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Research on Optimizing the Construction of the Long March National Cultural Park from the Perspective of Cultural Route Heritage Protection

Wang Yiping*

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Abstract: The idea of cultural route heritage protection expands the protection theory for world cultural heritage. The Long March route carries the prominent characteristic of cultural route heritage. By actively building the Long March National Cultural Park, China has strengthened the overall protection and integrated utilization of the Long March cultural heritage, upgraded the hardware facilities for exhibition, and investigated ways to protect cultural route heritage with Chinese characteristics. During the construction of the Park, it is necessary to draw on the concept and norms of the cultural route heritage protection, optimize the construction approach, and make the construction of the Park more in line with the linear cultural characteristics of Long March heritage. Specifically, it is proposed to improve the Long March cultural route heritage protection system oriented towards “authenticity” protection, to deeply tap and interpret the prominent universal worth of the Long March route, augmenting the international dissemination of the Long March culture in an innovative way, and realizing a more scientific and effective protection and utilization of Long March cultural resources.

Keywords: cultural routes, Long March route, Long March National Cultural Park

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The Long March Route as Cultural Route Heritage

The Rise of Cultural Route Heritage

Cultural route heritage signifies a type of cultural heritage that arose in protecting world cultural heritage in the 1990s, and it took several decades for the idea to emerge and develop. In 1994, the Expert Meeting on routes as part of Cultural Heritage was staged in Madrid, Spain. At the meeting, experts thoroughly discussed issues related to cultural routes, unanimously agreeing that “A heritage route may be considered as a specific, dynamic type of cultural landscape.” The experts’ report of the meeting proposed the idea of cultural routes and the concept of heritage routes based on the dynamics of movements and the idea of exchanges with continuity in space and time (Shan, 2015). In 1998, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) organized a meeting in Tenerife, Spain, and established the International Committee on Cultural Routes (CIIC). The concept of a cultural route implies a value greater than the sum of its parts and gives the route its meaning. Establishing the CIIC deepened people’s understanding of cultural route heritage systematically. Henceforth, the CIIC conducted in-depth research on the connotations, values, independence, and other core issues of cultural routes and agreed on the definition of cultural route heritage. On October 4, 2008, the 16th ICOMOS General Assembly eventually adopted *The ICOMOS Charter on Cultural Routes*, in which cultural routes were defined as “Any route of communication, be it land, water, or some other type, which is physically delimited and is also characterized by having its own specific dynamic and historic functionality to serve a specific and well-determined purpose” (ICOMOS, 2008). The rise of cultural route heritage conforms to diversity in the protection of world cultural heritage and the diversity of human civilizations, which embodies the developmental direction, conceptual foundation, and major innovation of cultural heritage protection.

The Characteristics of Cultural Route Heritage

As defined, the cultural routes feature integrity, cross-cultural significance, dynamic character, and comprehensiveness and differ from other types of heritage.

First, integrity. The integrity of a cultural route refers to a group of cultural routes whose value is greater than the sum of their parts and gives the routes their meaning. Cultural routes comprise various elements of a single heritage, such as towns, villages, architecture, and bridges. However, the value of cultural routes as an ensemble far outstrips the value of a single heritage. And it is the cultural significance that connects the various elements and forms a conceptual thread for a single heritage. The intangible spirit links various cultural elements internally and breeds the integrity of cultural routes. Therefore, protecting a cultural

route heritage highlights a holistic approach to maintaining the integrity of cultural routes.

Second, cross-cultural significance. The cross-cultural significance of a cultural route refers to cultural communications or interactions along the cultural routes. The interactions involve the mutual influence of knowledge, technique, and faith at the spiritual or ideological level and the win-win swap of commodities, crops, and utensils at the material level. Therefore, cultural routes have extensiveness and continuity in space and time with a wide-ranging influence on the regions along the cultural routes.

