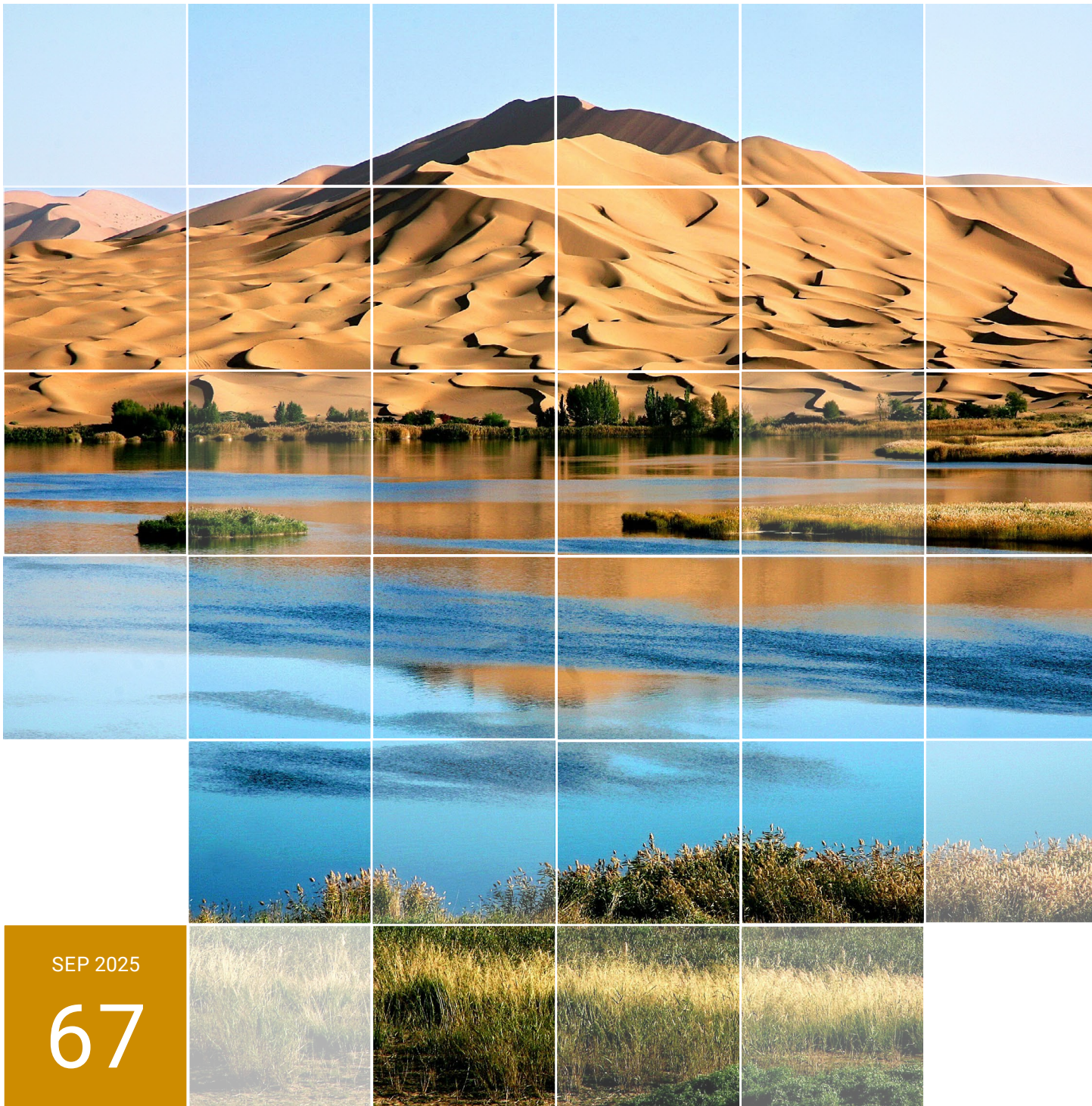


# WHITR-AP NEWSLETTER

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



SEP 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

## SPECIAL REPORT ON THE 47TH WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE (I)

### OVERVIEW

Marie-Noël Tournoux  
WHITR-AP Shanghai

#### Introduction

The 47th session of the Committee was held from 6 to 16 July at the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, France. Hosted by Bulgaria, the Committee was chaired by Prof. Nikolay Nenov (Bulgaria), supported by 5 vice chairs from Belgium, Mexico, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, and Zambia. The Rapporteur was Ms Joelle Bucyana (Rwanda).

The first day of the Committee focused on the Bureau meeting and registration. The plenary session was held from 7th July to 16th July, except on 14th July, which is the National Holiday in France and 16th morning, which was dedicated to the drafting of the report by the Rapporteur. The 21 Committee members are Argentina, Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece, India, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Lebanon, Mexico, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Rwanda, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Senegal, Türkiye, Ukraine, Viet Nam and Zambia.

All working documents were available online on the World Heritage Centre's website: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/sessions/47COM>, as well as the video recording of the plenaries.

#### Statistics

- 2600 pages of working documents.
- 321 draft decisions reviewed; 320 adopted (88% without debate).
- 248 State of Conservation reports examined.
- 3 properties removed from List of World Heritage in Danger: the Rainforests of the Atsinanana (Madagascar), Abu Mena (Egypt), the Old Town of Ghadamès (Libya).
- 53 properties remain on Endangered List.

Historic Achievements:

- First inscriptions for Guinea-Bissau and Sierra Leone.

- 26 new properties inscribed.
- Adoption of the Nairobi Declaration on authenticity in African heritage.
- World Heritage Capacity Building Strategy 2025-2035 approved (refined version due at 48th session).

#### Opening of the Committee

The Committee was opened by UNESCO and Bulgaria.

In her opening address, Director General Audrey Azoulay recalled some facts and figures, the number of listed properties 1,200 + spanning 4.8 million square kilometres across 196 State Parties. She underscored urgent global challenges to combat climate change, war, and inequality and stressed how one-third of natural sites and 20% of cultural sites now faced severe climate impacts, with Mediterranean World Heritage cities particularly vulnerable. She highlighted UNESCO's deployment of georeferencing tools for real-time risk monitoring as well as UNESCO's equity-driven agenda, including capacity-building programs across 27 unrepresented African nations and post-conflict recovery in Mosul (US\$115 million reconstruction) and Gaza (satellite damage assessment). She underlined the growing number of World Heritage sites impacted by war and conflicts on the List of Heritage in Danger. This point was largely debated throughout the 47th World Heritage Committee.

In his introductory speech, Bulgarian Minister of Culture, Marian Bachev, firstly championed youth



empowerment as the cornerstone of intergenerational responsibility, asserting that young people must become active custodians of cultural memory to transmit "a sense of belonging and identity" to future generations. Highlighting Bulgaria's struggle with youth outmigration, he proposed concrete measures: establishing transnational youth networks, skill-building programs, and internships to anchor young professionals in heritage work. He further emphasised that digital tools like 3D scanning and VR should serve as enablers for youth-led preservation—exemplified by Bulgaria's "Digital Black Sea Archaeology" project, where students documented underwater sites while experts retained interpretive authority. Secondly, Bachev delineated a rigorous ethics-driven approach to artificial intelligence, declaring: "AI is a tool, not a solution. It cannot create the individuals who dedicate themselves to preserving our cultural heritage." While endorsing AI for risk monitoring (e.g. climate threats or conflict damage), he insisted human expertise must govern final decisions to safeguard ethical judgment and community values—a stance contrasting with Western tech-centric models. This philosophy directly informed Bulgaria's draft Guidelines for AI in Heritage.

