
The Grand Canal (China)

No 1443 Bis

1 Basic data

State Party

People's Republic of China

Name of property

The Grand Canal

Location

Provinces, municipalities with province status, and cities:

- Beijing Municipality
- Tianjin Municipality
- Hebei Province: Cangzhou City, Hengshui City
- Jiangsu Province: Wuxi, Changzhou, Suzhou, Huai'an, Yangzhou and Suqian Cities
- Zhejiang Province: Hangzhou, Ningbo, Jiaxing, Huzhou and Shaoxing Cities
- Anhui Province: Huaibei City, Suzhou City
- Shandong Province: Zaozhuang, Jining, Tai'an, Dezhou and Liaocheng Cities
- Henan Province: Zhengzhou, Luoyang, Shangqiu, Anyang and Hebi Cities.

Inscription

2014

Brief description

The Grand Canal forms a vast inland waterway system in the north-eastern and central eastern plains of China, running from the capital Beijing in the north to Zhejiang province in the south. Constructed in sections from the 5th century BC onwards, it was conceived as a unified means of communication for the Empire for the first time in the 7th century AD (Sui dynasty). This led to a series of gigantic worksites, creating the world's largest and most extensive engineering project ensemble prior to the Industrial Revolution. It formed the backbone of the Empire's inland communications system, and enabled the supply of rice to feed the population and the transport of strategic raw materials. By the 13th century, it provided a unified inland navigation network consisting of more than 2,000 km of artificial waterways, linking five of the most important river basins in China. Still a major means of internal communication today, it has played an important role in ensuring the economic prosperity and stability of China over the ages.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

11 March 2016

2 Issues raised

Background

During the evaluation process, ICOMOS asked the State Party to reconsider the issue of the buffer zones, their definition and their regulation, in its letter dated 16 December 2013, because of the sometimes minimalist approach, particularly for ordinary sections of the Grand Canal without any specific attributes. The buffer zones seemed to have been established hastily, and some points had clearly been neglected. In the case of a serial property which is extremely extensive and complex, involving very different environmental situations in variable locations along the banks of the same serial property, various types of buffer zones should be considered, and each site should have a buffer zone that is well-adapted to it, and has been studied in conjunction with representatives of the local communities. Its protection system could then bring together in a credible way the general directives of cultural and natural environment preservation, the integrated regional projects linked to the canal (water quality, tourism development, transport, economic development, etc.) and specific protection appropriate to the local type of cultural and natural environment. It also seemed essential to define the special cones of vision, and protect them against the possible aggressive visible impacts of development projects.

Finally, the possibility of a supplementary continuous buffer zone, whose regulation would impose only weak constraints, but which would encourage local inhabitants and riverside communities to adhere to the canal's values, could have been considered. Its purpose would have been to demonstrate the continuity of the Grand Canal along its whole length, and to encompass all its modern-day variants.

In its reply in February 2014, the State Party stated that it had already revised the buffer zones of four of the nominated properties, by extending them considerably. The same process was under way for six other properties. A general typology setting out the various types of buffer zone, and the establishment of appropriate protection measures, was being drawn up by the State Administration for Cultural Heritage (SACH).

In the conclusion to its evaluation, ICOMOS considered that it would have been appropriate to allow the State Party to thoroughly revise the system of buffer zones, as regards their geographic definition and their setting up on the basis of negotiations with the regional and local authorities; a level 2 buffer zone could possibly have been considered, in order to highlight the continuity of the Grand Canal and to encompass all its modern-day components.

In its decision to inscribe the property 38 COM 8B.23 (Doha, 2014), the World Heritage Committee recommended that the State Party take note of the two points relating to the question of the buffer zones.

