

Discourse System Construction and Cultural Heritage Safeguarding in the Belt and Road Context

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Abstract: Since the 1950s, the concepts of “heritage” and “cultural heritage” have undergone significant modification and extension both in terms of connotation and denotation. Such a process highlights the international community’s efforts to further safeguard cultural heritage by respecting and promoting cultural diversity and human creativity. It is also directly related to UNESCO’s continual development of multilateral norms in the cultural sphere. In this context, the safeguarding of cultural heritage in countries and regions along the routes of the traditional Silk Road has been endowed with significance beyond culture. A review of UNESCO’s introduction of relevant conventions and the cultural heritage categories it safeguards, along with an analysis of the ICH (intangible cultural heritage) items, indicates that cultural diversity-enabled promotion of shared human legacy does not only concern the cultural sphere, but also has an increasingly profound correlation with the sustainable development of human society. Moreover, this cause is also a research field worth in-depth observation and summarization in discourse system construction and cultural heritage safeguarding in the Belt and Road context.

Keywords: cultural heritage; the Silk Road; the Belt and Road; cultural diversity; sustainable development

On March 27, 2014, President Xi Jinping visited UNESCO headquarters in Paris, where he delivered a speech highlighting the importance of “civilization exchanges and mutual learning.” According to Xi, “Civilizations have become richer and more colorful with exchanges and mutual learning. Such exchanges and mutual learning form an important drive for human progress and global peace and development(Xi, 2017). In August 2016, at the Work Forum on

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Advancing the Belt and Road Initiative, Xi Jinping explicitly proposed to enhance the construction of the Belt and Road discourse system.^① From the perspective of the Belt and Road Initiative proposed by the Chinese government, this paper reviews UNESCO's cultural heritage-related multilateral conventions, explores how to give full play to the safeguarding of cultural heritage in the multi-dimensional landscape of human sustainable development in the 21st Century, and discusses how to leverage China's multi-ethnic ICH resources to facilitate communication among different cultures in the Belt and Road discourse system in a bid to consolidate the people-to-people connectivity which is the basis of the "five connective index" (policy, infrastructure, trade, financial and people-to-people connectivity).

1. Cultural heritage: concept and connotation development

Over the past half century, UNESCO has successively issued several standard international texts to enhance the safeguarding of cultural relics and heritage. These texts include but are not limited to Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1954), Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (1970), Universal Copyright Convention (1952, 1971), Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972, hereinafter referred to as the World Heritage Convention), Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage (2001, hereinafter referred to as the Underwater Cultural Heritage Convention), Universal Declaration on Cultural

Diversity (2001), Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003, hereinafter referred to as the ICH Convention) and Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005, hereinafter referred to as the Diversity Convention). UNESCO's relentless efforts also demonstrate that the theme of "culture and development" has already aroused the international community's wide concern in an era characterized by modernization and globalization. Influenced by Samuel Huntington's hypothesis—the "clash of civilizations" and the 9/11 attacks, inter-civilizational, inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogues, which are themed on recognizing and respecting cultural diversity, are frequently seen on the UN agenda. As an inter-governmental organization committed to the causes of education, science, culture and communication, UNESCO has kept developing conventions, recommendations, declarations and guidelines. This helps the enhancement of international cooperation through multilateral conventions and draws on the experience of relevant countries' legislative and administrative practices and policies. From March to April 1998, the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development was held in Stockholm, Sweden. The Conference passed the Action Plan on Cultural Policies for Development, which explicitly called for "renewing the traditional definition of heritage," recognizing emerging cultural heritage categories (particularly cultural landscapes, industrial heritage and cultural routes); and enhancing the research, checking, registering and compiling of heritage items (including oral traditions). This paved the way for the formulation of appropriate and effective texts for implementing traditional protection policies in a scientific way.

① Xi Jinping's Speech at a Work Conference on the Advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative. Retrieved from: http://www.gov.cn/guowuyuan/2016-08/17/Content_5100177.htm, 2017-06-15.

