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Editorial

by Lothar Jordan

At the end of the tenth year of its existence, the *SCEaR Newsletter* gets a – modest – modification of its design. Now it follows the colour of the new logo of the Memory of the World Sub-Committee on Education and Research (SCEaR).

The *SCEaR Newsletter* 2025/1 informed about an Agreement on Cooperation between Memory of the World (IAC, SCEaR, RSC) and ICLA (International Comparative Literature Association). That Agreement names concrete joint tasks, but encourages also new initiatives that fit into the frame of this **cooperation**. The first article of this issue is a good example. It gives insight into a research project of Hu Suqing (Hunan University, China) which is to explore the reception of the Ferghana Horse, which had been an important element in economy and culture of the ancient Silk Roads, in various traditions, languages, literatures, heritages, etc. In a teleconference and various emails between Lucia Boldrini (Past-President, ICLA), Hu Suqing and me, and supported by ICLA-President Ipshita Chanda, we considered the potential of the project to develop and explore various **synergies**, between Comparative Literature and Memory of the World, and between various forms of heritage, and its potential of providing an interesting link between documentary and other heritages – and the biosphere. As a part of her project, Hu Suqing develops a preliminary database of Ferghana Horse heritage materials, comprising digital forms of textual, visual, artefactual, performative and orally transmitted sources as a basis for research and of strengthening the knowledge about the variant heritages.

With UNESCO, Memory of the World turns towards the UN **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs). The UNESCO Chair in Vulnerability Studies at the University of Hyderabad (India), a new partner of SCEaR, has valuable experiences in online teaching on all SDGs. The chair holder, Pramod K Nayar, reports – together with Anna Kurian – about them and other activities, including those on Memory of the World. Together with him, SCEaR made a draft concept on teaching MoW and the SDGs that waits for further consideration – see the end of his article.

The Working Group Africa is SCEaR's instrument to work for UNESCO **Priority Africa** on the field of documentary heritage. Its coordinator – and SCEaR Member –, Papa Momar Diop reports on the recent achievements, among them a Memory of the World Guide for disaster prevention.¹ The exploration of the interactions between documentary heritage and oral sources will be among its future tasks, thus touching the question of **synergies** between various heritages.

The **Pacific region** comes into view in SCEaR Rapporteur Roslyn Russell's report. She gives insights into an exhibition of the **Australian Memory of the World Knowledge**

¹ See Joie Springer's review on the *Conservation préventive et prévention des catastrophes pour le patrimoine documentaire Africain: Un guide Mémoire du Monde*. UNESCO. Programme Mémoire du Monde. Groupe de travail Afrique-SCEaR (SCEaR-WGA), *SCEaR Newsletter* 2025/1, pp. 23-26.

Centre, that showed items of documentary heritage on the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Register, relating to the wider Pacific region. She furthermore reports on a workshop held in Sydney at the end of October 2025 that aimed and to investigate and develop potential nominations from the Pacific region to the MOWCAP and International Memory of the World Registers. That collaboration for the Pacific region will be continued in 2026.

Finally, as a follow-up to an international conference in Hangzhou (China) in June 2025,² we present a report on the Traditional Teahouse Archives in Chengdu, China. Joining documents, documentary heritage and heritage sites these Archives are another example of synergies between different forms of heritage. In the future they also could give an example for further partners of SCEaR, supplementing the network of Memory of the World Knowledge Centres.

² See Helen Jeong's report in *SCEaR Newsletter* 2025/1, pp. 19-22.

The Ferghana Horse as Multimodal Cultural Memory: Two Millennia of Evolving Heritage Practices

by HU Suqing

The Ferghana horse, celebrated in China as the “Heavenly Horse” or “blood-sweating horse,” played a pivotal role in the early development of the Silk Roads, shaping cultural, political, and economic interactions across Central Asia. Introduced into China during the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), this remarkable breed became the focus of sustained cultural imagination and inspired a tradition that has continued for more than two millennia. Over time, this tradition has evolved into a richly layered form of cultural heritage, preserved across textual, visual, material, oral, and now digital media. It provides an exemplary case for understanding how cultural symbols are created, transformed, and continually revitalized across history and media environments.

The Ferghana Horse (hereafter also referred to as the Heavenly Horse based on the context) heritage is particularly significant for comparative literature study and research for the UNESCO Memory of the World Programme’s efforts to document and safeguard diverse forms of cultural memory. It has evolved into a distinctly multimodal heritage, manifested in diverse yet interdependent forms: documentary heritage, such as numerous literary works about the horse, official hymns, horse administration archives, and other manuscripts; material heritage as represented in sculptures, reliefs, murals, ceramics, textiles, and mortuary objects, etc.; intangible heritage, which mainly includes oral myths, equestrian rituals, artistic performance, and cross-cultural storytelling traditions; and newly developed digital forms. These forms interact and intersect in dynamic ways, forming a multimodal cultural heritage form with documentary heritage as the core, other forms mutually verifying and supplementing each other. Such multi-modality also offers a shared methodological horizon with comparative literature study for cross-disciplinary and trans-cultural analysis, to trace how stories travel across nation borders, how memories are mediated, and how cultural symbols, be versed in text, inscribed on silk, or carved in stone, continue to forge connections across civilizations. For instance, the Ferghana Horse provides a focal point for comparative and world literature studies, linking Central Asian oral horse motifs, as seen in the Kyrgyz *Manas* epic and the Uzbek and Kazakh *Alpamysh* horse-hero cycles, with Han-period hymns and textual traditions. In doing so, it illustrates how oral traditions and mythic narratives can traverse ethnographic and national boundaries, become incorporated into written histories, and ultimately contribute to the formation of intercultural and international collective memory. This approach not only illuminates the mechanisms of intercultural exchanges but actively contributes to constructing collective memory in the early stage of globalization. This article on the Ferghana Horse heritage, therefore, is one of the exploratory attempts carried out within

the framework of the Agreement on Cooperation between the AILC-ICLA and the UNESCO Memory of the World Programme (MoW), signed on 29 July 2025.

1. Historiography and the Framework of the Miraculous

The earliest and most enduring foundation of the Ferghana Horse's cultural memory in China lies in the literary and historiographical imagination of the Han dynasty. Emperor Wu writes in Song of the Heavenly Horse 天马歌 that “At the command of the Supreme One, the Heavenly Horse descends, its sweat crimson and its foam the color of cinnabar 太一况, 天马下。沾赤汗, 沫流赭。”³ Sima Qian 司马迁, the most renowned Han Dynasty historian, describes the horses are “from the north-west regions 神马当从西北来,” as “offspring of heavenly horses 天马子,”⁴ underscoring their otherworldly origin. Ban Gu 班固 further elaborates the motifs of “blood-sweating” in the context of Emperor Wu's western expeditions, framing the horses' arrival as a celestial endorsement of imperial legitimacy.⁵ These textual constructions shaped an extraordinary hybrid creature, at once a marvel from distant lands and an omen-bearing medium through which imperial virtue and divine agency were interpreted.

From this oral and textual matrix, the Ferghana Horse soon developed into a powerful literary figure through which early Chinese writers conceptualized foreign geographies and marvels. This intercultural dimension is richly expressed in *Fu* 赋 compositions and *Yuefu* (ballad poetry 乐府). For example, a hymn to the Heavenly Horse writes, “The Heavenly Horses come from the Western Extremity, traversing ten thousand li to return to the possessor of virtue. Bearing numinous authority, they descend from foreign lands. Crossing the flowing sands, all tribes of the four quarters submit 天马徕兮从西极, 经万里兮归有德。承灵威兮降外国, 涉流沙兮四夷服。”⁶ In the poem, the Heavenly Horse becomes a metaphor for transcendent power, moral excellence, and the unbounded mobility associated with frontier space. In these texts, the foreignness of the horse is aestheticized and absorbed into a poetics of distance, speed, and cosmic resonance.

Visual culture, although comparatively sparse in quantity during this period, provides a complementary register that reinforces the literary imagination. The famous Bronze Galloping Horse (figure 1) was excavated in Gansu province. The horse lifts its head and raises its tail, neighing with its mouth open to show that it is galloping at full speed. Its posture is remarkably graceful, three of its legs suspended in mid-air, while the right hind leg lightly resting on the back of a flying bird, evoking the aura of a celestial steed roaming freely through the skies. Both the form and spirit of the animal closely correspond to the famed blood-sweating horses of Ferghana region. This bronze figure masterfully integrates

³ Ban Gu 班固, *Book of Han* 汉书, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1962, vol. 22, pp. 10601061.

⁴ Sima Qian 司马迁, *Records of the Grand Historian* 史记, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1959, vol. 10, p. 3160.

⁵ Ban Gu 班固, *Book of Han* 汉书, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1962, p. 3875.

⁶ Sima Qian 司马迁, *Records of the Grand Historian* 史记, vol.24, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1959, p. 1178.

the superior equine form of the Ferghana horse with the Central Plains' mythical “dragon-sparrow 龙雀,” a divine bird capable of travelling immense distances in ancient Chinese lore. This fusion not only reflects the Eastern Han dynasty's high esteem for horses from the Western Regions, but also embodies the broader intercultural synthesis characteristic of the Silk Roads era.



Figure 1. Bronze Galloping Horse. Image from Michael D. Gunther *Old Stones: The Monuments of Art History*, <http://www.art-and-archaeology.com/china/gansu/gm07.html> (accessed December 1, 2025), (CC BY-SA 3.0.)

