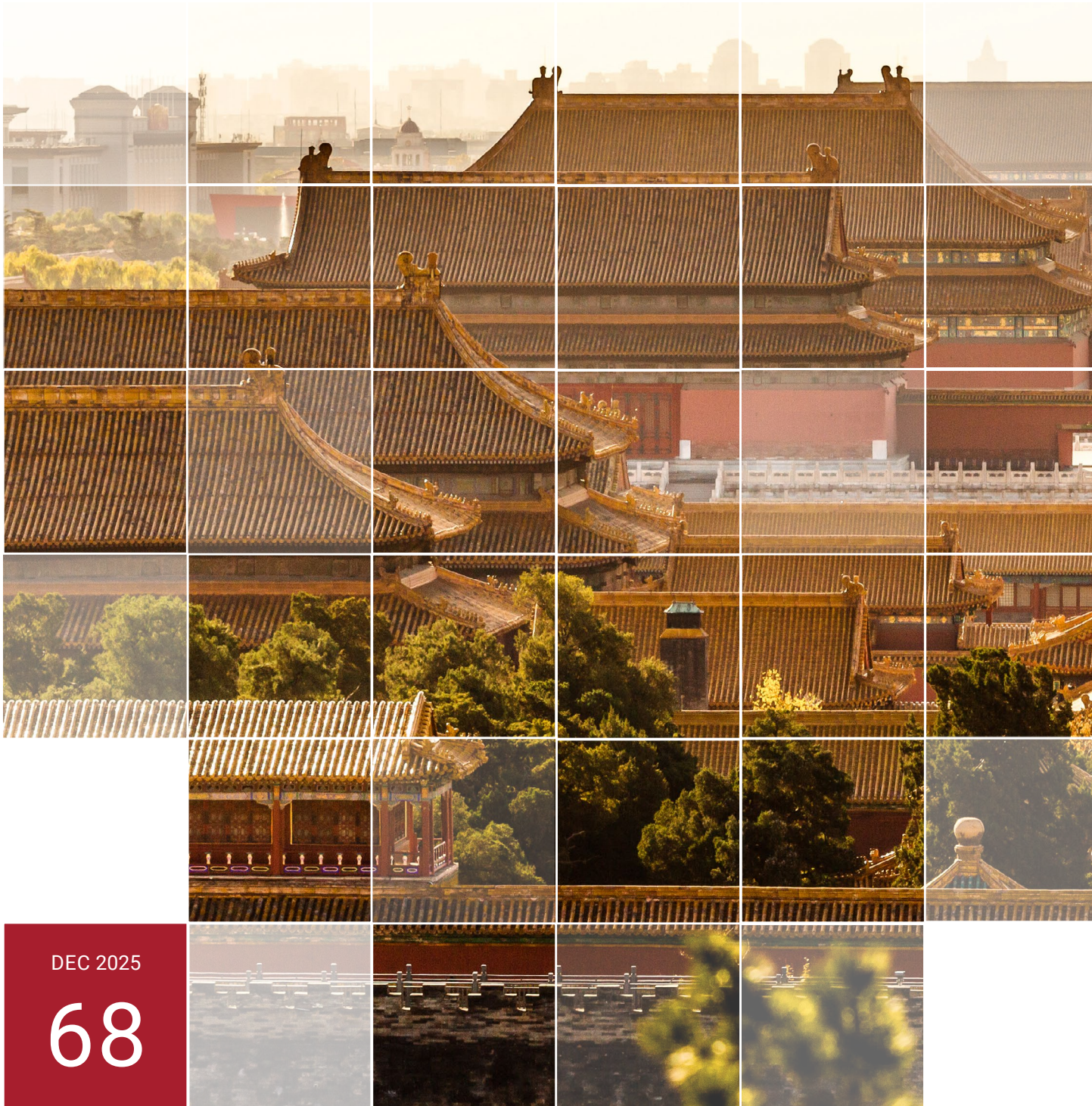


# WHITR-AP NEWSLETTER

World Heritage Institute of Training and Research for the Asia and the Pacific Region under the auspices of UNESCO



DEC 2025

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The World Heritage Institute of Training and Research for the Asia and the Pacific Region under the auspices of UNESCO (WHITR-AP) is a Category II institute under the auspices of UNESCO. It was the first international organisation in the field of world heritage to be established in a developing country. Mandated by the States Parties of the World Heritage Convention and other States Parties of UNESCO, the institute was founded to promote the conservation and development of World Heritage in Asia and Pacific Region. WHITR-AP has three branches in Beijing, Shanghai, and Suzhou.

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SPECIAL FEATURES

REVIEW OF THE GANSU REVITALIZATION AND INNOVATION PROJECT

Zhou Zijie, Park Lina, Hu Xiaoye (intern)  
WHITR-AP Beijing

In June 2024, WHITR-AP Beijing launched the Gansu Revitalization and Innovation Project (GRIP). Commissioned by the UNESCO Regional Office for East Asia, the project applies the “Cities, Culture and Creativity (CCC) Framework” jointly developed by UNESCO and the World Bank to systematically analyze how Gansu can translate global development concepts into localized action.

The project's key output, *Leveraging Culture and Creativity for Sustainable Development: Policy Guidelines for Gansu's Cultural and Creative Industries* (hereinafter referred to as the *Guidelines*), was jointly released by UNESCO and the People's Government of Gansu Province on 22 September 2025 at the 8th Silk Road (Dunhuang) International Cultural Expo, during the “Dunhuang Forum—The Forum on Global Knowledge Sharing for the Protection of Human Cultural Heritage and Creative Industries”. The bilingual digital edition was officially launched on the UNESCO digital library on 3 December 2025.

The *Guidelines* provide a tailored development pathway for Gansu, while also offering transferable experience for other provinces and municipalities in China, as well as for other countries and regions, seeking to promote sustainable and inclusive development through culture and creativity. This special feature section provides a brief retrospective of the project as a whole.

Fieldwork

To support the research, the project team organized two large-scale fieldwork campaigns. During the Joint Workshop on Cultural Heritage Conservation in July 2024, teachers and students were divided into four groups to conduct investigations in Tianshui, Dingxi, Zhangye, and Longnan. In August, additional field visits focused specifically on Jiuquan and Dunhuang.

The 2024 Joint Workshop on Cultural Heritage Conservation, a Peking University summer course, opened in Lanzhou, Gansu Province. It was jointly organized by WHITR-AP Beijing, the School of Archaeology and Museology of Peking University, and the Public Archaeology and Art Center of Peking University. A total of 25 teachers and students from 13 universities participated.

During the workshop, surveys were conducted in seven areas: Ganzhou District of Zhangye City; Qin'an County and Maiji District of Tianshui City; Tongwei County and Lintao County of Dingxi City; and Wudu District and Cheng County of Longnan City. The teams examined cultural resources and cultural and creative industries, exploring how heritage contributes to local cultural tourism and competitiveness within the cultural and creative industries framework.



Group Photo from the Closing Ceremony © WHITR-AP Beijing

During the field research in August 2024, the group was divided into three teams to conduct site visits across seven areas of Jiuquan City—Suzhou District, Jinta County, Yumen City, Guazhou County, Dunhuang City, Subei Mongolian Autonomous County, and Aksai Kazakh Autonomous County. Using the CCC framework as the foundation, the teams developed an assessment indicator system tailored to the context of Gansu Province.

The fieldwork covered six major cultural core regions of Gansu, with each group focusing on distinctive regional resources:

- **Zhangye Group** conducted in-depth research in Ganzhou District, focusing on Silk Road-related historical heritage and intangible cultural heritage (ICH). The group visited more than 20 sites, including the Zhangye Museum, the Colorful Danxia Scenic Area, and the Dafo Temple. It held discussions with government departments, cultural and tourism enterprises, and ICH inheritors. By combining group-based and joint investigations, the team systematically reviewed practical pathways for integrating cultural and creative industries with tourism, collected over 60 visitor questionnaires, and generated first-hand references for marketization of

traditional craftsmanship and innovation in cultural tourism projects.



Group Photo of the Zhangye Team with the Person in Charge of Chuanshi Classic Culture Development Co., Ltd. © WHITR-AP Beijing

- **Dingxi Group** visited Lintao and Tongwei counties, focusing on Majiayao polychrome pottery culture and Tongwei calligraphy and painting. Key sites such as the Majiayao site and Yuxin International Calligraphy and Painting Village were surveyed. Through in-depth exchanges with practitioners of paper-cutting, shadow tune, and straw weaving, the group examined models that integrate public cultural infrastructure development with rural revitalization under World Bank-financed projects, and explored the cultural and creative potential of the Loess Plateau–West Qinling transition zone.



The Dingxi Team Conducting Field Research in Majiayao Village © WHITR-AP Beijing

- **Tianshui Group** concentrated on Qinzhou District, Maiji District, and Qin'an County, centering on Fuxi culture, the Maijishan Grottoes, and the Dadiwan Site. The group visited cultural and tourism bureaus, museums, and the Grotto Art Research Institute, experienced the immersive performance *Tianshui Through the Ages*, and conducted in-depth research on key issues such as the “integration of museums and temples” management model, digital conservation of grottoes, and the operation of ICH

workshops, analyzing how cultural and creative industries enhance urban competitiveness.



