shanghai Museum attracted over 2 million visitors. China is giving full play to its unique role in promoting mutual learning among civilizations through international cultural exchange by showcasing the unique glamor of Chinese civilization, deepening dialogue between Chinese and other civilizations, and strengthening people-to-people ties.

### 1.3 Pooling Chinese Wisdom

Into the new era, China's cultural heritage protection has become more comprehensive in philosophy, more integrated in system, more diversified in methods, and more distinctive in characteristics.

#### **—Upholding cultural subjectivity with self- confidence and independence**

Chinese civilization is the only great civilization in the world that has continued uninterrupted to this very day in the form of a state. An abundance of archaeological discoveries shows that while Chinese civilization originated from its own land, it has never been closed and secluded. Instead, it has kept developing through exchanges with other civilizations. Its rich and splendid cultural heritage encapsulates the genes of civilization, preserves national memory, and bears deep imprints of the enduring spiritual pursuits and governance wisdom of the Chinese nation developed over five millennia. It answers the questions of our times, i.e., "Where did China come from?" and "Why China?" — which are the most direct embodiment of the cultural subjectivity of the Chinese nation.

In its cultural heritage protection endeavor since the onset of the new era, China has consistently been pursuing the enhancement of cultural confidence and subjectivity as its fundamental goal. It stays the course in seeking independence and self-reliance and draws strength from the deep identification with the cultural values of all ethnic groups. It emphasizes the need to keep its independent character in the mutual learning among civilizations by consolidating the foundation of development based on its cultural subjectivity.

**—Handling properly the relationship between conservation and development.** China has a huge volume of cultural heritage resources in multiple categories, which are widely distributed. The accelerated pace of industrialization, urbanization and modernization has had an impact on the safety of some cultural relics, such as ancient buildings, ruins, and industrial heritage sites, and on the survival and development of some intangible cultural heritage. It has also raised the bar for coordinating the promotion of cultural heritage efforts with economic and social development. In its urban and rural planning and construction, China attaches great importance to cultural heritage protection, strictly holds the bottom line of protection, and builds a formidable safety barrier.

Rejecting a fragmented protection approach, China promotes a deep integration of cultural heritage with the ecological environment, urban renewal, and rural revitalization and has forged a systemic conservation network in which cultural heritage no longer exists in isolation, but has become closely linked with natural landscapes, historical contexts, social customs, etc. in an organic whole.

### **—Reflecting the fundamental stance of putting people first**

Cultural heritage is a shared treasure of the entire people. The people's cultural needs are becoming increasingly diverse, with a stronger desire to learn about the preservation and promotion of China's outstanding traditional culture and to enjoy quality cultural products that are steeped in some of the best elements of China's traditional culture and imbued with characteristics of the times.

In its work of protecting cultural heritage, China consistently follows a people-centered approach. By deeply unearthing the contemporary relevance of cultural heritage and reinventing its modern expressions, China strives to "bring relics to life" with a view to empowering public cultural services and fulfilling people's needs for cultural-ethical development. In addition, China pays attention to the coordination between cultural heritage preservation and socioeconomic development. Through rational and effective utilization, the social values of cultural heritage can be better leveraged to benefit the public at large. Nationwide participation is encouraged to foster a sound environment of extensive protection by the whole society.

**—Having a global vision with an inclusive perspective.** Cultural heritage is a valuable resource for safeguarding the diversity of human civilization and promoting equal exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations.

China has always carried out cultural heritage protection with an open and inclusive mind. It actively draws upon advanced international experience while using cultural heritage as a bridge for global communication and as a window to showcase the distinctive appeal of its fine traditional culture. China plays the role of connecting and integrating itself with the rest of the world through its cultural heritage. Through it, China expresses its attitude and views on contemporary issues of world civilization and demonstrates contemporary Chinese people's views on the world, civilization, culture, and values. China actively participates in international governance in the field of cultural heritage by sharing preservation technologies and practical experience, thus contributing Chinese wisdom and solutions to promoting the prosperity of global civilization and building a community with a shared future for humankind.

A series of new practices and concepts bear testimony to the splendid glory of Chinese civilization across ever broader horizons. As Shi Xingeng, an archaeologist and researcher of Liangzhu Culture, reflects in the preface of his work "Liangzhu" over 80 years ago: "Living in this formidable yet magnificent era, we must exert our utmost to preserve the inherent cultural legacy of our nation."

## Chapter Two

# The Living Practice of Cultural Heritage Protection in China

**Cultural relics and heritage carry and sustain the cultural genes and lifeblood of the Chinese nation, serving as non-renewable and irreplaceable cultural resources of Chinese civilization. We must actively advance the protection and utilization of cultural relics alongside the safeguarding and inheritance of cultural heritage, tap their multidimensional values, and disseminate more value symbols and cultural products of Chinese civilization and the Chinese spirit.**

**—Xi Jinping**

Amid the dual impacts of globalization and modernization, the protection of cultural heritage has emerged as a shared imperative for humankind.

How can China's five-millennia-old civilization sustain its vital continuity in the tides of the times? China has responded by crafting a weighty answer for the new era—with historical legacy as its writing paper and innovative practices as its writing brush. Through its practice paradigm of "safeguarding cultural roots, exploring intrinsic values, empowering preservation through technology, and centering on humanistic purposes", China addresses the eternal question of "what defines civilization" by enriching the cause of cultural heritage protection with real practice.

This represents not merely a sentimental dialogue with history, but an endeavor to address the contemporary challenge involving the survival and sustainability of human traditions with Chinese wisdom during the transmission and evolution of the genes of civilization. By transforming cultural heritage from "rare manuscripts of antiquity" into "open-source codes" for the future, we ensure that the lifeblood of China's five-millennia civilization flows eternally and sustainably through protection and innovation.

## 2.1 Safeguarding the Roots of Civilization

The past guides the present and history illuminates the future.

Cultural heritage, including archaeological remains, constitutes the best "living dictionaries" of history, having woven together the grandeur of our storied past, revealing the future of China's great national rejuvenation, and enshrining the developmental code that reveals "wherefrom we came and wherein we are heading".

Cultural heritage crystallizes the cultural foundation and spirit of our country of

ancient civilization and carries the unique ideas and concepts, ways of thinking, values and spirit of the Chinese nation. Through generations of specific practical activities, these elements have given rise to and converged into the distinctive genes and lifeblood of the Chinese nation.

**—The further cultural relics travel, the closer they move toward people.**

Proper protection is the top priority. From "attention to cultural relics preservation", to "comprehensive attention to cultural relics protection, inheritance, and utilization", and further to "the strengthening of systematic protection and rational utilization of cultural relics", the path of cultural relics protection has been running in a continuous line, with policies adapted to evolving time and circumstances, developing in steps with the times.

Legislation leads the way. China has enacted the Cultural Relics Protection Law and Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage as well as relevant administrative regulations, such as the Regulation on the Protection of the Great Wall, Regulations on Museums, Regulation on the Protection of Famous Historical and Cultural Cities, Towns and Villages. Regional legislation on cultural relics protection has also been developed, with all provinces (including autonomous regions and municipalities) issuing their respective composite legislation. Some of them came up with specific legislation targeting world heritage sites, such as the Beijing Central Axis World Heritage Conservation Act, Regulation of Hunan Province on the Protection of Yinxu Ruins, and Regulation of Chongqing Municipality on the Protection of Dazu Rock Carvings. By now, China has built a hierarchically structured and priority-oriented rule of law framework which provides a firm and effective judicial safeguard for the protection, inheritance, and utilization of the country's cultural heritage.

After over two decades, the Cultural Relics Protection Law of the People's Republic of China underwent its second revision—with 19 provisions added and 75 amended—before its implementation as of March 2025. The amendments include the addition of a front-loaded protection mechanism of "investigation before construction" and "archaeological studies before land transfer", strengthened protection of unclassified immovable cultural relics to delineate an inviolable red line for cultural relics protection with "the strictest regime", and empowering cultural relics administrations with the authority to take supervisory and inspection measures, increasing penalties for violations of laws and regulations governing the protection of cultural relics.... These measures collectively fortify the legal safeguards for the protection of cultural relics.

In the Fourth National Survey of Cultural Relics, China implemented a series of innovative measures: it practiced thorough protection by including all old and ancient structures, cultural sites, tombs, grotto temples, and stone carvings predating 1911 in the scope of the survey and designation; the cultural content of cultural relics were enriched with the refinement of 59 relic types in six major categories extended to 63

types; cultural landscapes were clearly specified to be incorporated as survey targets for the first time; the identification, registration, and publication of immovable relics were listed as main tasks to enhance systematic protection, with the survey results used as the basis for sector-specific public listings, constituting a robust support for the construction of a historical and cultural heritage protection system with relic resources as its core.