2. Ritualized Images of the Heavenly Horse: Wei-Jin and Southern and Northern Dynasties

During the Wei-Jin and Southern and Northern Dynasties (220–589 CE), the cultural expression of the Heavenly Horse evolved from the Han Dynasty's dual emphasis on textual and visual carriers into a more diversified multi-medium system. Sculpture emerged as a prominent material cultural vehicle in specific regions, while ritualization and visualization became the central channels for conveying meaning. The funerary system emerged as the most stable and continuous repository for the Ferghana Horse image. Large numbers of stone horse statues, ceramic horse figurines, and stone reliefs with equestrian motifs were positioned along tomb avenues, collectively reinforcing the horse's attributes of power, posthumous passage, and cosmic mobility. The Western-Jin Dynasty Heavenly Horse Brick Relief (figure 2) unearthed from Foyemiao Tombs, Dunhuang, Gansu is good case in point. The horse is a relief carved on a brick surface, it assumes a right-side galloping posture, with cloud patterns in front of it. The overall carving is exquisite, and the composition exudes remarkable dynamism, blending Han Dynasty mythic imagery of the

Heavenly Horse with winged beast motifs from Western Regions.⁷ The relief serves as tangible proof of the Han Dynasty’s literary Heavenly Horse imagery evolving into material art with the era’s funerary ideology of immortality, and stands as critical material for studying early Sino-Western cultural exchange.



Figure 2. Western Jin Dynasty Heavenly Horse Brick Relief, Dunhuang Museum, reproduced with kind permission of the Dunhuang Museum.

Six Dynasties literature expanded the imaginative horizon of the Ferghana Horse in parallel. Supernatural anecdotal literature志怪 frequently featured extraordinary steeds such as “flying horses 飞马” and “numinous horses 灵马” in works such as *Records of the Search for Spirits 搜神记*, *Tales of the Hidden and Manifest 幽明录*, and *Collection of Marvels 艺苑*.⁸ This mode of imagining builds on the Han dynasty’s rhetorical tradition of framing the horse as an “exceptional being” associated with otherworldly realms, deities, or immortality. Yet it integrates the creature more organically into the Neo-Daoist metaphysical intellectual climate玄学 of the Six Dynasties. Robert Ford Campany has shown that early medieval Chinese anomaly accounts deploy strange creatures to articulate experiences of boundaries

⁷ Chinese indigenous mythology features winged flying horses, most characteristically in the form of the dragon-horse 龙马, a divine creature combining a horse’s body with dragon scales and wings. In Western tradition, the paradigmatic winged horse is Pegasus from Greek mythology. Via the Silk Roads and Hellenistic influence, the Pegasus motif reached China’s western regions by the late Han period. It is regarded that winged horses in ancient China and the West exerted mutual influence upon one another. See Liu Kexin 刘可心, Tracing the Origins of Winged Horse Imagery in the Tang Dynasty: Soaring Across the Silk Roads 飞跃丝路的唐代翼马形象溯源, *Beijiang Cultural Studies 北疆文化研究*, (2024)1.05:40-47.

⁸ For example, *Collection of Marvels 异苑*, compiled by Liu Jingshu 刘敬叔 in the Liu-Song dynasty, contains several accounts of divine or anomalous horses, including a horse that suddenly sprouted wings and flew away at midnight (vol. 6), a leopard-patterned horse that hid by day and travelled by night without eating grass 马如豹形, 昼伏夜行, and the so-called “Hidden Colt 隐骥”, capable of covering a thousand li in a single night yet remaining invisible by day.

and impulses toward “transcendence”.⁹ The Heavenly Horse’s appearance in such narratives should thus be understood as part of this broader cultural psychology.

In a larger cultural framework, the Heavenly Horse in this period also embodies a form of cross-culturality, not bounded by modern nation-state frameworks but rooted in the circulation of knowledge and aesthetic ideas. While Six Dynasties texts rarely specify geographical origins, their frequent references to “exotic beasts” and “marvels from distant realms” reflect a more general imagination of distant knowledge rooted in the ancient East Asian conceptual tradition.

The mutually illuminating relationship between sculpture and literature becomes especially pronounced in this period. Numerous Six Dynasties epitaphs reference the deceased’s military achievements, official careers, travels, or horse-related responsibilities, such as overseeing equine administration, managing postal relay services, or performing protective escort duties. These textual records correspond closely to the horse statues flanking tomb avenues, forming a mirror-like structure. Epitaphs document the virtues and accomplishments of the human subject, while sculpture materializes the dignity of horses. Together, they construct an integrated visual-textual narrative within the tomb context, offering a vivid illustration of the cultural “grammar” that cohered these images and inscriptions. Wu Hung’s conceptualization of Six Dynasties funerary art as a “system of underground visual culture” perfectly captures this integrative logic.¹⁰

Even more significant is a reverse influence of funerary sculpture on textual representation. As funerary horse statues evolved toward a more stylized and solemn form during the Six Dynasties, the aesthetic depiction of horses in literary works shifted accordingly. The Han-era emphasis on hyperbolic speed and supernatural attributes such as “blood-sweating” and “lightning-fast” gradually gave way to an aesthetic of dignified composure, contained power, and ritualized bearing that resonated with contemporary tomb sculpture. This visual-literary alignment finds clear expression in poems written by Pan Yue 潘岳, Lu Ji 陆机, and Guo Pu 郭璞 preserved in *Literary Selections* 文选. For instance, in Pan Yue’s Inscription for the Military Governor of Qian 马汧督诔, “Weapons for defense were never lacking, and in the stables neighed vigorous warhorses” vividly reflects the adequate military preparations during the siege, contrasting sharply with the tragic fate of the generals afterward.¹¹ This commemoration of a military leader closely parallels the symbolic role of tomb horse statues, which materialized the deceased’s martial dignity and status, forging a link between textual accounts of military merit and sculptural representations of equine nobility. The Heavenly Horse thus evolved from a Han cosmic portent into a Six Dynasties emblem of metaphysical restraint and ritual permanence.

⁹ Robert Ford Campany, *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1996, p. 266.

¹⁰ Wu Hung, *Art of the Yellow Springs*, London: Reaktion Books, 2015, p. 10.

¹¹ Pan Yue 潘岳, Ma Qian Du Lei 马汧督诔, *Annotated Collection of Pan Yue's Works* 潘黄门集校注, Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou Ancient Books Publishing House, 2008, p. 224.

3. The Aesthetic Zenith of Poetry, Painting and Other Forms: Heavenly Horse Image Synthesis in the Tang Dynasty

The Tang dynasty (618–907 CE) represents the third and most pivotal stage in the cultural life of the Ferghana Horse, marking the moment when its multimodal expressions matured into a highly integrated aesthetic system. During this period, the Ferghana Horse departed from the earlier framework of the “numinous-ritual-ceremonial” paradigm and entered the domains of poetry, painting, decoration and even dances, where it acquired unprecedented emotional depth and aesthetic refinement. The various modes intertwined in a profoundly intertextual and mutually generative process, defining the Ferghana Horse as one of the most vibrant and enduring symbols in Tang artistic culture.

Tang poetry first endowed the Ferghana Horse with heightened emotional resonance and spiritual significance. In “The Song of Heavenly Horse 天马歌,” the famous poet Li Bai 李白 writes, “The heavenly horse emerges from Yuezhi grottoes, back striped like a tiger, bones winged like a dragon's. It whinnies into azure clouds, shaking its emerald mane 天马来出月支窟，背为虎文龙翼骨。嘶青云，振绿发。”¹² Li Bai's Heavenly Horse is no longer a mere political emblem, but a symbol of natural force and spiritual freedom, reflecting the poet's relentless pursuit of spontaneous inspiration. Du Fu 杜甫, another most pioneer poet of the time, deepens this transformation, turning the horse into a vehicle for pathos, historical tragedy, and moral reflection. As presented in the poem “The Dappled Gray: A Ballad 骢马行,” the poet metaphors himself as a Heavenly Horse, “A virile stance, a posture aloof, how high and tall it loomed; it looked at its shadow, gave a proud neigh, vaunting the favor it enjoyed 雄姿逸态何嵒峯，顾影骄嘶自矜宠。”¹³ The Tang equine imagery characteristically bears a double quality of restless energy and lyric subjectivity, serving as a medium for poetic emotion and moral judgment. Thus, from Li Bai to Du Fu, the Ferghana Horse completes its aesthetic migration from the Han-era “heaven-sent” wonder-beast to an extension of the poet's inner sensibility.

Meanwhile, Tang dynasty painting attained an unprecedented level of sophistication in depicting the spirit and dynamism of the Ferghana Horse. Han Gan emerged as the central figure of this artistic tradition, with his masterpiece Night-Shining White 照夜白图 (figure 3) standing as its quintessential expression. The painting portrays an imperial steed tethered to a wooden stake, rearing its head in a neigh, with pricked ears, wide eyes, and thrashing hooves, poised to break free from its bonds. This depiction captures an unruly and powerful steed, brimming with vitality and dynamism as if soaring through the vast firmament.

¹² Libai 李白, The Song of Heavenly Horse 天马歌, in *Complete Works of Li Bai 李太白全集*, Wang Qi (annot.), Vol. 3, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1977, p. 185.

¹³ Du Fu 杜甫, Song of the Dappled Horse 骢马行, *Complete Tang Poems 全唐诗*, vol. 27, *Siku Quanshu (Wenyuange Edition) 文渊阁四库全书*, vol. 1472, Beijing: Erudition Digital Publishing Co., Ltd. from Erudition Chinese Classic Ancient Books Database 爱如生中国基本典籍库, p. 459, Dec. 1, 2025.