The Tianshui Team Visiting Tianshui Ancient Street © WHITR-AP Beijing

- **Longnan Group** conducted fieldwork in Wudu District and Cheng County, focusing on construction of cultural institutions and the layout of cultural tourism industries in a post-disaster reconstruction context. The group examined projects such as the Wanxiang Cave Scenic Area and Zhangba Ancient Village homestays, interviewed inheritors of Gaoshan opera, wood carving, and dough figurines, and emphasized research on the development of the “Wudu Impressions” cultural and creative brand, as well as innovative practices at Longnan Normal University, including ICH courses entering schools and university–enterprise collaboration. The group explored regionally coordinated approaches to cultural tourism development.



Group Photo of the Longnan Team © WHITR-AP Beijing

- **Jiuquan Group** conducted extensive field research across Suzhou District, Jinta County, Yumen City, and the counties of Guazhou, Subei, and Aksai. Focusing on four major categories—tangible cultural heritage, intangible cultural heritage, cultural enterprises, and public cultural institutions—the



team examined diverse local practices related to historical heritage, industrial heritage, ethnic heritage, and community-level cultural facilities. Through visits to traditional craft workshops such as night-light cup carving, Jinta woodcarving, and Xun (ocarina) making, as well as conversations with cultural and tourism enterprises, county-level museums and cultural centers, film and television bases, and heritage sites including Suoyang City and the Yulin Grottoes, the team mapped the characteristics and driving forces of cultural–tourism integration, ICH revitalization, and public cultural services along the Hexi Corridor. Their findings distilled feasible pathways and practical insights for the coordinated development of multiple forms of cultural resources.



Group photo of the Jiuquan Team © WHITR-AP Beijing



Mogao Li Craftsmen Village – Du Yongwei's Dunhuang Clay Sculpture ICH Studio © WHITR-AP Beijing

• **Dunhuang Group** centered its research on the cultural heritage and cultural industries of Dunhuang City and its surrounding areas, covering five major categories: natural heritage, tangible cultural heritage, intangible cultural heritage, public cultural institutions, and cultural enterprises. The investigation focused on three key zones—the Mogao Cave Scenic Area, Mingsha Mountain Scenic Area, and Dunhuang urban area. The team

visited the Cultural and Creative Research Center and Exhibition Hall of the Dunhuang Academy, the Dunhuang Museum and Cultural Center, the National Cultural Industry Demonstration Park, Dunhuang Expo Park, Dunhuang Bookstore, the night market, Yueyaquan photography town, and Mogao Li Craftsmen Village, and conducted assessments of major cultural performance projects such as *Thousand Hands Thousand Eyes*, *Dunhuang in Motion*, and *Dunhuang Splendour*.

Throughout the research process, all groups combined on-site observation, in-depth interviews, and questionnaire surveys. They engaged with museums, heritage conservation areas, and ICH workshops, while also coordinating with cultural and tourism authorities and World Bank project offices, and communicating widely with inheritors, artists, business leaders, and local residents. Through the systematic application of the CCC Framework, the teams not only documented practical experiences and challenges in cultural heritage conservation across different locales, but also focused on core issues such as the market-oriented transformation of cultural resources, the living transmission of ICH, and innovation in culture–tourism integration. These findings, combining theoretical value with practical guidance, laid a solid foundation for subsequent report writing.

Report Preparation

Following the completion of fieldwork, the project team began data consolidation and drafting. The *Guidelines* cover nine counties and districts along the Silk Road, aiming to support Gansu in integrating culture and creativity into its sustainable development strategies. They elaborate on how Gansu leverages its rich cultural assets—including seven World Heritage properties, five elements inscribed on UNESCO's ICH lists, 83 national-level ICH items, and a diverse cultural and creative industry base—to promote inclusive growth, improve community well-being, and drive innovation.

Based on the UNESCO–World Bank CCC Framework, the *Guidelines* systematically analyze how Gansu translates global development principles into local action.

The framework report indicates that through enabling measures—such as improving cultural infrastructure, cultivating human capital, building digital ecosystems, and advancing inclusive policies—Gansu is well positioned to expand employment channels, promote rural revitalization, and enhance quality of urban life.

The study also emphasizes that the value of culture and creativity extends beyond economics, contributing positively to social cohesion, community identity, and the inclusion of vulnerable groups.

Release of Project Outcomes

On 22 September 2025, the “Dunhuang Forum—the Forum on Global Knowledge Sharing for the Protection of Human Cultural Heritage and Creative Industries,” part of the 8th Silk Road (Dunhuang) International Cultural Expo, was held in Dunhuang, Gansu Province. Jointly organized by the World Bank, UN Tourism, UNESCO, and the Gansu Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism, the forum brought together more than 100 government representatives, scholars, and industry leaders from 13 countries and regions and 4 international organizations. Participants gathered to discuss pathways for cultural heritage protection and innovative development, promoting mutual learning among civilizations and coordinated regional development.

At the forum, the *Leveraging Culture and Creativity for Sustainable Development: Policy Guideline for Gansu's Cultural and Creative Industries* was officially released. Developed under the *Gansu Revitalization and Innovation Project*, a collaboration between the Gansu Provincial Government, UNESCO, and the World Bank, the core research and drafting were led by the WHITR-AP Beijing. Drawing on the jointly developed UNESCO–World Bank “Cities, Culture and Creativity (CCC)” framework, the guide provides an in-depth analysis of how Gansu can translate global consensus into local actions. It further explores how Gansu can leverage its unique cultural resources to become a hub for cultural tourism, creative entrepreneurship, and cross-regional cooperation. The report serves as an important reference for local governments, industry practitioners, and the academic community.



Release of the Policy Guideline for Gansu's Cultural and Creative Industries © 第八届丝绸之路（敦煌）国际文化博览会

The bilingual Chinese–English digital version of the report has been published on UNESCO's Digital Library.

During the forum, Chinese and international guests exchanged experiences around three major themes: “Protection of Human Cultural Heritage and Mutual Learning among World Civilizations,” “International Tourism Cooperation and Regional Economic Development,” and “Cultural Heritage Protection and Creative Industry Development.” Li Kuanghan, Executive Director of the WHITR-AP Beijing, was invited to attend and shared the WHITR-AP Beijing's practical experiences and achievements in international cooperation in world heritage conservation and the promotion of creative industries during the roundtable discussion.

From the project's launch in June 2024 to the global online release of the bilingual *Guidelines* in December 2025, the Gansu Revitalization and Innovation Project, led by WHITR-AP Beijing, has taken the UNESCO–World Bank CCC Framework as its core foundation. Through cross-regional fieldwork covering Gansu's six major cultural core regions, and by integrating the academic insights and local practice of 25 faculty members and students from 13 universities, the project achieved a full cycle from on-the-ground research to policy translation. The publication of the *Guidelines* not only provides reference pathways for the living transmission of cultural heritage, deep integration of culture and tourism, and upgrading of creative industries in Gansu, but also, through an innovative “global ideas + local practice” model, offers a replicable and scalable example for culture- and creativity-driven sustainable development in China and beyond. It demonstrates the strong synergy between international organizations, academic research, and local development, injecting lasting momentum into the transmission and innovation of Silk Road culture.



# IN FOCUS

## UNESCO Priority Initiatives

### **WHITR-AP participated in the UNESCO–Africa–China Symposium on World Heritage Capacity-Building and Cooperation**

**Zhou Zijie**  
WHITR-AP Beijing

From 19 to 20 October 2025, the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, the Fujian Provincial Administration of Cultural Heritage, and the Quanzhou Municipal People's Government jointly organized the "UNESCO–Africa–China Symposium on World Heritage Capacity-Building and Cooperation" in Quanzhou, Fujian Province. Aiming to advance in-depth cooperation between China and Africa in World Heritage nomination, protection, management, and capacity building, the event sought to support African countries in enhancing their heritage conservation capabilities. Nearly 100 participants attended the event, including representatives of government agencies, leaders of international organizations, heritage experts, scholars, and practitioners from China, UNESCO, and African countries.

WHITR-AP actively participated in the discussions and exchanges throughout the symposium. Song Feng, Deputy Director of WHITR-AP Beijing, joined two roundtable sessions—"Implementing the Nairobi Results: Strengthening Africa's Nomination and Capacity-Building Efforts" and "Potential Nomination Projects of Underrepresented African States." Together with experts from Kenya, Comoros, Mali, and other countries, he discussed the opportunities and challenges in African World Heritage nominations and capacity building, sharing China's practices and experiences in heritage nomination and management.

Li Kuanghan, Executive Director of WHITR-AP Beijing, took part in the roundtable discussion on "World Heritage Education and University Cooperation." She engaged in in-depth exchanges on the development of World Heritage education systems, youth training, and cooperation with higher education institutions, and introduced WHITR-AP Beijing's initiatives and practices—under the management of Peking University—in advancing heritage education and international collaboration.

At the "Digital Innovation for Heritage Conservation and Management" session, Li Xin, Deputy Secretary-General of WHITR-AP, delivered a keynote speech titled "Co-creating the Heritage Universe: Innovations in Digitally-Driven Heritage Education Models." She emphasized the need to address the systemic changes brought by technology to the heritage field,

calling on all stakeholders to collaborate in building digital platforms, foster cross-sector innovation, and achieve holistic model innovation, enabling heritage to better embrace the digital era.