### **—Properly protecting intangible cultural heritage**

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) constitutes an important component of China's finest traditional culture and serves as a living testament to the enduring legacy of Chinese civilization. The 2025 Report on the Work of the Government explicitly calls for advancing the systemic protection of cultural heritage while elevating the standards for the protection and utilization of cultural relics and intangible cultural heritage and for archaeological research.

In 2011, the Intangible Cultural Heritage Law of the People's Republic of China was promulgated for implementation, codifying in legal form the important value and basic elements of the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage, and ushering this endeavor into a new stage of protection according to law. All 31 provincial-level administrative regions enacted intangible cultural heritage protection regulations while some cities and counties produced local statutes. Thus, intangible cultural heritage protection operates under legal regulations, statutory guidance, and standardized norms.

The protection listing and cataloguing system has been continuously refined. As of March 2025, China had released 1,557 national-level ICH representative projects and recognized 3,999 national-level ICH representative inheritors. Over 100,000 ICH projects had been incorporated into the four-tiered national, provincial, municipal, and county-level protection catalogues. Additionally, 23 national cultural ecology (pilot) reserves had been innovatively established across 17 provinces as a significant step in holistic conservation.

More importantly, ICH protection has taken root in local communities. In the Blang ethnic village of Jingmai Mountain, Yunnan, elders pass down time-honored tea-making techniques to the younger generation through hands-on mentorship. By scanning the QR code on ancient tea trees' ID tags, one can trace millennia-old ancestral cultivation wisdom.

At Situ Town in Jincheng, Shanxi, ICH inheritors have integrated iron-flowering craftsmanship into the primary school curriculum, turning molten iron into sparks of cultural inheritance. In Li County, Hunan, young people gather at a teaching site of Lishui boat trackers' work songs to observe the laborers' workflows and experience the toils of hauling ropes.

The long river of Chinese civilization, unbroken for five thousand years, is now flowing through classrooms and fields, injecting the genes of civilization into the bloodstream of a new generation.

Stewardship of the roots of cultural heritage is both a homage to history and a solemn vow to the future.

## 2.2 Exploring Contemporary Values

To better inherit cultural heritage, it is essential to always enable cultural relics, history, and culture to speak for themselves. China encourages the effective use of cultural resources while ensuring the security of cultural relics, prioritizing social benefits to provide a variety of cultural products and services at different levels. Efforts are made to promote the effective utilization of both immovable and movable cultural relics in a way that suits local conditions.

In Sichuan's Yanjiaba Rural Park at Ziyang City, the Sichuan Opera Rejuvenation Experience Hall, integrating intangible cultural heritage and study tour, has once again captivated young audiences with its ancient tunes. Works such as the dance poetry drama *The Journey of a Legendary Landscape Painting* and the TV program *Palace Banquet in Tang Dynasty* are staged to uphold the cultural stance of Chinese culture, inherit its cultural genes, and showcase its aesthetic style.

These practices fully demonstrate that preservation is not sealing, but an interactive dialogue between cultural heritage and modern life.

From the opening of digital resources at sites like Dunhuang and the Palace Museum, which have built a bridge for the joint possession, construction, and enjoyment of valuable historical and cultural treasures across society, to the explosive growth in visitor numbers at museums nationwide; from the popular cultural and museum programs on TV and the frequently trending cultural and creative products that enhance people's beautiful lives, to the civilization imprints at major international events such as the Beijing Winter Olympics, Hangzhou Asian Games, and Chengdu Universiade that captured global attention...the brilliant cultural heritage is now getting closer to our daily life through diverse means and forms, radiating the brilliance of the times.

### **—The value of cultural heritage sustained through its integration into contemporary life**

In Azheke Village, Honghe Prefecture, Yunnan Province, modern governance has promoted the sustainability of traditional farming. Its terrace field system that features a "forest-village-terrace-river" structure has not only been put on the World Heritage List, but also become a sound ecological template for rural revitalization, which proves that "cultural heritage is a significant resource for future sustainable development".

The 3,200-kilometer Grand Canal of China, which was excavated 2,500 years ago, was put on the World Heritage List in 2014. Since then, the canal culture has been blossoming with renewed vitality, creating an ever more comfortable living environment for people along the canal. Ancient villages, bridges and archways are interwoven; the original native ecological landscape and modern atmosphere are in perfect harmony.

In Ya' an, Sichuan, the applications for the enlistment of the Ancient Tea Horse Road and the South Asia Corridor of the Silk Road on the UNESCO world heritage sites are about not only mapping out geographical routes, but uncovering the cultural genes of "openness and inclusiveness" as well. By revitalizing 82 cultural relic preservation units, the local government and communities have transformed the history of tea trade into a "Belt and Road" cultural bond, turning the thousand-year-old ancient road into a living textbook for dialogue between China and the rest of the world.

From heritage conservation to cultural decoding, from static sealed storage to dynamic growth, the values of cultural heritage penetrate the dust of history and are bursting with great vitality in contemporary society.

### **—Discovering the connection between intangible cultural heritage and modern life**

The Spring Festival is the most culturally rich, widely participated, and deeply influential traditional festival in China. In 2024, the Spring Festival—the Social Practice of Chinese New Year Celebration was successfully listed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

During the 2025 Spring Festival, people across China put up the annual red, wore Han-style clothes, bought lanterns, experienced the ancient predecessors' way of celebrating the New Year in intangible cultural heritage museums, and wrote down wishes for the New Year at markets filled with trendy cultural and creative products. With the tempering of time, the flavor of the traditional Chinese New Year became ever richer, more mellow and visible.

Intangible cultural heritage, carrying the five-thousand-year-old civilizational memory of the Chinese nation, conveys the unique folk customs of places across China. Different parts of the country have continued to step up their efforts to preserve intangible cultural heritage and explore inheritance models that integrate development so that ancient intangible cultural heritage can convey new cultural voices and shine brilliantly in the new era.

In Henan and other regions, a series of activities titled "Talking about Intangible Cultural Heritage by the Yellow River" were organized, with online views reaching 7 million, creating a "grand chorus" for intangible cultural heritage preservation across nine provinces along the Yellow River. Zhejiang is pushing ahead with national pilots for "high-quality inheritance and development of traditional crafts" and "intangible cultural heritage in aid of rural revitalization", promoting the revival of traditional crafts and increasing employment and income for local residents. In Yulin, Shaanxi, popular attractions such as the Ancient City of Yulin and the Northern Shaanxi Folk Song Museum are leveraged to create by experiment innovative cultural tourism projects like "Intangible Cultural Heritage+Festivals", "Intangible Cultural Heritage+Performance", and "Intangible Cultural Heritage+Study Tours"....

As an important town on the ancient Silk Road, Kashgar in Xinjiang has a history

of over 2,000 years as a city. Even more so, the ancient city of Kashgar is a "living ancient city", with many traditional dwellings and pottery crafts dating back over a century. Strolling through the winding streets and alleys, one can pause at the bustling bazaar (i.e., market). Stores such as the Kantuman Bazaar Iron Industry Cooperative, Aidelaisi Story Museum, Mehmet Storytelling House, Kashgar Old Wine Stores, and Medicine Tea Museum are scattered throughout the ancient city of Kashgar, serving both as production workshops and tourist attractions, making intangible cultural heritage products fashionable and practical.

## 2.3 Unleashing the Technological Momentum

From archaeological excavation to cultural relics conservation, from value interpretation to public display and dissemination, technology's supporting and leading role has become increasingly prominent. The 14th Five-Year Plan for Cultural Heritage Conservation and Technological Innovation marks the first time such a plan was elevated to a national-level special program, with a dedicated chapter that outlines a full-chain approach to improving the scientific and technological innovation capabilities in cultural relics preservation.

Chinese heritage professionals have pioneered a convergence of tradition and innovation, forging deep integration between cultural relics preservation and technological innovation. This approach not only increases scientific and technological applications in archaeology and conservation, but also stimulates the creativity and public appeal of cultural relics on display and in dissemination. Meanwhile, it catalyzes new business models and application scenarios, injecting fresh momentum into the cultural heritage protection sector.

### —Technology-empowered archaeological excavation

The increasing integration of technological means into archaeological excavation represents both a new imperative of our era for archaeological work and a new direction for the discipline's development. In China's cultural heritage conservation practice, science and technology are permeating the entire workflow from survey and prospecting to field excavation, data processing, research analysis, artifact preservation, and ultimately public exhibition and use.