The World Heritage Committee has recommended to the State Party give consideration to the following:

- a) *Continuing the work that has begun to revise the system of buffer zones in terms of their territorial definition, by major canal environment zone type, and enact protection measures that are fully adapted to local situations and negotiated with the municipal and regional authorities,*
- f) *Examining the possibility of a supplementary continuous buffer zone with a low level of constraint, which could both indicate the value of the functional continuity of the Grand Canal and also involve all the local residents in adhering to its values.*

The World Heritage Committee has also recommended:

- d. *Stepping up efforts in environmental and landscape conservation, for example by defining priority cones of vision for the properties, and then protecting them from the impact of new buildings.*

Modification

In accordance with point f of decision 38 COM 8B.23 (Doha, 2014), taken when the World Heritage Committee decided to inscribe the property, the State Party supplied, in November 2015, a detailed report on the implementation of the recommendations of the decision. Point 2 of the report is particularly concerned with the buffer zones issue, and it proposes the following modifications for six components of the Grand Canal:

Component	Name	Former BZ (ha)	New BZ (ha)
TJ-03	Zhengzhou Section of Tongji Canal	989	2022
TJ-05	Shangqiu Xiayi Section of Tongji Canal	13	98
WH-01	Hua County and Xun County Section of Wei Canal (Yongji Canal)	693	733
HY-01	Qingkou Complex	6275	6310
HY-03	Yangzhou Section of Huaiyang Canal	4359	4765
ZH-02	Suqian Section of Zhong Canal	2270	2298
	TOTAL	54208	55835

The State Party indicates that it has fully taken into account the decision of the World Heritage Committee and the ICOMOS recommendations about buffer zones. It is also very aware of the important role that they play in the preservation of the banks of the various sections of the Grand Canal and in expressing the Grand Canal's outstanding universal value. The method consisted of performing preliminary studies for the revision of the buffer zones considered to be the least satisfactory or most sensitive, through a process of consultation with the provincial governments, the municipal authorities and professionals. It proved necessary to allow for the great complexity of the banks of the Grand Canal, and to make adjustments that are relatively limited but relevant in terms of preserving the banks of the canal. Ten minor extensions are proposed, concerning six of the 31 components of the serial property. They relate to historic

urban environments, modern urban environments and rural environments.

Annex 1 of the State Party's report provides detailed mapping of the buffer zones that have been extended and descriptive tables of the adjustments, with a justification for each one. Each modification is illustrated by an overall map view of the component, and detailed maps showing the cadastral parcels concerned or providing precise geodetic indications.

As for the recommendation that the possibility of a continuous level 2 buffer zone be considered, the State Party points out that the various sections of the Grand Canal and its heritage sites were inscribed in March 2013 as a serial site to be protected by the State as a matter of priority.

ICOMOS considers that the work done by the State party, in cooperation with the regional and municipal authorities concerned, for six of the 31 sections forming the serial property of the Grand Canal, has led to a coherent and justified set of extensions to the existing buffer zones. This process has, amongst other things, enabled the inclusion of new archaeological discoveries in the protected areas. The extensions moreover remain relatively limited in relation to the initial perimeters of the buffer zones. Furthermore, the proposed territorial proposals are accompanied by important organisational measures which can provide an appropriate conceptual and technical framework for the satisfactory future management of the buffer zones:

- the indicators for monitoring the Grand Canal and its banks (Annex 2),
- an inventory of the historic periods represented by the various parts of the Grand Canal (Annex 3),
- a handbook of guidelines for the coordinated protection of Grand Canal landscapes (Annex 4).

It is however advisable to consider whether the other sections forming the serial property necessitate buffer zone adjustments or not, and to consider the deepening of the "visual corridor" concept referred to in the handbook of guidelines by envisioning the definition of specific priority vision cones for the Grand Canal and their protection in the future.

ICOMOS is also considering the short reply made by the State Party to the second recommendation of decision 38 COM 8B.23 (Doha, 2014), about the possibility of a continuous buffer zone along the whole length of the Grand Canal. No new elements have emerged in respect of this point since the inscription application, but ICOMOS is fully aware of the extreme difficulty that would be involved in introducing a level of protection, even if only very weak, on areas that are as extensive and densely populated as all the banks of the Grand Canal. ICOMOS therefore considers that the continuity of the Grand Canal is sufficiently effected, firstly through its continuity of hydraulic

operation and secondly by the continuity of use over the whole of its length.

