

# ICOA1083: PROMOTING HERITAGE CONSERVATION USING DIGITAL COMMUNICATION SYSTEM IN CHINA

## Subtheme 03: Protecting and Interpreting Cultural Heritage in the Age of Digital Empowerment

**Session 1:** Relevance of Digital Tools & Technology in Documentation, Conservation and Safeguarding  
of Heritage & Community Engagement

**Location:** Silver Oak 2, India Habitat Centre

**Time:** December 13, 2017, 09:55 – 10:10

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**Abstract:** Statistics from 2016 show that in China, more than 90% of the 624,000,000 smartphone users actively use the social mobile application WeChat. 80% of WeChat users have chosen and subscribed to information feeds via the application run by enterprises, media or privately, called official accounts. Other new forms of digital communication systems that are making great daily impact include micro blogging (e.g. Weibo), real-time video sharing (e.g. Yi-zhibo etc.), question and answer websites (e.g. zhihu.com), and news and information mobile applications that recommend personalized information to individual users based on artificial intelligence technology (e.g. Jinri Toutiao). These powerful digital systems have changed the methods people use to acquire information, and provided more opportunities for the users to share and spread. The varied forms of content combining text, image, sound, video and interactive interface keep users absorbed.

Communication and dissemination related to cultural heritage has greatly benefitted from this development. Real cases of using the digital media systems, especially the WeChat official account, shows its contribution to heritage conservation by engaging public supervision on site protection, promoting understanding of sites and history, and drawing interests from the potential disseminator. The WeChat official account serves also as an important marketing tool for museums, sites and design firms.

This article is based on the studies of recent communication cases, e.g. the ‘botched’ repair of the Great Wall in Liaoning Province and the live broadcasting of the night in Chengdu City Museum etc., to demonstrate the types of impacts which new digital communication systems make on heritage conservation. It will analyze the changes the new systems introduce, the opportunities and challenges they bring. Then by the end it will try to explore how the digital system will expand and complement the heritage conservation field into an ecosystem.

**Key words:** dissemination, communication, smartphone, cultural heritage conservation

## Digital communication platforms in China

50% of the Chinese population is actively acquiring information via cell-phones, which makes the real amount of these people huge to be reaching 700 million this year. Statistics from 2016 show that in China, more than 90% of the 624,000,000 smartphone users are actively using the social mobile application WeChat. 80% of WeChat users have chosen and subscribed to information feed via the application run by enterprises or private person, called official account. Other new forms of digital communication system that are making great daily impact include micro blogging (e.g. Weibo), real-time video sharing (e.g. Yi-zhibo etc.), question and answer website (e.g. zhihu.com), and, news and information mobile application that recommends personalized information to individual users based on artificial intelligence technology (e.g. Jinri Toutiao). These powerful digital systems have changed the method people acquiring information, provided more opportunities for the users to share and spread. The varied forms of content combining text, image, sound, video and interactive interface makes the users absorbed in.

TYPE	PLATFORM	TYPICAL ACCOUNT	AVERAGE VIEWS PER POST	HOST
SOCIAL	wechat	museum circle 文博圈	5000	cultural company
		museum China 文博中国	2000-3000	newspaper office
		silk road heritage 丝路遗产	2000-3000	ICOMOS Regional Center
		archeological park alliance 考古遗址公园联盟	less than 100	dozen of archaeological parks
NEWS APP	today's headline	cultural heritage 文化遗产	500,20000 for higher views	
		World heritage geology	300,30000 for higher views	periodical office
Q&A WEB+APP	Zhihu 知乎	spiralled truth	49578 followers	
REAL-TIME VIDEO BROADCAST-	PEPER 花椒直播	craftsmanship inheritance: intangible heritage review program	7 million	

Fig.1 – List of sample accounts in heritage related area on the major platform.

## Changes brought to cultural heritage dissemination

Using the new platforms, the providers of heritage related information quickly sprawled into the areas traditionally well taken care of, such as history, object appreciation, heritage related tourism, etc., not that

many on site conservation works. But heritage site works dissemination benefit from these digital communication platforms as well.

For example, new media have well shown its power on the archaeological excavation of HaiHun Hou tomb in 2015, making it a blast all over China, faster and richer than ever.