Into the 21st century, China has organized multidisciplinary collaborations to advance major archaeological projects, including the Origins of Chinese Civilization Project, Archaeology China, and the Xia - Shang Civilization Research Project. The completion of these initiatives involved experts from diverse fields such as archaeology, history, geosciences, physics, chemistry, biology, and other humanities and natural sciences. The integration of scientific technologies into systematic research and exploration on the history and culture of the Chinese has progressively revealed the inner logic, bloodline, and trajectory of Chinese civilization's formation and evolution, yielding a series of significant achievements.



For the archaeological survey of the No. 1 and No. 2 shipwreck sites on the northwest slope of the South China Sea, Chinese archaeologists applied for the first time archaeological theories, techniques, and methodologies, supported by deep-sea technology and equipment, to conduct systematic archaeological investigation, documentation, and research of ancient shipwrecks at depths exceeding 1,000 meters. This interdisciplinary integration of deep-sea science and technology and underwater archaeology marks China's ascent to global leadership in deep-water archaeological capabilities.

### **—Technology-enabled conservation and restoration**

In the field of cultural relic restoration and safety monitoring, advanced technological methods such as X-ray flaw detection, metallographic microscopy, and 3D printing have been extensively applied to cultural relics preservation and restoration. These cutting-edge techniques enable precise "diagnosis" and predictive analysis of disease in cultural artifacts.

Through meticulous cleaning and reversible physical stabilization, a number of epoch-defining cultural relics unearthed from No. 3-No. 6 Ceremonial Pits at the Sanxingdui site in Sichuan, including large-mouthed zun vessels, square zun vessels with round openings, kneeling statues holding zun vessels on their heads, kneeling statues with twisted heads, and gold masks, have been successfully restored. The use of the recently developed composite protective material has effectively resolved the challenge of conserving unearthed waterlogged and decayed ivory artifacts, enabling these precious cultural relics to be preserved for the long term and restored to their former glory.

The Xi'an City Wall, an ancient rampart structure with a long history, grand scale, and complete preservation, is now being protected with the use of advanced technologies such as big data, the Internet of Things, and surveying and scanning, all integrated through the Digital Cabin comprehensive management platform.

The report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China states: "We will implement a national cultural digitization strategy, improve the modern system of public cultural services, and launch new public-benefit cultural programs." This provides clear guidance for promoting digital cultural development.

A Cultural DNA Archiving Project is underway across the vast Chinese land. Millimeter-precision laser scanners are used to produce high-resolution 3D data collection for UNESCO World Heritage Sites, including Gulangyu Island's Bagua Building, Quanzhou's Kaiyuan Temple, and Fujian's Tulou earthen buildings. In the thousand-year-old ancient capital of Xi'an, UNESCO World Heritage Sites digital archives are also under construction for five heritage sites along the Xi'an segment of the "Silk Road: Chang'an-Tianshan Corridor", involving digital surveying, archiving, virtual restoration, and display.

### **—Technology-enhanced heritage revitalization**

On the strength of science and technology, China's cultural heritage protection

undertaking is having new development opportunities. "Empowered by science and technology, cultural relics are now going viral." This not only has enriched people's cultural life, but also is revolutionizing the dissemination and consumption of cultural values, driving high-quality growth in the cultural heritage preservation sector.

At the Yinxu Museum, encased in a monumental bronze ding-shaped structure, visitors can not only view 16 authentic oracle bones in the exhibition hall, but also interact with digital touchscreens. Additionally, the Sanxingdui Museum employs cutting-edge naked-eye 3D technology to recreate an entire archaeological excavation site within its huge archaeological galleries. The continuously updated "Digital Dunhuang" project transports precious cultural relics from the remote desert caves to audiences worldwide.

China is home to a number of world-leading tech companies that provide continuous scientific and technological support for the preservation and utilization of cultural heritage. For instance, Alibaba, in collaboration with institutions like the Xi'an Museum, launched the "Meta Heritage Universe" cultural tourism metaverse. This initiative employs technologies such as high-definition real-time cloud-based interaction and intelligent lifelike virtual avatars to create a digitally immersive space that blends the past and the present.

Meanwhile, Baidu partnered with Zhejiang University to develop an AI-powered cultural relics restoration system, which recommends optimal restoration solutions based on a database of millions of case studies. Additionally, the sale of limited-edition digital collectibles, revenue from AR-immersive exhibition ticketing, and cross-industry collaborations in cultural and creative products, inter alia, have collectively helped establish a sustainable "preservation – transformation – reinvestment" cycle.

China has achieved a string of remarkable outcomes in technological archaeology. The image of ancient Chinese civilization is portrayed ever more explicitly through rounds of fusion between technology and cultural heritage conservation while the role of archeological work in providing tangible evidence of Chinese civilization and spreading Chinese culture continues to be amplified. This represents a contribution in archeological wisdom and power that propels innovations in China's archaeological theories and methodologies, establishes the disciplinary, academic, and discourse systems of the country's archaeological framework, and advances its modernization.

## 2.4 Ensuring the People Share the Fruits

The Communist Party of China has put forward a people-centered philosophy of development, emphasizing that development is for the people, by the people, and its fruits are for the people. While adhering to the principles of prioritizing protection and inheritance, the Party pays attention to the rational utilization of cultural heritage so as to fully leverage its important role in delivering public cultural services and meeting the people's needs in their ethical and cultural lives, among others.

### —Cultural heritage integrated into daily life

The city of Hangzhou has designated July 6 each year as "Hangzhou Liangzhu Day" to guide local residents in participating in the preservation and inheritance of Liangzhu culture. In Pingyao Old Street, adjacent to the Liangzhu Archaeological Site Park, the launching of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) projects such as jade carving, paper umbrellas, pottery, kites, and lanterns has attracted an increasing number of cultural and creative businesses. Craftspeople among the local villagers have now gathered here, able to work close to home and increase their income while taking care of their families.

To uphold a people-centered approach to cultural heritage protection, it is imperative not only to improve the living environment, but also to preserve historical and cultural legacies. It calls for long-term protection mechanisms centered on local residents to stimulate the internal motivation for historical and cultural heritage protection in both urban and rural areas.

The Ancient City of Pingyao, a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site, is one of the best-preserved ancient cities in China. Spanning 2.25 square kilometers, the ancient city houses more than 300 historic sites and nearly 4,000 traditional buildings. In recent years, while continuously undergoing the preservation and restoration of historic sites and buildings, the Ancient City of Pingyao has also witnessed the conservation and renovation of traditional residential houses with private ownership and residential use within the city, benefiting more than 900 residents. The project was granted the Award of Excellence by the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation.

As traditional residential dwellings have transitioned from "static preservation" to "dynamic conservation", residents are now able to enjoy a high-quality modern life in the ancient streets and alleys, where historical culture and modern living are integrated, with traditional culture carried forward dynamically through everyday life.

In the Pingjiang Historical and Cultural Block of Suzhou Ancient City, with its typical grey bricks and black tiles, the elegant and lingering melodies of Pingtan (a traditional form of musical storytelling) echo through the air. Intangible cultural heritage items such as Suzhou embroidery, Song brocade, and Kesi silk weaving embody exquisite craftsmanship. Visitors can immerse themselves in the Suzhou-style life characterized by "savoring seasonal delicacies, residing amid the elegance of gardens, enjoying the grace of Kunqu Opera, and appreciating the beauty of Suzhou craftsmanship".

### —Cultural heritage nourishing high-quality development

For ancient capitals such as Xi'an and Luoyang, the protection of large archaeological sites involves greater difficulties, higher costs, and multiple competing interests, it is all the more important to balance planning with preservation, and development with use.

In response, Xi'an has taken solid steps in implementing the "archaeology before

land transfer" policy while Luoyang has taken measures such as "developing new urban areas away from the old city". Both cities have explored strategies including planning-led development, scientific archaeology, and site-specific approaches. These efforts have allowed cultural relics and historical sites to emerge from underground and regain the splendor of large sites while under protection. A preliminary model of large-site protection and management suited to China's national conditions and bearing distinctive Chinese characteristics has begun to take shape.

From discovery and restoration to exhibition and utilization, China's cultural heritage has continued to be involved in local development. The 200-year-old Fengyan Ancient Terraces in Shaanxi are the largest and best-preserved Qing Dynasty terrace fields discovered so far in the Qinba Mountains. Shaanxi Province has sought to integrate cultural relics protection, improvement of residents' living standards, and the showcasing of local folk customs by establishing the Fengyan Ancient Terraces Ecological Museum for relocated residents. On ordinary days, villagers pick mulberry leaves and grow rice; during the tourist season, they run farm stays at home or perform in folk art shows. Amid green mountains and clear waters, the local people have achieved poverty alleviation and prosperity.

