

Norbulingka (China)

No 707ter

Identification

Nomination The Expanded Potala Palace–
Norbulingka–Jokhang Monastery
Project in Lhasa: Norbulingka

Location Province, autonomous region or
municipality directly under the central
government of Lhasa, Tibet
Autonomous Region

State Party The People’s Republic of China

Date 30 June 2000

Justification by State Party

In history, Norbulingka, since its construction by the 7th Dalai Lama in the 18th century, was the habitual residence of successive Dalai Lamas and was known as the Summer Palace. From the third to ninth month of the Tibetan calendar each year, the Dalai Lama moved to live in Norbulingka from the Potala Palace, and all the major functioning departments of the local Tibetan government also moved to work in Norbulingka. Like the Potala Palace and the Jokhang Monastery, Norbulingka exerted a significant influence over the history, society, and culture of Tibet.

The architecture of Norbulingka is a masterpiece of Tibetan arts, combining unique architecture, religious traditions, and gardening. Its architecture mainly follows the Tibetan style, and at the same time it also incorporates many architectural elements of the palace and garden architecture of other ethnic groups, including the Han.

From the overall layout of Norbulingka to the indoor decorations of single buildings, as well as the handling of some wooden structural parts, it shows the inheritance of fine traditional techniques and also influences received from elsewhere in architecture and the layout and local handling methods of garden architecture. It reflects the development of architecture, technology, and social productivity in Tibet, expressed in the Tsoje Palace, the Dragon Palace, as well as the Tagtan Migyur Palace, built under the supervision of Taring Jigme Songtsan Wangbo.

Norbulingka is a large garden located at a very high altitude. At an elevation of 3650m, where the pressure is low and oxygen is lacking, it has a large man-made green area, a beautiful landscape, and an agreeable environment. It is an indisputable masterpiece of harmonious coexistence of man and nature at a high altitude, creating and maintaining sound ecological environment.

Norbulingka was an important residence of the Dalai Lamas in the past, and it is now used for various activities and the celebration of festivals, such as the Shoton Festival (sour milk drinking), the typical Tibetan operas from across the country, attended by farmers, herdsmen and pilgrims from Lhasa and elsewhere. It is the garden of Tibetan songs and dances.

The construction and development of Norbulingka was closely associated with well known historic events, personalities and religious beliefs in more than 200 years of history, such as the events related to the agreements signed by the Tibetan government and the Central People’s government in the 1950s.

Criteria i, ii, iv, and vi

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *monument*.

History and Description

History

The site of Norbulingka was a place with gentle streams, dense and lush forest, birds, and animals known as *Lava tsel*. The 7th Dalai Lama is reported to have had health problems and he used to come here for a cure. The construction of Norbulingka started in 1751 with the Uya Palace, benefiting from financial assistance from the central government. Successive Dalai Lamas continued building pavilions, palaces, and halls, making it their summer residence, and soon the site became another religious, political, and cultural centre of Tibet, after the Potala Palace. The Gesang Palace was built in 1755 and included a court for debates. The Tsoje Palace and the Jensen Palace were built by the 13th Dalai Lama in the 1920s, influenced by his time in Beijing; the Gesang Deje Palace was constructed in 1926. The Tagtan Migyur Palace was built in 1954–56 with support from the Central People’s Government. Since the departure of the 14th Dalai Lama in 1959, Norbulingka has been managed first by the Culture Management Group under the Preparatory Committee of the Autonomous Region and later directly by the Cultural Management Committee and Bureau.

Description

Norbulingka is located at the bank of the Lhasa river about 2km west of the Potala Palace in Lhasa. The name means "treasure garden." In fact, the site consists of a large garden with several palaces, halls, and pavilions, amounting to some 36ha. The area is composed of five sections.

The GESANG PALACE group includes the *Uya Palace*, *Gesang Palace*, and *Komsom Selon* architecture. The Uya Palace is a two-storeyed Tibetan style building, and it has fine mural paintings by famous artists. The Komsom Selon is a two-storied pavilion with a Han-style golden roof, the place where Dalai Lamas watched opera performances.

The second group is related to the TSOJE PALACE, including the *Tsoje Palace* (Palace in the Lake), *Lokang* (Dragon Palace), *Lukhangsha* (East Dragon Palace), the *Druzang Palace*, and lounges. The Tsoje Palace itself is waterside pavilion architecture, representing the Han style with hip-

and-gable roof, gabled ridge, and overhanging corners. Lokang was a place for sacrificial activities, held yearly for the dragon and fortune-telling.