Third, dynamic character. The dynamic character of a cultural route refers to the vitality of a cultural route that connects the past and the present. It involves not only the significance of the material cultural heritage of cultural routes today but also the cultural value constantly reflected by cultural routes that have contributed to the development of history and the deepening of human communications. The dynamic character element enables cultural routes to include more relevant cultural elements. As evinced in *The ICOMOS Charter on Cultural Routes*, “In addition to presenting physical evidence of its historical path, along with cultural heritage elements, Cultural routes include a dynamic factor that acts as a conductor or channel through which the reciprocal cultural influences have flowed” (ICOMOS, 2008). In brief, cultural routes develop with a historical process and evolve with people-to-people exchanges. Specifically, cultural routes that play such a role materialize the distinctive characteristics of living heritage.

Fourth, comprehensiveness. The comprehensiveness of a cultural route refers to the cultural route as a heritage complex that includes cultural and natural elements and tangible and intangible heritage. Cultural routes involve physical forms like architecture, roads, post stations, bridges, and natural forms that carry material relics like mountains, rivers, and landforms, and ideas, folk customs, religions, and faiths that spread along the cultural routes. In general, cultural routes constitute a heritage group of cultural heritage, natural heritage, and intangible cultural heritage, with heritage value, ecological value, and humanistic value.

The Characteristics of the Long March Route as A Cultural Route Heritage

The Long March signifies the historic event lasting from October 1934 to October 1936, when the first, second, and fourth front armies of the Red Army, accompanied by the 25th Red Army, transferred from their original revolutionary base to the Shaanxi-Gansu Revolutionary Base. The Long March route refers to the route taken by the Red Army in the Long March and consists of four march routes, some of which overlap. Connotatively, the Long March route has the characteristics of a cultural route heritage in four aspects.

First, the spatial characteristics of the Long March route. This indicates the length of the route in space and measures the extensiveness and diversity of cultural exchanges along the routes. The Long March route spans more than ten provinces, from the southeast and

southwest to the northwest of China. The generals and soldiers of the Red Army marched a long distance. The First Front Army of the Red Army alone traveled 12,500 kilometers, a truly great journey. The Long March route passed through complex and diverse landforms via the Southeast Hills, the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau, the Sichuan Basin, the Hengduan Mountains, the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, and other terrain areas. The Red Army crossed almost 100 rivers, scaled over 40 peaks, and traversed vast grasslands known as “death traps.” The Long March route boasts a breathtaking ecological route with rich natural resources and diverse ecosystems.

Second, the temporal characteristic of the Long March route. This means that only after a relatively long time can a cultural route impact the regional culture it involves. Lasting two years, the Long March reflects the continuity of the Long March route in time. From 1934 to 1936, the Red Army stayed for both long and short periods in different places along the way. Noticeably, in the important stops of the route, the Red Army stayed for a long time, held important meetings, and launched such activities as collecting materials, mobilizing the masses, publicizing the Red Army’s policies, and establishing the local political power of the Communist Party of China (CPC), which had a far-reaching impact on local people along the route. More importantly, as a type of cultural route heritage, the cultural influence of the Long March continues even beyond the end of the Long March. A constant stream of people has traveled to China to retrace the steps of the Long March. Many Chinese people have taken “re-visiting the Long March route” as a journey of faith to inherit the spirit of the Long March, forging a cultural phenomenon of “Long March Upsurge.” The Long March route can be viewed as a contemporary cultural route rather than just a historical route.

Third, the cultural characteristic of the Long March route. This mainly refers to cross-cultural elements and influences of the Long March route or the contribution of connecting various cultural groups. The Long March issued a manifesto, spread a message, and planted a seed. The Long March of the Red Army not only completed the historical task of a strategic transfer but also widely disseminated the policies and intentions of the Red Army. Regarding the cultural connotation of the Long March route, it carries forward the “red” revolutionary culture. This new culture integrates the basic tenets of Marxism with the realities of the Chinese revolution. Its dissemination profoundly impacts Chinese traditional culture, the cultures of various regions, and the cultures of ethnic groups along the route. This is manifested not only in the physical relics (e.g., architecture and stone inscriptions along the Long March route) but also in the attitudinal changes and practical actions of people of all ethnic groups along the way who helped the Red Army and supported the revolution.