Born of porcelain and prospering through porcelain, Jingdezhen, the millennium-old porcelain capital, has created a miracle of a city sustained for a thousand years by a single handicraft, forged through the fusion of clay and fire. Today, this ancient city is being revitalized in a unique way: old porcelain factories have been transformed into creative districts, new cultural and artistic landmarks are emerging one after another, and "Jingpiao" or Jingdezhen drifters—people who hail from all over the country in search of better opportunities in Jingdezhen—are gathering here.

Through protection and transmission, China continues its cultural lineage, enabling cultural heritage to gain renewed vitality and radiance in the new era, and to become an important source for enhancing the historical confidence and awareness of the entire nation. Standing at a new historical starting point, China fully demonstrates the unique strengths of cultural heritage in cultural inheritance and development, using the power of cultural relics to consolidate the foundation of civilization and write the future of culture.

## **Chapter Three**

# **"OPEN": An Innovative Paradigm of Chinese Cultural Heritage Preservation**

**We must respect history, culture, and ecology, and fully protect historical and cultural heritage. We should coordinate the development of tourism, distinctive businesses, and the protection of ancient cities, and set a firm baseline for cultural relics safety so as to safeguard the precious wealth left to us by our predecessors.**

**— Xi Jinping**

Since the beginning of the new era, China has achieved remarkable results in its cultural heritage protection endeavor as it continues to contribute a stream of China's wisdom, power, and solutions to human society. A series of original concepts have been successively advanced; a series of policies, laws, and institutional systems with Chinese characteristics have gradually come into shape; a series of major initiatives have been transformed from blueprints into reality. Contemporary China's concepts and practices of cultural heritage protection are best summarized in the "OPEN" innovation paradigm, which stands for Originality Contribution, Prioritizing Protection, Enhancing Collaboration, and Necessary Guarantee. This paradigm has not only enriched the cultural heritage protection theory for the Chinese modernization process, but also contributed further to the cultural heritage protection, inheritance, and utilization efforts by nations around the world.

### **3.1 Originality Contribution**

In the innovative theory and practice of cultural heritage protection, China continued to absorb, on the premise of standing firm on its cultural subjectivity and cultural confidence and in light of its national conditions, all outstanding achievements and systemic paradigms. China has creatively proposed a series of new concepts, systems, and approaches for cultural heritage preservation that feature Chinese characteristics, reflect the spirit of the times, and are in keeping with China's realities. It has embarked upon a series of new initiatives, practices, and explorations, helping break new ground in China's cultural heritage protection endeavor.

#### **3.1.1 Logical Starting Point**

This endeavor is based on the logical starting point of "the two integrations":

integrating the basic tenets of Marxism with China's specific realities and fine traditional culture. This scientific methodology provides in-depth guidance for the innovative development path of China's cultural heritage protection in the new era. In its protection practice, China uses the Marxist stance, viewpoints, and methodology to have a firm grasp of the law that governs cultural heritage protection while exploring characteristic protection models based on its national conditions; it both uncovers in depths the innate continuity, creativity, uniformity, inclusivity, and peacefulness of Chinese civilization and pushes for the creative transformation and innovative development of traditional culture. This makes cultural heritage preservation an important carrier for demonstrating our cultural confidence and sustaining its historical and cultural heritage.

Every river has its origin and every tall tree has its roots. With the "two integrations" as a logical starting point where to anchor its original concepts, China's cultural heritage protection undertaking finds support in a successful development path, strong material base, and rich historical and cultural accumulation. For one thing, the solid material foundation formed through Chinese modernization gives a firm backing for China's engagement in global governance and the provision of public goods, with cultural heritage preservation forming an important component. For another, the Chinese nation, with a history of civilization that goes back more than five millennia, has made indelible contributions to the advancement of human civilization and will continue to contribute its strength.

The integration of the basic tenets of Marxism with China's fine traditional culture represents "yet another emancipation of the minds" as this second integration allows us to make full use of the invaluable resources of the finest traditional Chinese culture within a broader cultural context to explore theoretical and institutional innovations for the future. This also signifies the new heights that the Communist Party of China has reached in theoretical self-awareness and cultural confidence. Proper protection, study, and use of our cultural heritage to extract and showcase the spiritual symbols of fine traditional Chinese culture and a deepened understanding of both fine traditional Chinese culture and the history of Chinese civilization constitute the ideological foundation for achieving the "second integration".

### **3.1.2 Distinctive Features**

Under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, intellectual independence, material abundance, and a glorious history provide solid backing for the innovation of China's cultural heritage protection theory and practice.

Building stronger cultural confidence marks an important part of Xi Jinping Thought on Culture and an original contribution to the Marxist cultural theory. "Cultural confidence is a broader, deeper, and more essential confidence, and it represents a more fundamental, more profound, and long-lasting force." "China has

firm confidence in its path, theory, and system, and at its core, this confidence is rooted in its cultural confidence stemming from a 5,000-year-long civilization." Reiterating the importance of cultural subjectivity and cultural confidence, President Xi Jinping pointed out that having firm cultural confidence is a major issue that bears on the country's destiny and cultural security, and the independence of the national spirit. For a culture to be firmly established, enduring, influential, cohesive, formative, and far-reaching, it must possess its own inherent subjectivity. Standing firm with unwavering commitment to cultural subjectivity, confidence, and independent innovation of ideas without blindly copying Western models is a distinct hallmark of China's cultural heritage protection effort in the new era.

China emphasizes the importance of preserving the fine traditional culture passed down by our ancestors as this helps bolster confidence in our chosen path of development. In this connection, a major task in cultural heritage protection and inheritance is to properly publicize and articulate the Chinese characteristics, namely, the "four clear articulations":

1. To articulate that each country and nation has its own historical traditions, cultural foundations, and basic national conditions and, therefore, its path of development must bear its own unique characteristics;

2. To articulate that Chinese culture embodies the deepest philosophical pursuits of the Chinese nation and serves as a rich source of nourishment for its continuous development and growth;

3. To articulate that fine traditional Chinese culture is a prominent source of strength of the Chinese nation and represents our most profound source of cultural soft power;

4. To articulate that socialism with Chinese characteristics is rooted in the fertile soil of Chinese culture, reflective of the will of the Chinese people, aligned with China's realities and the demands of the times, and solidly based on a profound historical origin and extensive realities.

During its practice of cultural heritage protection since the 18th CPC National Congress, China has emphasized in clear terms cultural subjectivity as the wellspring of China's firm cultural confidence that has enabled the country to achieve tremendous historic achievements across the board, from the theory to the practice of cultural heritage protection.

### **3.1.3 Innovative Contribution**

#### **—Creative transformation and innovative development.**

China advocates the need to persist in drawing on the past to serve the present and using history as a mirror for today. It also insists on critical engagement with traditions by preserving what is good and discarding what is bad rather than blindly glorifying the past while belittling the present or using the past to negate the present. China is striving

to bring about a creative transformation and innovative development of its traditional culture.

"Let urban dwellers see the mountains and rivers and remember their rural origins." Nostalgia about one's hometown reflects one's roots and bloodline, carries historical memories and patriotic sentiment, and symbolizes the continuity of cultural lineage and the anchoring of the national spirit. Proceeding from a people-centered position, China closely links the preservation and inheritance of urban and rural historical culture with people's livelihoods and well-being. In cities, China calls for preserving urban historical and cultural heritage just as one would treasure one's own life. It emphasizes the imperative to keep memories of urban culture by enabling people to remember their history and hometowns, thereby reinforcing cultural confidence and deepening their emotional bond with the nation. In rural areas, China advocates the need for deep exploration, inheritance, and innovation of outstanding traditional local and rural culture. Tangible rural cultural heritage must be made preservable, with full efforts devoted to identifying material heritage that embodies agricultural tributes, ethnic features, and regional characteristics and greater efforts made to protect ancient towns, traditional villages, historic buildings, ethnic settlements, cultural relics, and agricultural ruins.

### **—Reinforcing the systems thinking concept.**

Since the advent of the new era, China has broken away from the rules system and goal orientation led by Western experience in cultural heritage protection. In theoretical construct and living practice, China has demonstrated the historical initiative of Chinese civilization as the only great civilization in the world that has continuously evolved in the form of a nation-state to this very day.

China has strengthened systems thinking in cultural heritage protection and advanced the transition and upgrading of the protection focus from targeted preservation to comprehensive, systematic, and holistic preservation. Always prioritizing protection above everything else, China centers on cultural relics as core resources while providing overall protection of cultural objects properly and improving the environment. It is conserving traditional cultural ecosystems in a rational manner. A coordinated approach is taken to advance the protection of historical relics and sites, ancient architecture, renowned cities and towns, historic neighborhoods, traditional villages, cultural landscapes, and intangible cultural heritage. China is building an identification system for its civilization.