The event further strengthened cooperation between China and African countries in the fields of World Heritage conservation and capacity building. Building on this momentum, WHITR-AP Beijing will continue to focus on China–Africa cooperation in higher education and capacity building, deepening collaboration with African countries in heritage protection, academic research, and talent cultivation, and contributing to a more robust China–Africa heritage cooperation network.



### **WHITR-AP Shanghai was invited to participate in the MONDIACULT 2025**

**Plácido González Martínez, Pei Jieting**  
WHITR-AP Shanghai

WHITR-AP Shanghai was invited to participate in MONDIACULT 2025, held in Barcelona, Spain, from 29 September to 1 October 2025. After the first two MONDIACULT Conferences in 1982 and 2022 in Mexico City, this third edition—officially titled the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development—was hosted by the Government of Spain at the Barcelona International Convention Centre (CCIB).

As UNESCO's highest-level global conference on cultural policy, MONDIACULT 2025 brought together more than 2,500 participants from 163 countries, including 118 Ministers and Vice-Ministers of Culture. The event also welcomed representatives from

around 90 intergovernmental organizations and over 100 NGOs. The Conference convened global stakeholders committed to advancing culture's role at the core of the sustainable development agenda and reaffirmed the growing international recognition of culture as a key dimension of development policy.

#### **Background**

MONDIACULT is UNESCO's highest-level global conference on cultural policies, shaping how countries understand and implement cultural rights and cultural development. Following the first two editions in Mexico City (1982 and 2022), the selection of Barcelona as host for MONDIACULT 2025 is particularly significant: the city is home to nine UNESCO World Heritage properties; has been designated a UNESCO Creative City for Literature since 2015; and, since 2021, has hosted the International Center for Human and Social Sciences, a UNESCO Category 2 Center located at CaixaForum Macaya.

The Conference took place at a highly strategic moment. With the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development drawing near its conclusion, UNESCO and the Government of Spain seized the opportunity to advance the recognition of culture as a stand-alone Sustainable Development Goal in the post-2030 global development agenda.

As the host nation, the Government of Spain played a central role in promoting the event, with Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, Minister of Culture Ernest Urtezar and Minister for Foreign Affairs José Manuel Albares, serving as key figures in its inauguration and agenda-setting. The Spanish Ministry of Culture was a major partner in hosting the Conference and organized activities such as Mondiyouth, which held a prominent place in the programme. The Spanish

Ministry of Foreign Affairs also played a prominent role in co-organizing pre-conference workshops and side events, advocating for themes like culture for peace and the role of artificial intelligence in culture, as highlighted by Minister Albares in his opening address.

#### **Antecedents: why MONDIACULT is important.**

MONDIACULT 1982 was UNESCO's first global conference on cultural policies. Held in Mexico City during the Cold War, it brought to the fore debates on cultural identity, post-colonial state-building and media concentration that dominated international policy-making at the time. The conference established a broad conception of culture, extending beyond the arts to include ways of life, values, traditions and identities, and firmly linked culture to development. This landmark meeting laid the philosophical foundations of contemporary cultural policy and planted the intellectual seed for subsequent efforts to place culture at the heart of development.

40 years later, MONDIACULT 2022 again convened in Mexico City. Held amid accelerated globalization and digitalization and in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, it exposed the cultural sector's vulnerabilities and addressed a set of urgent contemporary challenges, including cultural rights, digital governance, the status of artists and the climate crisis. The 2022 conference updated the 1982 policy framework for the digital age and emphasized the need to embed culture as a formal priority within global development architecture.

Building on this legacy, Mexico continued to play an important role in the organization of MONDIACULT 2025, reflecting its sustained influence and contributions in the field of global cultural policy.



**What was discussed at MONDIACULT 2025**

UNESCO's leadership at MONDIACULT 2025 underscored its strong commitment to placing culture at the centre of the global agendas for peace and sustainable development. In this context, UNESCO actively advanced the recognition of culture as a stand-alone development goal within the post-2030 sustainable development framework. Culture is not only a driver of economic growth but also a fundamental human right, playing a critical role in fostering identity, social cohesion and societal resilience.

The thematic focus of MONDIACULT 2025 addressed the multidimensional role of culture in sustainable development, structured around six major areas: cultural rights; digital technologies in the cultural sector; culture and education; the cultural economy; culture and climate action; and cultural, heritage and crisis response. Particular emphasis was placed on the cross-cutting themes of "culture and peace" and "artificial intelligence and culture."

The key thematic discussions addressed the following topics:

- Cultural rights: Discussions highlighted cultural rights as fundamental to safeguarding human dignity, enabling individual fulfilment, and strengthening social cohesion. Ensuring their protection has therefore become an ethical, social and economic imperative, and a cornerstone for advancing culture as a global public good.

- Digital technologies in the culture sector: The sessions addressed the ongoing digital transformation reshaping the cultural sector, bringing both opportunities and challenges. Priority areas included strengthening skills for cultural employment in the digital era and improving equitable access to digital platforms.

- Culture and education: Discussions emphasised the importance of integrating culture across education systems, including the development of locally grounded models that incorporate cultural heritage, historical memory and traditional knowledge.

- Economy of culture: The debate examined the cultural sector's substantive contribution to economic development, the need to promote decent work and the urgency of strengthening policy frameworks and governance models.

- Culture and climate action: Sessions explored how culture is both vulnerable to climate change and a

key resource for climate adaptation and resilience. Participants stressed the need for comprehensive and inclusive policy frameworks that enable culture to contribute effectively to climate action.

- Culture, heritage and crisis: The conference called for the establishment of cultural crisis response mechanisms to protect cultural heritage from climate-related and disaster threats, and to combat illicit trafficking of cultural property resolutely through strengthened legal frameworks and international cooperation.

- Culture and peace: The role of culture in building peace, fostering dialogue, and promoting human rights and gender equality was a key theme.

- Artificial intelligence and culture: The ethical integration of artificial intelligence in cultural domains was a major topic, including its implications for education, gender equality, artistic creation, and the creative economy.

**What are the major outcomes of MONDIACULT 2025?**

The main outcome of the Conference is the adoption of the MONDIACULT 2025 Declaration. The key takeaway is the inclusion of a significant call to formally recognize culture as a sustainable development goal in the post-2030 development agenda, placing it on an equal footing with other major global priorities such as health and education. Discussions emphasized the need for a coordinated and collaborative approach, linking culture to global challenges and advocating for its role as a global public good, with a particular insight on:

- MONDIACULT assessed the progress on cultural policy, reviewing and reporting on advances, opportunities, and challenges since the 2022 MONDIACULT Declaration. Most importantly, the Conference offered the opportunity to present and discuss the first Global Report on the State of Culture, based on three years of data and case studies.

- Another important task was the promotion of cultural rights. In this sense, the attendance by top decision-makers helped to ensure that cultural rights, both individual and collective, are guaranteed in public policy. Most importantly, all parties agreed on the need to strengthen legal and policy frameworks so that marginalized communities have the right to cultural expression.

- A key issue was to address digital transformation

and AI. The variety of discussions on this topic helped to examine how digital technologies, and especially AI, are affecting culture, creativity, and cultural sectors. In this framework, there was a proposal to develop common regulatory solutions to ensure fair compensation, intellectual property protection, and rights for creators in the digital age.

- An important claim, which connects directly with WHITR-AP's mission, is to integrate culture into education. The Conference showed a consensus to promote the role of culture and the arts in education systems as a way to foster creativity, identity, and inclusion. Furthermore, there is a shared agreement on how to use cultural education to strengthen community bonds and cultural heritage awareness.

- Supporting the cultural economy is a highly important concern, addressed with a focus on how cultural industries and creative sectors contribute to economic growth, jobs, and sustainable development. Furthermore, there is request to improve policies that support cultural professionals, artistic workers, and creative entrepreneurship.

- All parties addressed the convenience to face the climate change challenge through culture, exploring the cultural dimensions of climate action and how culture can help societies adapt, mitigate, and respond to climate change. Debates also addressed how to use cultural heritage and practices to build resilience and awareness around environmental issues.

- There is also an important need to protect cultural heritage in crisis, strengthening international cooperation to safeguard heritage in emergency situations, such as conflict, disasters, looting, destruction. There is also a commitment to raise awareness about trafficking of cultural property and promote legal and policy measures to counter it.

- Reflections on situations of conflict, and especially in Gaza, were constant throughout the Conference. Addressing this important challenge there was a constant call to promote a culture of peace, using culture as a tool for dialogue, reconciliation, peacebuilding, and conflict prevention. This included the need to recognize cultural expression as a means to build social cohesion, mutual understanding, and human dignity.

- Part of a parallel process to avoid future situations of conflict, there was a call to strengthen multilateral and inclusive cultural governance. Reaching this goal was trusted to initiatives fostering multilateral cooperation among countries and institutions to set

a shared global cultural agenda. There were also calls to engage a wide variety of stakeholders – governments, civil society, youth, local authorities – in participatory dialogue. Participants pleaded to support member states in improving their cultural information systems (data, policy research, metrics) so public policy is more effective.

- Economic sustainability was also a key topic amidst calls to ensure sustainable funding for culture. This included a call for more and better investment in cultural policies, including in times of crisis and for long-term resilience, as well as to make cultural spending a priority in public budgets and development aid, especially as culture is framed as a public good.