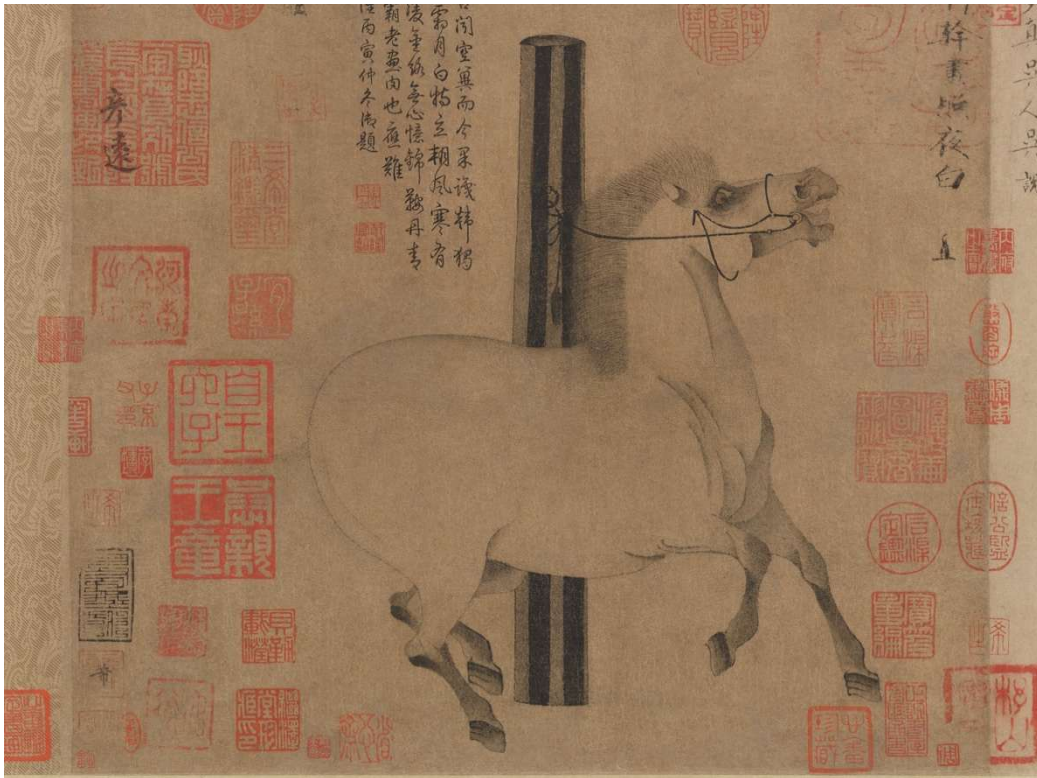


Figure 3. Night-Shining White, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/39901> (accessed December 1, 2025), open access (CC0).

Such imagery encapsulates the aesthetic traditions of Tang with the cultural ethos of Dayuan (Ferghana) from the Western Regions西域. As Zhang Yanyuan recorded in *Standard History of Chinese Painting* 历代名画记, “With the unification of the Tang realm, envoys from the Western Regions and Dayuan (Ferghana) offered tribute annually天下一统、西域、大宛，岁有来献.”¹⁴ Many of Han Gan’s celebrated equine subjects, including Jade Flower 玉花驄 and Night-Shining White 照夜白, were blood-sweating steeds presented as tribute from the Ferghana regions. Specifically, Night-Shining White was a gift from the King of Ningyuan to Emperor Xuanzong in the third year of the Tianbao 天宝 reign (744 CE). While it retains the potent, energetic spirit characteristic of Western Regions stock, its demeanor is refined by the dignified grace prized in Tang culture.

The intertextual relationship between poetry and painting served as the defining mechanism in constructing the multimodal cultural heritage of the Ferghana Horse during the Tang dynasty. This synergy is rooted in the classical Chinese concept of the “three perfections 诗书画三绝”, a tripartite practice in which an artist engages in poetry, calligraphy, and painting as components of a complete art.¹⁵ In this creative milieu, dynamic

¹⁴ Zhang Yanyuan 张彦远, Record of Famous Paintings of All Dynasties 历代名画记, *Records of the Heavenly Mean 天中记*, vol. 41, Beijing: Erudition Digital Publishing Co., Ltd. from Erudition Chinese Classic Ancient Books Database 爱如生中国基本典籍库, p. 5361, Dec. 1, 2025.

¹⁵ Cheng, François. *Chinese Poetic Writing*. New York: New York Review Books, 1977, p. 17.

horse imagery from poetry found immediate visual counterparts in painting. Elements such as raised manes, sidelong glances, and suspended hooves translated poetic dynamism into palpable visual form. Conversely, the detailed realism of equine painting pushed poetic expression toward more finely textured, image-driven descriptions of equine spirit and motion.

This dialogic exchange is exemplified in the works of renowned painters like Wei Yan 韦偃, Han Gan 韩幹, and Cao Ba 曹霸, whose equine subjects frequently became the focus of poetic eulogies. A representative case is Du Fu's 杜甫 poem "Song about a Painting to General Cao Ba 丹青引赠曹将军霸," which reflects on the imperial horse Jade Flower Blossom and Cao Ba's singular ability to capture its spirit amid a crowd of lesser painters. In another poem, "On a Wall Painting of a Horse 题壁画马歌," Du Fu describes watching Wei Yan 韦偃 bring a noble steed to life with a few swift brushstrokes, capturing a moment of shared artistic resonance. It is through such sophisticated intermedial engagements that the Heavenly Horse tradition of the Tang period reaches a particularly refined articulation and continues to resonate in later generations.

Horse sculpture of the Tang dynasty, while continuing earlier traditions, underwent a subtle yet significant transformation in function. This is epitomized by sancai 三彩 ceramic horses, which, with their vibrant glazes, elegant postures, and stylized body proportions, constituted a visual system that was simultaneously aesthetic and ritual. Characterized by exuberant colors and ornate forms, these sculptures convey a spirited and romantic aura, powerfully evoking the grandeur of a flourishing age. As one is inevitably "led into the poetic realm of the Tang upon viewing them,"¹⁶ sancai horses cannot be regarded as an isolated sculptural tradition. Instead, they form the third visual pillar of the Heavenly Horse's cultural heritage alongside poetry and painting. Furthermore, the distinctive "three-flower 三花" mane, formed by clipping the horse's mane into three upright tufts, can be traced to Persian influence, serves as a material testament to the profound cultural syncretism of the High Tang era.

By permeating objects of daily use contexts, the Ferghana Horse extended the aesthetic presence into the fabric of broader social life. With larger numbers of Ferghana Horses imported into China, images of the horse become so vivid that they were embedded in textiles as an auspicious motif. Du Mu's 杜牧(803–852 CE) "Ode to Zhang Haohao 张好好诗" contains a famous description of a textile bearing the Heavenly Horse pattern: "I presented her with Heavenly Horse brocade, together with a rhinoceros-horn comb 赠之以天马锦, 副以水犀梳."¹⁷ In this poem a beautiful lady is presented with Heavenly Horse brocade 天马锦 as an exquisite gift, which symbolizes the giver's ardent affection for her.

¹⁶ Liu Qiangong 刘谦功, Observing the Grand Prosperity of the Tang Dynasty through Tri-Color Glazed Ceramics of the Tang Period 从唐三彩看大唐盛世气象, *Chinese Culture Studies 中国文化研究*, 2009,(02):139-143. p. 140.

¹⁷ Du Mu 杜牧, Ode to Zhang Haohao 张好好诗, *Complete Tang Poems 全唐詩*, vol. 521; Beijing: Zhonghu Book Company, 1960, vol. 16, p. 5978.

As a high-grade silk tapestry of the Tang Dynasty, the Heavenly Horse brocade is crafted from high-quality silk, possibly interwoven with gold threads to achieve a luxurious, resplendent effect. Reserved as imperial tribute or rewards for the aristocracy, it often symbolizes auspiciousness and the exclusivity of imperial authority. The incorporation of the Heavenly Horse motif into Tang textiles represents one of the most profound and enduring achievements of Silk Road cultural synthesis. It was no longer merely a living symbol of imperial conquest and heavenly mandate, but had become a reproducible, commodifiable auspicious pattern. The ferocious “blood-sweating” warhorse of the Han hymns is reborn as an exquisite, ornament for everyday life, completing its journey from frontier violence to metropolitan refinement.

In addition to the above-mentioned tangible forms, the Ferghana Horse tradition also encompasses rich intangible records of performing arts and ritual practices. Cao Zhi曹植 (192–232 CE) was the first one to record in his “Memorial on Presenting a Horse献马表” that Ferghana horses can be trained to dance with music.¹⁸ In Tang dynasty this performative art has reached a climax, as documented in many material and textual records. The Gilt Silver Jar with Patterns of Dancing Horses (figure 4) featuring dancing Ferghana Horses is a vivid example of how these performances were artistically encoded. According to the Shaanxi History Museum’s illustration to the gilt silver jar, Tang court spectacles featured hundreds of elaborately adorned horses dancing to music: they lifted their heads, swished their tails, leapt in rhythm, and at the height of the ceremony mounted tiered platforms to spin in coordinated patterns. The leading horse would hold a wine cup in its mouth and present it to Emperor Xuanzong in a ritual gesture of celebration and blessing.¹⁹ Similarly, Tang poets describe the scene with lines such as “The horse holds a cup to end the banquet’s tune, drooping head and swinging tail, feigning drunkenness like mud更有衔杯终宴曲，垂头掉尾醉如泥，”²⁰ reflecting a sophisticated choreographic system that combined music, ritual, and imperial symbolism.

¹⁸ Cao Zhi曹植, Memorial on Presenting a Horse献马表, *Collected Works of the Prince of Chensi*, vol. 1, *One Hundred and Three Collections of the Han, Wei, and Six Dynasties*汉魏六朝百三家集陈思王集卷一, Beijing: Erudition Digital Publishing Co., Ltd. from Erudition Chinese Classic Ancient Books Database爱如生中国基本典籍库, p. 3143, retrieved on Dec. 9, 2025.

¹⁹ Introduction to Gilt Silver Jar with Pattern of Dancing Horses Holding Cups, in the website of Shaanxi Provincial Museum, <https://www.sxhm.com/collections/detail/469.html>, retrieved on Dec. 9, 2025.

