WHITR-AP NEWSLETTER

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

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WHITRAP
World Heritage Institute of Training and Research
for the Asia and the Pacific Region
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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

WHITR-AP RECEIVED ON-SITE EVALUATION FROM UNESCO EVALUATION EXPERT

Background

According to the relevant regulations of UNESCO, the World Heritage Institute of Training and Research for the Asia and the Pacific Region (hereinafter referred to as "WHITR-AP") is required to undergo an external evaluation organised by UNESCO every six years. The results of the evaluation will serve as the basis for the renewal of the Agreement, thereby determining whether the Centre may continue to exist. WHITR-AP's last renewal was completed in May 2020.

According to the relevant evaluation procedures and arrangements of UNESCO, this evaluation is conducted by four experts selected from the French consulting firm Learning Avenue, with Ms Elçin Bahçeci, Deputy Director of the firm, carrying out the on-site evaluation from 23 to 29 May. She conducted field visits in Shanghai, Suzhou, and Beijing, and hold on-site interviews and exchanges with relevant authorities, partners, and stakeholders.

UNESCO External Evaluation Expert Visited WHITR-AP Shanghai and Met with Professor Lyu Peiming, Executive Vice President of Tongji University

On the morning of 25 May, Lyu Peiming, Executive Vice President of Tongji University, met with Ms Elçin Bahçeci, the UNESCO-appointed evaluation expert. The meeting was attended by representatives from the Foreign Affairs Office, the College of Architecture and Urban Planning (CAUP), Shanghai Tongji Urban Planning and Design Institute Co., Ltd. (TJUPDI), as well as the Secretariat and the Shanghai Sub-centre of WHITR-AP.

Lyu Peiming warmly welcomed Ms Elçin Bahçeci and expressed appreciation for her and the evaluation team's sustained attention to and support for the work of Tongji University and WHITR-AP. He then gave a brief introduction to Tongji University's history, highlighting its longstanding excellence in architecture, urban planning, landscape design, and heritage conservation, and its reputation as one of China's leading institutions in these fields. During the meeting, the two sides engaged in in-depth exchanges on topics such as World Heritage conservation, sustainable development, capacity-building initiatives, and the current evaluation and future development of WHITR-AP.

Lyu Peiming noted that Tongji University has a long and productive history of cooperation with United Nations agencies, including UNESCO, UN-Habitat, and UNEP. As the host institution of the WHITR-AP Shanghai Sub-centre and the Secretariat, the University provides comprehensive support for the Centre in terms of institutional mechanisms, dedicated personnel, stable funding, and office facilities. He emphasised that this evaluation offers a valuable opportunity to further strengthen the Centre's governance structure, enhance its operational efficiency, and align its strategic priorities with UNESCO's evolving agenda. He expressed his hope that WHITR-AP would continue to leverage its unique platform as a UNESCO Category 2 Centre to better serve the capacity-building needs of the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

Ms Elçin Bahçeci highly commended Tongji University's steadfast support for the Centre's development, as well as the tangible achievements of the Shanghai Sub-centre in training, research, and publications. She also offered constructive suggestions for the Centre's future trajectory, including enhancing knowledge transfer and community engagement at heritage sites, diversifying funding mechanisms through partnerships with development banks and private donors, expanding the Asia-Pacific network to reach more member states, and intensifying support for Africa and Small Island Developing States (SIDS). She expressed confidence that with Tongji University's continued backing, the Centre will play an even more influential role in advancing World Heritage conservation across the region.

WHITR-AP Suzhou Underwent UNESCO Renewal Evaluation

From 26 to 27 May 2026, WHITR-AP Suzhou underwent a two-day on-site renewal assessment conducted by UNESCO-appointed evaluation expert Ms Elçin Bahçeci. She was accompanied throughout the visit by Professor Shao Yong, Secretary-General of WHITR-AP, and Dr Li Xin, Deputy Secretary-General, who provided additional context and support during the review process.

During the evaluation, Ms Elçin Bahçeci carried out a comprehensive and multi-faceted assessment. She inspected the office facilities at the Suzhou sub-centre, visited the cultural wall and an exhibition showcasing outcomes from the traditional architecture training programme, and reviewed a detailed six-year work report. These activities gave her deep insight into the centre's accomplishments in World Heritage conservation, professional capacity-building, and international exchange and cooperation — three pillars that underpin the sub-centre's mandate and regional contribution.

Ms Elçin Bahçeci also held in-depth discussions with the director and key staff of WHITR-AP Suzhou, as well as representatives from partner organisations. The conversations covered project management, team development, budget performance, and the challenges and opportunities facing the centre in the coming years. To verify the impact of the sub-centre's work on the ground, she undertook site visits to Suzhou's garden conservation and management projects, toured the Xinghai Middle School World Heritage Youth Education Base, and explored innovative models for integrating heritage education into school-based curricula.