**Specific initiatives emerging from MONDIACULT 2025**

A variety of initiatives emerged with a common agreement on considering culture as a human right as well as a global public good, and reaffirming that culture should be embedded as a "pillar" of sustainable development and called for it to become a stand-alone goal in the UN's post-2030 development agenda. Among the specific initiatives emanating from MONDIACULT 2025, are:

- After three years of work, UNESCO published its first-ever Global Report on the State of Culture comprising all new data, figures and analysis on the culture sector from heritage, creativity to cities. This Global Report was co-funded by the European Union.

- The presentation of the Virtual Museum of Stolen Cultural Objects: an immersive digital platform to raise awareness and cooperate internationally against illicit trafficking.

- At the local level, there was a remarkable success on the organization of a "Civic Agora", thought as a participatory space open to civil society, promoted



by the Spanish Ministry of Culture; the regional Generalitat government and the Barcelona municipal government.

- Arab States promoted The Jeddah Declaration in the context of the lead-up to the main global MONDIACULT conference: resulting from a conference of Islamic Culture Ministers that occurred in Jeddah in February 2025, it affirmed culture's role in development, highlighted the need to protect heritage and cultural institutions from climate change, and officially supported Saudi Arabia's bid to host the next MONDIACULT conference in 2029.

- There was a concrete call for orienting efforts for "heritage recovery" in crisis zones: UNESCO mentions heritage projects in places like Mosul, Beirut, Gaza, and Ukraine.

All these ideas and initiatives inspire the Mondiacult 2025 Outcome Document, which was presented by the Spanish Culture Minister, Ernest Urtasun, as Chair of Mondiacult 2025, reaffirming shared values and policy goals on cultural rights, AI ethics, and peace.

Participation of WHITR-AP

WHITR-AP Shanghai participated in MONDIACULT 2025 through the representation of Prof. Plácido González Martínez, Project Advisor of WHITR-AP Shanghai. Prof. González Martínez engaged in the main conference discussions, highlighting WHITR-AP's role as a key regional actor and contributing particularly to debates on heritage, education and artificial intelligence (AI)—areas aligned with WHITR-AP's recent initiative on the International Network for Urban–Rural Heritage Conservation in Higher Education Institutions (UHC-HEI).

During the Conference, WHITR-AP met with Dr Lazare Eloundou, Director of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, to explore avenues for strengthened cooperation. WHITR-AP also engaged with the Mexican delegation, including leaders of the PALECH Network (Latin America Pact for Education with Human Qualities), which brings together 188 institutions in the region. Further exchanges took place with organizations working in diverse regional contexts, such as CRESPIAL (Regional Centre for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Latin America), a UNESCO Category 2 Centre in Peru, and the Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda. These contacts are expected to broaden recognition of WHITR-AP's education and training work and to catalyze concrete cooperation with global culture partners.

Through its participation, WHITR-AP aims to enhance the visibility of its operational work, particularly in education, training and capacity-building, and to reinforce its cooperation with global partners in the cultural field.

Conclusion

Mondiacult 2025 was an extremely successful global gathering, marked by its scale, the variety and quality of the topics addressed and the speakers involved. The Conference benefited from strong support from the Spanish authorities at all levels, ensuring the smooth delivery of an intensive and well-organized three-day programme.

Compared with the 2022 edition, MONDIACULT 2025 marked clear progress, moving conceptual norm-setting to more concrete implementation. MONDIACULT 2022 defined cultural rights, declared culture as a global public good, and laid the groundwork for a global policy framework. MONDIACULT 2025 advanced this vision by addressing operational pathways, introducing new priorities (among them, AI and peace), building data infrastructure, and reinforcing culture's role in crisis response and sustainable development.

WHITR-AP Shanghai participated in SIDS World Heritage Consultation

Marie-Noël Tournoux, Tang Zhuping (intern)  
WHITR-AP Shanghai

On 12 September 2025, upon the invitation of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Ms Marie-Noël Tournoux, Project Director of WHITR-AP Shanghai, attended the online consultation on "Identifying and Streamlining World Heritage Global Priorities for Small Island Developing States (SIDS)" in Shanghai.

The meeting aimed to develop a dedicated World Heritage Strategy for SIDS through an inclusive consultation process. The future strategy seeks to streamline priority actions from existing regional plans, establishing clear goals with sustainable development and climate resilience at its core. It also aims to strengthen South-South cooperation and international collaboration, with the final strategy intended for examination at the 48th session of the World Heritage Committee in 2026.

Opening the Consultation

The meeting was chaired by Ms Himalchuli Gurung, Head of the Asia-Pacific Unit at the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, and introduced by Ms Jyoti Hosagrahar, Deputy Director of the Centre.

Ms Sachiko Haraguchi, Coordinator of the World Heritage Programme for Small Island Developing States, introduced the initiative. She presented key data, noting that the 39 SIDS are better understood as "large ocean spaces", underscoring their significant maritime territories and heritage value. All SIDS have now ratified the World Heritage Convention, with 37 properties listed across 24 SIDS and 104 sites on Tentative Lists from 32 SIDS.

Presenting Key Findings and Challenges

Ms Lorna Abungu, consultant for the World Heritage Centre, presented initial findings from a baseline survey and desk study. Key recommendations align with the results of the Third Cycle of Periodic Reporting and include securing sustainable funding, enhancing conservation, and fostering community engagement. She emphasized pervasive challenges such as financial constraints, insufficient capacity, and climate change acting as a "risk multiplier".

Mr David Sheppard, lead author of the IUCN study "Natural World Heritage in Oceania," presented its key findings. He highlighted that Oceania remains severely underrepresented on the World Heritage List despite its exceptional biodiversity and cultural richness. The report calls for urgent action, including updating Tentative Lists, increasing support, and fostering community-driven approaches.

Voices from the States Parties and C2Cs' Contributions

Following the presentations, representatives from SIDS in the Asia-Pacific region provided insights into their specific contexts. They confirmed the consultation's outcomes and detailed challenges such as the complex nomination process, lack of funding and competency, and the urgent impacts of climate change.

Three UNESCO Category 2 Centres (C2Cs) attended the meeting: WHITR-AP Shanghai, HIST, and WHIPIC. Ms Tournoux thanked UNESCO for the invitation and highlighted the value of listening to States Parties and site managers for WHITR-AP to further develop its actions. She briefly presented key areas of WHITR-

AP's expertise, particularly in training related to the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach, Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA), and World Heritage management and nominations. Her comments were followed by contributions from HIST and WHIPIC.

The consultation underscored the critical need for targeted international cooperation and capacity-building to support SIDS in safeguarding their unique and vulnerable heritage.

2025 Advanced Course on Conservation and Restoration Techniques of Traditional Architecture for the Asia-Pacific Region was successfully held in Langzhong, Sichuan

Jiang Yeqin  
WHITR-AP Suzhou

From October 20 to 26, the 2025 Advanced Course on Conservation and Restoration Techniques of Traditional Architecture for the Asia-Pacific Region was successfully held in the ancient city of Langzhong, Sichuan. The workshop drew more than 30 professionals from across China and the Macao Special Administrative Region, including university professors, heads of heritage architecture firms, researchers from cultural and museum institutions, and practicing architects.

Senior international experts in cultural heritage conservation, along with distinguished professors specializing in the preservation of ancient architecture from institutions such as Peking University, Tongji University, and Sichuan University, were invited to



# IN FOCUS

## Featured Programmes of three sub-centres

deliver lectures. They were joined by inheritors of Suzhou's "Xiangshan Bang" traditional construction techniques, local conservation experts from Langzhong, and outstanding representatives from the "2025 Asia-Pacific Young Masters for Heritage Conservation" programme. Through a combination of thematic lectures, field visits to Langzhong Ancient City, and case-study discussions, the workshop used Langzhong as a practical example to explore innovative approaches for the dynamic inheritance and sustainable development of historic cultural districts.

The training programme was made possible with the strong support of the UNESCO Regional Office for East Asia and the Langzhong Ancient City Conservation Administration. As of 2025, WHITR-AP Suzhou has held 17 consecutive annual editions of this workshop. In collaboration with universities, research institutions, and enterprises both domestically and internationally, WHITR-AP Suzhou has trained more than a thousand heritage professionals from over 30 countries across the Asia-Pacific region, playing a key role in preserving and promoting the region's ancient architectural heritage.

In recent years, WHITR-AP Suzhou has prioritized "Heritage Inheritance for Youth" and has launched innovative initiatives such as the "Youth and Traditional Building Skills Symposium" and the "Asia-Pacific Youth Masters for Heritage Conservation" international exchange programme. These efforts are aimed at expanding platforms for international exchange and cooperation in heritage conservation and at fostering a distinctive "Suzhou approach" to cultural heritage preservation.

### Inaugural UHC-HEI International Conference was held at Tongji University

Pei JiETING  
WHITR-AP Shanghai

On the morning of 25 October 2025, the inaugural international conference of the International Network for Urban-rural Heritage Conservation in Higher Education Institutions (UHC-HEI), initiated by the Network and hosted by Tongji University, officially opened in Shanghai. Under the theme "Reshaping Heritage Conservation in Higher Education: Why? How? For Whom?", the conference established a global platform for dialogue, bringing together over 200 experts and scholars from more than 30 countries to address the complex challenges in urban and rural heritage education, and to explore future directions for educational goals, methodological innovation, and capacity development in the field.