Fourth, the value characteristic of the Long March route. This means the function of the Long March route, including its role in cultural and commercial exchanges and its impact on the development of specific regions. The Long March possesses excellent significance for the Chinese Revolution and has profoundly impacted the process of Chinese history. The Long

March route symbolizes the ideals and beliefs of the CPC and the Chinese people. In the form of the Long March route, the spirit of the Long March has spurred generations of members of the CPC and the Chinese people to constantly surmount difficulties and move toward the realization of the lofty ideal of communism. Under the guidance of the spirit of the Long March, the CPC bears in mind the great contributions made by the people along the Long March route to the victory of the Long March and continuously provides policy support to the old revolutionary bases and poor areas along the route, which sustainably improves their production and living conditions. Therefore, the Long March route has turned from a cultural route to a development route for people's livelihoods, keeping pace with the times and forging new socialist values.

The Status Quo of the Long March National Cultural Park Construction from the Perspective of Cultural Route Heritage Protection

Long March Route Protection Under the Framework of the National Cultural Park

In 1985, the Chinese government joined the *Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, and the world heritage system was incorporated into China's cultural relics protection system. As a key part of the world heritage system, cultural route heritage protection is also highly valued and applied in China. As one of the first World Cultural Heritage sites in China, the Great Wall represents cultural lineage heritage. The Chinese government has continuously promoted the Chinese cultural lineage heritage's application for World Cultural Heritage. The Silk Road, the Grand Canal, and other cultural lineage heritages have been successfully inscribed on the World Heritage List one after another.

The Chinese government has effectively protected the Long March cultural heritage in line with its historical and cultural site protection system. In particular, the Long March cultural heritage, announced as a historical and cultural site under national, provincial, municipal, and county-level protections, has generally been well protected and utilized. As early as 1961, major Long March cultural relics, such as the historical site of the Zunyi Meeting and the Luding Bridge, were included in the first group of historical and cultural sites under national-level protection. As China attaches more attention to the Long March culture, the overall scale of the Long March cultural relics continues to expand. According to the statistics, among the eight major historical and cultural sites under national-level protection, there are 45 historical and cultural sites and 223 cultural relics with the Long March (Du, Yang & Liu, 2021). The provinces, cities, and counties along the Long March route have established historical and cultural sites protected at corresponding levels. Taking Gulin county of Luzhou city in Sichuan province as an example, the protection levels of the Long March sites are shown in the following table (Zhao et al., 2013):

Protection level	Name of cultural relics	Type of cultural relics	Management department
Key Historical and Cultural Sites under National-level Protection	The Historical Site of the Red Army's Four Crossings at the Chishui River Campaign		
Historical and Cultural Sites under Provincial-level Protection	“Comrade Mao Zedong’s Residence in the Central Red Army’s Four Crossings at the Chishui River” at Shuangsha Yutang Bay “The Historical Site of Comrade Mao Zedong’s Residence and the Station of the First Front Army of the Red Army in the Four Crossings at the Chishui River” at Taiping Ferry The Longshan Battlefield in the Four Crossings at the Chishui River Campaign of the Red Army The Historical Site of the Red Army’s Four Crossings at the Chishui River Campaign at Guanwenyun Village Red Army Village at Yuhua Red Army Street at Erlang	Major Historical Sites and Representative Architectures in Modern Times	Luzhou Cultural Relics Bureau
Historical and Cultural Sites under Municipal-level Protection	Chinese Workers’ and Peasants’ Red Army Station at Taiping Town The Red Army’s Four Crossings at the Chishui River at Jiuxi Ferry The Historical Site of Opening a Warehouse to Distribute Salt in the Red Army’s Four Crossings at the Chishui River at Erlang Town		

In recent years, China has taken important measures to implement the construction of national cultural parks, which signals a remarkable change in cultural route heritage protection in China. In 2017, the *Outline for the 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-2020) on Cultural Development and Reform of the People’s Republic of China* proposed to plan and construct several national cultural parks and form an important symbol of Chinese culture. In July 2019, the Central Commission for Comprehensively Deepening Reform deliberated and approved *A Plan on the Construction of National Culture Parks for the Great Wall, the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal, and the Long March*, taking the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal, the Grand Canal, and the Long March route as the sites of the first set of national cultural parks. According to the five national cultural parks identified, the Great Wall, the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal, the Long March, the Yangtze River, and the Yellow River all exhibit typical features of cultural route heritage and thus belong to cultural route heritage. According to the objects to be protected in the construction of the national cultural park, the national cultural park is committed to protecting the cultural lineage heritage featuring a large spatial span, a distinct cultural theme, and a representative Chinese cultural identity. This demonstrates China’s commitment to establishing a cultural-route-heritage protection system under the framework of national cultural parks.