The Committee examined and discussed thematic initiatives, the reports of the activities of the World Heritage Centre, the Advisory Bodies (ICOMOS, ICCROM, IUCN) and of Category 2 Centres such as WHITR-AP. It discussed the conservation and management of the World Heritage sites inscribed on the List, which is the key responsibility of State Parties to the Convention, and it examined inscription proposals and inscribed 26 new properties on the World Heritage List.

#### Civil society and indigenous people

The voice of civil society and indigenous people was strengthened, the important role of communities and indigenous people was highlighted and acknowledged in State of Conservation processes focusing on community engagement, prior informed consent processes and in particular in nominations borne by local communities and indigenous people (Australia and Africa Region). This year reference to "local communities" focused a little less on communities in urban environments and more on indigenous people. Civil society and NGO observers were given the floor regularly, and they highlighted a rights-based approach.

#### Africa Focus

Africa was in the spotlight of the Committee and central to several agenda items discussions, with a strong positioning of the Africa Group and an ongoing clear UNESCO priority Africa policy. Discussion focused on doctrinal aspects such as the presentation of the outcomes of the "International Conference on Cultural Heritage in Africa: A Dialogue on the Concept of Authenticity" . The document is interesting and important as it furthered the discussions on the concept of authenticity, not only in the African context but in other regions of the world. Africa was equally central in discussions on State of Conservation and nominations, with a focus on those countries which were inscribing sites for the first time or that had submitted a first nomination proposal in 2025. Representativity of World Heritage in Africa was another strong element of discussion, as well as capacity building.

#### State of Conservation

State of conservation reports keep increasing year after year, and the discussion on the World Heritage List in Danger as a tool for providing support and solidarity is ongoing. Like previous years, the advice of the Advisory Bodies was often not followed, with the Committee preferring to provide State Parties with more time to take action, which can be very challenging when human and financial resources are limited

Three sites were removed from the Danger List: the Rainforests of the Atsinanana in Madagascar, Abu Mena in Egypt, and the Old Town of Ghadamès in Libya.

Conflicts and the increase of World Heritage under threat or in zones of conflict were highlighted by the UNESCO Director General, whilst the Committee discussed how to address conservation goals in such cases.

#### Nominations

As always, the examination of nominations was a key moment of the Committee. Discussions demonstrated on the one hand the positive capacity of the Convention to federate partners around a nomination project and on the other hand confirmed the growing challenge of listing tentative sites with fragile value

justification and weak management mechanisms, leading to more state of conservation reports in the short term and confusing World Heritage branding. Twenty-six nomination proposals were examined by the World Heritage Committee.

By Category:  
Natural: 1  
Mixed: 1  
Cultural: 21 (including 4 new cultural landscapes).

Regional Breakdown:  
Africa: 5  
Arab States: 1  
Asia-Pacific: 11  
Europe/North America: 7  
Latin America/Caribbean: 4

Extensions Approved: 2 properties.

Nomination trends

**Local communities.** They were at the heart of nominations: several nominations were developed by local communities or indigenous people, which allowed to strengthen and acknowledge custodianship, such as the Murujuga Aboriginal lands (Australia) or sites in the Africa Region such as - Diy-Gid-Biy Cultural Landscape of the Mandara Mountains (Cameroon) or Mount Mulanje Cultural Landscape (Malawi), or the Huichol Route (Mexico) which refers to ancestral knowledge.

**Africa focus.** In line with UNESCO's priority for Africa, UNESCO provided support and encouraged African countries to develop nominations, submit nominations. The 47th session saw the inscription of 4 new sites in Africa, among which were inscriptions by countries which had no properties yet inscribed, Guinea-Bissau and Sierra Leone. The Committee also approved the extension of a site from South Africa to Mozambique, creating a transboundary natural park of almost 4,000 km². Countries such as the Comoros submitted their first nomination ever in 2025. By 2027, UNESCO expects 7 other African countries not yet on the List to submit a first nomination. The World Heritage Centre, via extra budgetary funding, provided direct support to some State Parties, outsourcing nomination dossier drafting to external consultants; this is the case for Comoros.

**Remembrance site.** They were largely discussed at the Committee, either in follow-up discussions on interpretation challenges or because new sites of memory have needed to be inscribed, such as

the Cambodian Memorial Sites: From centres of repression to places of peace and reflection. In past years several sites of memory have been inscribed or are in the process of being inscribed or nominations are in the drafting stage such as Funerary and memory sites of the First World War (Western Front) France and Belgium or the Memorial sites of the Genocide: Nyamata, Murambi, Gisozi and Bisesero, Rwanda, both listed in 2023. The first two Remembrance sites on the list are Auschwitz-Birkenau, inscribed in 1979 and the Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku Dome), Japan, inscribed in 1996.

**Archaeological and prehistory related sites.** Nearly a third of inscribed sites were linked to prehistory such as the Peruaçu River Canyon (Brazil), the Megaliths of Carnac and of the shores of the Morbihan (France) and the Petroglyphs along the Bangucheon Stream (Republic of Korea), the Xixia Imperial Tombs" (China), The Prehistoric Sites of the Khorramabad Valley" (Iran), "Petroglyphs along the Bangucheon Stream" (Republic of Korea), "Cultural Heritage Sites of Ancient Khuttal" (Tajikistan). The Archaeological Ensemble of 17th Century Port Royal (Jamaica) was an interesting archaeological site with an urban archaeological site with an underwater component.

**20th-century ecology.** In terms of innovative themes and symbols, ecology per se is now represented for the first time on the List with the Forest Research Institute Malaysia Forest Park, Selangor, in Malaysia is a human-made tropical rainforest established on degraded tin-mining land from the 1920s, showcasing early ecological restoration and sustainable land rehabilitation practices. In times where adaptation to Climate Change is a key conservation challenge, this site can highly contribute to raising awareness.

**Large-scale sites and phased nominations.** The Colonial Transisthmian Route of Panamá (Panama) is interesting and confirms interest in developing a phase-by-phase approach to nominate a very large-scale site. This site, as well as the Archaeological Ensemble of 17th Century Port Royal, also showcase a renewal of sites related to the history of trade. The Silk Road nomination was the first nomination of this kind where the Committee endorsed the phased nomination principle, which is a step-by-step approach which looks at OUV globally, different from property extension.

Periodic Reporting

Periodic Reporting was discussed by the Committee, which examined a reform proposal for the next

periodic reporting exercise, the 4th Cycle. The discussion was on how to align or not the World Heritage Convention Periodic Reporting cycle with the other UNESCO Culture Convention reporting cycles to avoid "reporting fatigue" and how to keep the specificity of a two-section reporting system, one on national policies and one on sites. Enhance the need for a joint platform on reporting and analysis of data, as suggested in the Mondiacult. The Committee agreed to keep a two-section logic. The key takeaways of the Periodic Reporting discussion were to:

- Strengthen capacity building and guidance mechanisms;
- Data continuity;
- Reinforce the reporting and inclusiveness process.
- Encourage greater coherence and efficiency within the cycle; maintain synergies between the national and site managers' levels.

Capacity Building Strategy

The new Capacity Building Strategy (CBS) was discussed at length by the Committee, in particular the management and coordination mechanisms to address the recommendation of the evaluators who highlighted the importance of coordination and ensuring a consolidated overview of the CBS.