### Opening ceremony: A shared vision for heritage education

Prof. Shao Yong, Director of the World Heritage Institute of Training and Research for the Asia and the Pacific Region under the auspices of UNESCO, Shanghai Centre (WHITR-AP Shanghai), and Professor at the College of Architecture and Urban Planning (CAUP), Tongji University, chaired the opening ceremony. Opening remarks were delivered by Prof. Zhao Xianzhong, Member of the CPC Standing Committee and Vice-President of Tongji University; Mr Ernesto Ottone Ramírez, UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Culture; Mr Song Xinchao, President of ICOMOS China; Mr Hu Min, Director of the Division for History and Culture Preservation, Department of Energy Conservation and Technology, Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development; and Prof. Wang Lan, Dean of the College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Tongji University.

Zhao Xianzhong (Tongji University) emphasized that the conference directly engages with the three fundamental questions of heritage education: why we teach, how we teach, and for whom we teach. He noted that, in the face of increasingly complex global challenges in urban and rural heritage conservation, profound innovation in educational content and methodology is urgently needed. As a pioneer in heritage education in China, Tongji University will build upon the newly established UHC-HEI platform to foster a global cooperation network aimed at



advancing sustainable development. He highlighted that the conference's five thematic forums focus on key issues such as the history of heritage education and the integration of new technologies, and underscored youth participation as a central driving force for the long-term vitality of heritage education.

Ernesto Ottone Ramírez (UNESCO) congratulated the network and welcomed the conference as a timely contribution to updating teaching, research and practice in heritage conservation. He commended WHITR-AP's role as a Category II centre in advancing participatory and inclusive approaches and positioned the Recommendation on Historic Urban Landscape (2011) as a key conceptual anchor. He also noted UNESCO's operational tools, such as urban heritage atlases and knowledge repositories and called for deeper collaboration between Universities, ICOMOS, ICCROM and other partners to integrate education innovation with the Sustainable Development Goals.

Song Xinchao (ICOMOS China) remarked that the conference theme responds directly to the needs of the present era and speaks to the core of the heritage cause. He emphasized that heritage education serves as a bridge to the future and must nurture a new generation of professionals who combine technical excellence with a strong sense of social

responsibility and mission. He underscored that, in a time when global cultural diversity faces increasing challenges, heritage education should place greater emphasis on linking local practice with international vision. He also expressed ICOMOS China's strong commitment to deepening cooperation with the UHC-HEI Network to jointly advance the integration of heritage conservation into sustainable development processes.

Hu Min (Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development) conveyed congratulations on the convening of the conference and noted that the conference holds particular significance at a time when China places strong emphasis on the protection and transmission of historical and cultural heritage. He commended Tongji University for its systematic contributions to research, practice and talent cultivation in the field of urban and rural heritage conservation. He also put forward three recommendations for the future development of higher education: to deepen the theoretical framework of heritage conservation with Chinese characteristics; to promote practice-oriented innovation that responds to real-world challenges; and to cultivate well-rounded professionals with both a strong sense of national commitment and a broad international vision.

Wang Lan (College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Tongji University) delivered remarks on behalf of the host institution. She highlighted the College's longstanding commitment to advancing innovation in heritage education through an interdisciplinary approach since its establishment in 1952. She introduced CAUP's initiatives in developing the programme on Historic Building Conservation Engineering, establishing a materials pathology laboratory, and promoting international joint teaching. She affirmed that, building upon the UHC-HEI platform, the College will continue to explore new models for heritage education and capacity building through curriculum renewal, practice-based innovation, and international collaboration.





**UHC-HEI Membership Certificate Ceremony – Opening a New Chapter in Global Cooperation**

During the opening ceremony, representatives from over 30 universities worldwide received official UHC-HEI membership certificates.

The event marked the formal launch of the International Network for Urban–rural Heritage Conservation in Higher Education Institutions (UHC-HEI) and laid a solid institutional foundation for sustained international collaboration and joint action in the years ahead.

**Exhibition Opening – Showcasing the Outcomes of Heritage Education**

Following the ceremony, delegates proceeded to the exhibition halls of the College of Architecture and Urban Planning (CAUP) to attend the inauguration of two exhibitions: “The Heritage Educational Landscape: Higher Education for Urban and Rural Heritage Conservation for Sustainable Development” and “Outcomes of the 2025 Dali Yunlong International Workshop on Tangible and Intangible Culture of Vernacular Heritage.”

Prof. Zhang Peng, Vice-Dean of CAUP, delivered opening remarks on behalf of the College, extending a warm welcome to all guests. He noted that the two exhibitions represent proactive responses to the global challenges of rapid urbanization, climate change, and the safeguarding of cultural diversity. He introduced the exhibitions’ five dimensions – learning objectives, educators, learners, curriculum content, and teaching methods – and illustrated how these are reflected through concrete case studies showcasing frontier practices in heritage education worldwide. From the conservation and renewal of the Bund and Nanjing Road in Shanghai to field projects in Xigaze, Tibet, and Pingyao, Shanxi Province, the exhibitions demonstrate CAUP’s extensive experience and academic depth in heritage education.

**Keynote Addresses – Experts Discuss the Future of Heritage and Education**

Prof. Zhou Jian, College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Tongji University, chaired the keynote session, which featured five distinguished experts from China and abroad who shared insightful perspectives on the future of heritage and education.

Alain Marinós (Architect and Urban Planner; Member of the French Academy of Architecture; Honorary

Inspector-General for Architecture and Heritage, Ministry of Culture, France) – In his lecture “A Sense of Place, Meaning, and Value Today: A Tribute to Françoise Choay,” Marinós opened with a tribute to the heritage theorist Françoise Choay and called for a renewed, people-centered approach to heritage conservation. He emphasized the need to view historic urban areas as living organisms and to place residents at the heart of conservation through meaningful public participation. He advocated prioritizing adaptive reuse and revitalization as strategies to transform heritage into a positive driver of sustainable development, and proposed piloting integrated governance and mixed-use approaches in selected sites. He cautioned against the twin pitfalls of “progressive illusion” and “cultural nostalgia,” underscoring the importance of everyday use, dialogue, and grounded practice in keeping heritage alive.

Dr Remy Sietchiping (Chief, Policy, Legislation and Governance Section, Urban Practices Branch, UN-Habitat) – In his keynote address, “Reimagining Heritage through Urban–Rural Linkages and Territorial Development,” Dr Sietchiping defined heritage as a strategic and forward-looking resource, noting that “heritage is not only what we inherit, but what we choose to transform.” He elaborated on UN-Habitat’s integrated approach to embedding culture and heritage into policy, legislation, metropolitan management, and urban–rural linkages to foster inclusive and resilient territorial development. He underscored the role of heritage within the Sustainable Development Goals (particularly Target 11.4) and the New Urban Agenda, and introduced the agency’s tools and initiatives to mainstream heritage in national and local urban policies. Dr Sietchiping also outlined UN-Habitat’s priorities in capacity building, technical assistance, advocacy, financing partnerships, and evidence-based research. Highlighting flagship initiatives such as the Heritopolis Metropolitan Heritage Network and the upcoming Urban–Rural Linkages Forum (3–6 November 2025), he called for strengthened partnerships among academia, communities, and city governments, positioning UN-Habitat as both a technical partner and a key facilitator in advancing heritage as a driver for sustainable urban and territorial futures.

Prof. Randall Mason (Weitzman School of Design, University of Pennsylvania) – In his keynote speech “Moving the Profession Forward,” Prof. Mason identified education as the driving force behind the professional advancement of heritage conservation. Citing the ideas of Rachel Carson and Herbert Simon, he advocated for a dynamic, design-thinking approach that prepares the field to respond effectively to rapid cultural transformation. He cautioned against the

widening gap between the evolution of heritage forms and the adaptability of heritage education, noting the growing complexity brought about by governance uncertainties and the expansion of heritage typologies and theories. To address these challenges, he outlined the University of Pennsylvania’s strategy: restructuring a resilient core curriculum that focuses on process and method rather than narrow content; ensuring in-depth field experience; broadening core competencies such as digital documentation, GIS, economic literacy, partnership building and negotiation; adopting a studio-based, design-oriented methodology to cultivate collaboration and adaptability; and supporting student wellbeing and professional growth. These actions, he concluded, aim to equip a new generation of professionals capable of shaping meaningful futures for heritage in an ever-changing world.

Prof. Cristina González-Longo (Director, MSc in Architectural Design for the Conservation of Built Heritage, Department of Architecture, University of Strathclyde; President, ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Education and Training – CIF) – In her keynote address, “The Epistemology of Architectural Conservation,” Prof. González-Longo called for the practice of conservation to be firmly grounded in rigorous knowledge, design, and education. She observed that theoretical and design thinking in the field have lagged behind rapid advances in materials science and recording technologies, warning of conceptual ambiguities, weak public discourse, and a widening disconnect between international principles and local practice. She urged professionals to “read” monuments through careful processes of value assessment, documentation, diagnosis, and interpretation, while upholding the fundamental conservation principles of minimum intervention, reversibility, and clear distinguishability of additions. Emphasizing conservation as a creative architectural endeavor that requires highly specialized expertise, she advocated for stronger “research-to-education” pathways, enhanced professional training, and the adoption of AI-assisted methods for survey and assessment. She further encouraged empowering building owners, rethinking asset management, and developing innovative funding mechanisms. Drawing inspiration from theorists such as Ruskin, Riegl, Brandi, and Boito, as well as from exemplary cases such as Queensberry House, she outlined a comprehensive model for the discipline – one built on research, knowledge, education, training, and experience – to guide architectural conservation into the future.