These field visits gave her a first-hand understanding of the centre's achievements in heritage preservation, revitalisation, and youth engagement.

Ms Elçin Bahçeci fully affirmed WHITR-AP Suzhou's effectiveness in leveraging the region's rich heritage resources and advancing both regional and international cooperation in heritage conservation. She noted that the centre had prepared thoroughly for the assessment, presenting comprehensive, well-structured reports that clearly document its six-year performance. She further observed that the centre's work and strategic direction are fully aligned with the positioning and evaluation criteria expected of UNESCO Category 2 Centres, and commended the sub-centre for its professionalism and clear vision for the future.

UNESCO External Evaluation Expert Visited Peking University and Conducted On-Site Evaluation of WHITR-AP Beijing

On the morning of 28 May, Ms Elçin Bahçeci, UNESCO external evaluation expert and Deputy Director of Learning Avenue Consulting (France), visited Peking University to conduct an on-site evaluation of WHITR-AP Beijing. She was received by Vice President Chu Xiaobo, who also participated in the evaluation activities.

Representatives from the School of Archaeology and Museology, the College of Urban and Environmental Sciences, and the College of Architecture and Landscape Design at Peking University, along with leadership from the WHITR-AP Secretariat, attended the meeting.

Vice President Chu extended a warm welcome to Ms Elçin Bahçeci and expressed gratitude for the evaluation team's close attention to the work of both Peking University and WHITR-AP. He noted that this evaluation serves as a comprehensive review of WHITR-AP Beijing's recent performance and presents a valuable opportunity to further strengthen the Centre's institutional framework and enhance the quality of its programmes.

Peking University has a long and productive history of collaboration with UNESCO in areas ranging from cultural heritage to higher education. As the host institution of WHITR-AP Beijing, the University remains fully committed to providing robust support for the Centre's effective operation, including institutional resources, academic expertise, and administrative coordination.

Vice President Chu expressed confidence that, following the renewal of its mandate, the Centre will be well positioned to play an even greater role in World Heritage conservation across the Asia-Pacific region, contributing to both regional capacity-building and global heritage dialogue.

During the meeting, Shen Ruiwen, Director of WHITR-AP Beijing, and Li Kuanghan, Executive Director, presented the Sub-Centre's main activities and representative projects since 2020, covering areas such as training, research, and international cooperation.

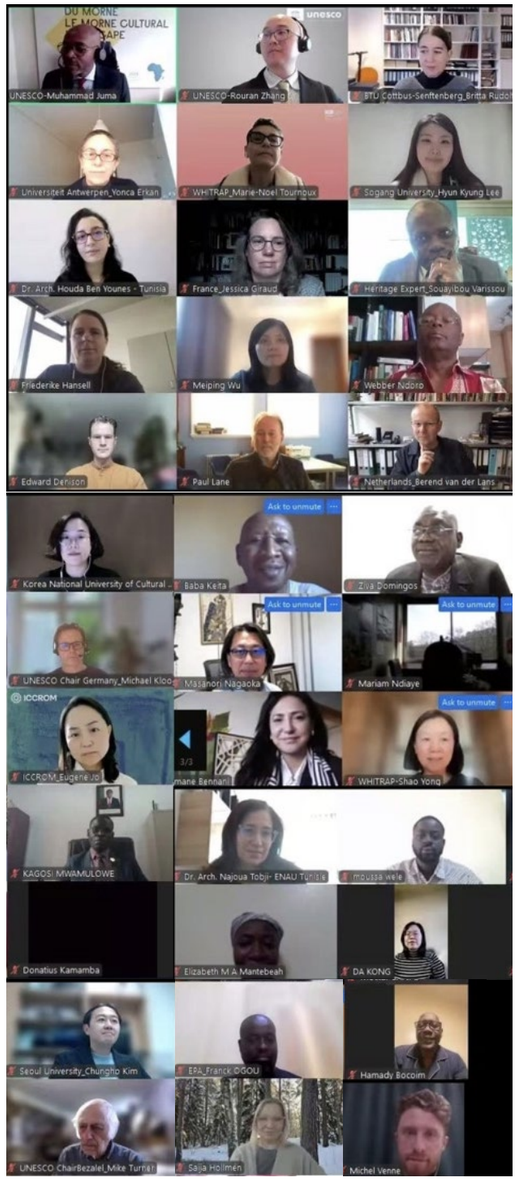
The two sides engaged in in-depth discussions on Peking University's multidisciplinary strengths in cultural and natural heritage conservation, WHITR-AP Beijing's ongoing international cooperation initiatives, and the strategic direction for the Sub-Centre's future development. The conversation also touched upon the role of young scholars and the importance of integrating heritage education into broader academic curricula.