During this process, the definition of cultural heritage has changed significantly both in terms of connotation and denotation. Its scope has been extended, referring to not only tangible heritage items across the world, but also intangible items rooted in different cultural traditions, particularly those closely related to people's daily lives (oral traditions, performing arts, rites, festivals, traditional knowledge, traditional handicraft, etc.). Such an extension exhibits a mutually complementary dual direction. It prompts people to recognize "shared heritage" as the "common heritage of human beings" and induces people to accept cultural diversity, and the subsequent multi-cultural recognition, and regard this diversity as a creative source of sustainable development. Centering on several major conventions, this paper intends to unveil a global picture of the current cultural heritage conservation and its relevance to discourse resources.^①

In 1972, World Heritage Convention integrated natural heritage protection with cultural heritage protection. While recognizing the harmonious coexistence between man and nature, the World Heritage Convention also highlights the balance between the two. Within the framework of this Convention, heritage mainly includes cultural and natural heritage of outstanding universal value in natural and man-made environment, such as monuments, groups of buildings, sites and other movable tangible cultural heritages, which are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art, archaeology, science and ethnology. The UNESCO World Heritage List classified heritage as cultural heritage, natural heritage and mixed heritage. Following this, through 45 years of practice, the World Heritage Convention has

further enriched the heritage categories. So far, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee has identified and defined several special cultural and natural heritage categories concerning cultural landscapes, cities & towns, canals and cultural routes. It has also formulated a detailed guideline to help assess heritage items to be included on the World Heritage List. Admittedly, such an inclusive extension is intrinsically connected to discussions on cultural diversity(Xu, 2012). Local communities which are interdependent in their heritage also play an indispensable role in safeguarding their heritage items and environment. July 12, 2017 saw the conclusion of the 41st World Heritage Committee session in Krakow, Poland. By then, the World Heritage List included a total of 1,073 heritage items in 167 countries. More specifically, on the list were 832 cultural heritage items, 206 natural heritage items and 35 mixed heritage items. Of the 1,073 heritage items, 37 fell into the cross-border heritage category; 54 were later included on the List of World Heritage in Danger; and two were stripped of the World Heritage title. Only 26 of the 193 contracting states still fail to have any of their items inscribed on the World Heritage List.

In 1992, UNESCO initiated the Memory of the World Program, which aimed to exercise the task of safeguarding and managing world cultural heritage, promote democratic utilization of cultural heritage, and help people further understand the importance of documentary heritage and the necessity of its management. Conceptually, the Memory of the World Program is arguably an extension of the World Heritage List. But it focuses on documentary heritage of global significance, including a compendium of documents, manuscripts, oral

^① For brevity, this paper only includes the standard international texts concerning cultural heritage introduced by UNESCO. Still, attention must be paid to the UNEP (Nations Environment Program) Convention on Biological Diversity (1992) and the "biosphere reserves" under its framework, the Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems initiated by FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations), and other programs.

traditions, audio-visual materials, and archival holdings of universal value preserved by memory institutions, civil society and NGOs (museums, archives, libraries, etc.). On October 6, 2015, the 12th Meeting of the International Advisory Committee (IAC) of the Memory of the World Program was concluded at Abu Dhabi in the UAE (United Arab Emirates). By then, the Memory of the World Register included a total of 346 documents and archives from countries across the world. It is noteworthy that The Recommendation Concerning the Preservation of and Access to Documentary Heritage, Including in Digital Form, which was approved at the 38th session of UNESCO's General Conference in 2015 has become a "normative tool" for safeguarding world documentary heritage (UNESCO, 2017).

According to the 2001 Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage (Underwater Cultural Heritage Convention), "underwater cultural heritage" means all traces of human existence having a cultural, historical or archaeological character which have been partially or totally under water, periodically or continuously, for at least 100 years such as; sites, structures, buildings, artefacts and human remains, together with their archaeological and natural context, vessels, aircraft, other vehicles or any part thereof, their cargo or other contents, together with their archaeological and natural environment, and objects of prehistoric character. The Underwater Cultural Heritage Convention pays extensive attention to and attaches great importance to ancient sunken vessels, sunken cities, submerged caves and other underwater relics of great cultural or historical significance. This convention introduced another complete set of legal instruments to the cultural sphere. It provides underwater cultural heritage, which had long been overlooked, with comprehensive protection equal to those enjoyed

by cultural heritage on land, and also promotes international communications and cooperation from a technological and professional perspective which is indispensable for the rational preservation of underwater heritage. Since 1980, a total of 49 ocean and coastal heritage sites, in accordance with the World Heritage Convention, have been inscribed on the World Heritage List. Since 2007, the proclamation system concerning "Best Practices of Underwater Cultural Heritage" which was established according to the Convention, has given rise to seven best practices in this regard.