Prof. Chang Qing (Academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences; Professor, College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Tongji University)

- In his presentation “Regenerative Way of Environment around Cultural Heritage Site - from Education, Research to Heritage Conservation Project,” Academician Chang set out the synergistic relationship between inheritance and innovation in built-heritage conservation. He traced the evolution of international conservation thought - from the Athens Charter’s principle of separation between old and new to the Machu Picchu Charter’s emphasis on integration and coexistence - and proposed the guiding principle of “new–old symbiosis” (harmonious coexistence in difference). He reviewed Tongji University’s establishment in 2003 of China’s first Historic Building Conservation Engineering programme, structured around theory, design, and technology modules and supported by a Materials Pathology Laboratory, and highlighted the programme’s emphasis on surveying fieldwork, mapping exercises, and international joint teaching. Drawing on projects such as the Bund historic-district renewal, the conservation and regeneration of Samzhubzê (Sangzhutse) Dzong, Shigatse (Xigaze), and the Qu Yuan Museum, Miluo, he illustrated approaches that retain and repair the original fabric while introducing contemporary interventions that engage in dialogue with the historic fabric. Several of these projects have received Asia-Pacific architectural awards. He emphasized that conservation is a careful process of managing relations between old and new - balancing preservation, restoration, and appropriate new construction - and argued that well-managed heritage can become a cultural driver of socio-economic development: “The best way to inherit history is to re-create new history.”

**Programme and field activity – Forum themes and study routes**

The conference extended over two days, featuring five parallel thematic forums that encompassed key topics, including over 120 specialized presentations across 19 thematic blocks, reflecting the latest frontiers of thinking and practice in heritage education. A special youth event, “Heritage After Hours: The Tangible/Intangible Debate,” provided an interactive platform for early-career researchers and students to exchange ideas and perspectives on contemporary heritage discourse.

The conference concluded with a closing ceremony on the afternoon of 26 October, followed by field visits on 27 October to significant heritage sites in Shanghai, offering participants experiential learning opportunities that connected theory with practice.

Conference Impact and Summary of Outcomes

As the inaugural international conference under the UHC-HEI Network framework, this event commenced preparations in 2023. Through multiple rounds of discussions, it received 315 abstracts from 31 countries, with 177 papers accepted after rigorous review. Authors represented 161 institutions worldwide, including 137 universities, fully demonstrating the conference series' growing international participation and academic cohesion.

The conference featured five parallel sessions:

- Session 1: History of heritage conservation education
- Session 2: Theories and methodology of heritage conservation education
- Session 3: New technologies for heritage conservation education
- Session 4: Integration of traditional knowledge in heritage conservation education
- Session 5: Youth and the futures of heritage conservation education

Beyond the in-depth discussions in these sessions, several side events were organized, including "Heritage After Hours: The Tangible/Intangible Debate" and exhibition openings. The atmosphere remained vibrant throughout, characterized by dynamic intellectual exchanges that highlighted the field's robust energy and innovative potential.

The conference achieved substantial outcomes. Selected outstanding papers will be recommended for publication in Built Heritage and Architectural Heritage, while all conference papers will be compiled into digital proceedings, reflecting a commitment to environmental sustainability. At the closing ceremony, scholars including Prof. Carola Hein of Delft University of Technology proposed collaborative initiatives such as joint research and special issues on themes like "Water Heritage," underscoring the sustained innovative momentum generated by the conference.

It was announced that the next international conference will take place in 2027 at the University of Seville, Spain. The success of this conference has not only established a high-quality platform for global exchange in heritage conservation education but also laid a solid foundation for collaboration and intellectual frameworks in future series. We sincerely look forward to reconvening global scholars to continue inspiring dialogues and collectively advancing heritage conservation education toward a more inclusive, smart, and sustainable future.

**Suzhou Gardens Exhibition: "Poetic Jiangnan in Ink and Brush" – Rubbings, Calligraphy, Painting & Floral Art Tour officially opened**

Jiang Yeqin  
WHITR-AP Suzhou

On 23 September 2025, *Suzhou Gardens Exhibition: "Poetic Jiangnan in Ink and Brush" – Rubbings, Calligraphy, Painting & Floral Art Tour* officially opened at the Summer Palace in Beijing. The exhibition highlights the artistic essence of Suzhou classical gardens through a selection of stone rubbings, Suzhou-style penjing (bonsai), and Suzhou-style floral arrangements. By conveying the subtle charm of ink rubbings, the vibrant greenery of penjing, and the refined elegance of flower art, it presents the cultural richness and aesthetic character of Jiangnan gardens in a multi-dimensional manner.

The exhibition's rubbing section features a diverse range of types, including model calligraphy, garden records, pictorial engravings, and poetic inscriptions. Using paper and ink as its mediums, this art form revives the engraved memories preserved on garden corridors and walls, allowing weathered characters and patterns to regain new life through the touring display. Suzhou-style penjing employs the gardening technique of "seeing the vast in the miniature," condensing the charm of Jiangnan's landscapes into a compact form and showcasing the ingenuity and artistry of Suzhou horticulture. Suzhou-style floral arrangements take seasonal flowers as their primary material, pursuing a natural, elegant, and profound aesthetic. Together, they vividly embody the artistic philosophy of Suzhou gardens: "crafted by human hands, yet as if born of nature."

This event is organized by the Suzhou Municipal Bureau of Landscape and Greening and the Zhangjiagang Municipal Bureau of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, and co-organized by WHITR-AP Suzhou, the Lion Grove Garden Administration, the Zhangjiagang Park Management Office, and the Cangjiang Book House. This touring exhibition will be presented at the Summer Palace in Beijing, the listed gardens of Suzhou, and the ancient city of Langzhong in Sichuan. Using garden art as a medium, it fosters cultural exchange and dialogue between the northern and southern regions of China. During the exhibition, a series of cultural and creative products inspired by Suzhou garden elements was also introduced. These items translate the gardens' architectural, landscape, and floral motifs into elegant daily objects that are both practical and aesthetic,

seamlessly integrating the art of Suzhou gardens into contemporary life.

The exhibition will run through the end of December 2025. With their unique cultural appeal, Suzhou gardens are now reaching beyond their physical walls into wider horizons. Through these artistic touring exhibitions, they are fostering the cross-regional dissemination and innovative development of traditional culture, continually enhancing the influence of Jiangnan culture.



**Suzhou Classical Garden Art Exhibition was held at the Singapore Botanic Gardens, bridging heritage dialogue**

Jiang Yeqin  
WHITR-AP Suzhou

On 12 November 2025, the Suzhou Classical Garden Art Exhibition opened at the Singapore Botanic Gardens, presenting the beauty of Eastern garden art through an international lens. The year 2025 marks the 35th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and Singapore. In a pioneering collaboration, two UNESCO World Heritage sites—Suzhou Classical Gardens and the Singapore Botanic Gardens—have joined hands for this exhibition. Using Eastern aesthetics as a bridge, it aims to foster deeper cultural exchange between the two countries.

Organized around five thematic sections—"Cultural Heritage," "Artisan Craftsmanship," "The City of Gardens," "Elegance of Canglang Pavilion and Orchids," and "Seasonal Charms"—the exhibition offers a systematic presentation of the artistic craftsmanship and humanistic spirit embodied in

Suzhou's Classical Gardens. The English promotional film *Poetic Dwelling* was also screened during the opening. Building on this event, the two parties aim to establish a sustained and collaborative relationship between Suzhou Classical Gardens and the Singapore Botanic Gardens through a platform dedicated to World Heritage conservation exchange.

Co-organized by the Suzhou Municipal Bureau of Gardens and Landscaping and the Singapore Botanic Gardens, with WHITR-AP Suzhou coordinating liaison and implementation, and supported by Singapore's Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, the exhibition brings together multiple institutional efforts to present overseas audiences with an artistic experience rich in cultural depth and visual appeal.

In recent years, WHITR-AP Suzhou has been actively transforming Suzhou gardens from cultural landmarks into dynamic platforms for exchange through overseas garden exhibitions and international heritage dialogues. Moving forward, this model of "garden diplomacy" will be extended to other World Heritage sites across the Asia-Pacific region, fostering a sustainable network of partnerships and serving as a bridge for cross-cultural dialogue.



**The "Suzhou Gardens + Artificial Intelligence" Exchange Event was successfully held at WHITR-AP Suzhou**

Jiang Yeqin  
WHITR-AP Suzhou

On 26 November 2025, the "Artificial Intelligence + Suzhou Gardens" application scenario exchange event took place at WHITR-AP Suzhou, exploring



new digital approaches to the conservation, research, exhibition, and utilization of classical gardens. The event attracted active participation from over 20 garden management units, more than 30 enterprises, and various social organizations, who jointly discussed innovative solutions for integrating digital technology with classical gardens.