²⁰ Zhuang Shuo张说(667-730CE), Zaqi Geci (Miscellaneous Tunes) Yuefu Lyrics for Dancing Horses for the Longevity Celebration杂曲歌辞·舞马千秋万岁乐府词, *Complete Tang Poems*, vol. 87, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1960, p. 956.



Figure 4. Gilt Silver Jar with Pattern of Dancing Horses. Though taking the form of a physical artifact, the dancing horse images reflect the intangible heritage of horsemanship and performance associated with the Ferghana Horse.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gilt_silver_jar_with_pattern_of_dancing_horses.jpg (accessed December 9, 2025), public domain.

4. Reinterpretation and Renewal: The Heavenly Horse from the Song–Qing 宋-清 Era to the Present

The exchange of the Ferghana Horse between China and the Ferghana areas reached its apex during the Tang dynasty. Afterward, while large-scale imports of foreign horses continued, the influx of Ferghana-originated steeds declined amid shifts in Silk Road dynamics and Central Asian political landscapes. Correspondingly, the cultural life of the Ferghana Horse entered a distinct new phase. It transformed from an “active cultural symbol” deeply tied to cross-border exchange and imperial authority into an “object preserved, interpreted, and rearticulated” within late imperial regimes of knowledge. The multimodal heritage forged by Tang texts, paintings, and sculptures was reorganized, reclassified, and recontextualized, endowing the horse with a renewed epistemic structure and cultural vitality.

This transformation took shape within the connoisseur culture of mid-and late imperial literati. As archives and private collections matured, Tang equine paintings were systematically incorporated into art-historical catalogues. The Qing imperial compilation *Stone Moat Precious Book Collection* 石渠宝笈, a definitive record of classical Chinese art,

contains extensive entries on Ferghana Horse paintings, documenting their provenance, transmission, and stylistic characteristics. As Wen C. Fong observes, painters after Song dynasty did not mechanically imitate Tang models; instead, they reconstructed these styles through rewriting, imitation and reinterpretation that allowed Tang aesthetic paradigms to be reborn in late imperial contexts.²¹ A representative example is Zhao Mengfu's 赵孟頫 combined scroll of Grooms and Horses (Figure 5) from the Yuan dynasty. The work relocates the accumulated Ferghana–Heavenly Horse tradition into the idiom of literati painting, where poetry, calligraphy, and brushwork jointly articulate values of restraint, cultivated ease, and ethical self-discipline. The horses' demeanor, which is leisurely without indolence and noble without ostentation, together with Zhao's inscribed poem, mirrors the scholar's ideal of moral self-cultivation and spiritual autonomy. In this way, the Heavenly Horse tradition persists not as a fixed image but as an internalized cultural memory, translated into a new ethical and aesthetic register.



Figure 5. Grooms and Horses, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/40507> (accessed Dec.12, 2025), open access (CC0).

Simultaneously, poetry and evidential scholarship 考据学 integrated the Ferghana Horse into new intellectual frameworks. For instance, the renowned poet and connoisseur Su Shi 苏轼 in the Song dynasty offered incisive commentary on numerous Heavenly Horse paintings and composed celebrated verses. In his Postscript to Han Jie's Landscape Paintings (Second Entry) 又跋汉杰画山二首, he writes that “Viewing scholar-paintings is like evaluating horses under heaven, in which one seeks their vital spirit. By contrast, craftsman-painters often fixate on whips, manes, troughs, and forage, lacking a trace of noble vigor 观士人画，如阅天下马，取其意气。乃若画工，往往只取鞭策皮毛槽枥刍秣

²¹ Wen C. Fong, *Beyond Representation*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, introduction, p. 8.

，无一点俊发。”²² By analogizing painting appreciation to horse conformation, a tradition rooted in the Han-era *Book of Horse Conformation* 相马经, Su Shi emphasizes capturing the inherent spiritual essence of artworks. Crucially, this argument embeds the aesthetic logic of steed appreciation of valuing inner vitality over superficial form into scholar-painting theory, exerting a profound influence on subsequent generations.

Another vital tradition that perpetuated the cultural legacy of the Ferghana Horse was the flourishing genre of “poems on paintings 咏画诗,” which emerged as a distinctive literati practice from the Song dynasty onward. Tang Heavenly Horse paintings, particularly those by Han Gan and later attributed masterpieces or their copies, frequently served as focal points for poetic description, eulogy, and philosophical reflection in subsequent eras. Prominent examples include Yuan Haowen’s 元好问 “Ode to a Horse Painting for General Xing 画马为邢将军赋” composed during the Jin-Yuan transition, Song Lian’s 宋濂 “On Li Guangli’s Campaign against Ferghana 题李广利伐宛图” from the early Ming, and Qian Zai’s 钱宰 poem inspired by Zhao Yong’s 赵雍 Heavenly Horse Painting, to name only a few. These works vividly depict Heavenly Horses in paintings, reinterpreting Tang-era imagery through late imperial literati sensibilities. Together with scholar-painting theory, this poetic tradition facilitated the continuation and reconstruction of Heavenly Horse culture beyond the Tang.

In the contemporary era, digital technologies have further propelled the reconstruction of the Heavenly Horse heritage. Through high-resolution scanning, 3D modeling, searchable digital databases, and GIS-based spatial reconstruction, the Ferghana Horse has entered a new digital archival life cycle. With the continuous emergence of new digital technologies, particularly virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and interactive digital platforms, the methods for preserving and presenting the cultural heritage of the Ferghana Horse will become more diverse, offering boundless space for exploration and discovery to contemporary scholars and the general public.

Despite a rich body of research on the Heavenly Horse motif in Chinese art and cultural history, important gaps remain that call for more integrated and interdisciplinary approaches. Current research often examines textual, visual, or archaeological findings in relative isolation, which obscures the interconnected, multimodal nature of this longstanding cultural symbol. The Ferghana Horse has travelled across the various medias mentioned above but is not limited to them. Folklores, songs, dances, and some other intangible forms of the Ferghana Horse heritage are still in great needs of exploration. Moreover, while the motif is frequently interpreted within a predominantly Sinocentric framework, its broader role as a carrier of cross-cultural knowledge along Eurasian routes also deserves greater attention.

Outlook

²² Su Shi 苏轼, Second of Two Postscripts to Hanjie’s Painting of Mountains 又跋汉杰画山二首, *Collected Works of Su Shi* 苏轼文集, vol. 70, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1986, p. 2216.

The author is currently developing a preliminary database of Ferghana Horse heritage materials, comprising digital forms of textual, visual, artefactual, performative and orally transmitted sources. The next stage of the project will involve the classification, organization, and further digitization of these multimodal materials. Looking ahead, the author plans to produce a publicly oriented, introductory monograph designed to make the subject accessible to a wider audience.

HU Suqing, Associate Professor, PhD in Comparative Literature, College of Foreign Language Studies, Hunan University, China. Research focuses include human-animal studies and critical animal studies from a comparative literature perspective. - Sincere gratitude goes to Professor Lucia Boldrini and Professor Lothar Jordan for their valuable guidance and support with this project.

Vulnerability Studies, Memory of the World and the SDGs

by Pramod K Nayar and Anna Kurian

The last twenty years saw a growing worldwide interest in Vulnerability Studies. Vulnerability is both innate (as in the ontological condition of being vulnerable as a result of being human with an injurable body) and social (induced due to factors and conditions ranging from the state of the economy, access to health services or environmental risks). It is often linked to Disaster Risk Reduction and Management, or when particular groups are deemed ‘most vulnerable’ in terms of social factors.

The UNESCO Chair in Vulnerability Studies at the University of Hyderabad, India (instituted in 2022) is a ‘teaching and research unit’. It concentrates, among other domains such as aging and vulnerability or environmental vulnerability, on the vulnerability of cultural memory, including language loss, the erosion of collective memory and documentary heritage and the crisis of artefactual preservation.

Its aims intermingle with some of the UNESCO Memory of the World Programme. Our key term “vulnerability” is very similar to the “fragility” of documentary heritage that triggered the UNESCO Memory of the World Programme.

And as Memory of the World is inextricably bound with the UN’s SDGs, so is our Chair in Vulnerability Studies. First, it contributes to the educational database of the world, given its range and depth, and this is in line, philosophically speaking, to SDG 4’s focus. It also furthers the SDG 16 agenda on inclusive societies and strong partnerships geared towards this end. Finally, it fits the SDG 17 aim of global partnership for sustainable development, especially because ‘development’ in the sense we ought to understand it, is the making of an inclusivity of vision, the spirit of understanding and tolerance across and toward cultures.

Its activities were geared towards the fulfilment of the SDG 4 mandate of education and teaching. In the process, the Chair generated global engagements with 40+ academics from over 12 nations, over 30 institutions across India, for conferences, workshops and varied pedagogic purposes, in the process also aligning itself with the SDG 17 of strong partnerships towards a better world. The activities kept in mind the outcomes as defined by UNESCO 41 C/Res.4 for Major Programme I:

- Outcome 1: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all;
- Outcome 2: Strengthen international coordination for the achievement of SDG 4 and develop the global education agenda based on research, foresight and innovation;
- Outcome 7: Promote inclusion and combat discrimination, hate speech and stereotypes and
- Outcome 8: Foster knowledge sharing and skills development in the digital age.

The Chair has also organized a capacity building programme (called a Faculty Development Program, or FDP, but open to researchers as well) in collaboration with the National Institute of Technology, Tiruchirappalli, India, whose focus was exactly in line with MoW's aims and scope: cultural vulnerability. Topics covered by experts included: Cultural Vulnerability; Vulnerability and Language; Cultural Vulnerability and Cultural Protection; Cultural Desecration; Vulnerability and the MoW Project.²³ Throughout this programme, the discussions centered vulnerable knowledges, the modes of memorializing, the worry over the politics of memory, and so on.