Report of the Open-ended Working Group: Representativity of the List

In its agenda item 11, on the Report of the Open-ended Working Group on the representativity of the World Heritage List and enhancing the balance of the List, improving capacity building, exploring the possibility of using additional service providers, and proposing solutions for the sustainability of funding, the Committee examined the recommendation of the group. The Committee discussed undertaking a new "gap report" to follow up on the 2004 "The World Heritage List: Filling the Gaps - an Action Plan for the Future. An Analysis by ICOMOS" report, which was a key document in its time, which with the first cycle of the Periodic Reporting influenced a new generation of nominations. The working group explored terminology such as represented, underrepresented, etc. It also explored twining and partnerships, in particular encouraging cooperation with educational institutions, and it also recommended increased engagement of regional experts and Category 2 Centres, or the possibility of having additional service providers. The Kenya conference on authenticity was considered

useful for the open-ended group. This study project would be under the responsibility of ICOMOS.

C2C Reporting

Since the 46th session, C2Cs are given more light and an opportunity to report orally. This year, C2C were also provided with a specific space in the plenary and nominative plaques, which not only provided more visibility to C2Cs but also made regrouping easier and facilitated communication between C2Cs.

Prof. Shao Yong, Secretary General of WHITR-AP, presented orally WHITR-AP's activity report, which was welcomed favourably with a question from Viet Nam on WHITR-AP's activities related to HUL.

Side events

WHITR-AP organised, co-organised or participated in several side events.

WHITR-AP organised 2 side events, one on July 8th on World Heritage Education Towards the Future / Global Innovative Network and Capacity Building, and one on 13th July on World Heritage Contribution to Sustainable Development Goals Environment and Resilience. It co-organised one, on July 12th, with the UNESCO Chair Water, Ports and Historic Cities TU Delft on Paris – The River and the World Heritage Property: Activating the Urban Atlas through a Walk along the Seine. WHITR-AP was invited to join a side event on 11th organised by ICESCO on July 9th (13:00-15:00, room XI) on ICESCO's strategy to support the removal of properties from the List of World Heritage in Danger.

These side events were successful; they allowed us to acknowledge several WHITR-AP activities through a ripple effect and strengthen the ties with several partners, particularly the Advisory Bodies. It facilitated contacts and meeting new potential partners.

Project and Partnership follow-up meetings

The World Heritage Committee session was an opportunity to hold side-line discussions with the World Heritage Centre Director, Lazare Eloundou and Deputy Director Jyoti Hosagrahar, State Party representatives, the Advisory Bodies, C2C representatives, individual experts, universities, the site manager and WHITR-AP's longstanding partners.



**The Next Committee session: Republic of Korea, Busan**

The Republic of Korea will host the 48th session of the World Heritage Committee in Busan 2026 in July, exact dates to be determined, as well as the Chair and the Rapporteur.



**THEMATIC FOCUS OF AGENDA  
ITEM 8B: EXAMINATION OF NEWLY  
NOMINATED PROPERTIES**

**Qian Meili** (intern)  
WHITR-AP Beijing

The 47th Session of the World Heritage Committee was convened at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, France, from 6 to 16 July 2025. The session focused on the expansion and conservation of the World Heritage List, reviewing nominations submitted by countries worldwide across cultural, natural, and mixed categories.

**Key Highlights of the Session**

Agenda Item 8B examined new nominations for inscription, resulting in the addition of 26 new World Heritage sites and approval of 2 significant boundary modifications.

As of the session's closing, the World Heritage List comprises 1,248 properties globally:

- 972 cultural
- 235 natural
- 41 mixed (cultural and natural)

China successfully inscribed Xixia Mausoleum as a new cultural World Heritage site, bringing its total to 60 properties—just one behind Italy, which remains in first place. China continues to lead in natural and mixed heritage, holding the most sites in these categories.

**Deliberation Process**

Experts from the World Heritage Centre, Advisory Bodies, and Committee Member States conducted structured evaluations and discussions on the nominations. Several Asia-Pacific nominations were approved following review.

**Cultural Assertions in Narrative Reframing: The Successful Reversals of Trúc Lâm Zen and Maratha Military Heritage**

Vietnam's Architectural and Landscape Complex of Yên Tử, Vĩnh Nghiêm, and Côn Sơn - Kiếp Bạc was initially recommended for Deferral by ICOMOS, citing an overly broad cultural narrative that failed to clearly articulate the material manifestations and

spatial organisation of Trúc Lâm Zen Buddhism, with insufficiently distinctive cultural landscape features. However, after robust advocacy from delegates of India, South Korea, Japan, and Senegal, the Committee adopted an amendment to inscribe the site under Criteria (iii) and (vi).

Member States emphasised that the minimalist spirituality, nation-building identity, and living faith traditions embodied by Trúc Lâm Zen should be recognised as integral intangible dimensions of cultural heritage. This case underscores Southeast Asia's strategic capacity to advance indigenous religious cultures within the World Heritage framework.

Meanwhile, the inscription of India's Maratha Military Landscapes highlighted the multilateral negotiation pathways of the World Heritage system when addressing sovereignty narratives and serial heritage complexities. Initially deferred due to inconsistencies in narrative logic, boundary delineation, and typological classification, the nomination vacillated between framing itself as a cultural landscape or a defensive fortress system, lacking a cohesive value statement. The twelve selected components also inadequately demonstrated the system's integrity, hierarchy, and functional linkages. Yet, with support from Greece, Ukraine, and Lebanon, the site was inscribed under Criteria (iv) and (vi).

Delegates argued that these fortresses not only reflect the Maratha Empire's defensive reconfiguration of geography but also contributed to global anti-colonial discourse through the Swaraj (self-rule) philosophy. The amendment's approval not only affirms South Asia's autonomous historical narratives but also sets a precedent for evaluating complex serial nominations.

**Ecological Restoration and Community Co-governance: Highlights from Selangor and Murujuga's Inscription Pathways**

Several Asia-Pacific cultural heritage nominations at this session reflected the Committee's growing emphasis on ecosystem rehabilitation and Indigenous-led governance, signalling a shift from material-centric narratives toward ecological ethics and pluralistic stewardship.

The Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) Selangor National Park, initially recommended for Referral by ICOMOS, challenged the World Heritage system's conceptual boundaries of "human-made nature." Once degraded mining land in the 1920s, it was transformed through scientific afforestation

experiments. Nominated under Criteria (ii) and (v), it was ultimately inscribed under Criterion (iv) after review.

Delegates from Japan, Zambia, Vietnam, and India underscored its landmark role in forest science history, highlighting how its pioneering reforestation efforts exemplify early ecological restoration and sustainable land remediation. Its inscription not only offers a global model for endangered heritage recovery but also expands strategic approaches to cultural heritage nominations.

Australia's Murujuga Cultural Landscape, initially referred to due to concerns about potential industrial pollution risks cited in an 800-page unpublished report, became one of the session's most symbolic victories. Led by Kenya and Japan, a coalition argued that existing studies confirmed the rock art's integrity and that the Indigenous-led nomination process itself was groundbreaking.

Approved after a heated debate, Murujuga's inscription reflects contemporary heritage governance's focus on "who safeguards" rather than merely "what is safeguarded." During the vote, Indigenous representatives seated with the Australian delegation wept openly while addressing the Committee—a poignant moment that underscored the emotional stakes.

This case may herald a future where Indigenous agency, rights recognition, and structural participation in governance become integral to World Heritage evaluations, redefining how value and sustainable conservation capacity are assessed.

UNESCO Priority Initiatives **IN FOCUS****SECRETARY-GENERAL SHAO YONG OF WHITR-AP REPORTED ACHIEVEMENTS AT THE 47TH WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE, RECEIVED HIGH COMMENDATION FROM THE COMMITTEE****Li Hong**  
WHITR-AP Shanghai

On the morning of 15 July 2025 (Paris time), during the 47th session of the World Heritage Committee, the World Heritage Institute of Training and Research for the Asia and the Pacific Region (WHITR-AP) presented its key achievements over the past year to the delegates as part of Agenda Item 6B.