Under the framework of 2003 ICH Convention, those previously overlooked traditional cultural expressions and cultural spaces now receive unprecedented attention. The popularization of the emerging concept—intangible cultural heritage (ICH) drives more and more countries to join the World Heritage Convention (174 as of May 12, 2017). All ICH items worldwide (including relevant practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills, as well as the related instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces) have come into human view. The intangible cultural heritage, as defined in the ICH Convention, is manifested in the following domains: (a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of intangible cultural heritage; (b) performing arts; (c) social practices, rituals and festive events; (d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and (e) traditional craftsmanship. On December 2, 2016, the 11th session of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage was concluded in Addis Ababa, capital of Ethiopia. As of that meeting a total of 429 ICH items had been inscribed on the World Heritage List. Of the 429 ICH items, 365 were on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, 47 on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, 17

on the Register of Best Safeguarding Practices, and 30 were jointly submitted multinational nominations.

Regarding the cultural heritage conservation movement led by UNESCO, the exact numbers of the Belt and Road countries on the various cultural heritage lists under the above mentioned convention frameworks remain to be disclosed. What is certain is that the cultural heritage items along the Silk Road, along with their historic and humanistic value in inter-cultural dialogue and their profound interpretation space for promoting cultural diversity, have been continually highlighted and extended both on land and sea. Given that the basic framework of the Belt and Road Initiative is based on the traditional concept of the Silk Road, I think it is necessary to examine the category of “heritage routes” or “cultural routes” and their special significance to the promotion of cultural communications between regions. At the experts meeting on Routes as Part of Our Cultural Heritage held in Madrid, Spain in December 1994, the term heritage routes, or cultural routes, were discussed and the following conclusions were made.

The concept of heritage routes is rich and fertile, offering a privileged framework in which mutual understanding, a plural approach to history and a culture of peace can all operate. It is based on population movements, encounters and dialogue, cultural exchanges and cross-fertilization, taking place both in space and time (UNESCO, 2016).

According to the Annex III of Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention—Guidelines on the Inscription of Specific Types of Properties on the World Heritage List, the following points should be considered when determining whether a heritage route is suitable for inscription on the World Heritage List: (1) The requirement to hold outstanding universal value should be recalled; (2) The concept of heritage routes; (3) A heritage

route may be considered as a specific, dynamic type of cultural landscape; (4) The identification of a heritage route is based on a collection of strengths and tangible elements, testimony to the significance of the route itself; (5) The conditions of authenticity are to be applied on the grounds of its significance and other elements making up the heritage route. It will consider the duration of the route, and perhaps how often it is used nowadays, as well as the legitimate wishes for development of the peoples affected. The concept of heritage routes: is based on the dynamics of movement and the idea of exchanges, with continuity in space and time; refers to a whole, where the route has a worth over and above the sum of its parts and through which it gains its cultural significance; highlights exchange and dialogue between countries or between regions; is multi-dimensional, with different aspects developing and adding to its prime purpose which may be religious, commercial, administrative or otherwise (UNESCO, 2016).

Judging from the above definition and interpretation, the proposal of cultural routes as a heritage category was in line with the basic idea of UNESCO’s previous study project Integral Study of the Silk Roads: Roads of Dialogue (1988-1997) and it enables the international community to rediscover and reflect on the significance of human communications and inter-cultural dialogues regarding today’s peace-building, cultural construction and sustainable development. Jing Feng, Chief of the Asia and Pacific Unit at UNESCO’s World Heritage Centre, has long been engaged in the safeguarding and management of world heritage sites in the international arena. He has given a comprehensive and systematic exploration and analysis of cultural heritage conservation along the Silk Road routes both in China and abroad. In his analysis, credit was given to UNESCO and the World Heritage Committee for their relentless efforts

to the mutual promotion of the Silk Road and inter-cultural dialogue (Jing, 2015). In 2014, Silk Roads: The Routes Network of the Chang'an-Tianshan Corridor, jointly declared by China, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, was successfully inscribed on the World Cultural Heritage List (heritage route category). This fully testifies that cross-border heritage cases have been feasible dialogue practice for contracting states to enhance mutual coordination and seek further interaction and communication with relevant advisory bodies, intergovernmental committees, specialized research centers and local communities. The experience and lessons learned can serve as references for utilizing inter-cultural dialogue to promote cultural diversity during the process of building the Belt and Road discourse system.

Against this background, it is imperative to examine the ICH items along the Silk Road routes, their status quo, as well as the significance of preservation practices to the promotion of inter-cultural dialogue. Carrying time-honored humanistic traditions, intangible cultural heritage is a melting pot of diversified cultures and a guarantee of sustainable development. Culture diversity is the shared heritage of all mankind and an essential cultural resource for the Belt and Road countries. Thus, in the context of the Belt and Road discourse system construction, the ICH items of China and other relevant countries can add substantial vigor and resources to inter-cultural dialogue.