This FDP in fact grew out of *four* earlier events in which the Chair had a role. In 2023 we conducted a workshop at GITAM University, Hyderabad, with two thrust areas: extinction (which had a component on what Ursula Heise calls 'extinction memories'), and child rights in literature. Early in 2024, we co-taught a course with Queen's University Belfast on ageing in literature, perspectives from the Global North and South. Also in 2024 we were co-organizers of an international conference 'Sustaining Cultural Diversity in the Context of Emerging Technologies in India' in the University of Hyderabad. At the Conference, speakers addressed 'mnemocultures', tech-enabled (or disabled) translations from and into Indian languages, cultural diversity and its challenges, among others. In the course of this Conference's deliberations and presentations, it dawned on us that there is substantial researcher interest in and concern with cultural artefacts, language hegemony and attendant language vulnerability (and even loss), the necessity of language preservation and diversity protection. In late 2024, we offered a one-credit course on vulnerability studies from Wilson College, Mumbai, in which linguistic and cultural vulnerability and memory was a major theme.

In its four-season Siting Vulnerability series of talks (2022-2025) which then became OERs (Open Educational Resources), we had several speakers addressing questions of memory, cultural heritage and diversity and conservation/ translation/ archiving.

unesco Chair

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY TIRUCHIRAPPALLI

UNIVERSITY OF HYDERABAD

DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
National Institute of Technology Tiruchirappalli

In association with

THE UNESCO CHAIR IN VULNERABILITY STUDIES
University of Hyderabad

One Week Online Faculty Development Programme
Researching Cultural Vulnerability: Concepts, Contexts, and Challenges

27th January 2025 – 1st February 2025

National Institute of Technology (NIT), Tiruchirappalli
 National Institute of Technology, Tiruchirappalli (NIT Trichy) founded in 1964 is a public technical and research university in Tamil Nadu, India. It is one of India's oldest technical universities and is located at Tiruchirappalli in a campus of 800 acres. The university is recognized as an Institute of National Importance by the Government of India. The university focuses exclusively on science, technology, engineering, management, architecture and humanities. National Institutional Ranking Framework ranked the university 1st among the NITs in India in 2024. Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry named the university as the "University of the Year" in 2017. The university has academic and research collaborations with universities and research centres in India and abroad including the United States and the United Kingdom and is undergoing accelerated growth through the World Bank-funded Technical Education Quality Improvement Program (TEQIP).

Department of Humanities & Social Sciences
 The Department of Humanities and Social Sciences has been in existence since 2004. The department is known for independent interdisciplinary research and for a dynamic collaboration between faculty and students. To meet the existing demands of industry, business, public and private organizations, academic and human services, the department has constantly striven for a practical curriculum with a high degree of professional relevance, enabling students to face real-time challenges. Accordingly, the department has been offering a wide range of core and elective courses to undergraduates and graduates. The department has been offering a full-fledged Ph.D. program since 2004 and has produced quality research work in newer areas of Humanities and Social Sciences. Recognizing the growing demand for humanities-based courses, the department also offers minor degree courses in Economics and in Language/Literature. In 2020, the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences started an MA programme in English Language and Literature. Faculty in the department are committed teachers engaged in continuous research in niche areas like Language and Genetics, Health Humanities, Gender Studies, Cultural Studies, English and Employability Skills, Critical Pedagogy and Aviation English.

²³ The Chair of the MoW SCEaR, Lothar Jordan, took part as a speaker in this programme.



Noting that linguistic and literary hegemonies via English operate to erase other cultural practices and domains, the Chair's Fellow organized a very focused conference on 'Vulnerability in Urdu Literature' in 2023. While focusing on the theme of vulnerability across genres in Urdu literature, speakers also addressed the vulnerability of Urdu literature in contemporary contexts.

The Chair has also taken its public facing work and responsibility seriously and has published several pieces of journalism on cultures of mourning, Memory of the World, cultural memory and Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in *Telangana Today*, *The Wire* and other places.

The Chair has delivered over half a dozen talks on planetary memory delivered at the annual conference of the Indian Network for Memory Studies and Centre for Memory Studies, Indian Institute of Technology Madras, India and cultural memory/archives at various conferences across India.

While not directly within the remit of memory culture studies, it is pertinent to note the Chair's continued fidelity to the SDGs. In 2024, we were the academic partner to the University of Hyderabad's Madanmohan Malviya Teacher Training Centre in organizing a Short Term Program in 'SDGs, Precarity and Literary Studies'. Talks on motherhood and vulnerability in Early Modern English drama, forms of climate change literature (poetry, graphic novels), the Blue Humanities, Women's Writing, among others, evoked considerable discussion amongst participants and scholars. From February 2025, the Chair has hosted what we believe might well be India's longest running academic event around the SDGs: 'The Literature of Sustainability: Reading, Writing and the SDGs', involving 20 speakers for the 17 SDGs. These talks are archived as OERs for anyone who wishes to understand the function of Literature in the SDG-era.



The UNESCO Chair in Vulnerability Studies
Department of English
University of Hyderabad



The Literature of Sustainability: Reading, Writing and the SDGs

February 2025 - December 2025

- SDG 1:** (28 Feb) Joseph Entin (Brooklyn College, City U of New York, USA)
- SDG 2:** (21 March) Miriam Mara (Arizona State U, USA)
- SDG 3:** (25 April) Lucy Burke (Manchester Metropolitan U, UK)
- SDG 4:** (25 July) Jesse Cordes Selbin (Gettysburg College, USA)
- SDG 5:** (25 June) Bonnie Zare (Virginia Tech, USA)
- SDG 6:** (4 July) Isabel Hofmeyr (U of Witwatersrand, SA), Charne Lavery (U of Pretoria, SA), Sarah Nuttall (U of Witwatersrand, SA)
(11 July) Balakrishna Pisupati (Head of Environment Policy, UNEP)
- SDG 7:** (8 Aug) Stacey Balkan (Florida Atlantic U, USA)
- SDG 8:** (12 Sep) Cindy Weinstein (CALTECH, USA)
- SDG 9:** (24 Oct) Clare Pettitt (U of Cambridge, UK)
- SDG 10:** (10 Oct) Nick Lu (Marist College, USA)
- SDG 11:** (7 Nov) Christine Daigle (Brock U, Canada)
- SDG 12:** (23 May) Elizabeth Carolyn Miller (U of California Davis, USA)
- SDG 13:** (23 Sep) Jennifer Wenzel (Columbia U, USA)
- SDG 14:** (29 Aug) Cecilia Åsberg (Linköping U, Sweden)
- SDG 15:** (19 Sep) Sarah Bezan (University College Cork, Ireland)
- SDG 16:** (14 Nov) Alfred J. López (Purdue U, USA)
- SDG 17:** (28 Nov) Sean Cubitt (U of Melbourne, Australia)

Google Meet Link:
<https://meet.google.com/ojm-twld-atg>



Pramod K Nayar | Anna Kurian

We have expanded our collaboration to now work as an Archival Partner with Culture at Risk Unit, Digital Humanities Institute, under the British Library's Endangered Archives Project, EPFL, Lausanne, Switzerland, to inventory and digitally document endangered Armenian inscriptions in India – a project that will receive British Council funding.

Looking ahead, particularly in its collaboration as a Cooperating Institution with UNESCO's MoW SCEaR, the Chair has discussed a series of possible works. Grounding it in the theme of 'The Role of Documentary Heritage in Sustainable Development', exemplified by SDG 16. Preliminary ideas and thoughts on this collaboration have thrown up the following possibilities: a series of online presentations on, ideally, all 17 SDGs, to

discuss and elaborate the relation between MoW and the SDGs. We also expect that these talks can then take the form of a volume to be published in 2027, celebrating the 35th anniversary of MoW. Highlighting the fragility of cultures and their memories, examining the academic theorizing of cultural memory and developing an understanding, among the target audience (the informed listener, memory studies scholars, vulnerability studies scholars) are among the aims of this collaborative initiative.

Pramod K Nayar holds the UNESCO Chair in Vulnerability Studies, University of Hyderabad, India. His Postcolonial Poetry and the Environment (Bloomsbury 2025) and India and Imperial Vulnerability (Manchester UP, forthcoming in 2026) address the literature of vulnerability, forms of memory-and-storytelling, the construction of vulnerable subjects and their memories.

Anna Kurian is a Faculty Fellow, UNESCO Chair in Vulnerability Studies, and has published on cultural memory in the age of AI, constructions of afterlives in narrative memory, and studied the contemporaneity of literary themes in gender, racism, the 'stolen generation', and others.

The UNESCO Chair in Vulnerability Studies is a Cooperating Institution of the SCEaR.

The SCEaR Working Group Africa (SCEaR–WGA)

by *Papa Momar Diop*

The Sub-Committee on Education and Research (SCEaR) of UNESCO’s Memory of the World International Advisory Committee seeks, through its activities, to contribute to the implementation of UNESCO’s Priority Africa.

In implementation of the four priorities of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030),²⁴ UNESCO organized the First Global Forum on Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Policies for the Sustainable Preservation of Documentary Heritage, held in Paris on 11 December 2018.²⁵

This Forum inspired SCEaR to develop a project *Preventive Conservation and Disaster Prevention of Documentary Heritage in Africa. A Memory of the World Guide*. The Subcommittee on Technology (SCoT) – now the Subcommittee on Preservation (SCP) – and ARCMoW joined in. When SCEaR created its Working Group Africa on 26 November 2020 this project became a core task of the WGA:

SCEaR–WGA has four main tasks:

1. To support the development and strengthening of education and research on the UNESCO Memory of the World Programme and on documentary heritage in Africa;
2. To reflect disaster risk reduction and management in Africa, including through the project *Preventive Conservation and Disaster Prevention of Documentary Heritage in Africa: A Memory of the World Guide* (in cooperation with the Subcommittee on Preservation and ARCMoW);
3. To explore synergies between documentary heritage and other forms of heritage, particularly intangible heritage (for example, Africa’s oral traditions);
4. To identify additional topics for reflection related to Task 1.