3. ICOMOS recommendations

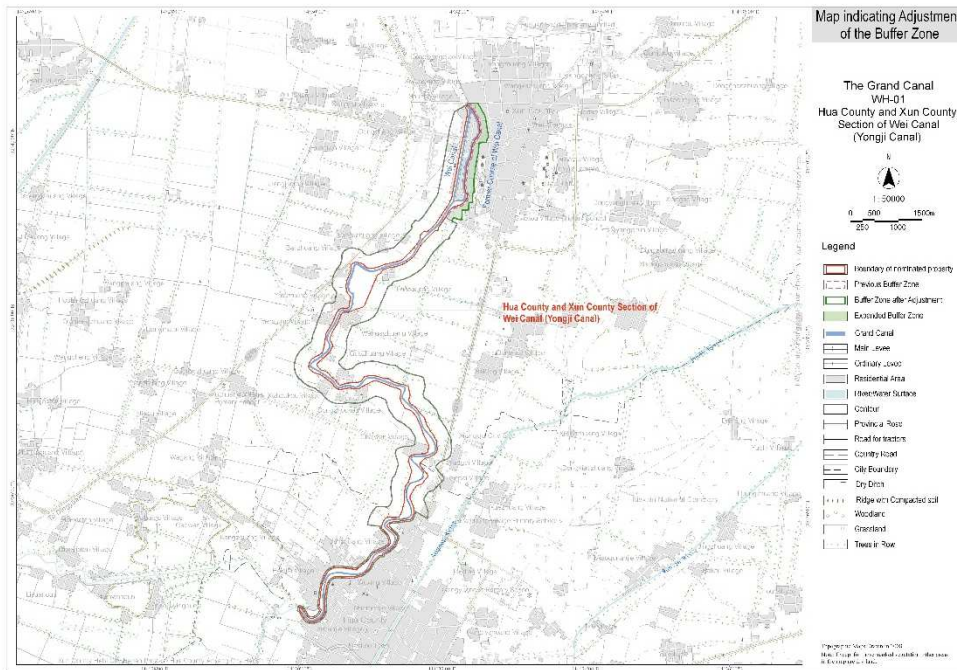
Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that the proposed modification of the buffer zones of six sections of the Grand Canal, China, be **approved**.