During the discussions on Agenda Items 5A and 5B, the World Heritage Centre (WHC) and Advisory Bodies (ABs) repeatedly highlighted their close collaboration with WHITR-AP and other UNESCO Category 2 Centres (hereafter referred to as C2Cs), particularly in areas such as Preliminary Assessments and Impact Assessment (IA) capacity-building. These cooperative efforts further underscore the pivotal role of C2Cs in advancing global heritage conservation.

This recognition not only reflects the international community's broad acknowledgement of the growing importance of C2Cs in World Heritage conservation but also signifies their expanding influence on the global heritage protection stage.

At this session, Prof. Shao Yong, Secretary-General of WHITR-AP, provided a comprehensive overview of the Centre's key achievements over the past year, which were strategically aligned with four priority directions.

She first highlighted the collaborative and complementary strengths of WHITR-AP's three offices in Shanghai, Beijing, and Suzhou, as well as the 2024 Governing Council's decision to advance the renewal evaluation of Category 2 Centres (C2Cs).

Shao then reported WHITR-AP's notable progress in:

1. Advancing Heritage and Sustainable Development:  
Launched the "World Heritage's Contribution to SDGs" project, focusing on "Environment & Resilience" (2024) and "Prosperity & Livelihoods" (2025).
2. Empowering Heritage Professionals:  
Co-organised an "Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA)" training in Melaka, Malaysia, with SEAMEO SPAFA.

Hosted the "Asian Regional Workshop on World Heritage Preliminary Assessments" in Chengdu with ICOMOS and ICOMOS China.

3. Strengthening Convention Implementation:  
Supported the Third Cycle Periodic Reporting and Regional Action Plan for Asia-Pacific.  
Implemented the "World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism (WH+ST)" initiative in China.  
Facilitated the "Heritage Without Borders" Sino-French seminar (China/Loire Valley).  
Provided advisory services for World Heritage nominations.

4. Expanding Outreach:  
Enhanced regional collaboration through the "University and Heritage-City Consortium (UHC-HEI)" and "HeritAP" network, partnering with WHC, ICCROM, and national authorities.  
Established new World Heritage Youth Education Bases to nurture future guardians.

Looking ahead, WHITR-AP will continue working with UNESCO and UN-Habitat to develop the "Five-Year Plan Proposal (2026–2030)\*", further integrating methodologies like the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) with sustainability, innovation, and post-2030 SDG strategies.

Following the presentation, Secretary-General Shao Yong addressed questions raised by the Vietnamese delegation.

**Capacity Building for the Mongolia Heritage Programme held in Ulaanbaatar****Carolina Castellanos**  
WHITR-AP Shanghai

From 16 to 20 June 2025, Component 1 of the Mongolia Heritage Programme (MHP 2025–2026) was successfully undertaken at the School of Culture of the National University of Arts and Culture of Mongolia, in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. The programme is implemented through a strategic partnership between the UNESCO Regional Office for East Asia, the Ministry of Culture, Sports, Tourism and Youth of Mongolia, the Mongolian National University of Arts and Culture, and the Mongolian National Commission for UNESCO and supported by WHITR-AP Shanghai. Ms Carolina Castellanos, Head of Research Unit, WHITR-AP Shanghai, designed and lectured extensively in the workshop, while 18 participants from Mongolia attended.

The MHP represents a collaborative and capacity-driven response to Mongolia's growing need for skilled heritage professionals. It has been conceived as a comprehensive framework to support cultural, tangible and intangible, and natural heritage management and emphasises integration with international best practices while rooting learning within local and national contexts. Component 1 marks the first phase of a two-year initiative aimed at delivering targeted capacity building and ultimately laying the groundwork for a dedicated academic degree in heritage management.

Component 1 was designed as an intensive, in-person training module, preceded by a one-day online orientation. The module introduced participants to essential knowledge areas and practical methodologies in heritage identification, protection, safeguarding, and sustainable management. Content was delivered through five thematic modules: Introduction to Heritage, Legal Frameworks, Heritage Protection and Safeguarding, Heritage and Sustainable Development, and Challenges and Future Directions.

Pedagogical approaches combined foundational knowledge delivery with active, participatory learning and peer exchange. They included theoretical presentations, group work, guided thematic discussions, and debriefing sessions, all aimed at encouraging reflection on complex heritage issues and application to real-world challenges. The programme welcomed 18 participants from across

Mongolia, who actively contributed to group exercises, shared professional insights, and contextualised global frameworks within local realities. Through interactive sessions, they examined specific challenges in heritage management and identified potential context-sensitive solutions. Component 1 ended with participants articulating their personal action plans—identifying specialisation areas and framing their future learning journeys for upcoming MHP components.

The success of Component 1 underscores the relevance of modular, practice-oriented capacity development as a scalable model for the heritage sector. It offers a replicable framework for institutional partnerships, cross-sectoral knowledge-sharing, and long-term professionalisation of heritage management in Mongolia.

**Conclusion meeting of the Second Phase of UNESCO's "World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism" Chinese Pilot Project was held successfully in Yancheng****Li Hong** / WHITR-AP Shanghai  
**Han Feng** / College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Tongji University

On 19 June 2025, the conclusion meeting for the Second Phase of UNESCO's "World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism" Chinese Pilot Project—Migratory Bird Sanctuaries along the Coast of Yellow Sea-Bohai Gulf of China (Phase I)—was held in Yancheng, China. Prof. Han Feng from Tongji University reported the project achievements, and



Ms Li Hong, Project Director of WHITR-AP Shanghai, attended the meeting. Guided by UNESCO's concepts and approaches to World Heritage conservation, management, and sustainable tourism, the project centred on the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the pilot heritage site. It systematically explored methods, strategies, and products for sustainable tourism, established tracking evaluation indicators, and promoted in-depth collaboration among stakeholders through demonstrative research. The project, which holds both local guiding significance and global demonstration value, was unanimously praised by review experts and successfully concluded.

The project conducted in-depth research on the ecological patterns and characteristics of coastal migratory bird habitats, accurately identifying challenges to sustainable tourism in the heritage site. It formulated development approaches, strategies, and effectiveness evaluation management indicators suitable for the Migratory Bird Sanctuaries along the Coast of Yellow Sea-Bohai Gulf of China (Phase I), established recreational interpretation themes, and planned recreational experience spaces and routes, effectively guiding sustainable tourism development in the pilot heritage site.

Through promoting World Heritage values and providing sustainable tourism training, the project significantly enhanced stakeholders' awareness of World Heritage values and their capabilities to participate in and manage sustainable tourism. Additionally, pilot demonstration workshops based on collaborative cooperation among communities and stakeholders provided innovative models for protecting biocultural diversity in migratory bird habitats, coordinating World Heritage conservation with wetland agricultural economy, establishing partnerships, and increasing income through heritage, cultural and creative products. These efforts were widely welcomed and praised by governments at all levels, tourism enterprises, nature reserves, rural communities, and nature researchers in the heritage site.



## WHITR-AP Beijing co-hosted the Thematic Workshop on Serial World Heritage Properties in the Asia-Pacific Region

Park Lina (Intern), Li Ziyi (Intern), Zhou Zijie  
WHITR-AP Beijing

From August 10 to 17, 2025, the Thematic Workshop on Serial World Heritage Properties in the Asia-Pacific Region was successfully held in Quanzhou, Fujian Province. The event was jointly organized by WHITR-AP Beijing, ICOMOS China, the Fujian Provincial Administration of Cultural Heritage, and the School of Archaeology and Museology at Peking University; hosted by the Quanzhou Municipal Bureau of Culture, Radio, Television, and Tourism; and co-organized by the Quanzhou Cultural Heritage Protection Center and the Anxi Teaching and Research Base of Peking University's School of Archaeology and Museology.



