
Beijing Central Axis (China) No 1714

1 Basic information

Official name as proposed by the State Party

Beijing Central Axis: A Building Ensemble Exhibiting the Ideal Order of the Chinese Capital

Location

Beijing Municipality
The People's Republic of China

Brief description

The nominated property runs from north to south through the heart of historical Beijing. The Central Axis is defined by former imperial palaces and gardens, imperial sacrificial buildings, ancient city management facilities, ceremonial and public buildings and central axis roads remains. The Axis bears testimony to the evolution of the city and exhibits evidence of the imperial dynastic system and urban planning traditions of China. The location, layout, urban pattern and design of the Axis showcases the ideal capital city paradigm prescribed in the *Kaogongji*, an ancient text known as the *Book of Diverse Crafts*. The Central Axis originated in the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) that established Dadu, its capital, in what corresponds to the northern section of the Axis. The nominated property also features later historical structures built during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and improved during the Qing Dynasty (1636-1912).

Category of property

In terms of categories of cultural property set out in Article I of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *group of buildings, monuments and sites*.

Included in the Tentative List

29 January 2013 as The Central Axis of Beijing (including Beihai)

Background

This is a new nomination.

Consultations and technical evaluation mission

Desk reviews have been provided by ICOMOS International Scientific Committees, members and independent experts.

An ICOMOS technical evaluation mission visited the nominated property from 18 to 25 August 2023.

Additional information received by ICOMOS

A letter was sent to the State Party on 4 October 2023 requesting further information about the justification for

inscription, the comparative analysis, conservation, factors affecting the nominated property, management, and interpretation and presentation.

Additional information was received from the State Party on 10 November 2023.

An interim report was provided to the State Party on 19 December 2023 summarising the issues identified by the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel.

Further information was requested in the interim report on the historical and conceptual background, the role of communities in reconstruction and rehabilitation projects, the involvement of residents in the management of the nominated property, tourism impacts, and interpretation.

Additional information was received from the State Party on 25 February 2024.

All additional information received has been incorporated into the relevant sections of this evaluation report.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

13 March 2024

2 Description of the nominated property

Note: The nomination dossier and additional information contain detailed descriptions of this property, its history and its state of conservation. Due to limitations on the length of evaluation reports, this report provides only a short summary of the most relevant aspects.

Description and history

The nominated property lies in the centre of historical Beijing, in what is now Beijing Municipality. It consists of an ensemble of historical buildings, monuments and archaeological sites that bear evidence of the evolution of the city during the imperial dynastic system.

Bordered by the Taihang Mountains to the west and the Yanshan Mountains to the north, Beijing is located in between two almost parallel rivers, the Yongding River to the southwest and the Wenyu River to the northeast. The terrain where the city stands is elevated in the northwest and low-lying in the southeast and has been settled for around 3,000 years. The history of the Beijing Central Axis starts around 750 years ago, when this particular topography and geographical location served for the design and planning of Dadu, capital of the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), on the east bank of the Jishuitan Lake (present-day Shichahai Lake), following the prescriptions of the *Kaogongji*, the *Book of Diverse Crafts*, an ancient manual which sets, amongst other themes, instructions for city planning. It is said that the urban elements exhibited in the Axis have been designed to reflect the relationship between nature and humans.

The State Party divides the development of the Central Axis into five phases:

From 1267 to 1405

The initial construction of the Axis began with the establishment of Dadu, in accordance with the ideal capital city model presented in the *Kaogongji* that states, “*court in the front, market in the back*”, “*an ancestral temple on the left, and altar of land and grain on the right*”, and defining a centre under the principles of neutrality and harmony. This phase includes the establishment of the layout, with the central platform and the central tower. A chequer-board pattern was laid out, with the construction of the *lifang* neighbourhood system. The palace city was constructed towards the south and the city wall was defined with the central platform as the centre. The Imperial Ancestral Temple was built on the east and the Altar of Land and Grain on the west side of the Axis. The Axis ran from the central platform, crossing the Wanning Bridge and the Houzaihongmen Gate, which corresponded to the north gate of the imperial city. Then it passed through the palace city crossing the Yanchun Hall and the Daming Hall where the emperor resided, and then passed through the Chongtianmen Gate, which was the southern gate of the palace city. Subsequently, it went through the Zhouqiao Bridge, exiting the imperial city through the Lingxingmen Gate. The Axis terminated in the Lizhengmen Gate (present-day Zhengyangmen Gate), which was the southern gate of the outer city, after passing the imperial square, extending for a total of 3.75 kilometres.

From 1406 to 1564

The overall layout of the Axis in its 7.8 kilometre-long was completed in this second phase, with the construction of the inner and outer cities during the early and middle years of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). During this period, the Bell and Drum Towers were completed in the northern section of the Axis, the palace city (present-day Forbidden City) was placed at the centre, and the Wansui Hill, the imperial garden, was placed in the north of the palace (present-day Jingshan Hill). The Imperial Ancestral Temple and the Altar of Land and Grain were placed symmetrically on the east and west at the south of the palace, while the Altar of Heaven and Earth (present-day Temple of Heaven) and the Altar of the God of Agriculture, were symmetrically aligned on the east and west of the Central Axis outside of the inner city. In 1420, when all the buildings were completed, the Ming Dynasty officially moved its capital to Beijing. With this expansion, the centre of the Axis moved to the Hall of Supreme Harmony in the Forbidden City. In 1439 the Zhengyangmen Gate Tower and Archery Tower at the south of the inner city were built. The construction of the outer city responded to the need of improvement of the military defence of the capital and was undertaken in 1553. The Altar of the God of Agriculture and Temple of Heaven that were outside of the inner city became part and southern limits of the outer city. At this stage, the Axis started at the Bell and Drum Towers, crossed the Wanning Bridge, passing by the Wansui Hill, the Forbidden City, the Upright Gate, the Chengtianmen Gate (present-day Tian'anmen Gate), the imperial square, the Zhengyangmen Gate, passing by the Altar of the God of Agriculture and the Temple of Heaven, to end at the Yongdingmen Gate which

was the southern gate of the outer city. With this new expansion, the centre of the Axis moved to Tian'anmen Gate.

From 1565 to 1911

Further development of the Axis was undertaken in this phase. The layout was maintained, and partial additions and renovations were carried out. The imperial road was paved with bricks and stone. Adjustments and improvements were made on the Jingshan Hill and the Temple of Heaven during the reign of the Qianlong Emperor (1736-1795).