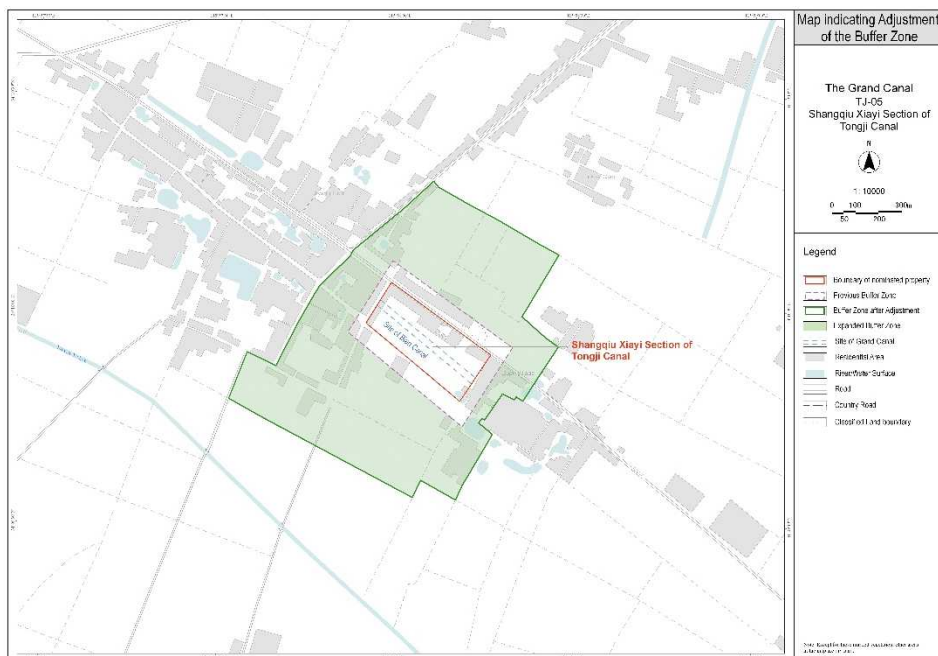
Additional recommendations

ICOMOS recommends that the State Party give consideration to the following:

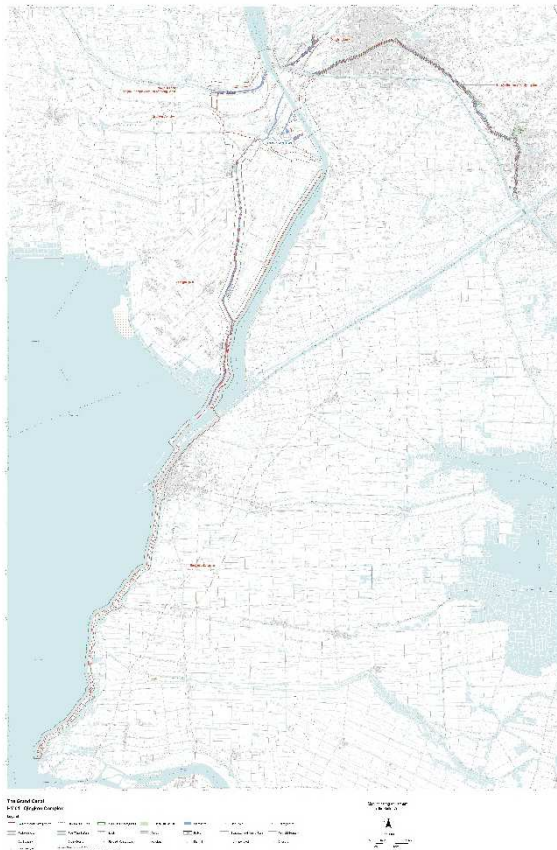
- Considering whether or not the other sections forming the Grand Canal serial property necessitate buffer zone adjustments;
- Continuing environmental and landscape conservancy efforts, for example by defining prioritised vision cones for the properties and protecting them from the impact of new buildings.



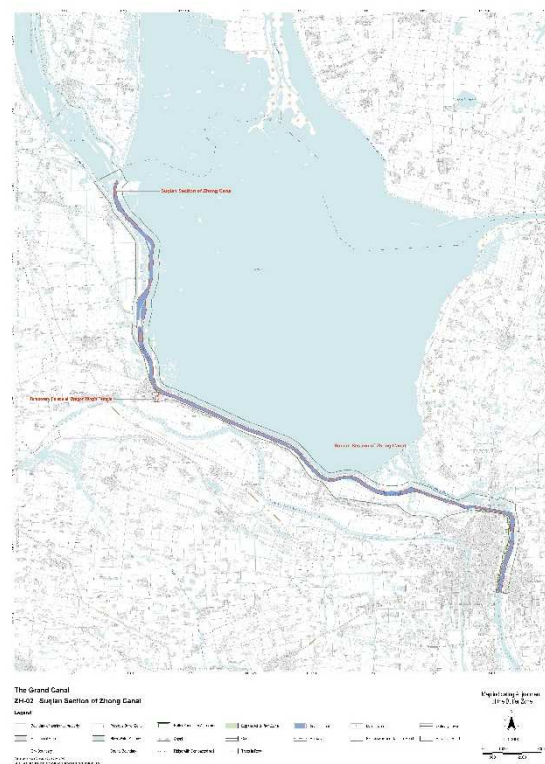
Hua County and Xun County Section of Wei Canal – Map showing the boundaries of the proposed buffer zone