During the event, WHITR-AP Suzhou presented an overview of the collective conservation initiatives undertaken for Suzhou gardens, as well as their accomplishments in both international and domestic exchanges. Participants focused their discussions on three key dimensions—innovative communication, smart management, and heritage education—exploring in depth how AI technology can be integrated into the preservation and utilization of classical gardens. Representatives from seven AI enterprises in Suzhou addressed the core challenges of garden digitization and demonstrated a range of forward-looking practical solutions.

By integrating AI algorithms with 3D Gaussian splatting technology, the efficiency of garden digital scanning is expected to increase significantly, while reducing digitization costs and enabling lightweight mobile "cloud tours" of gardens. This opens new avenues for the global dissemination of garden culture. Meanwhile, a digital twin-based smart management platform for ancient architecture will enhance daily inspections, preventive conservation, and intelligent safety management of gardens, providing strong support for the full lifecycle management of historic structures. In addition, innovative solutions have emerged in areas such as digital conservation of gardens, smart guided tours, digital promotion of cultural IP, and immersive heritage education experiences.

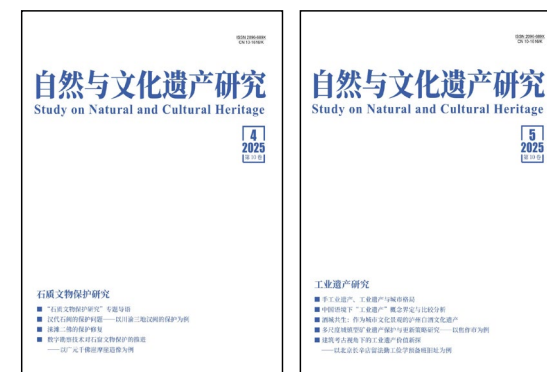
During the event, interactive garden-guiding robots and head-mounted cloud-tour devices were showcased, allowing participants to experience firsthand the practical application of AI technology in garden settings. This exchange has established a collaborative platform for social forces to participate in heritage conservation. Moving forward, WHITR-AP Suzhou will continue to deepen the exploration and practice of “AI + Suzhou Gardens,” strengthen top-level planning for digital gardens, and support the sustainable development of Suzhou gardens through technological innovation.

**Publication of Issues No. 4 and No. 5  
of the Study on Natural and Cultural  
Heritage (2025)**

**Zhou Zijie**  
WHITR-AP Beijing

Issue No. 4 of the *Study on Natural and Cultural Heritage* (2025) was published in September 2025. The special feature of this issue is the Research on the Protection of Stone Cultural Heritage, curated by Sun Hua, Professor at the School of Archaeology and Museology, Peking University, and Director of the Quanzhou Academy of Cultural Heritage. The thematic papers include: *Conservation Issues of Han Dynasty Stone Que*, *The Protection and Restoration of Laitan Erfo*, and *The Promotion of Digital Survey Technology in the Conservation of Grotto Cultural Relics*.

Issue No. 5 of the *Study on Natural and Cultural Heritage* (2025) was published in November 2025. The special feature of this issue is the Research on Industrial Heritage, curated by Qian Wei, Professor at the Institute for Cultural Heritage and History of Science & Technology, University of Science and Technology Beijing, and Chair of the Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage, China Association for Preservation Technology of Cultural Relics. The thematic papers include: *Handicraft Heritage, Industrial Heritage and Urban Layout, Research on the Definition and Comparative Analysis of Industrial Heritage in Chinese Context, Symbiotic Cityscape: Luzhou Baijiu Cultural Heritage as an Urban Cultural Landscape, Research on the Protection and Renewal Strategy of Multi-scale Urban Mining Heritage, and A New Exploration of the Value of Industrial Heritage from an Architectural Archaeology Perspective.*



**W**HITR-AP Shanghai supported the  
Vietnam Heritage Professionals  
Course

**Li Hong, Yang Huaqing** (Intern)  
WHITR-AP Shanghai

From 11 to 12 September 2025, the Department of Cultural Heritage (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Viet Nam) and the UNESCO Ha Noi Office co-hosted a national training course on “Enhancing Professional Capacity in the Protection and Promotion of Cultural and Natural Heritage” in Điện Biên City that brought together more than 120 heritage officers, site managers and disaster-prevention staff from ministries and provinces nationwide. The World Heritage Institute of Training and Research for the Asia and the Pacific Region under the auspices of UNESCO, Shanghai Centre (WHITR-AP Shanghai), served as the key technical partner, with Professor Carolina Castellanos (Head of Research Unit) on site and Ms Li Hong (Project Director) online.

Classroom sessions and an afternoon field exercise at the Mường Phăng Historic Site focused on World Heritage management systems and the 2022 Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessment in a World Heritage Context, both presented by WHITR-AP. Ms. Verónica Casanovas provided lectures on Post-Disaster Needs Assessment, while local case studies from Hội An and Cát Bà National Park—together with briefings on Viet Nam's 2024 Cultural Heritage Law and Decree 208—completed the programme. Participants praised the hands-on approach and the clear link between global standards and national regulations. During the closing session, WHITR-AP Shanghai also invited Vietnamese partners to join its upcoming activities and the expanding HeritAP practitioner network.



**WHITR-AP Shanghai was engaged in the 2025 ICOMOS University Forum**

**Marie-Noël Tournoux, Tang Zhuping** (Intern)  
WHITR-AP Shanghai

On 20-21 September 2025, Prof. Zhang Peng, Vice Dean of the College of Architecture and Urban Planning at Tongji University, and Ms Marie-Noëlle Tournoux, Project Director of WHITR-AP Shanghai, participated in the 2025 ICOMOS University Forum for Cultural Heritage in Tianjin, China. Following the first edition of the Forum in China hosted by Tsinghua University in 2024, the second edition was held at Tianjin University, convened under the timely theme “Cultural Heritage Interdisciplinary Innovation”, bringing together global experts to address pressing challenges in the heritage field. The ICOMOS University Forum initiative was formally established in 2017 at the ICOMOS General Assembly in New Delhi. It aims to gather universities and other cultural institutions that wish to collaborate in accomplishing the mission of ICOMOS. It addresses the gap in ICOMOS composition, namely, the universities and academic institutions. Co-organized by Tianjin University's School of Architecture, ICOMOS China, and ICOMOS Nepal, the forum attracted over 100 participants from 10 countries. The event served as a critical platform for further discussing innovative policies, technologies, and educational frameworks essential for enhancing heritage resilience and sustainable development.

Marie-Noël Tournoux and Professor Zhang Peng both participated in panel discussions, one in the morning session hosted by Prof. Peng Liang, Associate Researcher at the School of Architecture, Tianjin University, and one in the afternoon hosted by Chen Yujiao, Associate Research Fellow of the Chinese Academy of Cultural Heritage. They reacted to the contributions of speakers, furthering the discussion on competency and gaps for heritage conservation and management, and challenges to develop new approaches to teaching and research. They detailed WHITR-AP and CAUP's activities and programs, notably the Urban-rural Heritage Conservation for Higher Education Network (UHC-HEI) and 2025 International Conference on Reshaping Heritage Conservation in Higher Education.

The forum concluded by Song Xinchao and Prof. Chunyan Zhang with a forward-looking ceremony. Prof. Zhang Peng, Vice Dean of the College of Architecture and Urban Planning at Tongji University, delivered a speech as part of the official handover, confirming that Tongji University will host the 2026 forum.

This year's forum held special significance, coinciding with the 60th anniversary of ICOMOS and the 130th anniversary of Tianjin University. Building on the success of the inaugural forum at Tsinghua University in 2024, the 2025 edition successfully advanced the dialogue on integrating professional practice with academic excellence, a mission WHITR-AP continues to champion globally, notably through its Urban-rural Heritage Conservation for Higher Education Network (UHC-HEI) and on the 25-26 October 2025 International Conference on Reshaping Heritage Conservation in Higher Education. Attending the Forum provided an opportunity to further discuss with members of the UHC-HEI Network from Tianjin University, Tsinghua University, France, and ICOMOS.



**WHITR-AP Shanghai participated in the International Dialogue on Urban-Rural Linkages**

**Marie-Noël Tournoux, Tang Zhuping** (Intern)  
WHITR-AP Shanghai

From 3 to 6 November 2025 in Songyang County, Zhejiang Province, Ms Marie-Noël Tournoux, Project Director of the World Heritage Institute of Training and Research for the Asia and the Pacific Region, Shanghai Centre (WHITR-AP Shanghai), participated as a keynote speaker at the International Forum on Urban-Rural Linkages (IFURL). Organized in the framework of the International Dialogue on Urban-Rural Linkages (IDURL), the event, themed "Advancing Urban-Rural Linkages: Culture, Housing and Basic Services," was co-hosted by UN-Habitat and the West Europe and Africa Communication Centre (China Today) of China International Communications Group (CICG).

The International Dialogue on Urban-Rural Linkages is a flagship initiative of UN-Habitat, established to advance the global urban-rural linkages agenda in alignment with *Sustainable Development Goal 11* and the *New Urban Agenda*. Since its inception in 2019, the International Dialogue on Urban-Rural Linkages (IDURL) has been held four times in Songyang (2019, 2021, 2023, 2025), with the 2025 dialogue following the third International Forum held during October 2023.

The two-day conference served as a high-level platform for discussing integrated urban-rural development strategies. It brought together over a hundred participants from 12 countries. Representatives from government, academia, civil society, and the private sector advanced the global urban-rural linkages agenda in alignment with *Sustainable Development Goal 11* and the *New Urban Agenda*.