The workshop responded to the spirit of the "Third Cycle of Periodic Reports and Regional Framework Action Plan for the Asia-Pacific Region" issued at the 45th World Heritage Committee in September 2023. It

focused on the study, protection, and interpretation of series heritage in the Asia-Pacific region—especially transnational and transboundary heritage—and aimed to advance UNESCO's mission of promoting international cooperation, peace, and the highest standards of heritage protection and interpretation.

The event attracted 18 participants from countries and regions, including Australia, Pakistan, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Tajikistan, India, Indonesia, as well as mainland China, Hong Kong, and Macau. 9 experts from Mexico, Italy, Malaysia, and China were invited to deliver in-person lectures.



Over the course of eight days, the workshop combined five days of lectures, two days of field visits, four group discussions, and two reporting sessions. The curriculum started with the basic definitions and nomination procedures of World Heritage, gradually advancing to topics such as Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), the evolution of heritage protection and management concepts, series heritage, and the assessment of authenticity and integrity. Participants conducted field visits to the Maritime Silk Road cultural heritage sites in Quanzhou and the Tan Kah Kee educational heritage in Xiamen, directly experiencing the value of series heritage. Using the Tan Kah Kee educational heritage as a case study,

participants applied series heritage methods to complete assignments and reports.

The workshop not only deepened the understanding of series heritage concepts among Asia-Pacific participants but also broadened international cooperation perspectives, injecting new momentum into the protection and exchange of World Heritage in the region.



# IN FOCUS

## Featured Programmes of three sub-centres

### 4<sup>th</sup> Technical Meeting of the UHC-HEI International Network

Marie-Noël Tournoux, Song Kewei (intern)  
WHITR-AP Shanghai

On 17 June 2025, from 18:30 to 20:30 Beijing time (UTC+8), WHITR-AP Shanghai and CAUP Tongji University organised the 4th Technical Meeting of the International Network for Urban-rural Heritage Conservation in Higher Education Institutions (UHC-HEI).

#### The UHC-HEI Network

The UHC-HEI Network was established in Shanghai, China, on 27 September 2023 at the International Conference on Urban Heritage Conservation and Design for Sustainable Development and International Network for Urban Heritage Conservation in Higher Education Institutions (UHC-HEI) initiated by the World Heritage Institute of Training and Research for the Asia and Pacific Region, Shanghai Centre (WHITR-AP Shanghai) and the College of Architecture and Urban Planning (CAUP), Tongji University.

Its principles were set forth in the Shanghai Initiative on Urban Heritage Conservation and Design for Sustainable Development and Roadmap for Urban Heritage Conservation in Higher Education Institutions, adopted by the participants who agreed on the relevance of setting up an international network. The Secretariat of the network is provided by WHITR-AP Shanghai with the support of Tongji University.

The UHC-HEI Network was designed as a platform to strengthen cooperation with and among Universities and Higher Education Institutions that have recognized urban heritage conservation and design for sustainable development as a key subject of their teaching, research, and action plans to bridge the competency gap in the area of heritage conservation but also in the area of urban-rural development design and regeneration approaches, where the dichotomy between conservation and development still prevails.

Since its inception the UHC-HEI Network has built and consolidated the network by organizing three Technical Meetings, promoted exchanges among partners and other institutions, taken part in international expert meetings such as the UNESCO World Conference on Culture and Arts Education

in Abu Dhabi (February 2024) (Click for details), the CHARTER Alliance Paris Conference (March 2024), and the side event on Science, Creativity, Empowerment – World Heritage Education Towards the Future (Click for details) held at the 46th Session of the World Heritage Committee in July 2024 in New Delhi, India. It has designed a series of joint activities and is organising an International Conference on Reshaping Heritage Conservation In Higher Education: What, How, For Whom? (Click for details) which will take place in Shanghai, China, on 25-26 October 2025.

#### 4th Technical Meeting Review

To follow up on the Network's previous Technical Meetings of 18 March, 26 June 2024, and the one in two sessions meeting of 2 and 7 April 2025, WHITR-AP Shanghai and the College of Architecture and Urban Planning (CAUP), Tongji University, organized the 4th online Technical Meeting to update its members on ongoing activities, collect their feedback and allow members to share information on their activities.

Over 30 participants from 14 countries from the 4 regions of the world and UN-Habitat attended it.

The meeting allowed to greet new members and discuss in particular the preparation of the forthcoming international conference on Reshaping Heritage Conservation Education In Higher Education: What, How, For Whom? (25-26 October 2025) and of the Yunlong International Workshop 2025 (11-22 October 2025) (Click for details). Also, participants provided insightful contributions to the organisation of the first UHC-HEI Network General Assembly planned before the conference, on 24 October 2025.



Additionally, the meeting focused on the planning of two exhibitions, one on the outcomes of the Yunlong workshop and one on urban-rural heritage conservation in higher education to showcase the members' educational practices, research and actions in the field of heritage. The Technical Meeting allowed, furthermore, to present other ongoing or planned activities of the Network members. The secretariat detailed the side events organised and co-organised by WHITR-AP at the 47th Session of the World Heritage Committee, 6-16 July 2025, UNESCO Headquarters, Paris.

Finally, participants shared further information and discussed contribution and participation in the 3rd Mondiacult follow up meeting in Barcelona in September 2025, in the Ibero-American UNESCO Chairs and heritage conservation workshop organised at The Maule University, Chile on the last week of October and in the ICOMOS Annual General Assembly, Advisory Committee meetings and Scientific Symposium in Lumbini, Nepal, organized by ICOMOS Nepal from 11 to 19 October 2025.

Rich in thoughtful ideas, the 4th Technical Meeting worked fully as a networking platform and a forum to develop new projects and incentives.

### First Sino-French Heritage Dialogue: Poetic Dwelling was successfully held at WHITR-AP Shanghai

Yu Jiayi (intern), Marie-Noël Tournoux, Shao Yong  
WHITR-AP Shanghai

On 3 June, the first Sino-French Heritage Dialogue: Poetic Dwelling was successfully held online. The event was co-organised by WHITR-AP Shanghai and the College of Architecture and Urban Planning (CAUP) at Tongji University, with support from Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine de France, Mission Val de Loire Patrimoine mondial, Association des Petites Cités de Caractères de France (PCC), and Association Nationale des Architectes des Bâtiments de France. It also received strong support from the Heritage Conservation and Culture Revitalisation Institute of Shanghai Tongji Urban Planning and Design Institute Co., Ltd. (HCCRI-TJUPDI), and the Tongji-Dali Heritage Conservation and Culture Innovation Institute (TD-HCCII).



Under the moderation of Professors Shao Yong and Françoise Ged, experts from China and France discussed the theme of "Poetic Dwelling" using the Yunlong "Salt" Cultural Ecosystem, Jingmai Mountain Ancient Tea Forest, and the Loire Valley. They discussed issues such as heritage value assessment, integrating heritage conservation into spatial planning, improving the legal framework, addressing community residents' needs, promoting modernisation and renewal of living environments and public services, and developing a diversified economy. Additionally, over 300 participants from the Dali Prefecture Housing and Urban-Rural Development Bureau, the Culture and Tourism Bureau, housing and urban-rural development and culture and tourism departments of the 12 counties and cities in Dali Prefecture, township-level historical and cultural heritage management institutions, and technical units in Dali Prefecture attended the event and engaged in exchanges with Chinese and French experts.