From 1912-1977

Modern transformation of the Central Axis after the abdication of the last Qing Emperor included a series of functional changes in palaces and temples of the Ming and Qing Dynasties. The ritual structures and spaces that were for the exclusive use of the imperial family were opened to the public, transformed into museums and civic parks. The most extensive urban intervention was the total remodelling and expansion of Tian'anmen Square which was finalised in 1977. In this period, the Monument to the People's Heroes (1952-1958), the National Museum of China (1958-1959), the Great Hall of the People (1958-1959), and the Chairman Mao Memorial (1976) were built. To accommodate the growing city traffic, the Zhengyangmen Gate and surrounding areas were renovated in 1914-1915 and the Yongdingmen Gate and surrounding areas were demolished and renovated in the 1950s.

From 1978 onwards

Conservation of the Axis started with important buildings being legally designated, some others restored or reconstructed, including the Zhengyangmen Gate and the Yongdingmen Gate (2005). An accent has been placed in the preservation of the historical Central Axis in urban master plans.

Fifteen landmarks have been described as composing the Axis at present, namely: the Tian'anmen Gate, the Zhengyangmen Gate Tower and Archery Tower and Yongdingmen Gate, which were nodes for city management, as these were the gates of the imperial city, the inner city and the outer city respectively; the Bell and Drum Towers that regulated the opening and closing of gates and other daily activities of citizens; the Wanning Bridge; the Jingshan Hill; the Forbidden City, which includes the Hall of Preserving Harmony, the Hall of Central Harmony, the Hall of Supreme Harmony, the Gate of Supreme Harmony, areas for the exclusive use of the imperial family; the Altar of Land and Grain, the Imperial Ancestral Temple, the Altar of the God of Agriculture, the Temple of Heaven, which were important ritual and sacrificial spaces used by the imperial family, and became public parks in the 20th century; the Upright Gate; the Outer Jinshui Bridges; the Tian'anmen Square Complex; and the Southern Section Road between the Zhengyangmen Gate and the Altars of Heaven and Earth and Mountains and Rivers. Historical structures which had a ritual function in

origin, or that were conceived for urban governance, have now been transformed into museums and monuments that remind residents and visitors of the dynastic past of China while the Tian'anmen Square Complex functions currently as the heart of the Chinese modern state.

The nominated property has an area of 589 ha, and a buffer zone of 4,542 ha.

The boundaries of the nominated property are delineated based on physical urban features and elements such as perimeter walls, road curb lines, and embankments of rivers, including all the landmarks forming the Central Axis proposed by the State Party. The buffer zone includes the immediate setting of the nominated property, including several blocks which go beyond the former outer city limits to the south, and in the other directions includes several blocks that form the historical setting of the nominated property. Historic water systems, historic roads, historic and cultural areas are included. An analysis of visual corridors has been undertaken in order to define these limits. The buffer zone is delineated using road centrelines and toe lines, or the outer embankments of rivers.

Within the nominated property, three World Heritage properties are included: the Forbidden City (component part of the Imperial Palaces of the Ming and Qing Dynasties in Beijing and Shenyang (1987, 2004, criteria (i), (ii), (iii), and (iv)); the Temple of Heaven: an Imperial Sacrificial Altar in Beijing (1998, criteria (i), (ii), and (iii)); and, a section – Wanning Bridge – of the Old Beijing City Section of Tonghui Canal (component part of The Grand Canal (2014, criteria (i), (iii), (iv), and (vi)).

State of conservation

The fifteen landmarks presented by the State Party as the elements defining the Central Axis have undergone different types of interventions over the 700 years of its history. Imperial palaces and gardens, imperial sacrificial buildings, ancient city management facilities, and central axis roads have been maintained in the same locations. The layout of the Axis as it was achieved during the Ming Dynasty, with its 7.8 kilometre-extent, has been conserved, and archaeological research is continuing. All historical structures have changed from their original function, and currently house museums where their histories are explained, and some have become part of public parks and public space, which receive regular maintenance.

Comprehensive rehabilitation of building facades, street furniture, and greenery have been undertaken along Di'anmen Inner Street and Di'anmen Outer Street. Buildings such as the Bell and Drum Towers, and the Wanning Bridge have undergone conservation works for safety. The Altar of the God of Agriculture has undergone environmental rehabilitation, and environmental rehabilitation works are being carried out for the built environment of the outer section of the Temple of Heaven to restore historic landscape features.

Some buildings have been renovated or reconstructed at different moments in the development of the Axis. The Zhengyangmen Gate and Archery Tower, and surrounding areas, were renovated in 1914-1915, and recently have undergone conservation works for safety; and the Yongdingmen Gate was demolished in 1957 with the surrounding area being renovated. In 2005 the Yongdingmen Gate was reconstructed and is in good state of conservation.

The nomination dossier presents conservation projects undertaken between 2017 and 2022, however, no information is provided on projects undertaken prior to these dates. In October 2023, ICOMOS requested information regarding the rehabilitation and reconstruction projects developed by the State Party prior to 2017, and in particular details on the reconstruction process of Yongdingmen Gate and the southern section of the nominated property. In November 2023, the State Party provided a list of key conservation projects implemented between 2000 and 2017, adding also details on the rehabilitation projects of the southern section. The State Party explained that all conservation projects follow international guidelines, as well as other regional and national guidance. It ensures that the reconstruction of the Yongdingmen Gate has followed the principles of traditional craftsmanship, traditional techniques and traditional materials, using documentation from surveys undertaken in 1924 and 1944, before the demolition of the Gate. They considered that the reconstruction of the Yongdingmen Gate was necessary for recovering the integrity of the Central Axis. The State Party added in February 2024 that residents had an instrumental role in the decision-making process for the reconstruction as the Gate is considered important to keep the memory of the city.

Based on the information provided by the State Party and the observations of the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission, ICOMOS considers that the state of conservation of the nominated property is good.

Factors affecting the nominated property

Based on the information provided by the State Party and the observations of the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission, ICOMOS considers that the main factors affecting the nominated property are urban pressures related to development, traffic, and environmental pollution, and tourism pressures.

Urban development has impacted in several areas of the historical city, as well as its visual landscape. The State Party has conducted environmental rehabilitation projects around the Beijing Central Axis landmarks. To address urban pressures, the State Party has developed a number of regulations and plans to guide conservation and development.