Thus far, the Working Group’s efforts have focused primarily on producing the publication described in Task 2: *Preventive Conservation and Disaster Prevention of Documentary Heritage in Africa: A Memory of the World Guide*.

1. Composition of SCEaR–WGA

The initial structure of the Working Group – designed to maintain gender balance and parity between French- and English-speaking members – could not be preserved due to

²⁴ United Nations. *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030)*, p. 14.
https://www.unisdr.org/files/43291_frenchsendaiframeworkfordisasterris.pdf

²⁵ *First Memory of the World Global Policy Forum: Disaster Risk Reduction and Management for Sustainable Preservation of Documentary Heritage*
https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2025/03/firstforum_scearnewsletter2020_special_issu e1.pdf?hub=1081

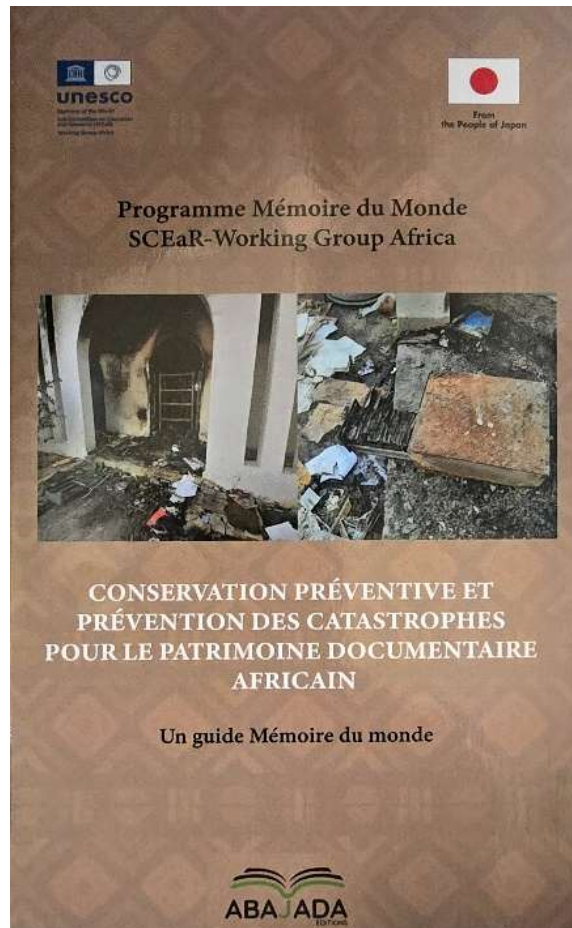
the withdrawal of two of the seven originally appointed members. As a result, SCEaR–WGA currently has five members, including one woman and two Anglophones.

The Working Group is composed as follows:

- Ms. Lydia Waithira Muthuma, Senior Lecturer, Department of Design and Creative Media, Faculty of Social Sciences and Technology, Technical University of Kenya, Nairobi;
- Mr. Elisam Magara, Professor, School of Information Science and Library Studies, Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda;
- Mr. Seyni Moumouni, Director of Research in Civilizations and History, African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education (CAMES); specialist in sub-Saharan African and Islamic manuscripts, Director of the Institute for Research in Human Sciences (IRSH), Abdou Moumouni University, Niamey, Niger; he is a Corresponding Member of SCEaR;
- Mr. Papa Momar Diop, SCEaR member; President of ARCMoW; former Vice-Chair of the UNESCO Memory of the World International Advisory Committee (IAC); former Director of the National Archives of Senegal; former Ambassador Permanent Delegate of Senegal to UNESCO and currently Associate Professor of Documentary Heritage Management at Gaston Berger University, Saint-Louis, Senegal; he has been appointed Coordinator of the Working Group by SCEaR;
- Mr. Appolinaire Tokandji Gbaguidi, Documentation Engineer/Cultural and Audiovisual Heritage Manager; specialist in electronic data management; Professor of Archival Studies and Digital Document Processing at the University of Abomey-Calavi, Benin. As the only bilingual member of the Group, he has been reconfirmed as Secretary-General of SCEaR–WGA.

2. Preventive Conservation and Disaster Prevention of Documentary Heritage in Africa: A Memory of the World Guide

The Guide has been completed in its French version. Since three of the five contributors wrote their chapters in French and resources are insufficient to publish a full bilingual edition, the English-language edition and printed publication have been deferred.



SCEaR–WGA is grateful to have received generous support from the UNESCO Documentary Heritage Unit through the Japanese Funds-in-Trust, and we take this opportunity to express our profound gratitude.

The Guide²⁶ consists of four sections:

- An introductory chapter by the Coordinator, Papa Momar Diop;
- A chapter on the importance of collecting oral sources through community engagement, by Lydia Muthuma;
- A chapter on preservation requirements for different media, by Appolinaire Tokandji Gbaguidi;
- A chapter on disaster risk factors, in two parts, by Seyni Moumouni and Elisam Magara.

3. Future Perspectives

SCEaR–WGA intends to prepare and publish the English edition of the *Guide* soon. To achieve this, the Group is seeking a sponsor. The three French chapters have already been translated into draft English versions, which now require proofreading and revision. While awaiting final editing and printing, an electronic version will be made available.

²⁶ See the review by Joie Springer in *SCEaR Newsletter* 2025/1, pp. 23-26.

Once the English edition is completed, the Group aims to collaborate with educators in institutions that train documentary heritage professionals to transform the *Guide* into a teaching manual for students and practitioners.

The Working Group also plans to expand its membership – from five to eight members – to restore gender and linguistic balance.

Then SCEaR–WGA will explore the interactions between documentary heritage and oral sources and will prepare a comprehensive analytical proposal on this topic. Pending a positive evaluation by SCEaR, this will be submitted as a formal SCEaR initiative.

Furthermore the Coordinator of SCEaR–WGA proposed an African member, Mr Babacar Diong, for the new SCEaR Working Group – together with ICA, IFLA, and ICLA – “Lost Memory: Research on the Reconstruction of Lost and Dispersed Libraries and Archives”. The proposal was accepted.

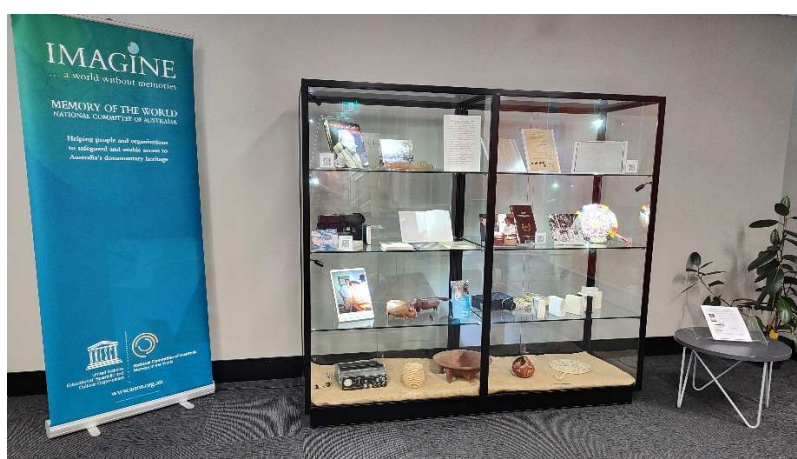
dpmomar@yahoo.fr

Connecting Pacific Collections

by Roslyn Russell

Those of us who inhabit the Pacific region have a shared history – of colonisation, of trade, of missionary endeavour, and, in many cases, of war. Pacific nation states have common links to most of these historical situations. Pasifika (the term used widely in the region) documentary heritage created by these interactions has been a major focus of the Australian Memory of the World Knowledge Centre and the Australian Memory of the World Committee for several years.

From February to May 2024, the Australian Memory of the World Knowledge Centre held an exhibition, *Pasifika Collections in the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Register*, which was featured in the programme of the Australian Capital Territory’s Heritage Month in April that year.

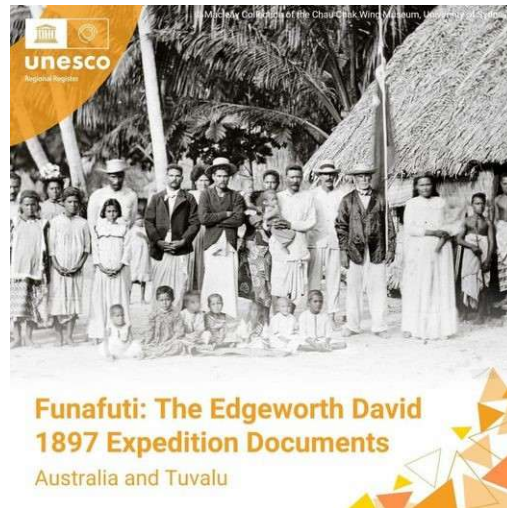


The *Pasifika Collections* exhibition on display at the Australian Knowledge Centre in the ACT Heritage Library in Canberra in 2024. Photo: Roslyn Russell.

The exhibition displayed a range of items relating to documentary heritage associated with the wider Pacific region, and inscribed on the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Register, including South Sea Islander Indentured Labourer Records that documented Islander recruits who worked in the Queensland sugar plantations from the mid-19th century to the early 20th century; and photographs of first contact between Papuan people and European administrators and anthropologists. Facsimiles of the original documents were used in the exhibition for conservation reasons, as well as publications relating to the inscribed records, and artefacts from Pacific nations such as Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Tuvalu.

