18th UTM-UN Tourism Training Programme

AI and Cultural Heritage:
China’s Practice in Authentic Storytelling

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Core Question

Authenticity is essential to heritage preservation.

- nomination materials
- intergenerational transmission
- will of communities





01 Using Technology to Tell Authentic Stories

China's exploration of "AI + Cultural Heritage" through local practices in Beijing, Xi'an, and Hangzhou.

02 AI Replicates Form, But Not Soul

The challenge of authenticity in the era of generative AI and the importance of human feeling.

03 Policy Support for Digital Development

Measures for the Labelling of AI-Generated Synthetic Content and advanced the national cultural digitization strategy.

01 Using Technology to Tell Authentic Stories

In recent years, China has actively promoted smart tourism. **“AI + Cultural Heritage”** is becoming an important focus of local practice.

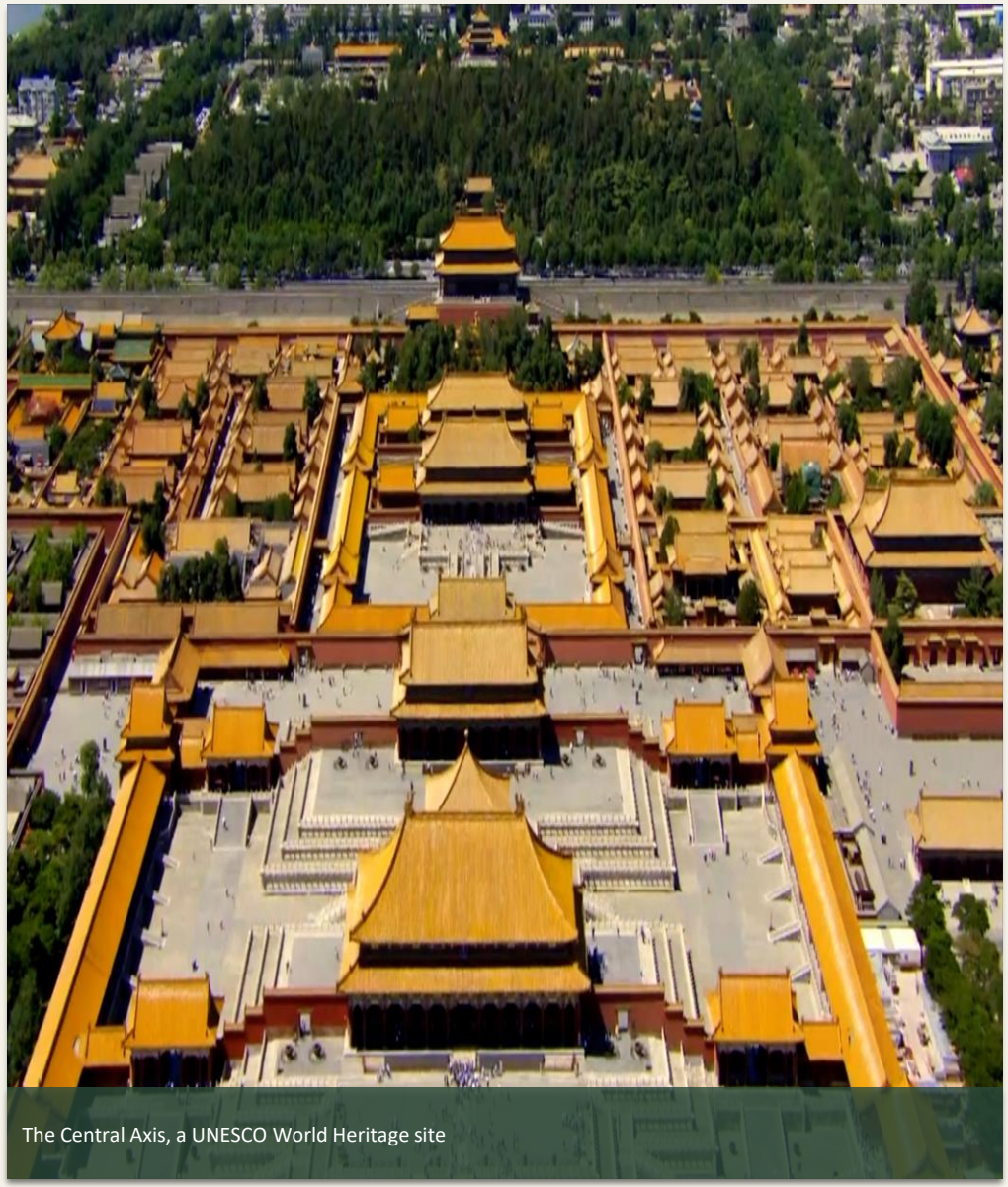
Technology, if well used, has the potential to help culture—rather than replace it—reach more people, be better understood, and be better preserved.