The State Party has presented a list of development projects that are planned within the nominated property and its buffer zone. ICOMOS requested further information in October 2023 regarding Heritage Impact Assessments being undertaken for these projects, in particular for the

refurbishment of the west plot of the Drum Tower (Guxi Project). The State Party clarified in November 2023 that all projects proposed located within the nominated property and buffer zone require a Heritage Impact Assessment. In the case of the Guxi Project, the State Party explained that, as the project is intended to be a community centre for cultural activities, it will be beneficial for the residents, as well as complying with all design and construction requirements. The State Party ensures that during the implementation of the project, any potential impacts will be monitored.

Regarding environmental pollution, the State Party mentioned that air pollution and acid rain are factors negatively affecting the historical buildings. Vibration and noise pollution have also been identified as damaging both the structural strength of historical buildings and the historic environment. These threats are being addressed in the Beijing Master Plan (2016-2035) which provides for increasing green areas, reducing carbon emissions from production activities, limiting motor vehicle travel, using clean-energy public buses, treating river pollution and conserving biodiversity.

In terms of hazards, the nominated property is affected by rainstorms, lightning, earthquakes, sandstorms, fires and pests. Climate change has increased the potential of torrential rains in the summer, which can cause landslides potentially affecting heritage structures. Early warning systems, emergency response plans, and disaster risk prevention and response protocols are in place. In October 2023, ICOMOS requested further information regarding climate change-related planning for the nominated property. The State Party indicated in November 2023 that the nominated property is part of Beijing's emergency response mechanisms including an early warning system for all natural hazards. Instruments are in place to coordinate actions with relevant institutions. Measures for ensuring security and safety, for residents and visitors, and disaster risk preparedness and mitigation are developed to strengthen the resilience of the city as a whole.

The nominated property contains important tourist destinations that are subject to visitor pressure. Measures to address it, including limiting the visitor numbers per day to some of the historical buildings and areas, installing reservation systems, and requiring guided tours are implemented. The State Party is also actively working on providing a quality visitor experience while preserving the quality of life of residents. Channels of communications for residents as well as facilities that improve both living standards of the citizens and tourist experience are in place.

ICOMOS considers that the state of conservation is good and that factors affecting the nominated property are urban pressures, environmental pressures and tourism pressures.

3 Proposed justification for inscription

Proposed justification

The nominated property is considered by the State Party to be of Outstanding Universal Value as a cultural property for the following reasons:

- Beijing Central Axis represents 700 years of Chinese urban planning practices, which exhibit the traditional city management and an emphasis placed on rituals and order.
- Beijing Central Axis represents the most complete example and an exceptional testimony of Chinese urban planning in its urban layout which expresses the ideal capital city paradigm prescribed in the *Kaogongji*, the *Book of Diverse Crafts*, and the philosophy of neutrality and harmony.
- The nominated property is associated with Chinese traditional spiritual beliefs and values of inclusion and diversity.
- The nominated property bears direct links with *The Travels of Marco Polo*, which introduced China to the Western world in Medieval times.
- It is also associated to a series of historic events that had worldwide impacts including the transformation of Chinese society from an imperial dynastic system to a modern state.

Based on the nomination dossier, the key attributes of the nominated property are the layout of the Axis, the physical structures and architectural styles that define it and testify of its development during the imperial dynastic system in China; the natural and historical urban settings of the Axis; the landscape sequences, visual corridors, key views from different points of the Axis; the functions and traditions connected to each of the historical structures which include city management, urban governance and rituals. Although the rituals conducted by the Emperor during the imperial dynastic periods when the Axis was developed are no longer practiced, ICOMOS considers that the festivities connected to these that are still performed in the Central Axis space and buildings are attributes of the nominated property.

ICOMOS notes that a higher emphasis is placed on physical attributes such as the historical buildings and monumental features in the urban environment than on intangible attributes that could reflect other aspects that might be important to sustain the significance of the Axis, such as the soundscape as well as other sensorial characteristics of the design of the Axis which could enrich the interpretation and presentation of the nominated property. In addition, ICOMOS considers that elements of the landscape, such as forests and ancient trees, could be further highlighted as natural elements that also played an important role in defining the Central Axis layout. ICOMOS requested further information in its interim report regarding the concepts of "neutrality and harmony" and how these are tangibly reflected in the nominated property. In addition, ICOMOS asked about the role of the Emperor in the creation and use of the Axis,

as well as the uses of the Axis during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. The State Party provided additional information in February 2024 which clarified the interlinkages between the Chinese ancient cosmovision based on the understanding of the night sky and the positioning of stars as an ideal system that reflects neutrality and harmony and how these were fundamental concepts that needed to be reflected in the order of the Earth. This system influenced the social organisation in all aspects, including the central role of the Emperor and the disposition of the urban layout of the capital city. The State Party explained in detail how these concepts are visible in the location of the different buildings, including the gates, and in particular, the temples in relation to the Axis and its centre, and how the Emperor used the Axis for ceremonial events during the Ming and Qing Dynasties.

Comparative analysis

The comparative analysis has been developed based on the typological, chronological-regional and thematic frameworks. It has examined properties within China, East Asia and throughout the world inscribed on the World Heritage List, inserted in the Tentative Lists of States Parties, as well as other properties.

The comparative analysis is based on the proposed Outstanding Universal Value and the attributes of the nominated property, specifically addressing comparators which are representative of urban axes formed by building groups, and urban historic sites that have been conceived as political centres worldwide from the 5th century to the present. It is a comprehensive study that includes eight capital cities in China from the Song Dynasty to the Ming-Qing period, from which three are inscribed on the World Heritage List, namely the Site of Xanadu (China, 2012, (ii), (iii), (iv), (vi)), the Site of Luoyang City of the Han Period, and the Site of Chang'an City of the Sui and Tang Period, component parts of the Silk Roads: the Routes Network of Chang'an-Tianshan Corridor (China, 2014, (ii), (iii) (v), (vi)). The nominated property stands out as the best-preserved example which follows the prescriptions of the *Kaogongji* that is continuing the tradition of the axis, as the other properties represent incomplete remains or archaeological sites. Furthermore, the State Party highlights the solemnity of Beijing Central Axis compared to other capital cities in China.

In terms of the regional framework, relevant comparators are capital cities in ancient Japan, Korea and Viet Nam, which are inscribed on the World Heritage List: the Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara (Japan, 1998, (ii), (iii), (iv), (vi)); the Historic Monuments of Ancient Kyoto (Kyoto, Uji and Otsu Cities) (Japan, 1994, (ii), (iv)); and Jongmyo Shrine (Republic of Korea, 1995, (iv)). These have also been influenced by the precepts of the *Kaogongji*, following Chinese urban planning traditions based on Confucianism and correspond to a similar period. The nominated property stands out for its completeness, and the relevance of the Axis in its urban layout which is still evident.