Ms Elçin Bahçeci highly commended Peking University's strong and sustained support for the development of WHITR-AP, and acknowledged the Sub-Centre's achievements in implementing the World Heritage Convention, fostering regional cooperation and exchange, promoting the sustainable development of World Heritage sites, and building institutional capacity.

She noted that the findings of this evaluation will inform concrete recommendations for the renewal of WHITR-AP's agreement with UNESCO, and that the final evaluation report will provide important guidance for the Centre's strategic planning and future development, particularly in aligning its work with UNESCO's evolving priorities.

As part of the evaluation visit, Ms Elçin Bahçeci also conducted on-site inspections of the historic Yannan Garden and heritage sites along the Beijing section of the Grand Canal — both areas where WHITR-AP Beijing has been actively involved in conservation research and project implementation. These site visits gave her a first-hand understanding of the Sub-Centre's practical engagement with heritage preservation and its contribution to the broader cultural landscape of the capital.

IN FOCUS UNESCO Priority Initiatives



WHITR-AP Participated in the Brainstorming on World Heritage Higher Education in Africa

WHITR-AP was invited to the UNESCO virtual workshop "Strengthening World Heritage Higher Education in Africa" on 23–24 February 2026. Building on earlier workshops in Zimbabwe (2018), the online meeting was organized by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre with support from the Republic of Korea, aiming to advance capacity-building institutionalization in African World Heritage conservation.

Over 100 participants from African universities and partner institutions exchanged experiences and best practices, reviewed regional/international trends, identified gaps, and outlined a roadmap for new curricula and partnerships, leading to a sustainable action oriented framework.

Shao Yong attended. In the session on Heritage in Digital Technology and Innovation, Song Feng, Deputy Director of WHITR-AP Beijing, and Zhang Jianwei, Dean of PKU School of Archaeology, presented on "New Pathways for China-Africa Higher Education Collaboration" and "Between Metaverse and Reality: Cultural Heritage Digitization." Ms Marie-Noël Tournoux introduced the UHC-HEI network, and Dr Li Kuanghan highlighted WHITR-AP Beijing's activities.

By **Marie-Noël Tournoux, Ye Shuzhen (Intern)**
More at *https://www.whitr-ap.org/index.php?classid=1461&newsid=3972&t=show*

Secretary-General of the WHITR-AP and Delegation from the Suzhou Sub-Centre Visit the UNESCO World Heritage Centre

From 8 to 10 June 2026, Prof. Shao Yong, Secretary-General of WHITR-AP conducted a working visit to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre. During the visit, she held discussions with Mr Lazare Eloundou Assomo, Director of the World Heritage Centre; Ms Jyoti Hosagrahar, Deputy Director; and Ms Himalchuli Gurung, Head of the Asia and the Pacific Unit.

Exchanges focused on key areas of ongoing and future cooperation, including the evaluation and renewal process of WHITR-AP as a UNESCO Category 2 Centre, the development of the forthcoming five-year cooperation programme on "Heritage Protection and Sustainable Development," preparations for side events at the 48th World Heritage Committee session, training activities related to the Third Cycle of Periodic Reporting and Action Plans, priority cooperation with Africa and Small Island Developing States (SIDS), as well as the activities of the Suzhou Sub-Centre.

By **Shao Yong**

WHITR-AP Representatives Visited the UNESCO Category 2 Centres INRULED and CRIHAP

On 10 April 2026, in preparation for the upcoming UNESCO renewal evaluation of WHITR-AP, Professor Shao Yong, Secretary-General of WHITR-AP, and Dr Li Xin, Deputy Secretary-General of WHITR-AP, visited two UNESCO Category 2 Centres based in Beijing: the International Research and Training Centre for Rural Education (INRULED) and the International Training Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (CRIHAP). The visits strengthened cooperative ties with key national UNESCO Category 2 Centres and

advanced interdisciplinary collaboration in World Heritage, rural education, intangible cultural heritage, and other relevant fields.

Since hosting the annual meeting of UNESCO Category 2 Centres based in China in 2019, WHITR-AP has maintained close communication and engagement with all national UNESCO Category 2 Centres. These visits have further consolidated multi-party collaboration. Moving forward, WHITR-AP will continue to support the establishment and development of a cooperation network among UNESCO Category 2 Centres.

By **Li Xin**
More at *https://www.whitr-ap.org/index.php?classid=1461&newsid=4062&t=show*

Case Study on Preservation of Classical Suzhou Gardens Included in UNESCO Digital Library

Recently, a collection of participating cases from the 19th Venice International Architecture Exhibition was published in UNESCO's Digital Library, including the case study "Suzhou Gardens Archives: A Vivid Record of the Preservation and Utilization of Heritage Gardens" on the conservation and adaptive use of Suzhou's classical gardens. In 2025, this exhibition was featured at the Venice Biennale as one of only three Chinese cases.