### **—A consistent rule of law mindset.**

The system should be overarching, stable, and fundamental in nature, providing long-term guidance. China is working to establish and refine the asset management system for cultural heritage resources by building a big national database of cultural relic resources, strengthening overall coordination and guidance for surveys of cultural relics in relevant fields, and publicizing the related catalogues, backed by increased technical support and guided public participation. The protection mechanism for



immovable cultural relics must be improved, with relics protection and management incorporated into the formulation and implementation of national territorial and spatial planning. The system design and supporting policies should be worked out in an order of "archaeological investigation before land transfer", with the stipulation that land which may contain historic and/or cultural remains must not be put to use until the related archaeological surveys, exploration, and excavation have been completed according to law. It is necessary to draw profound lessons from major cultural relic disasters both at home and abroad, strengthen supervision over the fulfillment of main responsibilities, step up efforts to eliminate hidden risks, and enhance cultural heritage protection capacity. It is also imperative to bolster law enforcement inspections, standardize reporting procedures, and strictly crack down on crimes involving cultural relics.

## 3.2 Prioritizing Protection

China has always prioritized the protection of cultural heritage. It strives to balance the dialectical relationship between protection and development, a relationship which is a profound embodiment of the law of the unity of opposites in Marxist philosophy in the cultural sector. Such a relationship is neither a simple binary opposition nor a rigid linear combination; rather, it is a sustainable life that produces cultural heritage through the dynamic transformation of contradictions.

**—Adhering to the principles of authenticity and minimal intervention constitutes the foundation and starting point in cultural heritage protection.** As Karl Marx emphasizes in *The German Ideology*: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past." Cultural heritage, as a materialized existence of historical practice, carries objective historical information about human practical activities in its physical form. Any damage to it will lead to a rupture in the historical chain of information.

In its efforts to protect cultural heritage, China also faces multiple challenges posed by rapid modernization and large-scale urbanization. For instance, the traditional names of some places were replaced with foreign ones such as "Manhattan" and "Venice". People in some cities were bent on indiscriminate large-scale demolition and reconstruction, tearing down historical landmarks to build artificial ones in their place. Some localities experienced excessive commercial activities around heritage sites. The question of how to properly navigate the relationship between protection and utilization has become one to which China, as a major powerhouse of cultural heritage, must produce a satisfactory answer.

China has all along adhered to the principle of prioritizing protection. It has made it explicitly clear on multiple occasions that effective protection is both the prerequisite

and ultimate goal of utilization. Local governments are required to build a solid bottom line of relics safety when coordinating cultural heritage conservation with urban and rural development, tourism, and economic growth. Understanding of the importance of cultural heritage protection has been evolving. As China's cultural heritage is rooted in its vast land, there should be not only strict enforcement of protection measures of the relics per se, but also the accompanying natural environment and cultural ecology. Our attention should not be confined to present-day scientific preservation. More importantly, we must do our utmost to leave the unique value and historical information of cultural relics in their most authentic form and flavor to future generations.

The Law of the People's Republic of China on Protection of Cultural Relics (2024 Revision) stipulates, "In capital construction and tourism development, priority must be given to the protection of cultural relics, the provisions on the administration of protection and safety management of cultural relics shall be strictly implemented, and damage caused by construction and excessive commercialization shall be prevented." This article provides a robust legal foundation for the "prioritizing protection" principle. Coupled with stringent supervision of law enforcement, it offers a fundamental guarantee for securing the bottom line of cultural relics safety.

**—Protection does not mean freezing heritage; development is not destruction.** A pure freezing type of conservation (e.g., sealing off a heritage site from public access) may appear to maintain the "authenticity" of the cultural heritage. But in reality, it severs its tie to contemporary society. Disorderly development, though profitable in the short term, will lead to the alienation of the cultural value embedded in the cultural heritage. Only through the dialectical unity of "protective use" and "innovative development" can the value of cultural heritage be regenerated. This principle represents both a rejection of the tendency to equate preservation with static sealing and a criticism of the short-sighted utilitarian approach that justifies destruction in the name of development. Instead, it is to bring about a living process of cultural heritage inheritance through dynamic equilibrium and creative transformation.

Development, however, must be carried out with caution to avoid the negative impacts of excessive commercialization. In response to the erosion of cultural heritage driven by commercial interests, the principle of prioritizing protection constitutes an indomitable institutional barrier.

Protecting cultural heritage is not by leaving it on the shelf, but rather bringing it to life. Only when it is brought to life can cultural heritage shine with new vitality and splendor; only then can we "take meticulous care of the cultural heritage left by our ancestors and ensure the continuous inheritance of our historical and cultural lineage".

The best way to protect cultural heritage is to pass it on. In the rapidly evolving world of today, only by integration with the times and with everyday life can cultural heritage shine with new splendor; when protection and inheritance are moving forward in a direction in which "all are willing to join and all are enabled to join", cultural

heritage can be passed on as it comes alive.

**—Seeking development through protection and ensuring protection through development.** In recent years, local authorities across China have upheld and advanced policy measures to shape tourism with culture and spread culture through tourism. Through continuous innovation and exploration, they have developed a series of new pathways, methods, and models for promoting cultural heritage protection and utilization. By establishing a dynamic balance between the "historical value" of cultural heritage and the "functional needs" of modern society, they have achieved sound effects in ensuring "coordinated unity" in both social and economic benefits.

The key to the proper handling of the relationship between protection and development lies in treating cultural heritage as a "continuously evolving living entity" rather than a "sealed specimen". Efforts to establish a flexible protection framework, innovate a value-conversion model, and build a multi-stakeholder governance mechanism will turn cultural heritage into a "catalyst beyond time and space" for advancing the progress of civilization.

In strengthening the protection and inheritance of historical culture, we should both firmly keep the bottom line of protection and persist in appropriate utilization in support of protection; we should both preserve the historical and cultural values and improve people's living environment. Many ancient cities have achieved coordinated progress of cultural relics protection and regional development through the model of "archaeological park+culturally distinctive town". This has proved that the dialectical relationship between coordinated protection and development is not a zero-sum game, but a historical inevitability in the evolution of civilization.

Integrating historical culture with modern life has become an important pathway for promoting the protection, inheritance, and development of cultural heritage. On the premise of preserving the historical features and cultural roots of street blocks, repairing damaged structures, optimizing spatial layouts, innovating cultural expressions, and embedding distinctive local businesses help integrate historical culture and modern life into a united whole that fosters well-coordinated development of city, industry, people, and culture. Such integrated progress presents a perfect picture in which the urban fabric and folklife heritage enrich each other, and a beautiful, livable environment coexists with thriving industries.

### 3.3 Enhancing Collaboration

In view of the fact that cultural heritage protection is a holistic and systematic endeavor that goes beyond administrative divisions, geographic scopes, and physical landmarks, China is accelerating efforts to break away from the traditional limitations of regional and departmental management with a singularity of method. The country is establishing a coordinated system for the protection, inheritance, and utilization of

cultural heritage to increase coordination and synergy in the common endeavor.

**—Integration and synergy between culture and tourism.** China is vigorously promoting the integration of culture and tourism by enriching tourism with culture and presenting culture through tourism, unleashing vitality for cultural heritage protection.

Since the beginning of the new era, China has actively promoted the deep integration of culture and tourism with other sectors by pushing forward the restructuring of government institutions. At the national level, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism was established; at the local levels, combined departments of culture and tourism were also instituted one after another to advance the integrated development of both sectors.

Through resource sharing, creative collaboration, and marketing interaction, complementary strengths have been harnessed and win-win results achieved through joint creation. Taking the integration of intangible cultural heritage and tourism as an example, in recent years, especially during the Spring Festival, local authorities across China have actively promoted integration models that combine intangible cultural heritage with tourism, sports, and film and television respectively. Distinctive cultural tourism brands are built by incorporating intangible cultural heritage elements into tourism product design, hosting cultural festivals, and organizing folk performances, thereby creating unique cultural tourism experiences.

**—Collaboration across departments and regions.** For a developing country with a vast land mass of 9.6 million square kilometers and extensive territorial waters, coordinating regional development is by no means an easy undertaking. China's vast expanse and huge population come with extraordinary disparities in natural resource endowment across its regions that are rarely seen in the world, making coordinated regional development a persistently colossal challenge. Such a challenge to regional development is also true of cultural heritage protection.

Along the Yangtze River basin and Yellow River basin, the Great Wall, the Grand Canal, and the Long March routes are the most heritage-rich belts in China, where the protection, inheritance, and utilization of cultural heritage face even greater challenges. The Chinese government has proposed the building of five national cultural parks and decided on a working framework characterized by centralized coordination at the national level, overall responsibility at the provincial level, tiered management, and segmented accountability to form a strong synergy for the national effort through greater coordination across regions and departments. In early 2025, several ministries and departments of the Chinese government jointly issued the Yangtze River National Cultural Park Construction and Protection Plan. Covering 13 provinces (and municipalities and autonomous regions), i.e., Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui, Jiangxi, Hubei, Hunan, Chongqing, Sichuan, Guizhou, Yunnan, Xizang, and Qinghai, the plan clearly identifies the holistic and systematic protection of cultural heritage as the primary task in the development of the park. This plan represents a major

achievement in coordination between central governmental departments and local authorities and will effectively advance cultural heritage protection along the Yangtze River to a new level.