The comparative analysis explores also comparators that present axes as fundamental features of urban plans in Europe, such as the Historic Centre of Rome, the Properties of the Holy See in that City Enjoying Extraterritorial Rights and San Paolo Fuori le Mura (Holy See, Italy, 1980, 1990, (i), (ii), (iii), (iv), (vi)), and Paris, Banks of the Seine (France, 1991, (i), (ii), (iv)); in Asia, such as Angkor (Cambodia, 1992, (i), (ii), (iii), (iv)), Jaipur City, Rajasthan (India, 2019, (ii), (iv), (vi)), and the Cosmological Axis of Yogyakarta and its Historic Landmarks (Indonesia, 2023, (ii), (iii)); and 20th-century modernist city axes such as Brasilia (Brazil, 1987, (i) and (iv)). The nominated property is distinct due to its specific cultural tradition, Chinese capital axis-based urban planning, which has specific ritual dimensions, philosophical concepts and spiritual beliefs that shape its physical layout and location.

In October 2023 ICOMOS requested further information about the prescriptions of the *Kaogongji* in the theory and practice of urban planning, as well as regarding the contributions of the nominated property to this theory and practice of urban planning. The State Party explained, in November 2023, the content of the *Kaogongji*, and compared its guidance on urban planning and architecture to the *Ten Books on Architecture* from Vitruvius, which emphasise defensive functions and an urban form centred around temples, and to the *Arthashastra*, which presents the ideal urban paradigm of ancient India which is based on the Mandala model. The State Party clarified that the Chinese tradition on urban planning is connected to the Confucianism philosophy and contemplates a ritual dimension in the layout and use of the capital city. This planning theory posits that principles of urban design influence on political order and societal harmony.

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis justifies consideration of this property for the World Heritage List.

Criteria under which inscription is proposed

The property is nominated on the basis of cultural criteria (iii), (iv) and (vi).

Criterion (iii): *bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the nominated property provides material evidence of the traditional Chinese philosophy of neutrality and harmony, testifying to the ritual traditions and their influence in capital city planning which objectives were connected both to city management and the provision of social harmony and stability.

ICOMOS considers that the urban planning tradition present in the nominated property represents an important contribution to the global history of urban planning, with specific characteristics reflecting a cultural and political system developed in China during the imperial dynastic period. This urban planning tradition

influenced the planning of other East and Southeast Asian capitals. The principles of planning used for the design of the urban layout which include the definition of the north-south axis and the establishment of a “centre” depict Confucian ideas expressed in the *Kaogongji*, or *Book of Diverse Crafts*, which intend to provide neutrality and harmony to the society by means of symmetry and balance in the urban layout. The ritual dimension of this urban planning approach also required placing temples in balance with the Axis and connections to the agricultural ritual calendar performed with seasonal festivities. This balance and symmetry as well as the specific elements of the temples and the centre are still visible and well conserved in the nominated property. ICOMOS considers that this urban planning tradition lasted until the end of the imperial dynastic system, and that since then, has been influential but transformed with modern practices. Nevertheless, festivities connected to the ancient agricultural calendar are still performed, including rituals in some of the temples within the nominated property.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion is justified.

Criterion (iv): *be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the nominated property represents an outstanding example of an urban central axis characteristic of Chinese capital cities, and is the best-preserved capital city central axis in China. The State Party argues that the Beijing Central Axis reflects the ideal capital city paradigm stated in the *Kaogongji*, the *Book of Diverse Crafts*, in its urban layout in a unique manner.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated property is an exceptionally well-preserved example of an urban ensemble developed based on ancient urban planning theory, founded in Confucian principles related to a ritual dimension with city planning, politics, and governance illustrating the imperial dynastic period in China, which represents an important era in human history. The principles of the *Kaogongji* have survived in the Axis during the imperial dynastic system against the growth and urbanisation of Beijing, providing the testimony of a distinct urban pattern which represents a particular typology in the urban history of the world.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion is justified.

Criterion (vi): *be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the nominated property embodies the traditional spiritual beliefs and values of inclusion and diversity in the Chinese society. The State Party adds that the Beijing Central Axis is directly linked to important literary works which introduced China to the world, particularly the

Travels of Marco Polo. Furthermore, the State Party argues that the nominated property is directly associated with a series of historic events which had global impacts, in particular the transformation of the Chinese dynastic system into a modern state.

ICOMOS considers that the State Party has not provided sufficient evidence to justify how the nominated property embodies the values of inclusion and diversity in the Chinese society as a whole. ICOMOS understands that the Axis has been developed throughout several periods of Chinese history, however, it is unclear how the nominated property could reflect these values in a tangible manner. Furthermore, ICOMOS notes that while the *Travels of Marco Polo* is an important literary work, it is not solely associated with the nominated property and its timeframe corresponds only to the initial phase of the Axis during the Yuan Dynasty and not to the Ming Dynasty when its major development took place. The nomination dossier mentions that the book describes in detail the layout of the nominated property when it was established as Dadu, and ICOMOS considers that as such, it can be used as a valuable source of information, but the association does not itself demonstrate outstanding global significance. In addition, the arguments made by the State Party concerning the associations with significant events do not explain the specific events and how these associations are reflected in the nominated property.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not been demonstrated.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated property meets cultural criteria (iii) and (iv) but that criterion (vi) has not been demonstrated.

Integrity and authenticity

Integrity

The integrity of the nominated property is based on the completeness of the Central Axis as an urban ensemble which carries development over the imperial dynastic system. All the attributes necessary to convey the proposed Outstanding Universal Value are found within the proposed boundaries. Some of the proposed attributes, such as historical structures, have undergone damages, demolition, reconstruction and renovation.

The buffer zone provides an added layer of protection helping to contain urban pressures which the nominated property is vulnerable to. Planning instruments have been developed to address these vulnerabilities.

ICOMOS considers that the integrity of nominated property has been demonstrated.

Authenticity

The authenticity of the nominated property is based on the continuity of the Central Axis as a core of the capital city. The location, natural setting and to some extent, the

historical urban setting have been preserved, particularly its layout. The layout of the Axis, as well as some of the proposed attributes, such as the Forbidden City, the Drum and Bell Towers, Jingshan Hill, the Temple of Heaven and other imperial sacrificial and ceremonial buildings have been preserved as they were developed during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. The form and design, urban and architectural characteristics of the imperial palaces and gardens, and most of the city management facilities have been maintained. The State Party maintains traditional techniques related to the construction and maintenance of these historical buildings, as well as keeping some ritual traditions and knowledge connected to it, including music and festivals. The function of the historical buildings however has changed and converted to public uses. The functions of the Axis as a whole has been preserved, as the core of the capital city.