Centred on the archives of Suzhou's gardens, the case illustrates the city's practical explorations and innovative approaches to interpreting the value of heritage gardens, revitalising them, and fostering interaction between heritage sites and local communities. Through texts, models, and physical exhibits, it highlights iconic gardens such as the Humble Administrator's Garden, Tiger Hill, the Lingering Garden, and the Canglang Pavilion. This initiative offers a replicable and scalable "Suzhou Model" for other UNESCO-designated sites worldwide.

The UNESCO Digital Library serves as a specialised repository for documents and related publications. The successful inclusion of this Suzhou garden conservation and utilisation case not only preserves the historical memory of these gardens but also shares the "Chinese Experience" in cultural heritage protection with the world in an open and inclusive manner, contributing "Chinese Wisdom" to global cultural exchange and mutual learning.

By **Jiang Yeqin**

UNESCO Office in Hanoi and WHITR-AP Shanghai Hold Bilateral Cooperation

On 13 May 2026, WHITR-AP Shanghai held bilateral cooperation talks with the UNESCO Hanoi Office at Tongji University. The Vietnamese delegation comprised representatives from the UNESCO Hanoi Office, World Heritage authorities, creative city departments, cultural heritage conservation institutions, and enterprises. Relevant officials from the WHITR-AP Shanghai, the College of Architecture and Urban Planning of Tongji University, and Shanghai Tongji Urban Planning & Design Institute Co., Ltd. attended the meeting. The two sides engaged in in-depth discussions on multi-stakeholder collaboration pathways centring on heritage conservation and sustainable development.

By **Li Hong**
More at *https://www.whitr-ap.org/index.php?classid=1461&newsid=4084&t=show*

IN FOCUS

Featured Programmes of three sub-centres

2026 World Heritage Education Innovation Forum Held at Tongji University

On 25 May 2026, the 2026 World Heritage Education Innovation Forum was held at WHITR-AP Shanghai to promote exchanges and share experiences in innovative practices in World Heritage education. The Forum was hosted by WHITR-AP and co-organised by the Zhejiang Urban Governance Research Centre. Moderated by Dr Li Xin, Deputy Secretary-General of WHITR-AP, the Forum was guided by the vision of "Heritage Education Innovation, Global Experience Sharing." Representatives of the Award of World Heritage Education Innovation Cases (AWHEIC) from Malaysia, the Philippines, and the Yangtze River Delta region were invited to share their innovative processes and practical experiences, while also exploring avenues for cooperation to jointly advance the future development of World Heritage education.

By **Li Xin, Duan Jinran (intern)**

2026 HeritAP Chat on World Heritage Contribution to SDGs Knowledge & Skills

On 28 May, the 2026 HeritAP Chat on WH Contribution to SDGs Knowledge & Skills was successfully held. The event was organized by WHITR-AP Shanghai. Six experts from India, China, Mexico, Thailand, Japan, and Sri Lanka participated and representatives from 11 heritage sites across six countries (Syria, China, Tanzania, Uganda, India, and Colombia) presented their cases and engaged in discussions with the expert panel to provide supplementary information. The livestream attracted a total of 3,104 viewers.

Recognizing these practices as important drivers of sustainable development, the initiative combines intergenerational knowledge transmission with systematic economic empowerment. It has established a replicable model that promotes community co-creation, gender empowerment, ecological regeneration, and market engagement, demonstrating how living heritage can contribute to inclusive and sustainable development. The twelve cases presented demonstrate that the transmission and application of heritage-related knowledge and skills are powerful drivers for multiple Sustainable Development Goals. By transforming heritage knowledge into teachable, scalable, and income-generating skills, these initiatives provide replicable models for achieving Partnerships for the Goals through multi-stakeholder collaboration, while ensuring that no community is left behind in the pursuit of sustainable, culturally inclusive development.

By **Xia Ziying (intern), Carolina Castellanos**
More at *https://www.whitr-ap.org/?classid=1461&newsid=4086&t=show*

First Session of UHC-HEI Steering Committee

On the evening of 13 April 2026, Beijing time, WHITR-AP Shanghai and College of Architecture and Urban Planning (CAUP), Tongji University organized the first session of the Steering Committee of the International Network for Urban-rural Heritage Conservation in Higher Education Institutions (UHC-HEI).

Organised by the Network's Secretariat, the first online session of the Steering Committee of UHC-HEI network reviewed the Secretariat's progress report, discussed the organisation of the forthcoming activities, examined the Network's institutional development, a new membership application and members' new initiatives. Chaired by Professor Shao Yong at CAUP, Tongji University, Secretary General of WHITR-AP and Director of WHITR-AP Shanghai, Ms Marie-Noël Tournoux, project director of WHITR-AP Shanghai, Coordinator of the UHC-HEI Network and Professor Plácido González Martínez at the University of Seville, Executive Editor, Built Heritage Journal, Project Specialist, WHITR-AP Shanghai, the online session gathered 16 participants.