—**Collaboration with social forces.** Social organizations represented by the China Foundation for Cultural Heritage Conservation, Chinese Museums Association, Chinese Society of Cultural Relics, and Chinese National Committee for the International Council on Monuments and Sites, among others, have played an increasingly prominent role in fundraising, academic leadership, mobilizing resources in society, advancing industry standards, and promoting international exchange and cooperation. Many enterprises have proactively committed themselves to the cause of cultural heritage protection, playing important roles across a broad spectrum, including protecting movable and immovable relics, presenting and designing for museum exhibitions, advancing digitization of cultural relics, developing creative cultural products, and producing films, television dramas and short videos. Hundreds of thousands of dedicated cultural heritage volunteers have participated in cultural heritage protection and utilization through various means, from photographic documentation, academic lectures, field research, and site patrols and inspections to monitoring and reporting of irregularities, guided tours at museums, and orchestration of heritage study programs. Participation in cultural heritage protection and utilization has blossomed into a new social movement and a cultural tide sweeping across Chinese society.

Shanxi Province took the lead in launching the Civilization Stewardship Program which, since its inception in 2017, has attracted over 500 million yuan in social funding and facilitated more than 500 projects involving the adoption and stewardship of cultural heritage buildings. A fairly sound policy support system has been established along with diverse avenues for public participation: high-profile cases such as the return of the Dengyu Stone Pagoda and the repatriation of the Buddha head stone statue from the Tianlongshan Grottoes have drawn widespread public attention; the Bilibili documentary *The Last Watch* has attracted over 20 million views.

### 3.4 Necessary Guarantee

China has remained committed to innovation-driven development by actively reinforcing territorial responsibility, injecting fresh capital, applying emerging technologies, and nurturing new talent in order to strengthen new quality productive forces in the field of cultural heritage protection and promote a gradual shift from "static preservation" to "dynamic innovation". As a result, a new pattern of multi-stakeholder participation, diverse measures, and coordinated advancement across multiple areas has taken shape.

—**Strengthening territorial responsibility.** In the final analysis, even the most well-conceived policies, systems, and plans depend on effective

implementation. The key lies in covering the "last mile" in cultural heritage protection. In China, from the central government to local authorities, a territorial responsibility system for cultural heritage protection is being consolidated through extensive efforts at awareness-raising and mobilization. This system is the most crucial pillar for cultural heritage protection in the country and is fundamental to the effective implementation of new concepts in this field.

Party committees and governments at all levels in China are firmly establishing the scientific concept that cultural relics protection constitutes part and parcel of officials' performance in office, and embracing the notion of historical and cultural heritage protection as a major responsibility. They are actively assuming the political responsibility for cultural heritage protection and taking steps to turn cultural confidence into concrete action. The Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Cultural Relics, by further defining such issues as the responsibilities of local governments, financial input, and accountability, has produced an enabling social atmosphere in which laws are put in place, observed, and strictly enforced, and all violators of the law are held to account.

The Theoretical Study Focal Group of the CPC Zhejiang Provincial Committee held a thematic study session on the Law on Cultural Relics Protection. The meeting underscored the need to further promote the scientific concept that "the protection of cultural relics constitutes an important part of officials' performance in office". It pledged to make new progress in the quality development of cultural heritage protection to better support and safeguard quality development and the building of a demonstration zone for common prosperity.

In 2024, the CPC Jilin Provincial Committee and Jilin Provincial People's Government conducted over 20 thematic investigations and meetings. Six special task forces were established, including one dedicated to renovating and revitalizing Xinmin Street in Changchun City, a site of historical and cultural significance. Moreover, efforts have been accelerated to repair and repurpose historic buildings and structures across the city. With a strong sense of responsibility toward history, the authorities have promoted the holistic and systematic protection of cultural heritage, revitalizing a large number of historic streets and buildings there.

**—Injecting financial vitality.** Substantial financial inputs have breathed a new life into the source of cultural heritage protection and inheritance. By now, China has developed a mechanism for financial input and use that combines central government support with social capital participation, ensuring sustainable and unimpeded efforts in cultural heritage protection through diverse and flexible approaches.

Ear-marked funding from the central government has continued its sustained growth. In 2024, the central government allocated a budget of RMB 6.38 billion for the protection of cultural relics, covering the expenditures needed for the restoration and maintenance, safety and security, archaeological research, and the conservation of movable cultural property and other related activities. An additional RMB 3.44 billion

was allocated as budgetary subsidies for free public access to museums and memorial halls, including subsidies for operations, exhibition setup, and national key museums. Approximately RMB 826 million was earmarked for the protection of the country's intangible cultural heritage, covering management and preservation efforts, among others.

Private capital is deeply involved in all stages of cultural heritage preservation. In 2021, Ant Group's Huabei (Ant Check Later) under Alibaba launched a dedicated public welfare initiative for heritage protection—the Huabei Cultural Relics Protection Program. The program's initial tranche of RMB 10 million in funding was made to support relic restoration, channeled through the established China Foundation for Cultural Heritage Conservation (CFCHC) – Huabei Cultural Relics Protection Special Fund, and implemented under CFCHC's guidance throughout the entire process.

In 2025, Tencent donated RMB 100 million to CFCHC, primarily to support the establishment of a joint cultural relics fund cofounded by the National Cultural Heritage Administration (NCHA) and the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC) in a focused effort to address key technological challenges in archaeology and the conservation and utilization of cultural relics.

**—Applying emerging technologies.** The protection and inheritance of cultural heritage must be carried out on the strength of scientific and technological advancements and the application of information technology. In recent years, China has continuously promoted the application of advanced technologies and achieved observable and controllable protection through network-based approaches, enabling tangible interaction with heritage resources via digital means.

Monitoring and early warning systems ensure cultural heritage security. The Yinxu (Yin Ruins) Management Committee in Anyang City, Henan Province has divided the 66 villages and communities in its jurisdiction into 176 units under a four-tiered grid system. It has not only assembled a team of several hundred relics protectors, including patrols and village/community officials, but also installed 2,650 high-definition (HD) cameras operating 24/7, achieving comprehensive, all-weather monitoring of the 29.47-km<sup>2</sup> Yin Ruins Protection Area in a continuous effort to tighten the site's security net.

In the ancient town of Lijiang, Yunnan Province, technological tools are employed for scientific monitoring and protection of heritage elements. Additionally, technologies such as the Internet of Things, big data, and artificial intelligence are used to construct a "smart brain" for old town governance, with HD videocams deployed to "keep watch" around the clock and smart interaction activated with digital, intelligent guide screens.... In a word, science and technology have been harnessed as "guardians" of cultural heritage.

The development of new materials is advancing in steps with evolving concepts of cultural relics conservation. In the protective treatment of excavated lacquered wooden artifacts and bamboo slips, the application of conservation materials has effectively addressed deformation and cracking caused by dehydration as well as disease. For the



preservation and restoration of fragile bronze artifacts, the development of novel corrosion inhibitors and self-peeling smart gel has slowed down corrosion. In the case of waterlogged and severely degraded ivory unearthed from the Sanxingdui site, newly developed composite sol – based reinforcement materials have resolved cracking and disintegration due to dehydration. Through the continuous exploration and application of innovative materials and technologies, China has been safeguarding these invaluable cultural treasures, enabling them to radiate with greater brilliance.

**—Cultivating new talent.** The protection and inheritance of cultural heritage is a long-term, large-scale, and complex undertaking that entails high demands on talent. Since the 18th CPC National Congress, China has been forging ahead with coordinated, multidimensional development in higher education, vocational training, and industry-education integration. Through sustained efforts, it has established a multi-tiered, professional, and sustainable talent pool to better meet the needs for the high-quality development of cultural heritage preservation. An increasing number of young people are joining the field. Among the nearly 200 individuals recognized by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 2024 as National Advanced Individuals for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage, a significant portion were born in the 1990s.

Establishing university-level disciplines to groom core talent. To date, educational institutions such as Peking University, Jilin University, and Northwest University have launched undergraduate majors in archaeology. Lanzhou University and other institutions offer a major in cultural relics and museology. Universities such as Capital Normal University have added cultural heritage as a major. Meanwhile, an increasing number of institutions of higher learning are paying attention to the interdisciplinary nature of archaeology and museology studies, adjusting their undergraduate and graduate curricula to foster multidisciplinary talent majoring in archaeology and museology.