ICOMOS notes two elements of concern in relation to authenticity. The first relates to the remodelling and extension of Tian'anmen Square Complex during the 20th century. ICOMOS understands that the State Party is proposing this area as part of the development of the Axis and its continuous relevance for Chinese society as a social and political core. Nevertheless, ICOMOS notes that these developments were influenced by Soviet socialist planning theories, which respect concepts of the Axis in a limited manner, because these are not directly aligned with the prescriptions of the *Kaogongji* and its ceremonial and ritual meanings. ICOMOS considers that the Tian'anmen Square Complex reflects a different epoch and its design is not connected to the figure of the Emperor which was a major foundation of the ancient Chinese urban planning tradition from which the Central Axis stems from.

The second concern refers to the reconstruction of the Yongdingmen Gate in 2005 after its demolition in 1957. ICOMOS considers that the reconstruction of this element has not responded to exceptional circumstances as prescribed by paragraph 86 of the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention. While ICOMOS notes that the reconstruction has been undertaken based on detailed documentation, and recognises the support of the local population for this project, it considers that the justification for the reconstruction to recover the integrity of the Axis is questionable.

While ICOMOS supports the need to conserve the Tian'anmen Square Complex and the Yongdingmen Gate in their current forms, it does not consider these elements to be attributes of the proposed Outstanding Universal Value.

ICOMOS considers that the authenticity of the Tian'anmen Square Complex and the Yongdingmen Gate has been compromised, yet the authenticity of the nominated property as a whole has been demonstrated.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity of the nominated property have been met, and

that the conditions of authenticity of some of the proposed attributes have been compromised, but the authenticity of the nominated property as a whole has been demonstrated.

Boundaries

A total of 41,000 habitants reside in the nominated property, and 794,000 live in the buffer zone (data collected in 2020).

The Central Axis line that is the focus of the nominated property, is continuous and contiguous from the northern perimeter wall of the Bell and Drum Towers to the southern terminus marked by the outline of the barbican walls and Archery Tower of the Yongdingmen Gate. The delineation of the boundaries has been based on the inclusion of the fifteen landmarks defined as the crucial elements marking this axis line. Elements beyond the nominated property that could have been part of the original layout of the capital city are not considered necessary to be included within the boundaries as these did not have a role in defining the Central Axis and might have lost their integrity or authenticity. Even though the nominated property is not delimited by historical boundaries, such as those of the inner and outer city walls, the current delineation seems adequate to include all the proposed attributes that support the understanding of the proposed Outstanding Universal Value.

ICOMOS observes that in most of the sections of the axis roads, blocks surrounding them have been included within the boundaries, which will serve to conserve the historical setting. However, ICOMOS notes that in the northern section of the Axis, between the Bell and Drum Towers, which corresponds to the Bell and Drum Towers Square, no blocks have been included within the boundaries, nor in the southern section of the road defining the Axis, between Zhengyangmen Gate and the Southern Section Road Archaeological Sites – Qianmen St./Tianqiao South St. –, potentially exposing the integrity of these sections of the Axis.

The buffer zone includes the historical setting of the Axis, though it does not coincide with historical boundaries of the Old City of Beijing. Nonetheless, it appears to be adequate to provide the historic context of the nominated property and an added layer of protection to the proposed attributes.

In addition, the boundaries of the nominated property cover one complete World Heritage property (Temple of Heaven), one component part of the Forbidden City (Imperial Palaces of the Ming and Qing Dynasties in Beijing and Shenyang), and the Wanning Bridge, a component part of the Grand Canal, section of the Tonghui Canal crossing the Old City of Beijing. The buffer zone for the Central Axis entirely encompasses the buffer zones of these World Heritage properties.

ICOMOS considers that the boundaries of the nominated property are adequate to encompass the attributes of the proposed Outstanding Universal Value and that the buffer zone provides an added layer of protection.

Evaluation of the proposed justification for inscription

In summary, ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis justifies consideration of the nominated property for the World Heritage List. Criteria (iii) and (iv) have been met, but criterion (vi) has not been demonstrated. Conditions of integrity have been demonstrated. Although the authenticity of some of the proposed attributes has been compromised, the authenticity of the nominated property as a whole has been demonstrated. The boundaries and buffer zone are adequate to support the integrity of the nominated property, though some sections of the axis roads might be vulnerable to development pressures.

4 Conservation measures and monitoring

Documentation

The Beijing Central Axis Conservation Center under the Beijing Municipal Cultural Heritage Bureau is in charge of archiving, recording and documenting the nominated property. It is also the monitoring centre for the nominated property and coordinates all relevant data and information collected at the different historical buildings, monuments and archaeological sites.

There is ongoing research on the heritage elements and surroundings of the Axis, providing updated information on the history of the nominated property and its proposed attributes.

The long history of protection and conservation of the different landmarks of the Axis provides a baseline for the management, conservation and monitoring of the nominated property.

Conservation measures

The conservation measures are carried out individually for each of the heritage elements under the supervision and coordination of national and municipal authorities.

Routine maintenance includes daily inspection, condition monitoring, regular building maintenance, horticultural care of old and valuable trees, environment and landscape maintenance, and potential risk elimination, which is carried out in accordance with the Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China (revised in 2015). Detailed heritage maintenance plans have been developed for each of the proposed heritage components. Regulations on the Conservation of Beijing Central Axis Cultural Heritage specify heritage sites to be protected and corresponding conservation measures. A conservation and management plan has been conceived for the nominated property providing over-arching conservation and management objectives for the Central Axis.

Recently, the State Party has carried out a number of conservation, protection and rehabilitation projects for

protected buildings, archaeological sites and historic environment within the nominated property.

Monitoring

The monitoring system of the nominated property is conceived to improve conservation, routine maintenance, disaster risk and tourism management as well as strengthening the coordination between heritage conservation and urban planning. It is based on three main categories of indicators: state of conservation, conditions of the environment and management systems. These are subdivided into six dimensions: property layout, property fabrics, natural environment, social environment, management, and rules and regulations.

The monitoring system involves four levels of administration; at national level the National Cultural Heritage Administration, at municipal level the Beijing Municipal Cultural Heritage Bureau, and at site level the Beijing Central Axis Conservation Center that coordinates with the different managers of individual heritage components. The reporting is done to the China World Cultural Heritage Monitoring Centre.

