The city of Xi’an, capital of Shaanxi province in central China, was the ancient capital of 13 dynasties and the eastern terminus of the Silk Road trade routes. Formerly named Ch’ang-an, the city is known as one of the “four great ancient capitals of China,” and holds a high degree of social, political, economic, and cultural significance in Chinese history. Of particular note are the archeological remains of the Tang Dynasty Daming Palace, the Hang Dynasty Ch’ang-an city site, and the Ming Dynasty walled city.

Today Xi’an faces numerous challenges common to many Chinese cities, including rapid urbanization and motorization. In this context, transportation, archaeological conservation, and urban development have become highly related issues that must be addressed in a comprehensive manner. Proposing to use the conservation of the Daming Palace site as a centerpiece for guiding future development, the State Administration of Cultural Heritage and the Xi’an Municipal People’s Government held the International Forum for the Construction of Daming Palace Cultural National Historical Park in October 2007, inviting international experts to discuss the project. Center for World Heritage Studies (CWHS) Director Arthur Chen and CWHS Faculty Affiliate Lance Neckar were invited participants in the forum.

The two alternative plans under evaluation both aim to protect the site as a research base for ongoing archeological work in an urban park that would redefine the center of the city and provide public space for local residents. One plan focuses on conservation of the Daming Palace site as a “heritage park,” to be implemented in six stages over a seven-year period. The other plan aims to move quickly to promote rapid urban development through the construction of an enormous Central Park-like space with the Daming Palace as its focus.

Given the important position of Xi’an as the eastern terminus of the Silk Road trading routes, Chinese officials also propose to use the development of the Daming Palace site in the preparation of a nomination of a portion of the Silk Road to UNESCO’s List of World Heritage Sites. In order to coordinate these efforts, the Daming Palace forum was held in conjunction with an International Symposium on the Application for World Heritage of the Silk Road.

The Center for World Heritage Studies, in close cooperation with UNESCO’s World Heritage Centre, has committed to assisting the Chinese authorities in their review of proposals for the Daming Palace site and the adjacent urban landscape, as well as a larger Silk Road nomination. In the coming year, CWHS will continue to provide technical assessments of plans for the conservation and management of archaeological resources and analysis of proposals, and will work to promote environmentally responsible development of the Daming Palace site.