2. International cooperation in the Belt and Road Initiative and ICH safeguarding

As the Chinese government pronounced in the Vision and Actions on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (hereinafter referred to as the Vision and Actions), to enhance people-to-people and cultural

exchanges, and mutual learning among the peoples of the relevant countries, and enable them to understand, trust and respect each other and live in harmony, peace and prosperity. It is a plan that will bring benefits to the people (National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Ministry of Commerce of the PRC, 2017). Only by promoting people-to-people cultural exchanges and mutual learning, respect for each other's choice of development mode, seeking common ground while reserving differences, being inclusive and advancing common the interests of all can the countries hold real cultural dialogues. It thus becomes an paramount responsibility for the policy-makers in the national cultural heritage sector and academia to explore the cultural links between shared heritages, develop a positive atmosphere for inter-cultural communications, extract a series of consensual topics and advance bilateral and multilateral people-to-people and cultural exchanges based on respecting cultural diversity and human creativity.

In May 2017, Irina Bokova, (former) Director-General of UNESCO (2009—2017), gave a speech themed “Enhancing People-to-People Connectivity” at the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. The speech echoed the Silk Road spirit proposed by President Xi Jinping and projected dynamic cooperation between China and UNESCO, which has already reaped a bumper harvest in culture, education, science and dissemination of information, as is indicated by the following figures: 8 members of UNESCO ASPnet (Associated Schools Project Network), 20 UNESCO Chairs Programme and UNITWIN Networks (University Twining and Networking), 33 MAB Biosphere Reserves and 8 members of UNESCO Creative Cities Network; 52 sites inscribed on the World Heritage List, 39 items on the ICH List and 10 items on the Memory of the World Register. The cooperation above indicates that China recognizes UNESCO's philosophy

displayed in several of its cultural treaties and related standard documents, and makes active efforts to join in UNESCO practices. All these practices based on international cooperation depend on the interaction and cooperation between UNESCO and its member countries, and correlative programs and plans are likely to radiate from one country to another. Cultural heritage conservation has become a common concern of the contracting states to the World Heritage Convention and has evolved through decades of development into a shared and intelligible discourse system in the international community. This provides adequate discourse resources and space for dialogues for the construction of the Belt and Road discourse system.

Intangible cultural heritage, by maintaining cultural bonds between communities, groups and individuals, has been passed down throughout generations of practice and is of great cultural significance and serves as an important tool for society. However, it is a pity that domestic academia and policy-makers have not paid enough attention to finding a way to integrate the ICH with the construction of the discourse system that enhances people-to-people connectivity. Recently published research reports have revealed both the big data concerning the Belt and Road and indicators concerning the “Five Connective” Index. However, no correlation between the ICH and the people-to-people and cultural communication is found under the category of people-to-people connectivity (Peking University, 2017; The “Belt and Road” Data Center under State Information Center, 2016). Even in the book *The Belt and Road National Conditions* there is no introduction to the protection of the ICH (Wang & Chen, 2015). The following part of this paper will revolve around international cooperation in the protection of the ICH and discuss the construction of the Belt and Road discourse system.

First, the question of how to evaluate the cultural cooperation among countries along the Belt and Road through the protection of the ICH must be resolved. The Vision and Action, when defining the scope of the Belt and Road, said “The Silk Road Economic Belt focuses on bringing together China, Central Asia, Russia and Europe (the Baltic), linking China with the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea through Central Asia and West Asia and connecting China with Southeast Asia, South Asia and the Indian Ocean. The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road is designed to go from China’s coast to Europe through the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean in one route, and from China’s coast through the South China Sea to the South Pacific in the other.” In his keynote speech delivered at the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, President Xi Jinping (2017) noted that the advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative is rooted in the historical soil of the Silk Road. Mainly focusing on the Eurasian and African continents, it is also open to the whole world. Whether it is from Asia or Europe, or from Africa or America, any friendly hand reaching out can become China’s international partner in advancing the Belt and Road Initiative. It is necessary to establish the scope of countries that have responded to the Belt and Road Initiative since there is a statistical analysis in the following text. Though the specific number of participating countries has yet to be fixed, emerging as 63, 65 or 80 as the author finds in recent macro reports on the Belt and Road Initiative, the variation of the number in turn indicates that the Belt and Road is an open initiative, whose scope is gradually expanding, and promising further extension in the future.