#### Keynote Speeches

*Protection of Traditional Settlement Clusters and Rural Revitalisation Based on Cultural Ecosystems: The Case of the "Salt" Cultural Ecosystem in Yunlong*

Shao Yong  
Professor at CAUP, Tongji University; Director of WHITR-AP Shanghai; Director of HCCRI-TJUPDI

Prof. Shao Yong drew on the concept of cultural ecosystems to share a case study on the preservation of Yunlong's "salt" cultural heritage villages and rural revitalisation. A cultural ecosystem is essentially an interactive system composed of people, technology, social structures, values, and other elements. Through centuries of continuous interaction between humans and nature, the Yunlong region has gradually formed a dynamic cultural ecosystem with the Bijiang



River Valley-Lancang River Valley as its natural foundation, and 'salt' as the core driving force linking natural and cultural resources. This ecosystem includes material and intangible elements such as salt valleys, salt wells, salt roads, salt villages, and salt customs. Therefore, the Yunlong 'salt' cultural ecosystem holds significant heritage value and derivative value. Historically, the 'salt horse ancient trail' network connecting salt well villages covered over 70% of the county's administrative villages. Along the route, there is a wealth of high-quality traditional villages and cultural relics protection units at various levels. However, while natural and cultural resources are abundant, they are fragmented. Additionally, the region faces challenges such as the need to enhance overall heritage protection and the lack of planning for heritage revitalisation and utilisation. Based on an understanding of the salt cultural ecosystem, Prof. Shao Yong mentioned the concept of "connecting points, linking lines, forming a network framework for comprehensive protection and revitalisation strategies. This approach uses linear heritage as a supply and control system to connect point-based heritage, enabling the region's historical and cultural resources to transition from "cells" to a 'living organism." This strengthens the systematic and comprehensive protection of natural and cultural heritage, as well as tangible and intangible cultural heritage, thereby supporting the protection of traditional village clusters and the revitalisation of multiple villages.

***The Protection and Utilisation of Cultural Landscapes: The Case of the Ancient Tea Forest of Jingmai Mountain in Yunnan***

Chen Yaohua  
Associate Professor, School of Urban & Environmental Sciences, Peking University; Director, World Heritage Research Centre, Peking University; Deputy Chair of the Academic Committee of WHITR-AP Beijing.

Prof. Chen Yaohua used the ancient tea forests of Jingmai Mountain in Yunnan Province as an example to discuss the conservation and utilisation of cultural landscapes. The ancient tea forests of Jingmai Mountain in Yunnan consist of five concentrated ancient tea forests, nine traditional villages, and three separate protective forests as heritage components. They serve as a prominent testament to the tradition of growing tea trees under forest canopies and represent an outstanding example of a sustainable land use system based on the integration of horizontal and vertical land use methods. In 2023, at the 45th session of the World Heritage Committee, they were inscribed on the World Heritage List,

becoming the first tea-themed World Heritage site globally. Subsequently, Professor Chen Yaohua summarised the six key aspects of the protection and utilisation of the Jingmai Mountain Ancient Tea Forest Cultural Landscape. In terms of the recognition of value in terms of both form and substance, cultural landscapes encompass form elements, substance elements, as well as key technologies and inheritance mechanisms. Jingmai Mountain maintains the millennia-old tradition of ancient tea forests through its 'four traditions' protection mechanism; in terms of the interaction between nature and culture, human understanding of culture drives the protection of ecological nature, creating a positive feedback loop; in terms of the continuous inheritance of tradition and modernity, while preserving historical culture, it is also essential to actively endow it with new contemporary functions; In terms of the organic unity of protection and development, three spatial planning models are used to plan village development spaces, enhancing and optimising living environments; In terms of balancing benefits and fairness, fully considering the reasonable demands and development fairness of stakeholders in heritage sites is an important social security measure for sustainable development; In terms of mutual promotion between heritage and regions, by establishing a scientific regional development perspective, coordinating functional layout, facility construction, and industrial development, the pressure on heritage site construction is alleviated, and the development of related regions is actively promoted.

***Management of the Living Cultural Landscape of the Loire Valley, a World Heritage Site***

Alain Marinos  
Honorary Inspector General of architecture et du patrimoine honoraire du Ministère de la Culture de France; Honorary President of Association Nationale des Architectes des Bâtiments de France; National Delegate for PCC

As the National Delegate for PCC, Alain Marinos delivered a speech titled "Management of the Living Cultural Landscape of the Loire Valley, a World Heritage Site," introducing this living cultural landscape that has been listed on the World Heritage List since 2000. He explained the characteristics of the valley (300 kilometres long, with a catchment area of 860 square kilometres) and the history shaped by the interaction between the river, the regions it flows through, and the residents over the past century. He highlighted the valley's diverse features from multiple perspectives, including historical sites, urban areas, and agricultural landscapes.

Alain Marinos stressed the necessity of adopting a comprehensive governance strategy that integrates socio-economic, cultural, and natural ecological values and transcends traditional administrative boundaries. In this process, the Loire Valley Office plays a key role through its management plan, connecting the national government, local governments, residents, and economic entities to achieve a dynamic balance between protection and development.

Some of the agency's landmark achievements include reflecting on the legal status of the Loire River, adjusting the environmental layout of the Loire River banks, and constructing an 800-kilometre cycling route along the Loire River, which has also been incorporated into the 4,450-kilometre-long European route.

In his closing remarks, Alain Marinos emphasised that the innovative practices over the past 22 years have transcended the realm of mere heritage conservation, achieving a balance between top-down and bottom-up management approaches. This experience, which integrates regional characteristics with sustainable development principles, has now become a model worth emulating for other heritage sites.

***Living with Water***

Bruno Marmiroli  
Director of Mission Val de Loire

Bruno Marmiroli outlined the organisation's objectives and strategic approach, covering academic research, dialogue with residents and local governments, and the enhancement of economic and regional value. His keynote speech, themed "Living with Water," interpreted the role of the Loire Valley as a World Heritage site, providing an educational and detailed analysis of the characteristics of different sections of the river.

Bruno Marmiroli emphasised the importance of regional partnerships, noting that the collaborations built over the past 22 years across administrative boundaries have enriched people's understanding of heritage. His presentation focused on several recently implemented projects, showcasing concrete practices that integrate political, cultural, and economic dimensions, while also stressing that heritage conservation efforts inevitably require time to mature.

Bruno Marmiroli also introduced a multi-dimensional regulatory framework, including both strict heritage

protection tools and more flexible approaches, such as the Charter, which serves as a contractual agreement aimed at protecting heritage values while avoiding the stagnation of local vitality. He presented various pathways for heritage revitalisation: conducting interdisciplinary collaborations between science and philosophy to disseminate knowledge about the river; collaborating with sound ecologists to explore soundscapes; and collecting oral histories from residents. Among these, the most innovative practice was the establishment of the "Loire River Parliament" (le Parlement de la Loire), which grants legal rights to the river. This initiative draws inspiration from natural rights protection models outside Europe. Finally, he particularly emphasised the revitalisation of traditional water-based activities, such as barge transport and fishing, which are far from mere folk performances.

***Roundtable discussion***

During the roundtable discussion session, Dr Roland Lin, Programme Specialist at the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Researcher at the Centre for East Asian Studies at the Sorbonne University in Paris, and Visiting Professor at Tongji University, provided commentary on three China-France case studies regarding the topic of "The Cultural Landscape Value of Cultural Routes: Challenges and Measures for Comprehensive Conservation."