> "Technology helps culture reach more people, be better understood, and be better preserved."

Three Examples

1. **Beijing**
   Digital Watchkeeper System
2. **Xi'an**
   AI Restoration of Warriors
3. **Hangzhou**
   Digital Assistant "Hang Xiaoyi"

01 Using Technology to Tell Authentic Stories



The Central Axis, a UNESCO World Heritage site

Digital Watchkeeper System

Public Volunteer Programme for Heritage Inspection

Beijing launched a public volunteer programme via a mobile mini-programme, designating the 7.8-kilometre Central Axis as a network of heritage sites open to public inspection. Citizens scan QR codes, locate sites, and upload photos.

30,000+

VOLUNTEERS

160,000+

INSPECTION PHOTOS

> "Transforming the public from visitors into guardians, combining professional expertise with society-wide participation."

01 Using Technology to Tell Authentic Stories

Intelligent Reassembly

AI for Fragment Identification & Digital Archiving

The museum partners with research institutions to use AI for the intelligent identification and reassembly of Terracotta Warrior fragments.

Deep Learning Analysis Automatically analyzes shapes, patterns, and fracture surfaces to match pieces.

3D Scanning & Archiving Creates a complete digital record for permanent preservation and accurate presentation.

> "Technology serves a practical purpose: it helps reassemble broken fragments and preserve the authentic image of the Terracotta Warriors."



Emperor Qinshihuang's Mausoleum Site Museum

01 Using Technology to Tell Authentic Stories



Hangzhou's cultural landscape

"Hang Xiaoyi"

AI-Powered Digital Tourism Assistant

Accessible with a single tap on a smartphone, this assistant evokes the idea of memory in Hangzhou. It provides end-to-end services including scenic guides, hotel bookings, and dispute mediation.

40,000+	2.5M+	1B+ ¥
SERVICE POINTS	VISITORS SERVED	TOURISM SPENDING

> "Making the city's culture more tangible and accessible through real-time guides and personalized route planning."

01 Using Technology to Tell Authentic Stories

"Technology, if well used, has the potential to help culture—**rather than replace it**—reach more people, be better understood, and be better preserved."



Reach More People

Making heritage accessible to a wider audience through digital platforms.



Better Understanding

Using AI to tell stories that resonate and educate visitors effectively.



Better Preservation

Creating digital archives and tools for restoration and protection.

02 AI Replicates Form, But Not Soul

Generative AI brings new opportunities for destination brand communication, but also new problems that erode tourist trust.

⚠ Challenges to Authenticity

AI Hallucinations: False information invented by AI models.

“Filter” Marketing: Destinations using AI to mass-produce material that does not accurately reflect their culture.

Rapid Spread

AI-generated content is spreading rapidly through the cultural sector, from short videos to text-to-video tools.

The more advanced the technology, the more precious authenticity becomes.

02 AI Replicates Form, But Not Soul

"AI can imitate the look of culture, but not the human feeling behind it."

Form

Replicable

Look, Structure, Pattern

Soul

Irreplaceable

Emotion, History, Community

Cultural heritage matters because it is irreplaceable, and destination brands succeed because they are genuine. As we embrace AI, we should keep **culture and people** at the centre, and let technology play a supporting role.

03 Policy Support for Digital Development

AI Content

Measures for the Labelling of AI-Generated Synthetic Content and advanced the national cultural digitization strategy.

Capacity Building

Tools are not enough; practitioners need the skills to use them well with cultural sensitivity.

Thank You

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