Developing vocational education to train skilled technicians. Vocational education is an important way of training reserved personnel with the necessary techniques for cultural relics preservation. In 2024, the Ministry of Education and the National Cultural Heritage Administration jointly issued the Implementation Opinions on Promoting the Reform and Development of Vocational Education for Cultural Relics in the New Era, aimed at optimizing the cultural layout of vocational education structures and accelerating the development of a whole array of skilled technicians with comprehensive expertise through dedicated training.

In recent years, provinces such as Shanxi, Shaanxi, and Shandong have explored targeted training models for all-around cultural relics talent by offering tuition-free education and job placement in local heritage institutions and museums upon graduation, effectively ensuring the staffing needs of grassroots cultural heritage institutions.



## **Chapter Four**

# **The Global Significance of China's Philosophy and Practice of Cultural Heritage Protection**

**World cultural and natural heritage represents important achievements of human civilization and natural evolution, and serves as vital carriers for promoting mutual learning and exchange among different civilizations. Protecting, passing on, and making good use of these precious assets is our shared responsibility, and an essential requirement for the enduring development of human civilization and sustainable development of the world.**

**— Xi Jinping**

Cultural heritage is a shared treasure of humankind. Good stewardship of the precious heritage passed down to us by our ancestors is a shared aspiration of people of all countries. Facing the various challenges confronting the human race, Chinese President Xi Jinping called for dialogue among civilizations, advocated inclusiveness and mutual learning, and urged joint efforts to explore the resonance among the positive approaches to life in our respective cultural traditions and the demands of our times. This demonstrates the global vision and sense of responsibility of a leader of a major country. It provides the Chinese approach and Chinese solutions for cultural heritage protection and offers intellectual support for promoting exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations and advancing human civilization.

## **4.1 The Global Vision to Safeguard the Shared Treasure of the Human Race**

When the great way prevails, the world is equally shared by all. The Communist Party of China is a party that seeks happiness for the Chinese people and rejuvenation for the Chinese nation. It is also a party that seeks human progress and pursues harmony for the world. China has proposed the Global Civilization Initiative, emphasizing the need to "fully harness the contemporary value of all countries' historical and cultural heritage, and promote the creative transformation and innovative development of their finest traditional cultures within the process of modernization". This initiative demonstrates a broad global vision and profound humanistic care.

In Paris, President Xi Jinping proposed: "We need to bring to life all cultural relics housed in museums, all heritage sites scattered across the vast land, and all literary works written in ancient books so that Chinese civilization along with the rich and

colorful civilizations created by people around the world can provide humanity with correct spiritual guidance and powerful motivation."

In Cairo, President Xi Jinping stressed: "The Chinese and Arab civilizations each have their own systems and distinctive features, yet they both epitomize the common values and pursuits accumulated in the course of human development. They both champion such values as moderation, peace, forgiveness, tolerance and self-restraint. We need to engage in inter-civilization dialogue, advocate inclusiveness and mutual learning, and jointly explore the resonance between the positive approaches to life contained in our respective cultural traditions and the demands of our times."

In Athens, President Xi observed with amazement: "Both China and Greece possess a wealth of cultural heritage. The two sides can enhance cooperation in restoring and preserving important cultural and historical heritage sites."

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China's philosophy for cultural heritage protection closely bonds Chinese civilization with other world civilizations. It integrates cultural heritage protection and the modernization process more effectively. It provides intellectual guidance and infuses strong confidence for the efforts to safeguard the cultural treasures of humankind, jointly cultivate its garden of civilizations, and for the international community to respond to the shared challenges in cultural heritage protection.

Cultural heritage has unique and important significance in advancing culture dissemination, conveying friendship, safeguarding global cultural diversity and creativity, promoting exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations, and advancing the establishment of a community with a shared future for humankind. The world today is undergoing changes unseen in a century, with an increasingly complex international environment. This makes it ever more imperative to harness the power of archaeology and historical research, making better use of civilization treasures as a "universal language of the world", and develop the international infrastructure for cultural cooperation.

In joint stewardship of the treasures of human civilizations, we should ensure the thriving vitality of our own civilizations while creating conditions for the development of others so that all civilizations in the garden of world cultures may flourish in all their splendour.

**—China has always fulfilled its responsibility for cultural heritage protection.** As President Xi Jinping emphasized, China will engage in closer cooperation with UNESCO to continuously enhance its capacity and levels in heritage protection.

Nancy Ovelar, Chairperson of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, said, China has been a driving force in advancing UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage safeguarding endeavors. The tremendous efforts China has made in protecting cultural heritage offer valuable lessons for many countries.

Gregor Hitzfeld, Secretary-General of the German National Committee of the

International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), emphasized, while the responsibility for heritage conservation is regionally defined, concrete preservation work invariably requires cooperation and cross-border thinking. China possesses a wealth of World Heritage Sites and its relevant institutions have accumulated a rich reservoir of experience in cultural heritage protection. He expressed the hope for further enhancing cooperation with China in the future.

**—China's philosophy of cultural heritage protection supports the preservation causes of many countries.** By actively implementing the initiatives of the Conference on Dialogue of Asian Civilizations, China has established an Asian regional platform for professional cooperation and exchange to advance the pragmatic implementation of the Asian Cultural Heritage Protection Action; China has continued to press ahead with the preservation and restoration assistance projects for the Belt and Road countries, including Cambodia, Nepal, Myanmar, and Uzbekistan, thereby aiding the safeguarding and transmission of global cultural heritage with China's cultural relics protection philosophy and producing results that have earned unanimous recognition and high acclaim from recipient governments, local communities, and experts at home and abroad.

China has provided technical support for Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan's heritage sites along the Silk Road. Through these actions, China is assuming greater responsibilities and obligations in the global cultural heritage domain, demonstrating its commitment as a responsible major power that makes a difference.

## **4.2 China's contributions to the world's cultural heritage protection endeavor**

The exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations represent a significant driving force for the progress of human civilizations and the peaceful development of the world. China has actively shouldered its international responsibility for the protection of the cultural heritage of humankind and has shaped a protection network across civilizations and a protection community of global cultural heritage through the model of collaborations in convention implementation, technology sharing, talent education, challenge response, and win-win development.

**Convention Co-Execution.** The conventions on cultural heritage protection formulated by UNESCO have established a basic international order, formed a basic international consensus, and built a bridge for interaction among countries in cultural heritage protection. China acceded to the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage in December 1985 and began to apply to UNESCO for world heritage sites in 1986. China is also an active practitioner of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Different parts of China have continuously explored new methods of cultural heritage protection and provided new examples for the international community: the

Grand Canal and the Great Wall were successively rated as Demonstration Cases of World Heritage Protection and Management by the World Heritage Committee, with the Great Wall Conservation Project winning the 2025 Award for World Heritage Conservation; Suzhou City, Jiangsu Province was awarded the title of World Heritage Model City by the Organization of World Heritage Cities affiliated to UNESCO; in Quzhou City, Zhejiang Province, the "Lichun (Onset of Spring) Praying Ceremony", which is integrated with farming experience and seasonal cuisine development to boost rural tourism, was listed as a "Chinese Example of Community-based Intangible Cultural Heritage" by UNESCO.

**Technology Sharing.** The China of today is equipped with a strong capacity for world heritage protection and management. Having evolved from a recipient into a provider of technological assistance, China now offers its wisdom for world heritage protection.

In recent years, Sino-foreign joint archaeological activities have made remarkable progress; Chinese archaeologists in over 30 archaeological teams have been dispatched to more than 20 countries and regions, covering Asia, Africa, America, and Europe. At Angkor Wat, Cambodia, the China Academy of Cultural Heritage undertook the restoration of the Prasat Chau Say Tevoda and Ta Keo temples, etc., setting a Chinese example of Angkor Wat protection. In Uzbekistan, a Chinese team participated in the restoration of the historical and cultural heritage sites of the ancient Khiva city. In Egypt, China and Egypt worked together to uncover the Mentu Temple. China has played an active role in the excavation, research, and preservation of foreign historic sites with its strengths in human talent and expertise.

China is at the forefront of the global innovation drive with the support of digitization, science, and technology. The Dunhuang Academy opened up the high-definition image data of 30 caves to the world. Tencent cooperated with the National Museum of Brazil to rebuild models of cultural relics through artificial intelligence and other technologies. The Palace Museum, Beijing shares its monitoring system for ancient buildings with Venice, Italy.