He first presented data to illustrate the current status of cultural landscape-related heritage sites within the World Heritage framework, highlighting that there is significant room for development in cultural landscape nominations within the Asia-Pacific region. He emphasised that within the World Heritage framework, the primary heritage value system of cultural landscapes includes land use, knowledge systems, social structures, and religion and rituals. He mentioned that the Yunlong Salt Horse Ancient Trail, Jingmai Mountain Ancient Tea Forest, and Loire Valley shared in this dialogue are all important cultural landscapes that require value-oriented research and protection, encompassing five key factors: historical context, cultural context, natural context, a people-centred approach, and regional and planning methods. He stressed the need to adopt an interdisciplinary approach, combining academic research, teaching, and practice to analyse, interpret, compare, reflect on, and make recommendations regarding cultural landscapes.

Dr Lin also raised several thought-provoking questions, such as how cultural routes and cultural landscapes can strengthen landscape-oriented protection

and management from the perspectives of planning, conservation, and management.

Prof. Han Feng from CAUP at Tongji University first highlighted the urgency of identifying the value of cultural landscapes. Whether it is the protection and management planning of the ancient tea forests of Jingmai Mountain or the coordination among multiple stakeholders, industries, and management mechanisms in the Loire Valley, all are based on an understanding of the value of cultural landscapes. Ethnic wisdom and spirit are the intrinsic driving forces for the sustainable development of cultural landscapes and also the source of sustainable development concepts such as poetic habitation.

Additionally, Prof. Han Feng discussed international standards for rural landscape heritage and sustainable development. Cultural landscapes serve as a bridge connecting humans and nature, and sustainable development involves the synergistic development of humans and nature, requiring a systematic exploration and identification of their true value. Finally, Prof. Han Feng also addressed the collaborative protection and management of cultural landscape values, noting that protecting the value of cultural landscapes and managing them during their dynamic evolution are important issues.

Q&A

During the Q&A session, representatives and technical personnel from the 12 counties and cities of Dali Prefecture, along with their affiliated townships and communities, first posed questions to Chinese and French experts regarding how to avoid the conflict between the holistic protection of the "natural-cultural-human" environment and the development of modern infrastructure. Prof. Chen Yaohua from the Chinese side, approaching the issue from the perspective of heritage nomination, emphasised that what is important is not the outcome of the nomination but the process itself. During the nomination process, determining the scope of protection and developing a conservation management plan can enable more comprehensive protection of the entire environment at a larger spatial scale.

Bruno Marmioli from the French side cited the example of the Loire River Valley Dam project being halted. He argued that this outcome did not stem from conservation policies but rather from residents, associations, and environmentalists who opposed the dam's construction because it would

disrupt ecological and landscape balance. Balancing residents' needs, community interests, climate change, energy consumption, and the interactions between ecosystems and hydrological systems is of utmost importance.

Subsequently, the audience asked Alain Marinos about how low-cost renovation and revitalisation of traditional dwellings are carried out in France. Alain Marinos mentioned that heritage should be integrated into local life, given vitality, and approached with a long-term perspective. Cross-functional cooperation among all stakeholders in the region is necessary, transcending administrative and disciplinary boundaries. Professor Shao Yong added insights into France's 'public-private partnership' policies and the role of volunteer teams and other social forces.

Conclusion

Prof. Shao Yong and Françoise Ged concluded the dialogue with closing remarks. Françoise Ged emphasised the importance of reflecting on architecture and the built environment over the past 30 years, and highlighted the central role of residents in shaping authentic cultural landscapes. She proposed that future dialogues should involve greater participation from local communities to foster collective reflection. Prof. Shao Yong expressed gratitude to Prof. Chen Yaohua, Alan Marinos, and Bruno Marmioli for sharing their experiences, as well as Dr Roland Lin and Prof. Han Feng for their participation in the discussion. Their shared practical experiences and perspectives have provided valuable direction and guidance for heritage conservation efforts.



WHITR-AP Beijing successfully conducted an Audience Survey on Targeted Interpretation at the Yungang Grottoes

Zhou Zijie  
WHITR-AP Beijing

From August 21 to 23, 2025, Dr Wang Siyu, research fellow at WHITR-AP Beijing, Director of the Centre for Public Archaeology and Art at Peking University, and Assistant Professor at the School of Archaeology and Museology, Peking University, together with WHITR-AP Beijing programme specialist Zhou Zijie, led a team of nine researchers to carry out an audience survey at the Yungang Grottoes, a UNESCO World Heritage site in Datong, Shanxi Province, focusing on "targeted interpretation."

The survey aimed to assess the applicability and effectiveness of the current interpretation system for different audience groups, and to identify the needs and directions for optimising targeted interpretation. Through questionnaires, interviews, and on-site observations, the research team collected extensive first-hand data, providing practical support for the future development of a more inclusive, diverse, and audience-oriented interpretation system, and contributing valuable experience to improving public services at World Heritage sites.



Suzhou Gardens - Culture and Natural Heritage Day 2025 Event: "Cultural Nature: Interdisciplinary Landscape Research Workshop" held in Suzhou

Jiang Yeqin  
WHITR-AP Suzhou

From June 13 to 15, 2025, the "Cultural Nature: Interdisciplinary Landscape Research Workshop" was held at Huiyin Garden and Chai Garden in Suzhou. The event was jointly organised by WHITR-AP Suzhou, the World Natural and Cultural Heritage Research Centre of Beijing Forestry University, the College of Humanities and Development Studies of China Agricultural University, and Tsinghua University Press. Leaders from the Suzhou Municipal Bureau of Gardens and Landscaping and the National Park College of Beijing Forestry University attended the opening ceremony. The event also featured the launch ceremony of the new book "The Anthropology of Landscape."



As part of the National Cultural and Natural Day of Suzhou Gardens, the Workshop aimed to build a platform for in-depth interdisciplinary dialogue,



focusing on Suzhou gardens and based on international cutting-edge concepts in cultural landscape heritage conservation. The workshop invited young and middle-aged scholars from Peking University, Beijing Forestry University, Tongji University, China Agricultural University, and other institutions to discuss core topics such as "Suzhou Classical Gardens," "Landscape Heritage," and "Landscape Cognition Methods." Participants conducted field research on Suzhou classical gardens as "cultural heritage" and explored their value as a World Heritage site. By combining theory and practice, the workshop sought to explore landscape as a unique path to bridge the gap between nature and culture, deeply uncover the cultural attributes inherent in the natural world of daily life, and promote cross-disciplinary integration and innovation in landscape spaces, heritage conservation, and the humanities and social sciences.

## **Suzhou Classical Garden Culture and Art Exhibition held at Taicang's Nanyuan Garden**

**Jiang Yeqin**  
WHITR-AP Suzhou

On July 18, 2025, the "Suzhou Classical Garden Culture and Art Exhibition," hosted by the Suzhou Municipal Bureau of Gardens and Landscaping, jointly organised by the WHITR-AP Suzhou and the Administration of Yanshan Garden in Taicang, opened at the Lou Dong Garden Exhibition Hall in Taicang's Nanyuan Garden.

The exhibition features 25 rubbing specimens of calligraphic stone inscriptions from Suzhou gardens and 24 garden models. It aims to interpret the cultural depth and exceptional construction techniques of Suzhou gardens from multiple perspectives through these rubbings and models. By offering citizens and visitors an up-close experience of the charm of garden art, the exhibition showcases the intricate craftsmanship and creative ingenuity embodied in the model works. It also highlights achievements in cultural heritage preservation and youth heritage education.