ICOMOS considers that the monitoring system is adequate and covers the state of conservation of the proposed attributes, as well as the progress in management implementation and responses, with a central organisation in charge of coordinating the monitoring system.

ICOMOS considers that existing documentation provides a baseline for adequate management, conservation and monitoring of the nominated property. Conservation measures encompass all the attributes of the proposed Outstanding Universal Value and the monitoring system seems to be adequate.

5 Protection and management

Legal protection

The nominated property counts with different levels of protective designations. The Bell and Drum Towers, the Wanning Bridge, the Jingshan Hill, the Forbidden City, the Upright Gate, the Tian'anmen Gate, the Outer Jinshui Bridges, the Altar of Land and Grain, the Imperial Ancestral Temple, the Monument to the People's Heroes, the Zhengyangmen Gate, the Temple of Heaven and the Altar of the God of Agriculture are National Priority Protected Sites under the Law of the People's Republic of China on Protection of Cultural Relics (1982, amended 2017). The Regulations for the Implementation of the Law of the People's Republic of China on Protection of Cultural Relics (2003, amended in 2017) set out conservation and management requirements on protected sites at various levels. The Measures of Beijing Municipality for the Implementation of the Law of the People's Republic of China on Protection of Cultural Relics (2004, amended 2019) set out local legislative requirements. Conservation areas and construction-control areas have been

established for all National Priority Protected Sites and protected sites at municipal level.

The Great Hall of the People of the Tian'anmen Square Complex was announced as a listed building in 2019. Regulations on the Conservation of Historical and Cultural Cities, Towns and Villages (2008, amended in 2017) and Regulations on the Conservation of Beijing Historical and Cultural City (2021) set requirements for the conservation and management of listed buildings.

Beijing is protected as a national historical and cultural city since 1982, with the focus to protect the historical urban layout, historic water systems, listed buildings, historic gardens, and historical and cultural areas. As its core, the Beijing Central Axis has always been under strict protection. The buffer zone includes twenty-nine historical and cultural areas, which have block-level plans.

The Beijing Master Plan (2016-2035), the Regulatory Plan for the Core Area of the Capital (Block Level) (2018-2035) and the Conservation Plan for Beijing as a Historical and Cultural City (2002) provide the basis for implementation of conservation work for the historical city.

Since 2015, historic gardens have been designated which include the Jingshan Hill, the Imperial Garden of the Forbidden City, the Garden of the Palace of Tranquil Longevity of the Forbidden City, the Imperial Ancestral Temple, the Altar of Land and Grain, and the Temple of Heaven. These are strictly protected by the Regulations of Beijing Municipality on Parks (2002, amended in 2019). 6,563 old and valuable trees are located within the nominated property, and 2,190 in the buffer zone. The Administrative Measures for the Conservation and Management of Old and Valuable Trees in Urban Areas (2000), and the Regulations of Beijing Municipality for the Conservation and Management of Old and Valuable Trees (1998, amended in 2019) set out the conservation and management requirements for old and valuable trees.

The complex legal framework protecting the nominated property is implemented at four levels of administration (national, municipal, district and site). Beijing Central Axis Conservation Center coordinates with site managers of the different heritage sites of the nominated property.

Management system

Nineteen institutions are involved in the management system. An Advisory and Coordinating Mechanism has been established having Beijing Municipal Leading Group for Building the National Cultural Center as the main manager and coordinating entity. The Beijing Municipal Cultural Heritage Bureau oversees the integrated protection of the nominated property considering all aspects of the planning framework. The National Cultural Heritage Administration provides technical guidance to the Beijing Municipal Cultural Heritage Bureau which functions under the People's Government of Beijing Municipality. Each heritage element is under the authority of a site management agency. The Beijing Central Axis Conservation Center has been created to coordinate the

implementation of the Conservation and Management Plan for Beijing Central Axis (2022-2035) with all other eighteen institutions involved. The Regulations on the Conservation of Beijing Central Axis Cultural Heritage issued by the Standing Committee of Beijing Municipal People's Congress set out special local regulations as well as established the management system.

The Conservation and Management Plan for Beijing Central Axis (2022-2035) has been approved by the National Cultural Heritage Administration. It is a legal instrument that provides information on the boundaries and buffer zone of the nominated property, state of conservation of the proposed attributes, states planning principles, targets and strategies as well as requirements and measures for heritage conservation and management. It also formulates plans for interpretation and presentation, monitoring, archive management and research.

Heritage Impact Assessments are required for all projects within the conservation areas or construction-control zones of the National Priority Protected Sites and the protected sites at municipal level.

In addition, as a site in the national Tentative List, Administrative Measures for the Conservation and Management of World Cultural Heritage Sites (2006) and Administrative Measures for the Monitoring and Inspections on World Heritage Sites in China (2006) are applied.

Disaster risk management is integrated in the larger framework of the Municipality of Beijing.

Visitor management

The nominated property receives a large number of visitors every year in the different heritage elements that compose it. A system to control the number of visitors has been created, limiting the access on a daily basis.

The pedestrian tourist route presented consists of the 7.8 kilometres of the Axis from the Bell and Drum Towers to the Yongdingmen Gate. The fifteen landmarks proposed as defining the Central Axis follow the Quality Grade Division and Evaluation of Tourist Areas (GB/T 17775-2003) and the Code for the Design of Public Park (GB51192-2016) which requires equipment and facilities like toilets, parking lots and first aid stations. A number of educational and promotion programmes have been developed. Guides receive specialised training. A permanent exhibition in the Capital Museum is dedicated to the nominated property.

In response to the ICOMOS request for additional information of October 2023, the State Party explained that the Conservation and Management Plan for Beijing Central Axis (2022-2035) provides guidelines for interpretation and presentation, considering the Outstanding Universal Value of the individual World Heritage properties contained in the nominated property, as well as for the nominated property as a whole. It also mentioned that an interpretation strategy is being

developed. As requested by ICOMOS in its interim report, the State Party provided an update on this process which focuses on developing interpretation and presentation of the existing World Heritage properties emphasising on their role within the nominated property.

Community involvement

Residents living in the nominated property and buffer zone can participate in the decision-making process regarding the conservation and management through deliberation and communication mechanisms at the community level, volunteering and other cultural and educational activities for the public. In October 2023, ICOMOS requested further information on how residents of the nominated property are being involved in the management system. The State Party provided details, in November 2023 and in February 2024, on the different ways in which residents and local stakeholders are participating in decision-making, implementation of management actions, and in particular supporting the monitoring of the state of conservation of the nominated property. ICOMOS takes note of all the channels existing for the participation of residents in the conservation and management of the nominated property, and recommends the State Party to create a platform for residents and local communities with a clear role in the management system and where all these channels are coordinated.