The Belt and Road National ICH Research Group, the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition, the Institute of Ethnic Literature and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, after referencing the countries listed in the “Profiles” column on the “Belt and Road Portal”

hosted by the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) of China, combined with the countries having signed cooperative agreements with China, as well as the countries listed in the Achievements of the Belt and Road Forum on International Cooperation that have struck cooperative deals with China, concluded that the number of the Belt and Road countries, inclusive of China, is 84.^① According to related figures published in the ICH feature on the UNESCO website (ich.unesco.org), among the 84 countries, 78 countries have joined in the ICH Convention;^② 16 countries, including Ireland, have joined it but have no ICH items listed yet. Hence among the Belt and Road countries there are 63 contracting states with ICH items already inscribed (totaling 258 items). More specifically, 220 items are inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (accounting for 85%); 30 items on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding (accounting for 12%); and 8 items on the Register of Best Safeguarding Practices (accounting for 3%). So far, 174 countries have joined in the ICH Convention. In the list of the ICH released by UNESCO, 60.1% of the 429 items are from or shared by the Belt and Road countries, the percentage notably higher than the average level of other regions in the world. If the non-contracting states are included, then there will be 113 countries, 55.8% of them being Belt and Road countries that have had their ICH items inscribed in the ICH List. Moreover, among the 13 countries that contribute more than 10 state-level ICH items to the ICH List, these eight countries—China, South Korea, Croatia, Turkey, Mongolia, India, Vietnam and Iran—are all located along the Belt and Road routes and outpace the average global

level in ICH contribution. Guo Cuixiao (2017), a member of the research team, combed through the ICH items from the Belt and Road countries by means of quantifiable and visualized figures, and did a statistical analysis of the number of projects, categories, sectors, geographical distributions, timelines and joint declarations of the ICH items, which indicated the overview and characteristics of the implementation of the ICH Convention by the Belt and Road countries and their partnerships. Such statistical analyses may go further in the future, for example, further discussions might be made on the ICH inheritance, practices and protection strategies revolving around the differentiation between the northern, middle and southern routes of the Silk Road Economic Belt and between the western and southern routes of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road.

Based on the latest analysis, there is strong evidence that the Belt and Road countries, especially those along the traditional Silk Road, have valued protecting their ICH by engaging people from all walks of life. In the work of the ICH rescue, protection, inheritance, promotion, as well as the item list compilation and declaration, the authorities, people and professionals in these countries have all made active efforts to adopt diversified approaches to implement UNESCO's principles and methods of ICH safeguarding. Compared with other regions, countries along the traditional Silk Road, owing to their proximity in natural environment and geographical location, long-standing cultural interactions and communications, and little seclusion from the outside world by natural barriers, are more likely to formulate regional cultural plates, such as economic and cultural groups and historical

① Retrieved from: www.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/

② The six countries of Russia, Maldives, South Africa, Singapore, New Zealand and Israel have not yet joined the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. However, prior to the effective date of the Convention, Russia had already seen two items proclaimed as "Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity," which were later automatically inscribed on the "Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity."

ethnic areas, as are defined by ethnology. Given the ICH items along the traditional Silk Road, if the correlation between cultural heritage conservation and human social development is used as a principle measure, then the known cultural heritage items in those regions and their sub-regions will present numerous vivid examples of the progress of human civilization from various aspects, of how the poetic wisdom and remarkable creativity of the people have served as the very source that helped maintain coordination between social organizations, convey knowledge and values, offer aesthetic pleasures, link man and nature and develop man's ability in a well-rounded manner across countries and regional cultural traditions. Here is an easy and vivid example—Meshrep. Having long been popular among the Uyghur people in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China, Meshrep is an important carrier of Uyghur traditional culture. As a comprehensive form of arts, Meshrep integrates a series of folk practices and forms of performing arts, and realizes convergence of diet and recreation, of music and dance, of drama and music. Moreover, Meshrep also acts as a non-governmental “court,” which judges between right and wrong and mediates disputes, and a “classroom,” which teaches people traditional knowledge, etiquette, ethics, culture and art. Meshrep, as a comprehensive non-governmental ICH item, has helped shaped a social culture with its great vitality and influence.