The third group consists of the *Jensen Palace*, the *Gesang Deje Palace*, and the *Chimi Chogyal Palace*. The Jensen Palace is noted for its fine carvings, identical with those in the White Palace of the Potala Palace area.

The fourth group consists mainly of the *Shabucho Monastery*, the former offices of the local Tibetan government and secretariat.

The fifth group is composed of the *Tagtan Migyur Palace* (New Palace), including a small scripture hall on the second floor, with murals depicting Tibetan history (301 pictures). It is the most representative modern example in Tibet, originally with finely decorated features, and adapted to office use, recreation, and vocation.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The site is in the ownership of the People's Republic of China. It was designated a major site of protection for its historical and cultural value, at the national level, on 13 January 1988. Protection is thus subject to the laws and regulations of the People's Republic of China (especially the Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage), and the Regulations of Tibet Autonomous Region on the Protection and Management of Cultural Heritage. The principal protection area is defined by the surrounding wall of Norbulingka; the area within 200m from this wall is a construction-control zone. Funds are allocated yearly for maintenance and protection.

Management

The management of the site is in the hands of the State Administration of Cultural Heritage of the People's Republic of China, the Department of Culture of the Tibet Autonomous Region, and the Administration of Cultural Heritage of the Tibet Autonomous Region.

Management is exercised within the framework of two master plans, the Urban Plan of Lhasa and the Norbulingka Protection Plan. Local government and residents are not allowed to undertake any construction, renovation, or addition within the protective zone. In exceptional cases, if any change is required, authorization is given by the relevant authorities after an opinion by experts.

There is a management office on the site, also responsible for visitor management and tour guides. The number of visitors is increasing, reaching 100,000 in 1999. The site is located in a new urban area of Lhasa, where there are several hotels and visitor services.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

The construction history extends from the mid 18th century until the 1950s, when the Dalai Lama departed. Since then the site has been under the care first of a local management group, then of the Central People's Government.

Authenticity and integrity

The group of buildings and the surrounding garden of Norbulingka have been well maintained and have had no major modifications or damage. Their authenticity and integrity are therefore intact.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited the property in March 2001.

Qualities

The palace and garden areas of Norbulingka are intimately linked with the Potala Palace, despite having been built later and assuming complementary functions. It became the summer residence of the Dalai Lamas because of its favourable climate, almost as an oasis in the otherwise harsh climate of the high altitude. The constructions represent high quality in their design and execution, integrated into the garden layout. The site is also closely linked with religious and political issues, having been a place for contemplation and for signing political agreements.

As already indicated in the ICOMOS evaluation of the Potala Palace, Norbulingka will be an important integration into the existing World Heritage site.

ICOMOS proposes that the previous criteria i, iv, and vi be retained in the extended nomination, in the light of the highly creative and artistic ensemble, the fact that it represents an outstanding example of a type of architecture, and its strong spiritual and religious associations with Buddhism.

Comparative analysis

The Potala Palace area can be considered unique in the Buddhist world of eastern Asia, as the long-time residence of the theocratic government of Tibet.

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

The current nomination is an extension to the Potala Palace nomination of 1994 (criteria i, iv, and vi). It is a follow-up to the ICOMOS recommendation, which considered the Potala Palace to be inseparably linked in spiritual and historical terms with the Tsuklakhang Temple and the holy city of Lhasa itself and proposed that the Government of the People's Republic of China should give consideration to an eventual extension of the Potala Palace nomination to include the whole area.

ICOMOS recommends that the name of the nomination be reconsidered, taking into account the previous site (the Potala Palace, Lhasa) and the extension, *The Historic Ensemble of the Potala Palace, Lhasa*.

Considering the development pressures in the city of Lhasa, ICOMOS recommends that particular attention be given to mitigating changes, particularly in the area extending from the Norbulingka Palace to the properties already inscribed.

ICOMOS Recommendation

That the nominated Norbulingka area be inscribed as an extension to the existing World Heritage Site of the Potala Palace, Lhasa, maintaining the existing criteria i, iv, and vi.

Bureau Recommendation

That this extension be *approved* and that the name of the inscribed property be changed to "The Historic Ensemble of the Potala Palace, Lhasa."

ICOMOS, September 2001