**Talent Co-Education.** In 2017, the School of Archaeology and Museology of Peking University applied for and set up an undergraduate discipline of "Foreign Language and Foreign History (Archaeology)", and enrolled the first group of undergrads as majors in Foreign Archaeology. Now, more and more students have gone abroad for archaeological internships in Japan, Greece, Kenya, and other places. The School of Archaeology of Jilin University has maintained longstanding stable cooperative ties with Durham University in the UK, Columbia University in the US, the University of Toronto in Canada, the University of Tokyo in Japan, and the National University of Mongolia.

In October 2023, the Fergana-Luoyang Archaeological Research Center was unveiled in Fergana State University, Uzbekistan. Archaeologists from Luoyang City, Henan Province are cooperating with the University to offer practical training courses in

archaeology, history, field archaeology, etc. to develop talent in archaeological technology for the University.

China has joined hands with international organizations and relevant countries to nurture essential manpower for world heritage protection. The UNESCO- Tsinghua Cultural Heritage Protection Center has trained over 1,200 professionals from more than 70 countries in courses that include mural restoration and historic site management.

Through the Belt and Road Scholarships for Cultural Heritage Protection, the Chinese government has sponsored more than 300 international students from countries along the Belt and Road to pursue their master's degrees in cultural heritage protection at Peking University and Northwestern University.

In addition, the inheritance of Chinese craftsmanship has benefited people at home and abroad. Wood carvers from Dongyang City, Zhejiang Province went to Cologne, Germany to teach mortise and tenon techniques and assist in restoring wooden churches of the Prussian period. Pottery artists from Jingdezhen City, Jiangxi Province and Delft in the Netherlands jointly developed a low-temperature cobalt material firing technique for blue and white porcelains, reducing energy consumption by 30%.

Joint response to challenges. The year 2025 marks the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Nepal. The nine-story Basantapur Palace complex—China's first large-scale cultural relics aid project in Nepal—now stands proudly again in front of the world. After the complex sustained heavy damage from the earthquake in 2015, China's "doctors of cultural relics" were invited to lend a helping hand. For more than 2,000 days and nights, they worked with local experts in Nepal, showing their cherishing love for this treasure of human civilization with perseverance and demonstrating mutual reach out between countries through action. In 2021, at the recommendation of the National Cultural Heritage Administration of China, a member of the Nepal assistance project team joined the Working Group on Post- Disaster Cultural Heritage Response and Protection established by the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group of the United Nations. He was selected as a co-chair to lead the revision and compilation of *Urban Search and Rescue at Heritage Sites: A Guide for the Field*. It is the first guide for heritage protection actions in the field of international search and is of great significance for international post-disaster governance of international heritage protection.

In May 2024, a G20 summit side event on Cultural Heritage and Climate Action was held in Brazil. China's climate action in the field of cultural heritage, including its integration of cultural heritage into national action strategies, the issuance of guiding policies and documents to strengthen the cultural heritage-related response to climate change, and the organization of academic seminars and public advocacy, provided the world with China's success stories of climate action in the field of cultural heritage protection.

In addition, China has actively participated in international cooperation in cultural

heritage protection and maintained close collaboration with UNESCO and other international agencies in combating illicit trafficking in cultural property. Pursuant to the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property and the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects, among others, China has conducted extensive cooperation with other countries in the field of cultural property protection. For example, China and countries such as Italy have in-depth exchange and cooperation to combat the illicit trafficking in cultural property and facilitate its restitution, having succeeded in tracking and claiming many batches of lost cultural property through diplomatic channels and legal procedures.

Win-Win development. China launched regional cooperation initiatives. In 2019, it proposed the Initiative for the Preservation of Asian Cultural Heritage; in 2021, it initiated the founding of the Alliance for Cultural Heritage in Asia, attracting positive responses and joint efforts from all parties in Asia. In 2023, the Asian Fund for Cultural Heritage Conservation was officially established. In light of local conditions, the Fund has been engaged in many major activities, including the "Guardians of Asian Cultural Heritage" project series, "Asian Cultural Heritage Education Cooperation Network" project, "Asian Cultural Heritage Conservation Action Project Open Application" program, and, through joint efforts, the China- Saudi Arabia Joint Archaeological Site Project at Al Serrian Port. All these initiatives have effectively advanced the cooperation and exchanges as well as the protection and inheritance related to Asian cultural heritage.

China has established special funds. In March 2025, UNESCO and Quanzhou Municipality of Fujian signed an agreement to launch the China Funds-in- Trust (Quanzhou) project aimed at strengthening the African region's world heritage protection and management capabilities. This project, building on the successful experience of the previous China Funds-in- Trust project series, has so far benefited more than 15 African countries and aided the inscription of three African sites in Rwanda, Benin, and Togo into the World Heritage List in 2023.

China has contributed significantly to joint application efforts for world heritage listing. "The Silk Roads: the Routes Network of Chang'an- Tianshan Corridor", an application submitted jointly by China, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, was successfully inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List in 2014 and became a breakthrough in the Silk Road international cooperation promoted by the World Heritage Center over the past 40 years.

### **4.3 China's Proposition for Safeguarding the Diversity of Human Civilizations**

**—Advancing systematic protection of cultural heritage and championing respect for civilization diversity**

Embodying the splendor of civilizations and carrying forward historical traditions, cultural heritage represents an important achievement of the diverse development of human civilization and is a non-renewable, irreplaceable valuable resource. China advocates for respecting the diversity of world civilizations and upholds the principles of equality, mutual learning, dialogue, and inclusiveness. Guided by the "protection and inheritance first" philosophy, China participates in the joint stewardship of humankind's shared cultural heritage with reverence and the diversity of human civilizations with an open mind.

### **—Promoting innovative development of cultural heritage and advocating civilization sustainability**

Each civilization is a continuation of the soul and blood of a country and a nation. Not only does it require passage and stewardship through generations, but more importantly, it also requires courageous innovation to keep abreast with the times. China advocates the importance of inheriting and innovating civilization, fully unlocking the contemporary value of cultural heritage to foster the creative transformation and innovative development of the finest traditional culture in the modernization process. Cultural heritage provides both the fertile soil and rich nourishment for cultural inheritance and innovation. China emphasizes selective inheritance through a dialectical approach to adapt the past for present needs and innovate upon tradition so as to effectively bridge traditions with modern advancement, translating the strengths in heritage resources into those for cultural progress.

### **—Enhancing international cooperation in cultural heritage endeavors and advocating mutual understanding and affinity among all peoples**

The cooperation and integration of diverse civilizations offer a powerful intellectual guidance for mankind to crack the tough problems of our times and achieve common progress, serving as an important driving force for the evolution of human society. China will continue to take the lead in cultural heritage conservation and inheritance, actively engaging in international exchange and cooperation in this field. It will work with other countries to continue improving heritage conservation capabilities and levels, facilitate exchanges, mutual learning, and appreciation among civilizations, foster mutual understanding, friendship, and trust between peoples in a joint effort to safeguard the shared treasures of human civilization.

## Conclusion

From the Egyptian pyramids to the city of Pompeii in Italy, from Cambodia's Angkor Wat to China's Great Wall and Terracotta Warriors...these cultural monuments left from the ages are not mere imprints of unique national civilizations, but invaluable treasures that are shared by mankind as a whole.

"In a world marked by rapid urbanization, environmental crises, and socioeconomic shifts, safeguarding our cultural and natural heritage is not merely about inheriting the past. It is an affirmation of our shared history and a promise to future generations," remarked Shahbaz Khan, director and representative to the UNESCO Regional Office for East Asia.

Cultural heritage stands as both a physical testament to and a focal tapestry of civilizations, capable of transcending the cognitive boundaries of time and space, geography, ethnicity, belief, etc. It is an agglomeration of the universal aspirations and shared ideals of the human race, a vital thread in the fabric of interaction and mutual learning among civilizations.

China has consistently valued the cultural inheritance and development, having found through exploration a whole set of effective new concepts, institutional frameworks, and methodologies. It has carried out a series of deployments, practices, and exploration efforts, reaping fruitful results in the protection, inheritance, and use of cultural heritage.

Building on this foundation, China has consistently remained committed to collaborative cultural heritage efforts grounded in shared principles, responsibilities, and benefits. China calls upon the international community to proceed from the common well-being of humankind, join forces in responding to the formidable challenges facing cultural heritage protection, continue to foster exchanges and mutual learning across regions and nations, and promote the continuity of human civilization and the sustainability of world development.

Cultural heritage has been sustained and renewed from antiquity to the present through an incessant play of music; inter-civilizational learning lights our shared path toward harmony in coexistence.

Looking ahead, we expect the whole world to join hands in shouldering the mission for our cultural legacy, actively promote international cooperation in cultural heritage protection, and build a global network for dialogue and cooperation among civilizations, cultivating a vibrant world garden where all civilizations blossom in their full glory.



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