The Steering Committee session welcomed, as observers, the evaluation team commissioned by UNESCO to undertake a comprehensive evaluation of WHITR-AP as part of the renewal process for its Category 2 Centre agreement.

The primary objectives of the inaugural Steering Committee session were to review operational progress since the first General Assembly in October 2025, to plan upcoming activities, including the next General Assembly and next scientific academic conference, to introduce new membership applications to expand the network's global reach and expertise, and to strengthen the network's institutional framework and collaborative platforms.

By **Marie-Noël Tournoux & Ye Shuzhen (Intern)**
More at *https://www.whitr-ap.org/index.php?classid=1461&newsid=4064&t=show*

WHITR-AP Beijing Successfully Completed Selection and Review for the Jiuzhaigou Global Recruitment for World Heritage Conservation Volunteers

To advance the conservation and management of the Jiuzhaigou World Heritage Site and cultivate the next generation of World Heritage professionals, the Jiuzhaigou Heritage Administration and WHITR-AP Beijing jointly launched the "International Volunteer Program," aiming to engage outstanding youth from around the world in the conservation and management of the Jiuzhaigou World Heritage Site.

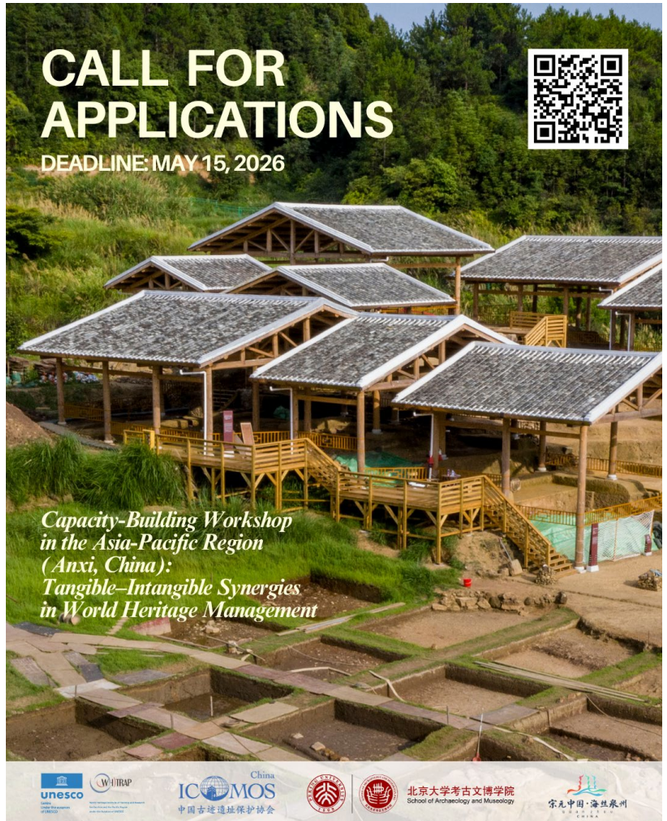
Since the recruitment announcement was released on 29 April, the initiative has generated enthusiastic responses from university students and world heritage professionals both at home and abroad. As of 10 May, the project team had received 275 valid applications from over 100 universities across more than 10 countries and regions, spanning undergraduate, master's, and doctoral students.

On 21 May, following a rigorous screening process, the final list of selected volunteers was officially announced, with six outstanding young candidates standing out.

The volunteer service period will run from June to October 2026. Next, the organizers will conduct a unified pre-service training. Selected volunteers will then travel to the Jiuzhaigou World Heritage Site for a 3-to-4-week on-site residency based on their academic schedules.

They will deeply participate in core conservation and management tasks, including Environmental Monitoring, Nature Education, Biodiversity Patrol, and Remote Sensing and Mapping. Upon completion of their service, volunteers will receive a volunteer certificate jointly issued by WHITR-AP Beijing and the Jiuzhaigou Heritage Administration.

By **Zhou Zijie**



WHITR-AP Beijing Collaborates with Multiple Partners to Launch Recruitment for the 2026 Asia-Pacific Regional Capacity Building Workshop

To bridge the "management divide" between tangible and intangible heritage in world heritage management and to promote the integrated conservation of world heritage sites in the Asia-Pacific region, WHITR-AP Beijing, in collaboration with ICOMOS China, the School of Archaeology and Museology at Peking University, and the Quanzhou Municipal Bureau of Culture, Radio, Television and Tourism, will host the Asia-Pacific Regional Capacity Building Workshop on

"Tangible-Intangible Synergies in World Heritage Management" from August 9 to 15, 2026, in Anxi County, Quanzhou, Fujian Province.