At the national level, *A Plan on the Construction and Protection of the Long March National Cultural Park* was developed. According to the overall design concept, by integrating “a series of cultural relics and cultural resources along the Long March route, with distinct themes, clear connotations, and prominent impacts,” the Long March National Cultural Park will “comprehensively form a Long March National Cultural Park that embodies the national will, reflects the national

standards, represents the national image and enjoys an international reputation, and become a model of Chinese solutions for the protection, inheritance, and utilization of cultural relics and resources in the new era” (Xinhua News Agency, 2021). By relying on cultural relics and resources and highlighting the comprehensive utilization of Long March cultural heritage values, the Long March cultural-route-heritage protection system under the framework of the national cultural parks has gone beyond the traditional protection unit system, which focuses on the individual heritage protection and establishes a cultural route heritage protection system with Chinese characteristics.

Effects of the Long March National Cultural Park Construction Under the Framework of the Cultural Route Heritage Protection System

The construction and protection concept of the Long March National Cultural Park is strictly in line with the characteristics of cultural route heritage. The 15 cities, autonomous regions, and provinces along the route are steadily advancing the various sections of the Long March National Cultural Park as per the construction program and protection plans and have achieved phased construction results.

First, attention is being paid to the holistic protection of the Long March route. Compared to the previous “vertical” individual heritage protection system from the county, municipal, provincial, and national levels, the construction of the Long March National Cultural Park, through national-level coordination and policy planning, has developed a cross-regional “horizontal” protection system covering the Red Army’s Long March route, thus reinforcing the overall protection of the Long March culture route. Specifically, a construction leading group for the national cultural park has been set up at the national level, responsible for the unified planning and coordinated implementation of the Long March National Cultural Park construction. In the construction and protection plan of the Long March National Cultural Park, it is proposed to “implement the overall protection project for the Long March route” and “build and improve the linear pavilion complex” (Xinhua News Agency, 2021) and other initiatives, thus realizing the transformation of the Long March route from heritage protection to overall route protection.

Second, the total cultural value of the Long March route has been fully tapped. The Long March route is of cultural, educational, and economic value. The Long March National Cultural Park aims to build an important identity of Chinese culture based on the cultural heritage of the Long March route, which has been given a multidimensional cultural mission. At the national level, through the construction of the Long March National Cultural Park, the country will take full advantage of the red cultural resources of the Long March, carry forward the red tradition, pass on the red gene, strengthen ideals and beliefs, and enhance the appeal of red culture. Taking the Sichuan section of the Long March National Cultural Park as an example, Sichuan established the Sichuan Long March Cadre College by relying on Long March cultural resources to strengthen the education of cadres and people on ideals and beliefs; in the two years since its establishment, more than 2,600 training courses have been held inside and outside the province, training more than 130,000 people (Li, 2022), giving

full play to the educational value of the Long March route. At the general level, the Long March National Cultural Park functions as a park, forming a public cultural carrier with an open space and providing public services, such as recreation, tourism, and red culture learning experiences for the people. In addition, the construction of the Long March National Cultural Park has enabled the socio-economic growth of the regions along the route and the improvement of residents' production and living conditions.

Third, the exhibition hardware facilities of the Long March route have been improved. During the construction of the Long March National Cultural Park, several new museums, memorials, and galleries were set up and renovated orderly. Moreover, the Long March cultural exhibition hardware facilities have been well improved, and linear exhibition hall clusters have been added. For instance, there are memorials, exhibition halls, galleries, or other commemorative facilities in every county and district in Sichuan where the Long March passed through, and the number of museums and memorials themed on the Long March ranks first across China (Li, 2023).