Effectiveness of the protection and management of the nominated property

In summary, ICOMOS considers that the legal protection of the nominated property is comprehensive and that the management system is complex but robust. ICOMOS considers that the proposed Conservation and Management Plan for Beijing Central Axis (2022-2035) and the entity created to be in charge of its implementation, the Beijing Central Axis Conservation Center, seem well conceived and potentially effective. The effectiveness of the management system needs to be evaluated as experience is gathered. While ICOMOS recognises the efforts of the State Party to address tourism pressures, it considers that this might increase and measures should be adapted accordingly. Involvement of residents in conservation and decision-making needs to be ensured and continuous for the long-term conservation of the nominated property with the inclusion of a platform with a clear role in the management system.

6 Conclusion

Beijing Central Axis: A Building Ensemble Exhibiting the Ideal Order of the Chinese Capital represents an outstanding testimony of the Chinese urban planning tradition, showcasing its evolution during the imperial dynastic system in its urban layout. It bears witness to the ideal capital city paradigm, based on Confucian principles stated in the ancient *Kaogongji*, the *Book of Diverse Crafts*, which were influential in the conception of other capital cities in China and East Asia. Planning principles include the definition of the north-south axis and the establishment of a “centre” to provide neutrality and harmony to the society by means of symmetry and balance in the urban layout. The ritual dimension of this urban planning approach also required placing temples in balance with the Axis and in connection to the agricultural ritual calendar performed with seasonal festivities. The Beijing Central Axis exhibits an urban ensemble that provides a distinct urban pattern in world urban history.

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis justifies consideration of this property for the World Heritage List. ICOMOS considers that the nominated property meets cultural criteria (iii) and (iv).

ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity are satisfactory, but that the authenticity of some of the proposed attributes has been compromised by remodelling and reconstruction. ICOMOS does not consider that the Tian'anmen Square Complex and the Yongdingmen Gate are attributes of the proposed Outstanding Universal Value, and recommends that the Tian'anmen Square Complex remodelling and the Yongdingmen Gate reconstruction be clearly presented in the interpretation of the nominated property. Nevertheless, ICOMOS considers that the authenticity of the Central Axis as a whole has been demonstrated.

Urban, environmental and tourist pressures are being addressed through a strong planning framework and several instruments.

ICOMOS considers that the state of conservation of the nominated property is good, and that the boundaries and buffer zone are adequate. ICOMOS recommends that proposed measures of urban planning and mitigation of existing and potential tourism impacts are adequately enforced and adapted in the event of an increase of tourism pressure. To support long-term conservation, ICOMOS recommends that the involvement of the residents of the nominated property and buffer zone be ensured and continuous, in particular through the creation of a platform with a clear role in the management system.

Legal protection is comprehensive including laws for the protection of cultural heritage and a planning framework for guiding heritage conservation and urban development. The management system is based on the Beijing Municipal Advisory and Coordinating Mechanism led by the Beijing Municipal Leading Group for Building the National Cultural Center. Site level management is

coordinated by the Beijing Central Axis Conservation Center, in charge of implementing the Conservation and Management Plan for Beijing Central Axis (2022-2035).

The Conservation and Management Plan for Beijing Central Axis (2022-2035) proposes principles and an implementation plan that considers the urban planning framework of the Municipality of Beijing, and responds to World Heritage requirements. The presentation and interpretation of the World Heritage properties that form part of the Beijing Central Axis should be continued and reinforced.

7 Recommendations

Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that Beijing Central Axis: A Building Ensemble Exhibiting the Ideal Order of the Chinese Capital, China, be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of **criteria (iii) and (iv)**.

Recommended Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

Brief synthesis

Beijing Central Axis runs from north to south through the heart of historical Beijing. It is defined by former imperial palaces and gardens, imperial sacrificial buildings, ancient city management facilities, ceremonial and public buildings and Central Axis roads remains. The Axis bears testimony to the evolution of the city exhibiting evidence of the imperial dynastic system and urban planning traditions of China. The location, layout, urban pattern and design of the Axis showcase the ideal capital city paradigm prescribed in the *Kaogongji*, an ancient text known as the *Book of Diverse Crafts*. The Central Axis originated in the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) that established Dadu, its capital, in what corresponds to the northern section of the Axis. The property also features later historical structures built during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and improved during the Qing Dynasty (1636-1912).

Criterion (iii): Beijing Central Axis contributes significantly to the global history of urban planning, with its specific characteristics reflecting a cultural and political system developed in China during the imperial dynastic period. This urban planning tradition influenced the planning of other East and Southeast Asian capitals. The principles of planning used for the design of the urban layout which include the definition of the north-south axis and the establishment of a “centre” depict Confucian ideas expressed in the *Kaogongji*, or *Book of Diverse Crafts*, which intend to provide neutrality and harmony to the society by means of symmetry and balance in the urban layout. The ritual dimension of this urban planning approach also required placing temples in balance with the Axis and connections to the agricultural ritual calendar performed with seasonal festivities. This balance and symmetry as well as the specific elements of the temples

and the centre are still visible and well conserved in the property. This urban planning tradition lasted until the end of the imperial dynastic system, and since then, has been influential but transformed with modern practices. Nevertheless, festivities connected to the ancient agricultural calendar are still performed, including rituals in some of the temples composing the Axis.

Criterion (iv): Beijing Central Axis is an exceptionally well-preserved example of an urban ensemble developed based on an ancient urban planning theory, founded in Confucian principles related to a ritual dimension with city planning, politics, and governance. The principles of the *Kaogongji* have persisted in the Axis during the imperial dynastic period against the growth and urbanisation of Beijing, providing an illustration of a distinct urban pattern which represents a particular typology in the urban history of the world originated and developed during the imperial dynastic system in China.

Integrity

The integrity of Beijing Central Axis is based on the completeness of the Central Axis as an urban ensemble which carries development over the imperial dynastic system. All the attributes necessary to convey the Outstanding Universal Value are found within the boundaries of the property. The buffer zone provides an added layer of protection helping to contain urban pressures which Beijing Central Axis is vulnerable to. Planning instruments have been developed to address these vulnerabilities as well as increasing tourism pressures, such as the Regulations on the Conservation of Beijing Historical and Cultural City (2021) and the Conservation and Management Plan for Beijing Central Axis (2022-2035).