Leveraging Anxi's rich resources—including World Cultural Heritage, World Intangible Cultural Heritage, and Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS)—the workshop will employ diverse formats such as expert lectures, field studies, participant presentations, and group projects. It aims to help participants move beyond theoretical frameworks, develop practical synergistic management strategies for their respective heritage sites, and establish a cross-regional cooperative network for heritage professionals across the Asia-Pacific.

By **Zhou Zijie**

WHITR-AP Beijing Co-convened the Inaugural "Cultural Heritage Innovation Research Salon" and Literature Reading Session

On 10 May 2026, the inaugural session of the Cultural Heritage Innovation Research Salon – themed "Heritage is Homeland: A Reading Session on 'A Literature Guide of International Cultural Heritage'" – was successfully held at Renmin University of China (RUC). The event was hosted by the NCHA-RUC Joint Institute for Cultural Heritage Innovation, the School of History at RUC, and the RUC Archaeological Research Center for the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei Region (Tongzhou), with co-sponsorship from the National Social Science Fund of China's Special Program on Cultural Heritage Conservation and Transmission.

The reading session was co-convened by Dr Li Kuanghan (Executive Director, WHITR-AP Beijing), Dr Wang Siyu (Research Fellow, School of Archaeology and Museology, Peking University; Research Fellow, WHITR-AP Beijing), and Dr Wang Ziqi (Executive Director, NCHA-RUC Joint Institute for Cultural Heritage Innovation). Cultural heritage scholars and experts from various prestigious institutions – including the Chinese Academy of Cultural Heritage, the Museum of Chinese Ethnic Cultures, Peking University, Renmin University of China, Fudan University, Sun Yat-sen University, and Tongji University – participated in presentations and panel discussions.

Centring on *A Literature Guide of International Cultural Heritage*, the participating scholars engaged in in-depth and comprehensive discussions on core concepts, cutting-edge issues, and critical practical reflections within the global cultural heritage field. The event successfully fostered interdisciplinary dialogue on cultural heritage theory and practice within the domestic academic community.

By **Institute for Cultural Heritage Innovation, Renmin University of China**

The 3rd Suzhou Youth Garden Model Creative Challenge Successfully Held

From 30 to 31 May, the 3rd Suzhou Youth Garden Model Creative Challenge was held simultaneously in Kunshan (Suzhou), Hong Kong, and Macao, bringing together young heritage enthusiasts from across the region. Guided by the WHITR-AP Suzhou Center, the event was jointly hosted by the United Front Work Department of the CPC Suzhou Municipal Committee, the Suzhou Municipal Bureau of Gardens and Landscaping, the Suzhou Education Bureau, and the Suzhou Association for Science and Technology. It was co-organised by the Suzhou Conservation and International Exchanges Centre for Classical Gardens of World Heritage, the Suzhou Society of Landscape Architecture, the Hong Kong Suzhou Association, and the Macao Suzhou Fraternity Association.

A total of 3,918 students from 203 schools in Suzhou gathered at the main competition venue in Kunshan, while nearly 200 young participants from Hong Kong and Macao joined remotely via video link at local sub-venues. In total, over 4,000 young people took part, using gardens as their creative medium. They skillfully assembled classical architecture models and engaged innovatively with AI technology, experiencing the timeless elegance of classical gardens while exploring new pathways for the future of world heritage protection.

By **Jiang Yeqin**

2026 Operational Conference on World Heritage Youth Education Bases Held at Shandong University

On 19 April, the 2026 Operational Conference on World Heritage Youth Education Bases, themed "Collaborative Innovation: Deepening and Expanding World Heritage Youth Education," was held at Shandong University. Organized by WHITR-AP Suzhou and the Suzhou Municipal Bureau of Gardens and Landscaping, and hosted by Shandong University International Education College, the meeting brought together key stakeholders to review the outcomes of youth education efforts across China in 2025. The conference also marked the official release of the 2026 activities list, setting the direction for the year ahead.

Over 50 representatives from youth education bases nationwide, together with delegates from World Heritage sites in Shandong, attended the meeting and engaged in in-depth discussions on new pathways for coordinated development in youth heritage education. During the event, the Shandong University Base for Research and Experience of Traditional Chinese Culture – established jointly by the Center for Language Education and Cooperation of the Ministry of Education and Shandong University – was officially inaugurated as a "World Heritage Youth Education Base," becoming a key member of the Asia-Pacific youth heritage education network.

Spearheaded by WHITR-AP Suzhou, the World Heritage Youth Education Base system serves as a vital platform for implementing UNESCO's "5C" strategic objectives. It puts into practice the Suzhou Declaration on World Heritage Youth Education, transmits heritage values to young people, and cultivates the next generation of heritage guardians. Over the past decade, the Suzhou Branch has adhered to high-quality, standardized construction requirements, establishing 53 education bases across 13 provinces and Macao. These bases encompass a diverse range of entities, including educational institutions, heritage sites, cultural heritage bodies, and cultural organizations, together forming a systematic and networked collaborative framework for youth heritage education that continues to expand its reach and impact.

