

ICOMOS

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МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ

Our Ref. GB/AR/1736_IR

Charenton-le-Pont, 19 December 2024

H.E. Ms Xinyu Yang
Ambassador, Permanent Delegate
Permanent Delegation of the People's Republic
of China to UNESCO
Maison de l'UNESCO
1, rue Miollis
Paris Cedex 15 75732

World Heritage List 2025

Xixia Imperial Tombs (China) – Interim report and additional information request

Dear Ambassador,

As prescribed by the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* and its Annex 6, the Advisory Bodies have to submit a short interim report for each nomination by 31 January 2025. We are therefore pleased to provide you with the relevant information outlining issues related to the evaluation procedure.

The ICOMOS technical evaluation mission to the “Xixia Imperial Tombs” was carried out by Prof. Chang Hwan Lee (Republic of Korea) in August 2024. The mission expert highly appreciated the availabilities and support provided by the experts in your country for the organisation and implementation of the mission.

On 20 September 2024, an additional information letter was sent by ICOMOS to request further information regarding the religious beliefs, the boundaries of the nominated property, conservation and management, protection, management, and interpretation. Please convey our thanks to all the officials and experts for the additional information you provided on 4 November 2024 and for their continued cooperation in this process.

At the end of November 2024, the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel evaluated the cultural and mixed properties nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List in 2025. The additional information provided by the State Party, together with the mission and desk review reports were carefully examined by the Panel members. This process will conclude in March 2025.

We thank you and your Delegation for your availability and your participation in the meeting held on 25 November 2024 with some representatives of the ICOMOS Panel. The exchanges during this meeting were of great help for the third part of the ICOMOS Panel meeting. During this last part of the meeting, the Panel has identified areas where it considers that further information is needed.

Therefore, we would be pleased if the State Party could consider the following points:

Integrity and authenticity

The Xixia necropolis presents a total of nine imperial mausoleums, of which Mausoleum No.7 is the only one whose occupant has been strictly identified by archaeological research. It was dedicated to Emperor Renzong (Renxiao), the fifth emperor of Xixia, whose name appears on fragments of a stele which was unearthed in the mausoleum. On the contrary, the excavation of Mausoleums No.3 and No.6 did not

reveal any connection to an emperor of the Xixia dynasty. With regard to the attribution of the mausoleums, with the exception of Mausoleum No.7, ICOMOS would welcome some clarification as to how the State Party was able to associate each mausoleum with a specific Xixia emperor.

ICOMOS also notes that three important additional sites have undergone archaeological excavation since January 2024: Mausoleums No.7 and No.8 and the northern architectural complex, with significant discoveries, particularly with regard to the state of preservation of Mausoleum No.8. It was found to be as well preserved as the mausoleums located further south. ICOMOS would like to know whether the circumstances under which only the mausoleum pagoda of Mausoleum No.9 survived have been identified, or if, as with Mausoleum No.8, future archaeological investigations are planned to uncover any more remains of the mausoleum.

The nomination dossier also mentions objects collected from the nominated property, particularly during the archaeological excavations of Mausoleums No.3 and No.6. Given that the nominated property was looted in the past, the circumstances of their discovery and the provenance of some of the unearthed objects is likely to be unknown. Nevertheless, ICOMOS would appreciate to know how, in addition to the excavations of Mausoleums No.3 and No.6, the more than 7,000 Xixia objects have been collected on the nominated property over time and the methodology that allowed these objects to be linked to a specific mausoleum, tomb or building.

Conservation measures

The scientific documentation of archaeological research is abundant and detailed, supporting the proposed statements of authenticity and integrity. However, this is less the case in the nomination dossier for the conservation work carried out on the site. Although such interventions are clearly visible on the photographs illustrating the dossier, the conservation techniques used are only partially described.

With regard to the consolidation and restoration works carried out in the past, as well as the work undertaken as part of the cooperation between the Yinchuan Xixia Imperial Tombs Management Office and the Dunhuang Academy, could the State Party please provide written, graphic and photographic documentation specifying the nature of the conducted work, its precise location, the techniques implemented, as well as the products and materials used?

Risk management plan

Historically, the nominated property has had to deal with the effects of run-off, and protective measures such as dykes and canals have been installed. Recently, as part of the Conservation Plan for Xixia Imperial Tombs (2019-2035), detection and control systems have been put in place for the same purpose.

The nomination dossier refers to new risks associated with climate change, in particular episodes of intense rainfall and their effects on the very substance constituting the remains of the tombs. To date, monitoring has been carried out and, according to the additional information submitted in November 2024, research programmes are underway under the auspices of the Ministry of Science and Technology. These aim to monitor the degradation process of earthworks and to research conservation techniques under the influence of a series of factors, as well as the effects of freeze-thaw cycles on the conservation of earthworks. ICOMOS would appreciate further information on the progress and results of these research programmes and on the status of research into techniques to protect against erosion due to heavy rainfall. Could the State Party please also communicate the timetable for implementation of the measures envisaged for risk mitigation and the resources mobilised for this purpose?

Another potential risk identified by ICOMOS could be the pollution from aircraft exhaust or vibrations during take-off and landing caused by the air base located in close proximity to the nominated property, as well as potential visual impact on the nominated property. Do the risk mitigation measures address

these potential risks that could affect the nominated property? And would it be conceivable to include this issue in the Joint Management Agreement for Cultural Heritage Conservation signed between the Yinchuan Municipal People's Government and the Unit of the People's Liberation Army of China?

Tourism strategy

The strategy for managing tourism within the nominated property is detailed, as is the location of the new site museum outside the boundaries of the nominated property. These measures are designed to sustainably manage the flow of tourists within the nominated property and help preserve it.

In the Conservation and Management Plan of Xixia Imperial Tombs (2023-2035), the "Planning Map of Xixia Related Cultural Tourism System" (p.103) indicates two types of circuits to national and regional Xixia sites. ICOMOS would appreciate receiving additional information on this programme and on how it will regulate the flow of visitors. What are the means implemented to both promote Xixia culture and avoid generating an increase in the number of visitors with potential negative effects on the conservation of the nominated property?

Local communities

The nomination dossier mentions the demolition of houses and small businesses originally located on the site, now owned by the State, and a final demolition programme carried out by the local authorities, in consultation with stakeholders, from 2014 to 2019. ICOMOS would appreciate information on the arrangements made by the State Party for the resettlement of residents and local businesses that were originally located on the site.

We look forward to your responses to these points, which will be of great help in our evaluation procedure.

We would be grateful if you could provide **ICOMOS** and the **World Heritage Centre** with the above requested information by **28 February 2025 at the latest**, the deadline set out in paragraph 148 of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* concerning additional information on nominations to be received. Please note that any information submitted after this statutory deadline will not be considered by ICOMOS in its evaluation for the World Heritage Committee. It should be noted, however, that while ICOMOS will carefully consider any additional information submitted within the statutory deadline, it will not be possible to properly evaluate a completely revised nomination or a large amount of new information submitted at the last minute. ICOMOS would therefore be grateful if the State Party could keep its response concise and respond only to the above requests.

We thank you for your support of the World Heritage Convention and the evaluation procedure.

Yours faithfully,



Gwenaëlle Bourdin
Director
ICOMOS Evaluation Unit

Copy to Department of Cultural Relics and Historic Sites (Department of World Cultural Heritage),
National Cultural Heritage Administration, the People's Republic of China
Cultural Heritage Bureau of Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region
Yinchuan Xixia Imperial Tombs Management Office
UNESCO World Heritage Centre