Second, the question of how to let the spirit of the ICH Convention drive the people-to-people and cultural communication among the countries along the Belt and Road must be considered. Under the framework of the ICH convention, the three UNESCO ICH lists, combined with international assistance, make up the four-fold international cooperative mechanism that safeguards the ICH. Unlike the linear biological evolution, cultural evolution tends to be nonlinear, and sometimes might have to span

a great distance in time and space. Communication and mutual learning between different cultures exert a meaningful influence on human progress that is far beyond our imagination. And whether the intercultural communication is easy or not invariably depends on the nature of the communication.

The ICH Convention lists reveal the current cultural cooperation. The World Heritage List, classified by theme, includes 49 seas and coasts, 149 above-ground buildings, 103 cultural landscapes, 91 forests and 190 cities. There are 37 cross-border items (including 19 cultural heritage sites, 16 natural heritage sites, 2 mixed heritage sites and one heritage site in danger). Though they involve 65 countries, they account for only a small percentage of the total 1,073 listed items. In terms of the ICH list, there is something worth our attention, namely that the Belt and Road countries exceed other areas in the number of joint ICH declarations and the scope and scale of participation, although the ICH Convention is so much “younger” than the World Heritage Convention. Of all the 258 items on the ICH Convention contributed by the Belt and Road countries, twenty (or two thirds of all joint declarations), were jointly declared by two or more countries (Zhu, 2017). In particular, two ICH nominations were jointly declared by over ten countries. The first one is falconry, a living human heritage declared by 18 countries; the second is Nowruz, a festival declared by 12 countries. It can easily be inferred that the declaration of these two items could not have been realized without the predominant efforts from the countries along the traditional Silk Road. The declaration of falconry was initiated by the UAE, and then attended by Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Kazakhstan, South Korea, Mongolia, Morocco, Pakistan, Portugal, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Spain and Syria—a group of countries that transverse Asia, Europe and Africa.

The declaration of Nowruz was initiated by Iran, and then joined by Azerbaijan, India, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Countries along the traditional Silk Road, especially those in Central Asia, boast an apparently larger number of joint ICH declarations than regions elsewhere. That in some measure indicates that their ICH shares certain common attributes.

The resolution concerning falconry made by the Review Board of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage may bring us a closer understanding of the philosophy contained in the ICH Convention and its Operational Guidelines. According to the resolution, falconry was initially a method of hunting for food. As time went on, it developed links with natural preservation, cultural heritage and social involvement within and across communities. It thus became a universal practice to train and breed falcons and build closer ties with them in many countries. Though details of the practice may differ, the basic approach to falcon training was generally the same. Falcon trainers viewed falcons as a group, and in their eyes, falconry meant ties with the past, as well as the link between nature and a traditional culture. The resolution especially stressed the tradition's role in providing long-lasting reassurance and pride to related communities and enhancing cultural identification. It also emphasized falconry's positive attributes, such as respect for the "natural state," help the protection of the natural environment and the falcon species. This conveys several meanings, which include but are not limited to falconry helps safeguard the ICH, enhances understanding and tolerance of diversified human culture, encourages and boosts mutual appreciation and inter-cultural dialogue, increases the pride and confidence of communities and people with a specific cultural tradition in their

own culture, protects the environment, makes man proceed with caution and consideration for the future when exploiting natural resources, fosters humanitarianism in those who are using and training animals, or in other words, treat animals with care, and builds ties with them by following their nature. All these measurements indicate a stance that not only respects diversified cultural traditions, but also conforms to the spirit of the existing UN human rights documents. The resolution explicitly conveys the direct correlation between safeguarding the ICH and sustainable human development, and then interprets how the relationship may exert a lasting influence on human social development.

The 12 countries which co-declared Nowruz are geographical neighbors and have a long history of inter-cultural communication. Thus, it is not hard to understand why they have similar or the same cultural practices. The action of the joint declaration itself is sufficient to prove that the Silk Road in history directly or indirectly boost communication and interaction among the countries along the Road. Besides, the expanding process of different batches of declarations, as a beneficial practice, also enhances mutual understanding and appreciation. Nowruz means "a new day," falling on the day of the spring equinox. The new year celebrations that begin from this day also witness people's praying for a better life. During the celebrations that last almost two weeks, people will embellish their dwelling places and neighboring places with decorations that symbolize purity, light, wealth and life vitality, and gather around the table with their family members for a big dinner. They will also get themselves dressed up, pay visits to friends and relatives, exchange presents with neighbors and pay honor to the elders. There are also large scale ceremony for Nowruz, which include music, dance and other types of street performances. In its resolution, the Review Board also held that Nowruz practices cover numerous cultural aspects,

such as ceremony, ritual, games, dining, music, dance, oral art and handicraft. Thus, in that way it helps enhance long-lasting social identification, promotes peace, harmony and mutual respect through family and public gatherings. It also increases mutual understanding between communities through social interactions. Under new circumstances, it might also permeate into more areas through the mass media, the Internet, research institutions, non-governmental organizations and other means. According to UN news, as a traditional festival, Nowruz is now celebrated on March 21 by 300 million.