The exhibition also displayed items used by the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau and the Pacific and Regional Archive for Digital Sources in Endangered Cultures (PARADISEC) to photograph, microfilm and digitise documentary heritage held in vulnerable documentary heritage collections across the Pacific region.

Items relating to the inscription of the *Funafuti: The Edgeworth David 1897 Expedition Documents*, a joint nomination to the UNESCO Memory of the World Programme's Asia-Pacific (MOWCAP) Register from Australia and Tuvalu, inscribed in 2024 (see <https://www.mowcapunesco.org/register/funafuti-the-edgeworth-david-1897-expedition-documents-2024/>), were on display in the exhibition.



MOWCAP's logo of the *Funafuti: The Edgeworth David 1897 Expedition Documents*, a joint nomination from Australia and Tuvalu, inscribed in 2024. Image courtesy of MOWCAP.

The Australian Memory of the World Knowledge Centre's emphasis on Pasifika collections continued, with a workshop held in Sydney at the end of October 2025 that aimed to further explore these connections, and to investigate and develop potential nominations from the Pacific region to the MOWCAP and International Memory of the World registers.

The workshop, held at History House (headquarters of the Royal Australian Historical Society) in Macquarie Street, in the historic heart of Sydney, brought together Pasifika attendees from Kiribati, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea, Tonga and Vanuatu with managers of Pacific Islands collections in Canberra and Sydney. The workshop was organised by the International Centre for Documentary Heritage in Cheongju, Republic of Korea, in association with the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Committee and the Australian Memory of the World Knowledge Centre.

Over two days of presentations and discussions, the workshop revealed some exciting possibilities for enhancing the profile of the Pacific region, and the Small Island Developing States within it, in particular, in the international documentary heritage ecosystem. This was greatly assisted by the participation in the workshop of Joie Springer, formerly head of the Memory of the World Secretariat in UNESCO (Paris), and currently Chair of the UNESCO Memory of the World International Advisory Committee's Register Sub-Committee (RSC).

Participants learned more about the UNESCO Memory of the World Programme and its nomination process, and how to prepare effective submissions that will ultimately be

inscribed on the Asia-Pacific and International registers; and gained a better understanding of the collections held both in the island nations of the Pacific and corresponding collections here in Australia. The groundwork has been laid for further cooperation between collecting institutions in Australia and those in Small Island Developing States in the Pacific region.

The third day of the workshop was devoted to site visits to view original documents in Pasifika collections in the State Library of New South Wales; presentations on the work of PARADISEC at its office in the historic Sydney Conservatorium of Music; and a viewing of the Wansolmoana Gallery of Pasifika items in the Australian Museum. The site visits concluded with a presentation on the Australian Museum's Pasifika Collections and Engagement strategy, and its interactions with the wide range of Pasifika communities in Sydney.

The workshop provided a wonderful opportunity to build the networks that will strengthen our capacity to engage with regional issues involving documentary heritage collections, including climate change, inadequate staffing and lack of resources in some Small Island Developing States.

Another workshop, this time for custodians of Australian documentary heritage collections, will be held in February 2026 at the Chau Chak Wing Museum in the University of Sydney. As well as focusing on the latest nomination round for the Australian Register, the workshop will also continue to develop the collaboration with our Pacific neighbours that has received great impetus from the event in Sydney in October 2025.



Photo: Group photo of Pacific Collections workshop participants. Courtesy of the International Centre for Documentary Heritage (ICDH).

Roslyn Russell is Rapporteur of SCEaR, and Chair of the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Committee.

Report

Revitalizing Chengdu's Traditional Teahouse Archives as Documentary Heritage

by Que Xuelian, He Yue and Wang Jiuling

On July 3, 2025, as heavy rain fell over Chengdu, the restored Jinqin Traditional Teahouse, a revival of traditional western Sichuan architecture, buzzed with life. Fourteen-year-old Jin Chengxi and his friends sat on bamboo chairs, treating tea drinkers to a performance of Dmitri Shostakovich's *Second Waltz* on cello, violin, and bayan accordion. Inside the teahouse, the warm glow of wooden tables and chairs mingled with the rising steam and aroma of gaiwan tea. Guests chatted, recorded the scene, or simply immersed themselves in the music. Sichuan Opera and Qingyin ballad-singing also take the stage weekly across traditional teahouse in Chengdu.



The street corner teahouse in Chengdu (Photo: Qi Ming).

How does the weathered charm of traditional teahouse harmonize with the romantic sweep of a waltz? How does the everyday ritual of lidded-cup tea blend seamlessly with modern life? The answer lies on May 8, 2024, when the Archives Relating to Chengdu Traditional Teahouse was successfully inscribed on the Asia Pacific Regional Register of UNESCO's

Memory of the World Programme (MoW), elevating traditional teahouse in Chengdu into a new cultural emblem on the global stage.

“What's past is prologue.” With the Archives Relating to Chengdu Traditional Teahouse now inscribed on the UNESCO’s MoW Programme, Chengdu faces new challenges. How to chart the next chapter? How can these archives evolve from regional memory to global heritage, from static preservation to dynamic utilization? How can documentary heritage transcend physical boundaries? The Chengdu Municipal Archives has launched a comprehensive strategy to infuse culture with fresh perspectives from historical records, pioneering contemporary paths for the revitalization and utilization of documentary heritage.

1.

“Chengdu is a giant teahouse, and every teahouse is a miniature Chengdu”. Teahouses in the city, whether on bustling streets, in narrow alleys, or under riverside shade, sprout organically, woven into the urban fabric, thriving in symbiosis with the city itself. The Chengdu Municipal Archives, custodian of the Archives Relating to Chengdu Traditional Teahouse, embrace the principle of public accessibility, sharing this invaluable cultural heritage widely through diverse channels.

In the spacious, sunlit halls of the Sichuan Library, the exhibition *A Millennium of Tea History: Sichuan Tea Stories in Classical Texts* unfolds. As visitors step into the exhibition hall titled Teahouse Known to All, their eyes are immediately drawn to a set of yellowed archives. These records vividly capture teahouses as vibrant cultural hubs, from stages where Sichuan Opera and Qingyin ballad-singing flourished, to early venues where film screenings sparked new forms of entertainment. The exhibition, with over 30,000 attendees, features exclusively the Traditional Teahouse Archives provided by the Chengdu Municipal Archives. Complementing the exhibition, archival researchers from the Chengdu Municipal Archives delivered a well-received lecture, *The Teahouse Chronicles: A Curated Collection of Archives Relating to Chengdu Traditional Teahouse*, at the Sichuan Library. Widely praised, the event highlighted successful collaboration between the two key cultural institutions.



Business license for Sichuan Opera performance at Yuelai Teahouse in 1941 (Collection of the Chengdu Municipal Archives).

Positioning Chengdu as a global hub for teahouse studies, by encouraging scholars to unlock the value of its collections, is a key innovation from the Chengdu Municipal Archives. Professor Wang Di, a Chinese-American historian, has visited the Chengdu Municipal Archives multiple times to research traditional teahouse records, leading to landmark works.²⁷ On May 11, 2025, at the *Archives Relating to Chengdu Traditional Teahouse – Chinese Tea Civilization Academic Seminar*, co-hosted by the Chengdu Municipal Archives and the 13th Sichuan International Tea Expo, Wang Di delivered a keynote speech on the historical significance of the archives and their role in shaping urban cultural identity, engaging in dialogue with over 400 representatives from government, business, and academia. Reflecting on his journey, Wang Di said emotionally: “These archives were indispensable. Without this rich trove of materials, the *Teahouse* series, micro-histories of Chengdu’s urban life, simply would not exist”.

²⁷ Such as *The Teahouse: Small Business, Everyday Culture, and Public Politics in Chengdu, 1900-1950* (Beijing, 2010), *The Teahouse under Socialism: The Decline and Renewal of Public Life in Chengdu, 1950-2000* (Chengdu, 2023), and *The Street Corner Teahouse* (Beijing, 2021).



Archives Relating to Chengdu Traditional Teahouse – Chinese Tea Civilization Academic Seminar during the 13th Sichuan International Tea Expo on May 9, 2024 (Collection of the Chengdu Municipal Archives).

Good wine needs no bush, but good tea needs a thoroughfare. To propel the historical documents beyond niche circles, the Chengdu Municipal Archives has built a robust media network to carry the aroma of tea across the globe. After the archives were inscribed on the UNESCO’s MoW Programme, CCTV-1 aired a 20-second live broadcast worldwide, while CCTV-13’s Live News dedicated 3 minutes and 2 seconds to a special report. The Chengdu Municipal Archives then coordinated coverage with 56 major media outlets, including Xinhua News Agency, People.cn, and Chinanews.com, sparking over 20 million online views the following day. A simple bowl of lidded-cup tea had become a global cultural moment, breaking regional boundaries and introducing the concept of “documentary heritage” to a mass audience. At the local level, the Chengdu Municipal Archives has forged ongoing partnerships with media such as *Sichuan Daily*, *Sichuan Observation*, and *Chengdu Release*. Through diverse formats, they’ve unpacked the archives’ stories. Short videos feature oral stories from tea masters, written pieces explore the unwritten rules of teahouse culture, and photo essays capture the diverse faces of tea drinkers. These efforts transform archival documents into tangible, relatable narratives, turning the Archives Relating to Chengdu Traditional Teahouse from static records into living symbols of the city’s cultural identity.



Commemorative envelope collection for the Archives Relating to Chengdu Traditional Teahouse on May 8, 2025 (Photo: CHINAPOST Chengdu Children's Post).