Shangqiu Xiayi Section of Tongji Canal - Map showing the boundaries of the proposed buffer zone



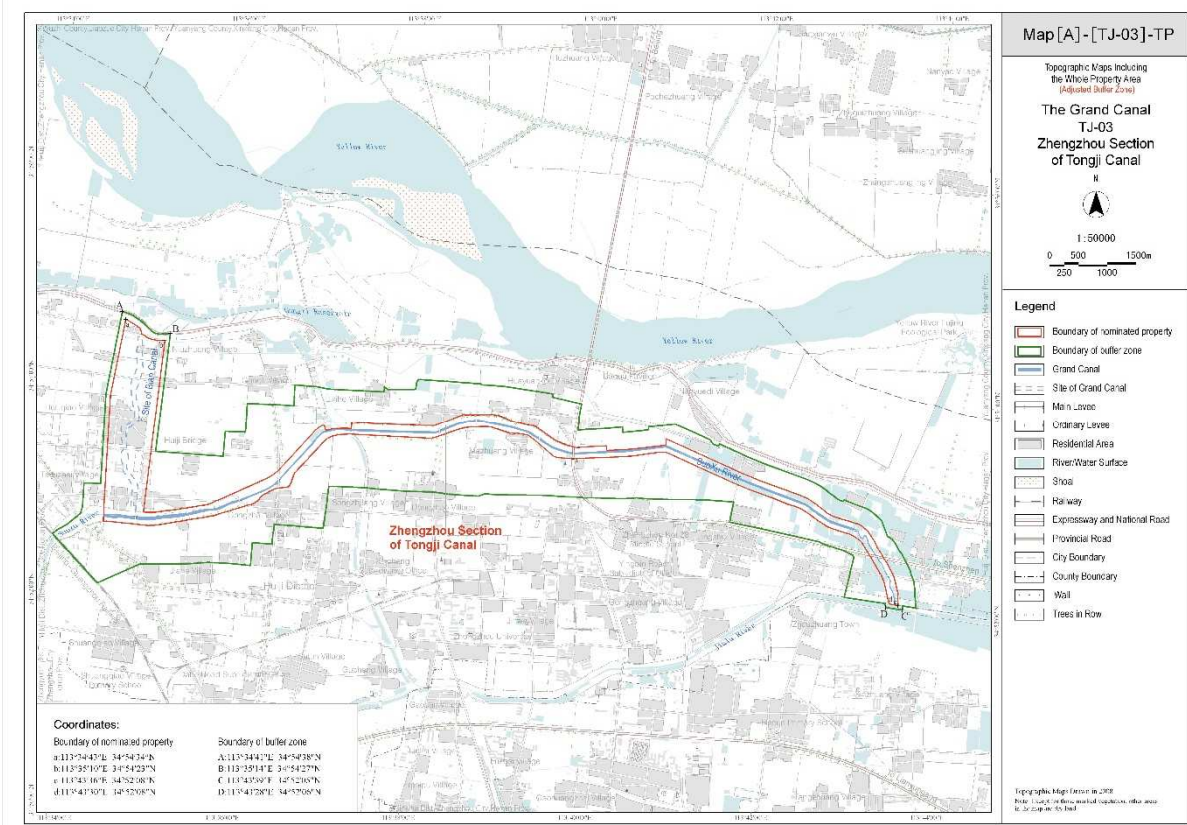
Qingkou Complex - Map showing the boundaries of the proposed buffer zone



Suqian Section of Zhong Canal - Map showing the boundaries of the proposed buffer zone



Yangzhou Section of Huaiyang Canal - Map showing the boundaries of the proposed buffer zone



Zhengzhou Section of Tongji Canal - Map showing the boundaries of the proposed buffer zone