The rubbing specimens on display were selected from renowned Suzhou classical gardens, such as the Humble Administrator's Garden and the Lingering

Garden, inviting audiences to appreciate the three-dimensional history of calligraphy spanning millennia. These treasured inscriptions, engraved on metal and stone, along with garden paintings, calligraphy, horizontal inscribed boards, and couplets, collectively form the cultural context of the gardens. They serve as enduring evidence of these historical gardens "remaining timeless between heaven and earth" and provide indispensable first-hand materials for studying garden history and culture, playing a vital role in the protection and research of cultural heritage. The exhibition will remain open at Taicang's Nanyuan Garden until mid-August.



## **Publication of Issue 3 of the Study on Natural and Cultural Heritage (2025)**

**Zhou Zijie**  
WHITR-AP Beijing

Issue 3 of the *Study on Natural and Cultural Heritage* (2025) was published in June 2025. The special feature of this issue is the Observation Report on the 46th Session of the World Heritage Committee, curated by Prof. Lyu Zhou from the School of Architecture, Tsinghua University. The main topics include: recent trends in the evaluation of World Heritage nominations, the development of impact assessment techniques for World Heritage, progress and challenges in World Heritage conservation, and a study on the potential of re-nomination as a means to address conservation issues.

## **WHITR-AP Beijing Research Fellow Wang Siyu invited to deliver Keynote at Beiyang Sailors Heritage Symposium**

**Zhou Zijie**  
WHITR-AP Beijing

On 21–22 July 2025, "Bridging Seas and Centuries: The Beiyang Sailors Legacy Symposium" was held at the Newcastle University Business School, UK. The event was hosted by the Confucius Institute at Newcastle University, with support from the Chinese Consulate-General in Manchester, the China Cultural Heritage Foundation, and other institutions.

Dr Wang Siyu, research fellow at WHITR-AP Beijing and Assistant Professor at the School of Archaeology and Museology, Peking University, was invited to participate and delivered a keynote speech. Drawing on archaeological practice and heritage interpretation, Dr Wang explored the value and contemporary significance of Beiyang Sailors' heritage in the construction of transnational memory, receiving keen attention from attending scholars.

The symposium brought together experts from China and the UK across multiple disciplines to discuss topics including cultural memory, archaeology, cross-cultural communication, and heritage tourism. The event not only advanced Sino-British academic dialogue but also opened new avenues for cooperation in Beiyang Sailors heritage preservation and public education.



## **The Second Suzhou Garden Model Creative Challenge Practical Activity for Youth was successfully held**

**Jiang Yeqin**  
WHITR-AP Suzhou

Aimed at fostering innovation awareness and practical skills among young people throughout the city, as well as cultivating future guardians of Suzhou's classical garden cultural heritage, the second Suzhou Youth Garden Model Creative Challenge Practical Activity commenced on May 24 at Yanwu Primary School in Qiandeng Town, Kunshan, and it lasted till June 14. The event was jointly organised by the Suzhou Municipal Bureau of Gardens and Landscaping, Suzhou Municipal Education Bureau, and Suzhou Association for Science and Technology, under the guidance of WHITR-AP Suzhou.

A total of 3,390 students from 167 schools across the city participated in the activity, producing 2,736 classical architectural models. These models not only accurately restored classic elements of Suzhou gardens, vividly showcasing the exquisite artistic conception of Suzhou's ancient garden architecture, but also integrated modern design concepts. When traditional upturned eaves and corners met technological algorithms, the millennia-old craftsmanship gained new vitality across generations. After a fair and rigorous evaluation, 219 students stood out and received the gold, silver, and bronze awards of the "Young Kuai Xiang" prize, symbolising the spirit of future craftsmen. Additionally, 13 schools were honoured with the "Comprehensive Group Award." These outstanding works, embodying wisdom and hard work, will subsequently be exhibited in various gardens and schools throughout the city, allowing more people to appreciate the power of youth in inheriting and innovating traditions.

In the future, this event will be held annually as a regular activity, continuously refining the model of youth heritage education. Plans are underway to gradually expand its reach to the Yangtze River Delta region and eventually nationwide, striving to build a premium platform that integrates Suzhou garden culture, science, and education. This initiative aims to rejuvenate ancient gardens through youthful wisdom, allowing them to radiate new brilliance.



# WORLD HERITAGE IN ASIA & PACIFIC

## BADAIN JARAN DESERT - TOWERS OF SAND AND LAKES

**Country:** China  
**Category of site:** Natural site  
**Date of inscription:** 2024  
**Criteria:** (vii), (viii)



Erosion alveoles © John MacKinnon



Corsac fox in snow © John MacKinnon



Tranquil lake © Chen Yao

### OUV

The property covers an area of 726,291.41 ha, with a buffer zone of 891,114.36 ha. Badain Jaran Desert, located in the Alashan Plateau in the hyper-arid and temperate desert region of northwestern China, is the third largest desert in China and hosts an irreplaceable natural heritage of lake and dune desert features. It stands out with its high density of mega-dunes, including the tallest stabilized sand dunes in the world, a myriad of interdunal lakes, and a range of aeolian landform features. The mega-dunes form an undulating landscape, among which the tallest sand dune achieves a relative height of 460 m. For a sandy desert and sand sea, Badain Jaran is home to abundant plant life and mostly nocturnal animal life. The lakes are mostly saline and diversely coloured, providing a favourable habitat for thriving worms, molluscs, crustacea and some fish.

Due to its geographical location and geological background, the property is strongly influenced by climate change and the continuing tectonic uplift of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. Its desert-forming process is continuing, so that the site and

its relics offer insights into long-term climatic changes and desert forming processes. The size and integrity of the site is important in understanding its ongoing evolution.

The property holds outstanding aesthetic values thanks to the significant abundance of mega-dunes, aeolian landscape diversity and to the uniqueness of its lakes.

### Criterion (vii)

Badain Jaran Desert - Towers of Sand and Lakes display spectacular ongoing geological and geomorphic features of desert landscapes and landforms subject to a temperate, hyper-arid climate. These features create exceptional aesthetic values emerging from the dense range of stabilized, linear, and parallel mega-dunes with numerous inter-dunal lakes as well as various types of smaller dunes in-between the mega-dunes. 144 inter-dunal lakes exhibit a myriad of colours, caused by different levels of salinity and microbial communities. With an exceptional expanse of so-called singing sands (describing the resonance caused

e.g. by wind moving dry and loose sand), the property also presents a remarkable soundscape. Wind-eroded landforms, oases, ripple effects and the grandeur of the world's tallest sand mega-dunes (relative relief of 460 m) compose a landscape of remarkable natural beauty. The dynamic of shifting sand dunes creates an ever-changing visual environment.

### Criterion (viii)

The property is located at the junction of three sandy regions of China and provides an outstanding example of the ongoing evolution of desert landscapes and landforms under a temperate and hyper-arid climate. It records and displays an exceptional variety of aeolian features and desert geomorphology, such as linear and parallel, stabilized mega-dunes and associated inter-dunal lakes. The property appears to be a very rare example at global scale that reflects the evolutionary landforms as a combined result of regional tectonism and hydrogeological changes associated with climatic evolution. The property also stands out due

to the remarkable stability of its linear mega-dunes and the abundance of inter-dunal lakes. It boasts the densest collection of stabilized mega-dunes globally, encompassing among the tallest sand dunes and the highest concentration of inter-dunal lakes found anywhere on Earth. With 144 inter-dunal lakes and the considerable variety of dune formations, the property hosts a remarkable geodiversity. Both IUCN's 2011 thematic study on desert landscapes and IUCN's 2021 study on the application of criterion (viii) highlighted the property as one of the most significant desert landscapes and geomorphological sites, not currently represented on the World Heritage List.

**Source:**  
<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1638/>  
Collected by **Luo Xi**, WHITR-AP Shanghai