Third, intangible cultural heritage must be shared across borders and the discourse system of the people-to-people connectivity must be enhanced. At the 2014 Central Working Conference on Nationality Affairs, President Xi Jinping noted that the areas housing ethnic minorities, always near the border and poor, serve as a repository of resources, a source of water and ecological barriers, and own their own culture. Only by understanding this can people truly understand the basic conditions of China. Bouchet, in his article “Pragmatics of Inter-Cultural Communication: The Bounded Openness of a Contradictory Perspective”, explains why inter-cultural communication should always be studied in context and how even though misunderstanding is normally at stake in inter-cultural communication, one can argue that the promotion of mutual understanding actually is of mutual interest for all of humanity... To be inter-cultural, a communication must not be infected by prejudices. Human beings cannot avoid evaluating situations, contexts, relations, people and cultures... Mutual respect and open-mindedness are better than disdain and dogmatism. Inter-cultural communication becomes more respectable when it acknowledges the variety of ways humans interact meaningfully and the plurality of their logic of (inter-) action. It is good and reasonable to value understanding because this

variety and pluralism have always kept society alive and now more than ever in our modern globalized world contributes to the creativity and interactivity of modern life (Bouchet, 2010). The rapid development and wide popularity gained by the UNESCO ICH Convention rightly provides a special context for our inter-cultural communication.

The discourse resources of people-to-people connectivity can be found in a large number of known ICH items. For example, the making and sharing of Uyghur flat bread, Mongolian yurt making, Chinese shadow puppetry and kirigami, which were listed in the 2003 ICH Convention, are marked by vestiges of inter-cultural influence everywhere, representing man's extraordinary ability to learn and recreate. Moreover, in terms of people-to-people connectivity, some traditional cultural expressions, from oral traditions (epics like *Manas*, *Gesar*, *Jangar* and *Langa Xihe*) to performing arts (*Maqam*, *Aytes*, *Khoomei* and polyphonic folk songs), from traditional holidays (*Dragon Boat Festival*, *Spring Festival*, *Mid-Autumn Festival*, *Tomb-sweeping Day* and *Water-Sprinkling Festival*) to life rituals (puberty and weddings), from knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe (abacus, 24 solar terms, acupuncture in traditional Chinese medicine, *Taijiquan* and *Kungfu*), to traditional handicraft (*Xuan paper*, *Longquan celadon*, *karez* and multi-ethnic musical instruments), whether they are inscribed on the ICH Convention, are mostly shared across borders and help reach non-governmental interaction and dialogues in a most natural manner. Indeed, silent, spontaneous cultural mutual learning proved more effective and lasting than programs choreographed and promoted by governments.

As mentioned, the definition of cultural heritage has been significantly expanded over the past decades, especially since the overall profile of cultural heritage has been raised as related treaties have built

international cooperative mechanisms and declarations on cultural heritage which have been gaining increasing global attention. China, as a country known for cultural and biological diversity, is home to 56 ethnicities who speak over 130 languages that make up a complex linguistic network. Those ethnicities have different living styles, their unique cultures and have developed spectacular system of local knowledge. These cultures and knowledge are the results of humoring the environment and also wisdom for a better life and greater development. Research into cultural heritage may shed significant light on the understanding of Chinese cultural patterns and the current situation of Chinese culture. Hao Shiyuan, in his speech “The Belt and Road and Cultural Diversity,” gave a consummate analysis on how Chinese cultural diversity is helping with and enriching the people-to-people connectivity during the advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative. He noted that:

Chinese ethnic minorities, due to historical reasons, have maintained traditional ties with neighboring countries and regions, which include similar languages, cultures, customs and religions. For example, The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region multi-ethnicity, multi-culture and multi-religion character connects it to countries in Central Asia and West Asia, even other Muslim countries. That is more of an edge than a disadvantage. These ethnic minorities bearing the attributes mentioned above must play an even bigger role in enhancing the people-to-people connectivity during the advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative.