Stamps are cultural messengers. On the first anniversary of the Archives Relating to Chengdu Traditional Teahouse being inscribed on the MoW Regional Register Asia and the Pacific, the Chengdu Municipal Archives partnered with Chengdu Children's Post Office, China Post to launch China's first archival heritage-themed commemorative postmark and special envelope collection. Featuring iconic elements, including teapots, lidded-cup tea, bamboo chairs, and square tables – paired with archival imprints of three historic documents: the 1941 business registration application of Heming Teahouse, the 1924 draft copper coin voucher from Yangyuan Teahouse, and the 1942 tea price assessment form by Chengdu's Teahouse Trade Association. The moment the envelopes were released, crowds of eager residents lined up at post office counters to purchase them.

Deep cross-institutional collaboration has expanded the ways to present Archives Relating to Chengdu Traditional Teahouse. The Chengdu Municipal Archives has collaborated with provincial and municipal departments of publicity, commerce, and culture and tourism, alongside industry associations, teahouse operators, and scholars, to collectively advance the revitalization of traditional teahouse. Key initiatives include organizing multi-agency forums to explore how to empower the tea industry with archival resources, co-producing *Tianfu Chronicles: Memories of Chengdu's Traditional Teahouse*(Chengdu,2024) with the Chengdu Municipal Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and launching the Traditional Teahouse Memory Collection Station to systematically collect oral histories and private memories. These efforts have deepened the integration of archival culture with industrial development. With diverse stakeholders involved, Chengdu's approach to breathing new life into its documentary heritage becomes increasingly dynamic and effective.

2.

"There lies a glassy oblong pool, where light and shade pursue their course. How can it be so clear and cool? For water fresh comes from its source." The driving force behind archival revitalization lies in people. Through the revitalization and utilization of the Archives Relating to Chengdu Traditional Teahouse, the Chengdu Municipal Archives has strengthened its professional teams, and deepened the foundations for sustainable revitalization. The responsible official at the Chengdu Municipal Archives, Lv Yi, commented (May 2024):

We're leveraging this opportunity to pursue a dual shift from collection-focused approach" to "utilization-focused approach" and from "custodians" to "researchers". Our goal is to build a professional team capable of both steadfastly preserving and creatively utilizing archival resources.

Through the in-house Lantai Mentorship programme, senior archival professionals provide hands-on guidance to junior staff in unlocking the value of historical documents. Junior staff are deeply involved in writing articles, drafting project proposals, tackling challenging research topics, and delivering themed presentations related to the traditional teahouse archives. Their role has evolved from "passive custodians of records" to "proactive users of archives". One junior staff member involved in the programme noted: "Working on the practical revitalization and utilization of the traditional teahouse archives has been an invaluable learning experience. It has deepened my understanding of what archives truly mean".

As part of the revitalization and utilization of the Archives Relating to Chengdu Traditional Teahouse, the Chengdu Municipal Archives has established a specialized research team to explore this documentary heritage. The team has published some books.²⁸ The project "Comprehensive Research and Documentation of Archives Relating to Chengdu Traditional Teahouse" secured inclusion in Sichuan Province's Key Publishing Program. Two additional projects, "Exploring Archives Relating to Chengdu Traditional Teahouse in the Memory of the World Programme" and "Chengdu Teahouse of the Republic of China Period: A Study Through the Lens of Memory Theory", were selected for the Chengdu Philosophy and Social Sciences Research Program. Additionally, the Research on Archival Documentary Heritage Revitalization Models was approved under the National Archives Administration's Science and Technology Program.

The Chengdu Municipal Archives has fully leveraged the *Archives for Political Reference* weekly bulletin, publishing a series of in-depth reports for municipal leaders, including *Era and Nation Reflected in Archives Relating to Chengdu Traditional Teahouse*, *Expert Perspectives: The Teahouse Archives and Chengdu's City Brand*, and *Revitalizing Heritage to Spotlight Teahouse Culture*. These pieces comprehensively highlight the archives' multifaceted significance, earning

²⁸ Including *Essential Documents from Archives Relating to Chengdu Traditional Teahouse*. The Chengdu Municipal Archives, Chengdu, 2024, and *The Teahouse Chronicles: A Curated Collection of Archives Relating to Chengdu Traditional Teahouse*. The Chengdu Municipal Archives, Chengdu, 2024.

recognition and support from municipal leaders and key departments. In January 2025, the inscription of the Archives Relating to Chengdu Traditional Teahouse on the Asia Pacific Regional Register of UNESCO's MoW Programme was officially noted in the Chengdu Municipal Government Work Report.

Archives are like tea leaves; their vitalization and utilization are the water— only when steeped in vitality do they release their full aroma. The Chengdu Municipal Archives has enabled the historical documents to "speak", unlocking their value through dissemination, research, and innovation. Meanwhile, once-static records of Sichuan's everyday life have become source material for videos, academic studies, and cultural products. The Chengdu Municipal Archives has launched a series of original campaigns for Archives Relating to Chengdu Traditional Teahouse, framed around four immersive experiences, including Reading the teahouse, Listening to the teahouse, Exploring the teahouse, and Tasting the teahouse. And the interactive H5 game Savor the Archives, Explore Teahouse was launched, using digital technology to recreate historic venues like Heming Teahouse and Jinjiang Teahouse from a century ago. Players can order a cup of tea, enjoy a snippet of opera, read a vintage newspaper, and sample a classic snack, stepping into a vivid, interactive recreation of Chengdu's cultural heritage. This engaging blend of education and entertainment has been widely praised by the public.

The Chengdu Municipal Archives' innovative approach to revitalizing and utilizing documentary heritage has won widespread recognition, drawing delegations from provincial and municipal archives across China for knowledge exchange. Looking ahead, Chengdu Municipal Archives plans to launch a new initiative to promote the Modern Sichuan Cuisine Archives for inclusion in the China Archival Document Heritage List. A key focus will be placed on exploring the historical links between Sichuan's culinary traditions and the food culture of traditional teahouses, aiming to build a cohesive heritage cluster centered on the Traditional Teahouse Archives, supported by regionally significant collections.

Swift like Jinjiang River's current, time's flow never stands still. Today, more than 10,000 teahouses in Chengdu share the rhythm of daily life with 21 million residents, continuing to write the city's "living archive". The Chengdu Municipal Archives warmly invites friends from around the world to explore the records and savor a cup of tea. East or west, sit as friends – let borders fade away; North or south, taste the cup – blend happiness today.

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On SCEaR

UNESCO Memory of the World Programme

International Advisory Committee

Sub-Committee on Education and Research (SCEaR)

SCEaR Members: Lothar Jordan (Germany), chair; Roslyn Russell (Australia), rapporteur; Papa Momar Diop (Senegal), Helen Ieong (Macau, S.A.R., China), Victoria Lemieux (Canada).

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Network of SCEaR Partners: 1. Cooperating Institutions. 2. Corresponding Members.

https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/mow_scear_network_institutions.pdf

https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/mow_scear_network_members.pdf

The UNESCO Memory of the World Programme (MoW) was created in 1992 to foster the documentary heritage by facilitating its preservation, assisting universal access, and raising awareness worldwide of its significance and value. It keeps an International and other Registers of significant documents and collections, and carries out or participates in digitization projects, internet projects, workshops/conferences, publications etc.

It is steered by an International Advisory Committee (IAC), appointed by the Director General of UNESCO. The SCEaR is one of its Sub-Committees. Its tasks are to develop strategies and concepts for institutionalizing education and research on Memory of the World, its registers and the world documentary heritage in a sustainable manner in all forms of institutions of higher learning as well as in schools, and to help develop innovative curricula and research on Memory of the World and/or on documents, especially in an interdisciplinary and international manner and related to the internet.

The SCEaR part of the UNESCO Memory of the World website is under reconstruction now.

SCEaR Newsletter (2016-2025)

Editors: Lothar Jordan (editor-in-chief), Roslyn Russell, Papa Momar Diop (French texts)

You can find links to all Regular Issues and Special Issues on the UNESCO Memory of the World website → How we work → International Advisory Committee → Education and Research.

Regular Issues:

- SCEaR Newsletter 2025/2 (December)
- SCEaR Newsletter 2025/1 (September)

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- SCEaR Newsletter 2024/2 (December)
 - SCEaR Newsletter 2024/1 (September)
 - SCEaR Newsletter 2023/2 (Updated 2025)
 - SCEaR Newsletter 2023/1 (September)
 - SCEaR Newsletter 2022/2 (December)
 - SCEaR Newsletter 2022/1 (June)
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 - SCEaR Newsletter 2017/2 (June)
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 - SCEaR Newsletter 2017/4 (December)
 - SCEaR Newsletter 2016 (November)

Special Issues:

- Special Issue 2024: Artificial Intelligence and Documentary Heritage
- Special Issue 2023: Press Freedom and Documentary Heritage
- Special Issue 2022: The Memory of the World Knowledge Centres. An Overview
- Special Issue 2021: Memory of the World School Kit
 - Part 1: Introduction
 - Part 2: Using the International Memory of the World Register for Teaching
 - Part 3: Case Studies: History
 - Part 4: Case Studies: Literature and Language
 - Part 5: Case Studies: Arts
- Special Issue 2020/2: Disaster Risk Reduction and Management
- Special Issue 2020/1: Disaster Risk Reduction and Management

A Style Sheet for the *SCEaR Newsletter* is in 2023/2, pp. 28-29; in its 2nd, updated ed. pp. 33-34.

Notes

- In general, the *SCEaR Newsletter* – like UNESCO – uses the British English, so: centre and programme. In case our partners use the US English (so center and program) we take these forms if they are parts of the names of institutions. We try to avoid mixed uses of British and American English in one article – but that is not always possible.
- According to the general use in MoW, academic titles and degrees (Prof, PhD, Dr, MA, etc.) are mentioned only in author's bios, or if they have a special function in a text.

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