By **Jiang Yeqin**

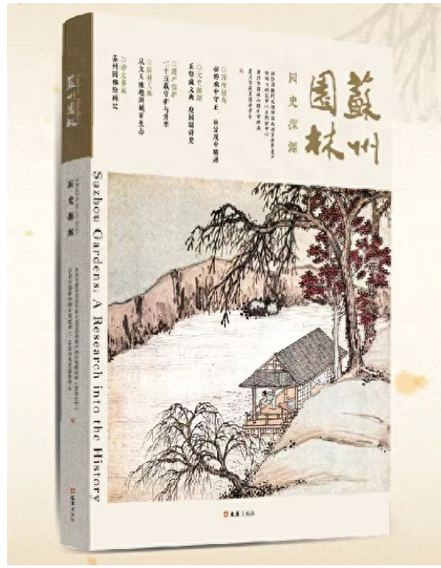
Launch of the First Volume of the "Suzhou Gardens" Book Series

The inaugural volume of the "Suzhou Gardens" book series, titled ***Suzhou Gardens: Exploring the Garden History***, has been published and is now available. Jointly edited by WHITR-AP Suzhou and local garden authorities, the series aims to bring the gardening wisdom and conservation practices of Suzhou's classical gardens to a wider audience.

Bringing together leading academic advisors, the series covers interdisciplinary research on garden design, history and culture, conservation and inheritance, active utilization, and garden aesthetics. It balances scholarly rigor with public appeal.

The book features historical images and garden photography, and key information—including the table of contents, abstracts, and captions—is presented bilingually to enhance international accessibility.

It is hoped that this series will serve as a link between history and the future, academia and the public, and China and the world. Shahbaz Khan, Director of UNESCO Regional Office for East Asia, commended the series for its international vision and the leading role of WHITR-AP Suzhou, expressing anticipation that it will broaden perspectives and draw on global wisdom.



By **Jiang Yeqin**

Publication of Issues No. 2 (2026) of the Study on Natural and Cultural Heritage

The May 2026 issue (Vol. 2, 2026) of the *Study on Natural and Cultural Heritage* has been officially published. This issue features a special theme on "Conservation and Continuity of Living Heritage," curated by Professor Sun Hua, Director of the Academic Committee of WHITR-AP Beijing and Professor at the School of Archaeology and Museology, Peking University.

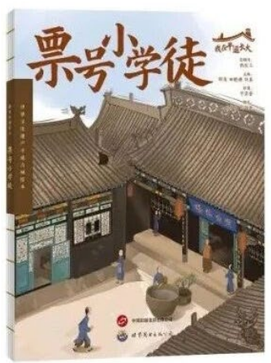
Key topics in this issue include:
- Holistic Conservation of Dong Drama and Its Cultural Space;
- An Ethnographic Study of the Life Course of Yunnan Pottery Cat and the Change of the Cylindrical Tile Base;
- Research on the Changes and Living Heritage Transmission of the Oral Traditions of the Salar Ethnic Group;
- Types, Connotations, and Cultural Heritage Reflections on the Legends of the Yungang Grottoes.

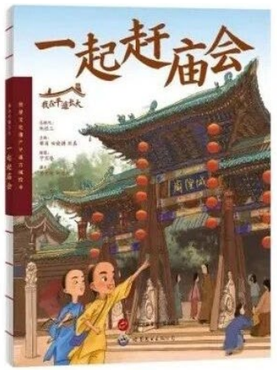
By **Zhou Zijie**

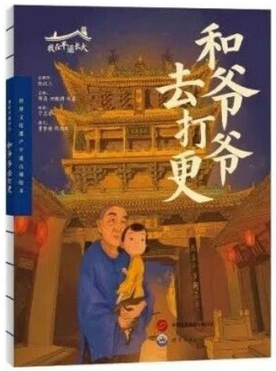
Growing Up in Pingyao Named to the 100 Best Books of the 13th "New Reading China Children's Book List" (2025)

Recently, the 13th New Reading China Children's Book List (2025) was grandly unveiled in Beijing. *Growing Up in Pingyao* (3-volume series) has been successfully named to its "100 Best Books" list in recognition of its outstanding original quality and profound cultural value! Officially released in July 2025, this series was co-published by WHITR-AP Shanghai, the College of Architecture and Urban Planning (CAUP) at Tongji University, Shanghai Tongji Urban Planning and Design Institute Co., Ltd., Yishao Culture (Shanghai), and the World Publishing Xi'an Co., Ltd. The picture books interpret a World Heritage site from a child's perspective, allowing the cultural DNA of the thousand-year-old city to take root in young hearts and minds. This honour represents a high recognition of both the books' quality and their value in promoting cultural heritage.