President Xi Jinping, while citing Sima Qian’s conclusion about the pre-Qin, Qin and Han Dynasties— “Those who labor are from the south-east, while those who reap the labor fruits must come from the north-west”—noted that the advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative would bring goods to the ethnic minorities, especially

the border areas. The development of the western region must be deepened, and the opening-up and development of the border areas must be stepped up to explore the new space and sustain the national development. The “new space” contains the strength in cultural diversity of ethnic minorities in border areas, and the strength of these ethnic minorities in enhancing people-to-people connectivity during their “people first” development. In this sense, the basic philosophy of respecting differences and bridging gaps, promoted by Chinese policies concerning ethnic affairs, is completely parallel to the humanistic spirit, mutual benefit and win-win outcomes advocated by the Belt and Road Initiative in a broad sense (Hao, 2015).

It is noteworthy that, in recent years, doubts have been voiced, arguing that implementing ethnic policies and respecting ethnic identification will lead to alienation between ethnic groups and weaken national unity. Regarding this, UNDP gave a strong backlash in its Human Development Report 2004. It can thus be inferred that those doubts not only exist in China but also abroad, not only hang over today but also the past. The Report was cited as saying that there is no trade-off between diversity and state unity, respecting diversity and sustaining peace; recognizing cultural diversity and other human development priorities such as progress in development, democracy and human rights; or between respecting diversity and promoting development (The United Nations Development Programme, 2004). There is a lot that has been conveyed between the lines.

3. Conclusion: The Silk Road Spirit and the discourse system construction in the Belt and Road context

In May 2017, President Xi Jinping advocated

the Silk Road Spirit, which is interpreted as “peace & cooperation, openness & inclusiveness, and mutual learning & mutual benefit,” and injected new historical connotations into the Silk Road. Irina Bokova, (former) Director-General of UNESCO (2009-2017) and the first speaker at the parallel forum themed on “Enhancing People-to-people Connectivity” of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, in reviewing the past, said that, “For thousands of years, the Silk Road was telling a legend of encounters between peoples, cultures, religions and knowledge. It was a story about how mutual understanding led to human progress, reminding us that no culture can expect to flourish in seclusion.” She also added that links between people through soft power, such as the promotion of the Silk Road Spirit, culture and scientific innovation, would create new opportunities for peace and common prosperity, “The Belt and Road is a fundamental building of soft power, which provides youth with knowledge, values and open ideas, and enables them to build a more inclusive and more peaceful society, and unhindered, to master multiple languages and travel between different cultures. Cultural heritage conservation is closely linked with people-to-people connectivity. Hence digging into the discourse resources inside the cultural heritage conservation will provide the Belt and Road Initiative with intelligent support that is based on historical and cultural memory, a line of humanitarian thoughts and a sense of multiple identities that will enrich the meaning of inter-cultural communication and learning.

The principle of achieving shared growth through discussion and collaboration China adheres to in contributing to global governance has already been represented by such stately national-level expressions—a community of shared interests, shared responsibility and common destiny—and

has presented itself to the world in a most sincere posture. The Belt and Road Initiative is supposed to play a positive role by breaking the geographical regional barriers, facilitating communication and promoting peace of the world. What discourse resources can China’s cultural heritage conservation practices bring to the promotion of the world’s cultural diversity and the maintenance of the lasting peace? That is a question that must be primarily considered today.

People-to-people connectivity is the social foundation of the Belt and Road construction. Some scholars hold that the Belt and Road Initiative is not only an economic event, but also a cultural event, a hallmark of the re-emergence of the Chinese civilization (Zhao, 2015). That theory, in today’s context, has become an non-harmonious, even aggressive note against the spirit of inter-cultural communication and learning on an equal footing. However, it has also been noticed that some scholars have begun to study the regional cooperation and the tendency of the Belt and Road Initiative from the perspective of respecting cultural diversity and boosting inter-cultural dialogues (Liu & Huang, 2017). On all accounts, it must be remembered that only by creating a harmonious environment for inter-cultural dialogues, transforming culture into a discourse resource for communication, cooperation and mutual understanding, and telling the “China Stories” as well as the “Human Stories” in a world language, can our environment, ability and approaches concerning inter-cultural dialogues, peaceful cultural construction be improved at the local, national, bilateral, multilateral, sub-regional and regional levels. In this new era, the Silk Road, spanning thousands of years and trodden by numerous forefathers, now branches out into unquestionable “journeys” one after another, promising a brilliant future.

(Translator: Xu Qingtong; Editor: Yan Yuting)



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