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## Danxia (China)

### No 1335

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#### 1. BASIC DATA

*Official name as proposed by the State Party:*

China Danxia

*Location:*

Chishui, Zunyi City, Guizhou Province  
Taining, Sanming City, Fujian Province  
Langshan, Shaoyang City, Hu'nan Province  
Danxiashan, Shaoguan City, Guangdong Province  
Longhushan, Yingtan City, Shangrao City,  
Jiangxi Province  
Jianglangshan, Quzhou City, Zhejiang Province  
People's Republic of China

*Brief description:*

This nomination proposes the inscription of six areas, with buffer zones, that are representative of Danxia (red bed) landscapes in the southern humid zones of China. Demonstrating different stages of geological evolution, from most recent to oldest, they are:

1. Chishui, Zunyi City, Guizhou Province
2. Taining, Sanming City, Fujian Province
3. Langshan, Shaoyang City, Hu'nan Province
4. Danxiashan, Shaoguan City, Guangdong Province
5. Longhushan, Yingtan City, Shangrao City, Jiangxi Province
6. Jianglangshan, Quzhou City, Zhejiang Province

These red, sedimentary sandstones and conglomerates are characterized by spectacular landscapes of peaks, cliffs and canyons with subtropical evergreen broadleaved forests and great scenic beauty. China Danxia is also *"an outstanding global example of harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature"* (3.b-5).

*Background information:*

This is a new nomination. The property is nominated on the basis of criteria (vii), (viii), (ix) and (x).

*Date of ICOMOS approval of this report:* 17 March 2010

#### 2. THE PROPERTY

Extensive cultural values of China Danxia are described at length in the nomination dossier. With millennia of human occupation, the region and the individual sites within it are filled with rich cultural associations, ranging from prehistoric human use of natural resources and ancient agricultural settlement to contemporary human activities with long histories including farming, religious and scholarly activities, tourism and scientific activities. Each of the six areas has notable cultural associations and resources, including strong associations with and material evidences of Taoist, Buddhist and Confucian cultures.

China already has inscribed a number of World Heritage Sites related to significant representations of these cultures that are justified under criterion (vi). They include Lushan National Park (1996), where Mount Lushan is described as *"one of the spiritual centres of Chinese civilization. Buddhist and Taoist temples, along with landmarks of Confucianism..."*; Mount Qingcheng and the Dujiangyan Irrigation System (2000), with temples closely associated with the founding of Taoism; Mogao Caves (1987), *"spanning 1,000 years of Buddhist art"*; Mount Emei Scenic Area, including Leshan Giant Buddha Scenic Area (1996); Mount Wutai (2009), *"one of the four sacred Buddhist mountains in China"*; and Mount Taishan (1987), associated with the emergence of Confucianism, the Temple and Cemetery of Confucius and the Kong Family Mansion in Qufu (1994) and Mount Wuyi (1999), *"the cradle of Neo-Confucianism"*. Mount Qingcheng, Mount Emei and Mount Wuyi all have Danxia landscapes.

Referenced for both its Taoist associations and its Yue culture in the proposed statement of Outstanding Universal Value, Longhushan stands out among the sites for its cultural values. They are evidenced in the culture of cliff burial / hanging coffins associated with the Ancient Yue Family ca 2,500BP, significant associations with the founding of Taoism and its Taoist courts and a continuing role as *"the Taoism bethel of China"*, a Buddhist centre of some importance, poems and inscriptions of the Tang Dynasty on cliffs, and Xiangshan College. Longhushan's role in Taoism is particularly notable and might have the capacity to compare with Mount Wuyi's relationship with Neo-Confucianism.

The most important attribute, from the perspective of cultural value, is China Danxia's representation of the tradition in Chinese culture and religions of the perceived harmonious co-existence between people and nature which inseparably unifies cultural and natural associations in landscape. In the language of the proposed statement of Outstanding Universal Value, the landscapes embody *"A history of people adapted to their natural environment, demonstrating the harmonious coexistence between people and nature"* (3.b-1).

In addressing this aspect of the landscape, the State Party has focused on criterion (vii): to contain superlative

natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance. In justification of this criterion, it is stated that Danxia has a scenically superlative landscape and landforms and exceptional natural beauty, and holds a special place in Chinese culture. While the aesthetics of shape and form are highly important, the aesthetic significance of Danxia landscapes is not limited to these attributes. The scenery is seen as an embodiment of natural features with cultural meaning, and its exceptional beauty derives as much from spiritual and emotional associations as from visual qualities. *“The beauty of Danxia landscapes has promoted the development of China’s aesthetic culture, and given birth to series of exclusive terms of Danxia aesthetics. (...) Danxiashan is named for its colourful appearance akin to that of rose-coloured clouds.”* Chinese phrases used to describe Danxia mountain blocks and caves refer respectively to *“the ancient castle built by gold”* and *“the palace for a king or emperor (...) the ground where the gods live”* (2.a-5-2). *“The mountains like ‘ancient gold castles’ give a sense of solemnity and sacredness. At the same time they symbolize authority, richness and honor. The landscape colour has become associated with traditional religions. Thus, the Danxia landscapes are holy lands in religious terms, and perfect places for refined scholars to rest, and become immortal”.* (3.a-1)

Many Chinese traditional religious cultures are strongly associated with Danxia landscapes, and landscape components have religious significance embodying long-term associations between religious beliefs and natural landscapes. *“The purple hues of Danxia landscapes give people a sense of heavenliness, and are associated with authority, wealth and good fortune in traditional Chinese culture. Purple is also the main colour associated with China’s religions”.*

This association with religion is not limited to its visual qualities: the landscape is studied caves, statues and inscriptions. Temples built in Danxia caves *“strengthen the authority and mystery of the religious places and their environmental associations”* and *“funerals in Danxia caves made by ancients to ensure passage to heaven, that are closely related to the unique shapes and individuality of Danxia landforms”*. Large numbers of inscriptions on stone, statues and murals occur on cliff walls and in rock caves. *“This close relationship between landscape and people creates a particular special cultural association in Danxia areas that can be called a ‘Danxia culture’, which is well recognized in China”*. Aesthetics embodies a harmony between humanity and earth. *“The landscapes take on the significance of an immortal realm of sublime natural beauty”.* (2.a-5-2; 3.b-2)

Overall the justification that is put forward for criterion (vii) is very similar to the justification accepted for criterion (vi) for Mount Wutai (World Heritage Site 2009) which *“reflects perfectly the fusion between natural landscape and Buddhist culture, religious belief on the*

*natural landscape and Chinese philosophical thinking on the harmony between man and nature”.*

### 3. ICOMOS CONCLUSIONS

ICOMOS notes the care with which the State Party has integrated the cultural values of aesthetics and coexistence of humanity and nature in China Danxia into the nomination document, including the latter in the proposed statement of Outstanding Universal Value.

ICOMOS considers that the proposed justification for criterion (vii) in relation to Longhushan goes far beyond the recognised use of this criterion for natural areas that are perceived to have natural beauty.

The justification put forward is for cultural associations linked to religion and for cultural interventions in terms of rock caves, inscription, etc. which more normally would be associated with criterion (vi) and other cultural criteria.

ICOMOS considers that it would be inappropriate to recognise criterion (vii) for Longhushan for the justification put forward.

If the current justification is contemplated for this nomination, in line with what has been put forward by the State Party, then ICOMOS considers that this nomination should be considered as a mixed site and evaluated for its cultural significance by ICOMOS.



Dispersal wide valley peaks forest landscape in Longhushan



Ancient cliff tombs in Longhushan