By **Liu Zhen, Zhang Yidan (intern)**
More at https://www.whitr-ap.org/index.php?classid=1461&newsid=4065&t=show







Shao Yong Delivered Report on Vernacular Heritage at 2026 International Day for Monuments and Sites

On 18 April 2026, Professor Shao Yong, Director of WHITR-AP Shanghai, was invited to the main event of the International Day for Monuments and Sites, held in Foshan, Guangdong. The conference theme — covering historic towns and villages, living heritage, sustainable tourism, and the integration of tangible and intangible heritage — aligns closely with WHITR-AP Shanghai's core priorities and long-standing research focus in the Asia-Pacific region. In her presentation, Professor Shao introduced the International Vernacular Heritage Field School, a flagship initiative that translates living heritage theories into practical, community-based action. She also demonstrated how this model integrates international best practices with local Chinese experience, offering a replicable approach for heritage conservation in the region. The report was well received and reaffirmed WHITR-AP's professional leadership and active commitment to the field of living heritage conservation.

By **Shao Yong**

WHITR-AP Beijing Participated in Archaeological Heritage Academic Exchange in Chengdu

On 10 April 2026, an academic exchange event centring on the hot topic of "Conservation, Transmission, and Sustainable Development of Archaeological Heritage" was successfully held in Chengdu. Under the guidance of the Chengdu Municipal Bureau of Culture, Radio, Television and Tourism and the Chengdu Cultural Heritage Conservation Association, the event was jointly organized by several institutions, including the Chengdu Jinsha Site Museum and the Sanxingdui Museum. Leading cultural heritage conservation experts and representatives from heritage management institutions in China gathered to discuss collaborative paths for heritage protection and community development. Professor Sun Hua, Director of the Academic Committee of WHITR-AP Beijing and Professor at the School of Archaeology and Museology, Peking University, along with Dr Wang Siyu, Research Fellow at WHITR-AP Beijing and Assistant Professor at the School of Archaeology and Museology, Peking University, were invited to attend and deliver key speeches.

By **Zhou Zijie**

PREHISTORIC SITES OF THE KHORRAMABAD VALLEY

Country: Iran (Islamic Republic of)
Category of site: Cultural site
Date of inscription: 2025
Criteria: (iii)

Ghamari Cave © IMCHTH

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The Prehistoric Sites of the Khorramabad Valley comprise five prehistoric caves and one rock shelter with evidence of human occupation dating back to 63,000 BP. These are the Kaldar, Ghamari, Gilvaran, Yafteh and Kunji caves, as well as the Gar Arjeneh Rock Shelter (component parts 1 to 6). The Khorramabad Valley is located in the Central Zagros Mountain Range, one of the key routes of human dispersal out of Africa. The numerous caves and rock shelters, ample water resources, rich fauna and flora, suitable stone sources for the tool industry, and relatively mild climate have created favourable conditions for human settlement since the Middle Palaeolithic period.

Archaeological excavations and study of the artefacts excavated on the sites have established the scientific chronology of human development in the valley. The Mousterian layers in Kunji Cave testify to the domination of the Neanderthals in the valley during the Middle Palaeolithic. During the transition between the Middle and Upper Palaeolithic periods, anatomically modern humans arrived in the valley, expanded their settlements and eventually supplanted the Neanderthals, illustrating the earliest transition phase in the Zagros region, which shed light on the debate over human migration routes out of Africa into Eurasia. The pendants and other decorative objects discovered at the sites, the evidence of using ochre pigments, as well as a decorated piece of terracotta mark the emergence of human cognitive behaviour and belief systems. The shell pendants were possibly sourced from the Persian Gulf, indicating the existence of communication and exchange routes between the Khorramabad Valley and the lowlands of the Persian Gulf during the Upper Palaeolithic period. Large numbers and varieties of stone tools discovered at the sites bear witness to the sophisticated stone tool technologies of the Baradostian culture that surpassed contemporaneous developments in the Zagros Mountains.

Kaldar Cave © IMCHTH

Criterion (iii)

The Prehistoric Sites of the Khorramabad Valley, with the shell pendants sourced from the distant Persian Gulf and ornaments fashioned from deer canine teeth, are an outstanding manifestation of the emergence and evolution of symbolic communication, a crucial aspect of modern human cognitive development. This evidence, alongside sophisticated stone tool technologies, is an exceptional testimony to the Upper Palaeolithic Baradostian culture on a global scale. The caves and shelters bear witness to the domination of the Neanderthals, to the arrival and expansion of the anatomically modern humans who eventually supplanted the Neanderthals in the valley, and provide insight into the migratory route of human dispersal out of Africa.

Kunji Cave © IMCHTH

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https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1744
Collected by **Luo Xi**

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