**Digital technology was incorporated into the excavation,** GIS, 3D laser scanning and other digital documentation tools, unmanned aircraft video shooting have been intensively applied on each key phase. This provides the project dissemination a very solid material base.

**Diversified channels of communication have participated into reporting this project, generation vast information and views.** By the end of January 2016, through the main search engine, type in "Nanchang haihun hou tombs (in Chinese)" shows the result of more than 800,000 findings<sup>1</sup>, the national each big mainstream media, web portal, regional sites are in a frenzy of propaganda trend to conduct a comprehensive and detailed report. Various media have carried out comprehensive and multi-angle analysis on the unearthed cultural relics of the tombs of haihun hou, the speculation of the burial masters and the archaeological value.

In terms of the spread on weibo, Dajiang net official weibo account has established special initiative on the tomb has reading as much as 27.45 million times, while the special initiative on the tomb on CCTV's official weibo account has reading of 5.9 million the art newspaper tomb topic has the reading in total 22.59 million. It can be seen that micro blog communication is fast and flexible, and quickly causes the topic to discuss and create hot spots. In addition, the popular WeChat public account in the past two years has the characteristics of rapid and continuous transmission in hot spots. The search for WeChat "haihun" shows that there are 4994 articles related to haida hou. Specific fan base plus the accumulation of retweets can be imagined.

**Success of this case makes people realize and grasp these new possibilities:**

The use of contemporary information dissemination method lets people access to important information anytime, anywhere, like always immersed in an online exhibition, even if not on the archaeological sites.

Compared to traditional radio and newspaper, promptness, visibility and the choice to save and carry on the preferred content break through the communication limit in time, place and space.

A series of original and regenerated information on the archaeological excavations are open to the future. Archaeologists professional, new media hosts and users retweets and commands provide important public archaeology or history research material. Their content is a kind of new understanding of archaeological finds.

It's opportunity and challenge as new things always are.

**The 3 years effort of *Qingyuan Cultural Heritage*<sup>TM</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup>ZHU Zheng, 2016

*Qingyuan Cultural Heritage* (hereafter shortened as Qingyuan) is a media dedicated to cultural heritage conservation dissemination firstly built in early 2015 on wechat as a public account. Now this original platform has about 12,000 constantly growing followers, new post released twice weekly. On wechat higher view per single post has reached over 10,000. Now we are on Weibo, Today's Headline (jinritoutiao), and Sohu public platform. The highest view of the other platforms has reached over 100,000.

Qingyuan demonstrate the model of a conservation plan/design firm running new media platform: Traditionally, a design firm does research, survey, documentation, analysis and a lot of other works then present the result as a plan, but only to its client. This point is the end of this production line. While in our case, we use all of the content generated by our design firm during the production, then create content for the public (including professionals). As the public read, retweet, add on or even recreate this information, they spend more time and enhance interest in heritage related area. It benefits the client as offering material for their propaganda or marketing, with better understanding, as well assist the plan implementation. Meanwhile, all these efforts, with the public on board, help to build the firm's greater reputation.

Qingyuan has fixed columns such as:

3 columns based on project work directly:

- Featured heritage, a column telling research, history, values, and stories of the heritage site we work on.
- Legacy and life, a column sharing conservation professional's behind the scene life, e.g. love of local food, activities, etc.
- Major Projects, a column seriously discuss conservation plan, methodology, problem solving, decision making etc.

Other column linked to training, information sharing such as:

- Qingyuan lecture room: a column dedicated to our monthly public event of a lecture of very distinguished experts in conservation, archaeology, urban planning. We put real-time broadcasting on our other media platform; also post a image plus text version of the speech.
- Academic: a column re-post our published papers from the journals
- Featured subject: internal training materials shared here. We have organized subjects such as authenticity, legislation system, interpretation, to be demonstrated with doctrines, experts' online discussion sharing, and cases demonstration. This requires a lot of human resources but reward was good.
- Also some exclusive reports: there have been 4 years we send team of specialists to observe the World Heritage Convention and write observation reports. From 2016 we post daily review of what is happening in-situ by professional point of view. This is an implacable endeavour so far and has gained us great attention and fame.
- Other real-time hot issue. Such as news of which site is just listed as world heritage.



Fig.2– List of Qingyuan Wechat posts in 2016.