The Optimization Path of the Long March National Cultural Park Construction from the Perspective of Cultural Route Heritage Protection

The construction of the Long March National Cultural Park embodies the top-level design for the protection and utilization of the Long March cultural heritage at the national level, explores the path of the cultural route heritage protection with Chinese characteristics, possesses great political and cultural significance, and robustly promotes the protection and utilization of the Long March route. Therefore, relevant departments must unswervingly implement the Long March National Cultural Park. The central government and the provinces along the Long March route have generally formulated the construction and protection plans for provincial sections. This facilitates the construction of the Long March National Cultural Park in an organized and planned way. The construction of the Long March National Cultural Park provides new opportunities for strengthening the protection and utilization of the Long March cultural resources. Inevitably, there will be many unknown challenges because construction work is a creative endeavor. As a typical cultural route heritage, the Long March Cultural Park can be built as per the concept and norms of the world heritage system so that the construction of the Long March National Cultural Park aligns with the linear cultural heritage and the cultural resources of the Long March can be protected and utilized more scientifically and effectively.

Improving the Cultural-Route-Heritage Protection System for the Long March with “Authenticity” as the Guiding Principle

According to *The ICOMOS Charter on Cultural Routes*, “Every Cultural Route should fulfill authenticity criteria” (ICOMOS, 2008). Authenticity is a prerequisite for recognizing the value of cultural heritage, which is based on tangible and intangible evidence. To address the problems in the

excavation and protection of cultural heritage along the Long March route, this article proposed:

First, carrying out the Long March archaeological and collection activities is suggested. Cultural relics departments along the Long March route should organize professional archaeological forces to conduct comprehensive archaeological surveys of key sites around major battlegrounds, long-term Red Army activities, and major ruins and relics. Meanwhile, cultural relics departments should collect Long March cultural relics from the community, especially from residents along the route, and gather intangible elements such as oral histories and folk stories, thus enriching the categories and quantities of Long March cultural relics and supporting the authenticity of the Long March culture route with sufficient cultural relics.

Second, it is suggested to complete authenticity information for existing cultural relics. Regardless of unearthed cultural relics or architectural sites, processing information, such as the time, place, and original state of the material remains of cultural heritage items and relics, is the key to judging their nature and confirming their value. In the Long March National Cultural Park, many cultural relics and sites lack this type of authenticity information, which requires including authenticity information as an essential part of the cultural-route-heritage protection system.

Third, it is suggested to strictly prevent construction activities from damaging the authenticity of the Long March route. In constructing national cultural parks, much attention should be paid to the integrated effect of cultural relics and resources for the sake of multiple cultural functions. This also aligns with the sustainable utilization of a cultural route heritage. However, preemptive risk assessments and intervention actions should be established in the construction activities, such as cultural tourism development and traditional utilization, to avoid any damage to the authenticity of a cultural heritage incurred from development and construction activities.

Deeply Tapping and Diversely Presenting the Prominent Universal Value of the Long March Culture

As a large cross-regional and even cross-border cultural heritage, cultural route heritage places a high premium on the outstanding universal value of heritage, i.e., the rare cultural value of the heritage that transcends national boundaries and possesses universal significance for the present and future of all humankind. Speaking of the great historical significance of the Long March, Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, stresses that “The sheer duration, scale, distance, severity, and ferocity of the Long March were not only unparalleled in Chinese history, but almost totally unheard of in the history of war and human civilization” (Xi, 2016). This profoundly interprets the outstanding universal value of the Long March culture for all humankind. Looking back on the Long March route in the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics, its cultural value has transcended its historical significance.

Innovative Ways to Strengthen the International Dissemination of the Long March Culture

Designing the Long March National Cultural Park to become an important symbol of Chinese

culture and a cultural card of national and global compatibility, relevant departments must constantly augment the popularity, recognition, and reputation of the Long March culture in the international community. As required, the construction of the Long March National Cultural Park needs to bolster the building of international communications capacity so that the world can better understand China through the Long March, as well as the construction of the protections, displays, and inheritance system of the internationally famous Long March National Cultural Park. Relevant departments need to focus on digitalizing the cultural resources of the Long March, build a multilingual database of the cultural resources of the Long March, and open it to the world to facilitate foreign scholars to research the Long March culture. Simultaneously, they should build an international academic research platform for the Long March culture, establish the Long March Culture Research Fund, and encourage foreign scholars to publish works on the theme of the Long March.

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