Authenticity

The authenticity of the property is based on the continuity of the Central Axis as a core of the capital city. The location, natural setting and to some extent, the historical urban setting have been preserved, particularly its layout. The layout of the Axis, as well as some of its attributes, such as the Forbidden City, the Drum and Bell Towers, Jingshan Hill, the Temple of Heaven and other imperial sacrificial and ceremonial buildings have been preserved as they were developed during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. While some elements within the boundaries of the property, such as historical structures, have undergone demolition, reconstruction and remodelling, and areas of the property have undergone and continue to be under rehabilitation and renovation works, the form and design, urban and architectural characteristics of the imperial palaces and gardens, and most of the city management facilities have been maintained. Traditional techniques related to the construction and maintenance of these historical buildings have been maintained, as well as some ritual traditions and knowledge connected to it, including music and festivals. The function of the historical buildings however has changed and has been converted

to public uses. The functions of the Axis as a whole has been preserved, as the core of the capital city.

Protection and management requirements

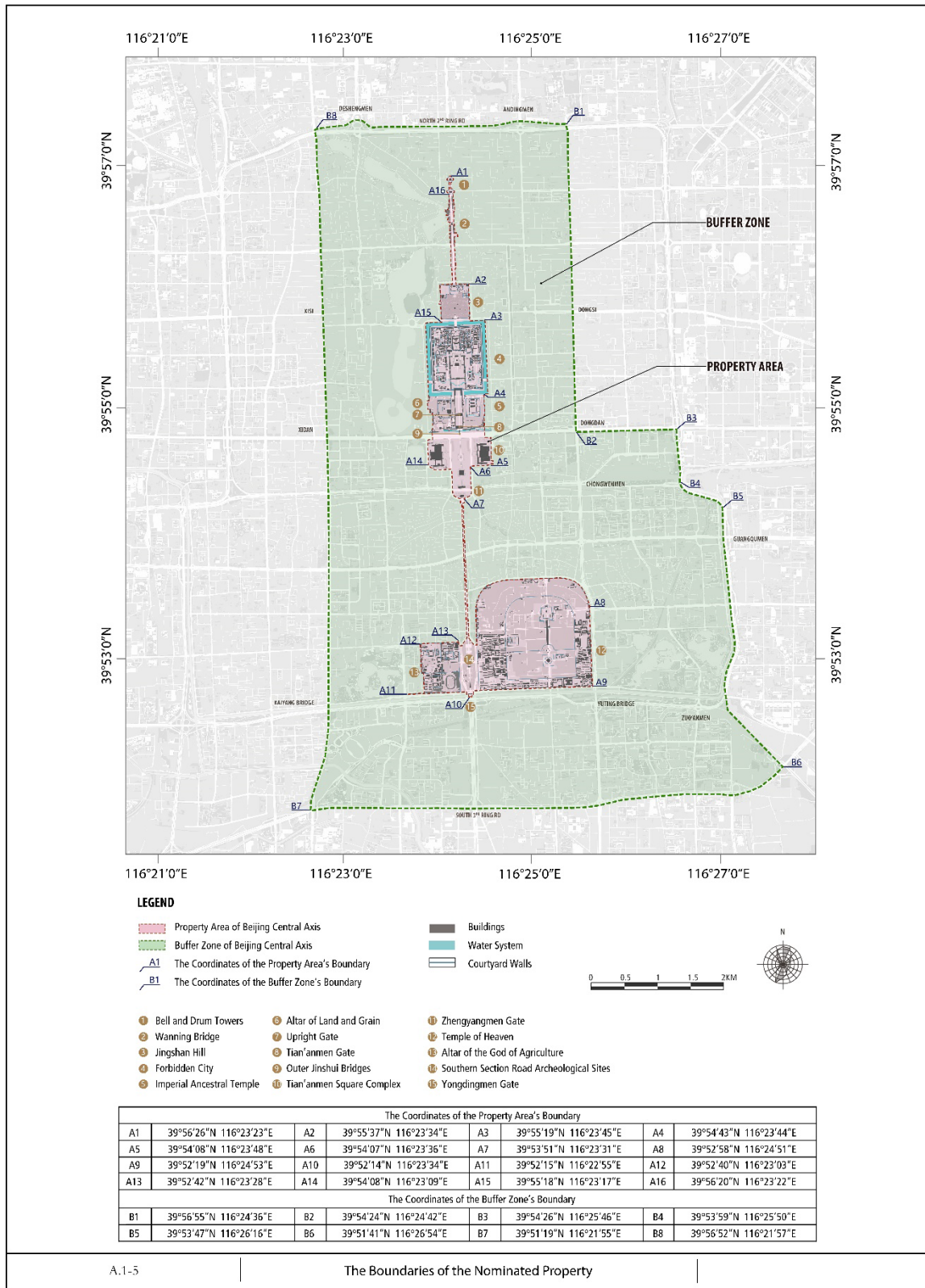
Beijing Central Axis attributes are strictly protected by national and local legislation. In particular, the Regulations on the Conservation of Beijing Central Axis Cultural Heritage and the Conservation and Management Plan for Beijing Central Axis (2022-2035) have been enacted based on the consent of rightsholders and stakeholders, and tailored to the protection of the property and the buffer zone. Multi-level urban plans from the municipal level to the block level have been published and implemented.

Nineteen institutions are involved in the management system. An Advisory and Coordinating Mechanism has been established having Beijing Municipal Leading Group for Building the National Cultural Center as the main manager and coordinating entity. The Beijing Municipal Cultural Heritage Bureau oversees the integrated protection of the property considering all aspects of the planning framework. The National Cultural Heritage Administration provides technical guidance to the Beijing Municipal Cultural Heritage Bureau which functions under the People's Government of Beijing Municipality. Each heritage element is under the authority of a site management agency. The Beijing Central Axis Conservation Center has been created to coordinate the implementation of the Conservation and Management Plan for Beijing Central Axis (2022-2035) with all other eighteen institutions involved.

Additional recommendations

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

- a) Continuing to enforce sustainable tourism management measures that mitigate impacts on the property, buffer zone and its residents,
- b) Reinforcing the involvement of residents of the property and buffer zone in the management system of the Beijing Central Axis by establishing a coordinating platform with clear mechanisms of participation,
- c) Continuing interpretation and presentation works to clearly convey the role of the World Heritage properties that form part of the Beijing Central Axis,
- d) Clearly presenting the reconstruction and remodelling processes of the Tian'anmen Square Complex and the Yongdingmen Gate, clarifying that these are not attributes of the Outstanding Universal Value,
- e) Developing and implementing a Heritage Impact Assessment for development proposals.



Map showing the boundaries of the nominated property