Now all client representatives, before we approach, already subscribed and read Qingyuan's posts. Many said they use the case they read on qingyuan as benchmark while looking for design firm. Other of our subscriber including big variety of heritage related professionals, architects, planners, students, and also quite a lot of heritage enthusiasts from different background. New clients recognize our expertise in heritage conservation and are now approaching us for training development, seminar hosting and public awareness campaigns. We are now looking into making a new chain of services in areas in need.

After running and expanding Qingyuan platforms, we have a few remarks:

1. Heritage conservation dissemination is a great valuable field. Only by making us reachable by the already comparably smaller audience, that we can make a bigger impact. It's not very rewarding, only keep it going can reward your efforts.
2. Communications studies are important discipline for heritage professionals. This has been overlooked. We are trained to generate content, but don't have the feeling who is going to read and what attract he/her to read, not mentioning how ignorant we are on how to lead and improve communication effects. For example, a good communication on social media platform need great amount of involvement, it need to generate a "see, open, comment, retweet, create intense discussion" flow, to spread in scale like the ripple.
3. With the new behaviour and habit of younger generation feed with digital communication since early age, authority and reputation will be built upon followers. Inaccurate information get supported and spread as any grassroots can do better acquiring more followers. The professional institutions need to really participate in public communication. No need to all run accounts or platforms, but pay attention and effort to generate good and public friendly material.

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# **ICOA1083: LA PROMOTION DE LA CONSERVATION DU PATRIMOINE PAR L'UTILISATION DES SYSTÈMES DE COMMUNICATION NUMÉRIQUE EN CHINE**

## **Sous-thème 03: Protéger et interpréter le patrimoine culturel à l'ère de l'autonomisation numérique**

**Session 1:** Pertinence des outils numériques et de la technologie dans la documentation, la conservation et la sauvegarde du patrimoine et l'engagement communautaire

**Lieu:** Silver Oak 2, India Habitat Centre

**Date et heure:** 13 Décembre, 2017, 09:55 – 10:10

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**Résumé:** Les statistiques de 2016 indiquent qu'en Chine, plus de 90 % des 624 000 000 utilisateurs de téléphone intelligent utilisent activement l'application mobile sociale WeChat. 80 % des utilisateurs de WeChat ont choisi et ont souscrit à l'alimentation de l'information au moyen de l'application dirigée par des entreprises, des médias ou à titre privé, ce que l'on appelle le compte.

D'autres nouveaux systèmes de communication numérique, qui ont un grand impact au quotidien, sont le microblog (par exemple. Weibo), le partage de vidéo en temps réel (par exemple, Yi-zhibo etc.), de même que les sites web questions/réponses (par exemple zhihu.com) et les applications basées sur l'intelligence artificielle qui suggèrent des nouvelles quotidiennes personnalisées à l'utilisateur (par exemple. Jinri Toutiao).

Ces systèmes numériques puissants ont changé les moyens selon lesquels les gens acquièrent l'information et ils ont permis de nouvelles opportunités pour les utilisateurs de se multiplier et de partager. Les diverses formes de contenus combinant le texte, l'image et le son, ainsi que l'interface vidéo interactive captivent les utilisateurs.

La communication et la dissémination du patrimoine culturel ont grandement profité de ce développement. Des cas réels d'utilisation de médias numériques, particulièrement l'application WeChat, montrent sa contribution à la conservation du patrimoine en permettant la surveillance des lieux par le public, la protection sur place, et en promouvant la compréhension de sites et de leur histoire. Le compte officiel WeChat sert aussi d'outil de marketing pour des musées, des sites et des sociétés de design.

Cette présentation est basée sur des études de cas de communication récentes, par exemple la réparation 'bâclée' de la Grande Muraille dans la Province Liaoning et l'émission en direct de la nuit dans le Musée Chengdu de La ville etc., dans le but de démontrer les types d'impacts que les nouveaux systèmes de communication numérique peuvent avoir sur la conservation du patrimoine. Elle analysera les changements que les nouveaux systèmes ont introduits de même que les opportunités et les défis qu'ils apportent. Enfin, elle tentera d'explorer comment les systèmes numériques pourraient prendre de l'expansion et transformer le domaine de la conservation du patrimoine en un écosystème.

**Mots-clés:** *diffusion, communication, téléphone intelligent, conservation du patrimoine culturel*