The programme featured thematic discussions on critical sub-themes and extensive field visits to several sites in Songyang and surrounding villages, providing first-hand experience of Songyang's innovative practices in heritage preservation and rural development. Each thematic session was hosted on-site at the last stop of the field visit itinerary, allowing for full immersion of participants.

The thematic Sessions focused on:

- 1) Cultural Heritage Preservation and the Revitalization of Existing Urban Spaces, and the field visit was to Hetianling Block, Mingshan Academy, and Old Bus Station.
- 2) Cultural Heritage Protection and Thematic District Development. The field visit was to Songyang Old Street Three Temple and Cultural Communication Centre in Wenli.
- 3) Living Heritage Transmission and Innovation in Traditional Villages and field visit was to Songzhuang Village, Sandu Township.
- 4) Urban-Rural Green Transportation and Sustainable Development, and the field visit was to the Smart Transportation Industrial Park and SongYang Public Distribution Centre.

The Forum provided a valuable platform for WHITR-AP to strengthen engagement with UN-Habitat and other international partners. The institute's participation supported its ongoing mission to advance the integration of cultural heritage in broader development agendas, particularly through initiatives such as the implementation of the UNESCO 2011 Historic Urban Landscape Recommendation and the Urban-rural Heritage Conservation in Higher Education Institutions Network (UHC-HEI).

**WHITR-AP Beijing was invited to participate in the 2025 General Assembly of the RCEP Member States World Heritage Cooperation Alliance (RCEP-WHCA)**

**Zhou Zijie**  
WHITR-AP Beijing

On 17 October 2025, the inaugural General Assembly of the RCEP Member States World Heritage Cooperation Alliance (RCEP-WHCA) was held in Huangshan, Anhui Province. The event brought together more than 180 representatives from World Heritage management authorities, research and monitoring institutions, and international organizations across 15 member States. Participants jointly advanced the implementation of the *Huangshan Initiative of the RCEP World Member States Heritage Cooperation Alliance* and strengthened international cooperation in heritage conservation, transmission, and sustainable development across the region. WHITR-AP Beijing served as one of the supporting institutions for the event.

Song Feng, Associate Professor at the College of Urban and Environmental Sciences, Peking University, and Deputy Director of WHITR-AP Beijing, was invited to attend the meeting in the capacity of an observer. The General Assembly featured the inauguration ceremony of the Alliance, the release of the *RCEP Report on Systematic World Heritage Conservation and Sustainable Development (2025)*, and the signing of several cross-regional cooperation agreements, laying a solid foundation for building a collaborative platform for World Heritage exchange and cooperation among RCEP member states.



**WHITR-AP Beijing was invited to participate in the International Symposium on Living Heritage and Urban Renewal Development in Hong Kong and to chair a Concurrent Session**

**Zhou Zijie**  
WHITR-AP Beijing

From 17 to 18 October 2025, the International Symposium on Living Heritage and Urban Renewal Development was successfully held at the Hong Kong Heritage Discovery Centre. Co-organized by the Development Bureau of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Fudan University, Hong Kong Chu Hai College, and the UNESCO Chair on Living Heritage and Community Development, the symposium brought together over 100 participants from mainland China, the Hong Kong SAR, the Macao SAR, as well as the United Kingdom, Japan, Korea, Singapore, Uzbekistan, and other countries and regions. Attendees included government officials, distinguished university scholars, and experts from heritage institutions, who gathered to explore how living heritage can be effectively safeguarded and transmitted amid global urbanization, and how it can play a constructive role in urban renewal and rural-urban integration.

Dr Li Kuanghan, Executive Director of WHITR-AP Beijing, was invited to serve as the moderator for the session on "Living Heritage and Integrated Urban-Rural Development," where she engaged in an in-depth dialogue with Professor Zhu Haishan, Dean of the Faculty of Science and Engineering at Hong Kong Chu Hai College, discussing the role of living heritage in advancing sustainable rural-urban development. Research Fellow Wang Siyu from WHITR-AP Beijing also attended the symposium.





**WHITR-AP Beijing was invited to participate in the Autumn Series Launch Event at Nanjing Niushou Mountain Cultural Tourism Zone and deliver a presentation**

**Zhou Zijie**  
WHITR-AP Beijing

On 26 October 2025, the Nanjing Niushou Mountain Cultural Tourism Zone held the launch event for its Autumn Series of activities, titled "Harmony and Coexistence - Niushou's Multifaceted Charm", providing a comprehensive overview of the area's cultural tourism integration and innovative practices. Featuring a special international exchange segment, the event invited Song Feng, Deputy Director of WHITR-AP Beijing, to attend and deliver a keynote speech on "The Power of Culture."

In his presentation, Song Feng expressed WHITR-AP Beijing's anticipation of deepening collaboration with Niushou Mountain to jointly build a broader international exchange network and promote it as a model for cultural and natural heritage conservation and sustainable development in the Asia-Pacific region. He highlighted the importance of leveraging Niushou Mountain's historical connection to Zheng He's maritime expeditions and its rich cultural heritage to further advance research on the Maritime Silk Road and foster cross-civilization dialogue. Additionally, he proposed the timely launch of an international public art programme to solicit innovative artworks worldwide, aiming to transform Niushou Mountain into an open ecological museum and immersive cultural narrative space, thereby injecting new momentum into high-quality regional cultural tourism development.



**WHITR-AP Beijing was invited to participate in the 5th International Seminar on Water Culture and deliver thematic presentations**

**Zhou Zijie**  
WHITR-AP Beijing

On 13 November 2025, the 5th International Seminar on Water Culture was held in Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province. Co-hosted by the China Institute of Water Resources and Hydropower Research (IWHR) and the UNESCO Regional Office for East Asia, the symposium brought together representatives from government agencies, research institutions, and international organizations across more than ten countries to explore the contemporary relevance of Dayu's Water Wisdom and new approaches to river governance enabled by digital technologies.

Sun Hua, Professor at the School of Archaeology and Museology, Peking University, Director of the Quanzhou Academy of Cultural Heritage, and Chair of the Academic Committee of WHITR-AP Beijing, along with Cao Jiyang, PhD student at the School of Archaeology and Museology, Peking University, were invited to attend the Seminar and deliver thematic presentations at the session on "Modern Interpretations of Dayu's Water Wisdom."

Prof. Sun Hua presented "From Water Resource Utilization to Water Culture Intentions: Historical Development and Impact of the Sanxingdui City," outlining the role of ancient water culture in shaping regional civilizations.

Cao Jiyang presented "Hydrological Record Heritage: A Conceptual Analysis and Case Study of Surviving Relics in Japan and South Korea," examining the characteristics and conservation approaches of hydrological record heritage in East Asia. This presentation, part of WHITR-AP Beijing's ongoing World Hydrological Heritage Research project, highlighted WHITR-AP Beijing's academic contributions in the field of hydrological heritage studies.

**WHITR-AP Beijing was invited to participate in the Silk Road World Cultural Heritage Protection and Transmission Exchange Meeting**

**Zhou Zijie**  
WHITR-AP Beijing

From 15 to 16 November 2025, the Silk Road Cultural Heritage Protection and Utilization Exchange Meeting was jointly organized in Jimusar County, Xinjiang, by the ICOMOS China, the People's Government of Jimusar County, the Xiamen Branch of the Fujian Aid Xinjiang Program, and the School of Sociology and Anthropology at Xiamen University. Over 50 experts, scholars, and heritage managers from across China participated in the meeting, engaging in field investigations and experience-sharing discussions. Topics included the conservation and revitalization of the Beiting Ancient City Ruins, the enhancement and narrative reconstruction of the Beiting Ancient City Ruins Museum exhibitions, and strategies for leveraging the Tianshan Corridor World Cultural Heritage IP to explore synergistic development paths.

Li Kuanghan, Executive Director of WHITR-AP Beijing, and Wang Siyu, Research Fellow at the WHITR-AP Beijing, were invited to attend the meeting.

During the visit, both sides deepened their understanding of each other's research work and explored new opportunities for future collaboration in promoting inclusive approaches to World Heritage interpretation.



**WHITR-AP Beijing hosted WHIPIC delegation to explore inclusive interpretation of World Heritage**

**Zhou Zijie**  
WHITR-AP Beijing

From 22 to 24 October 2025, WHITR-AP Beijing organized and hosted a research delegation led by Prof. In-Kwon Park from Seoul National University. The delegation visited on behalf of the International Centre for Interpretation and Presentation of World Heritage Sites (WHIPIC) to engage in a three-day programme of academic exchange and on-site heritage investigations focused on inclusive interpretation of World Heritage.



# WORLD HERITAGE IN ASIA & PACIFIC

## BEIJING CENTRAL AXIS: A BUILDING ENSEMBLE EXHIBITING THE IDEAL ORDER OF THE CHINESE CAPITAL

**Country:** China  
**Category of site:** Cultural site  
**Date of inscription:** 2024  
**Criteria:** (iii), (iv)



Looking towards the Forbidden City from the Jingshan Hill © Beijing Municipal Cultural Heritage Bureau

### OUV

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



Tranquil lake © Chen Yao

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.



The Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests  
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### Source:

<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1714/>  
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