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# The Spanish Republican Exile: Identity, Belonging and Memory in the Digital World

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## Abstract

In recent years there has been an increasing number of websites dedicated to providing information about the Spanish Republican exile. These are generally created by exile descendants' associations, research groups or private individuals. The recent growth of social networks, especially Twitter and Facebook, has simplified the exchange of this information and allowed the culture of the Republican exile to spread through the Internet and beyond, also influencing the scientific literature on this topic. This paper aims to analyse how the memory of the exile has grown through the Web with the passing of time and to examine the channels of communication that have become places of identity and belonging for the exiles, creating and enhancing a culture that permeates not only communities interested in the subject, but also people not directly linked to it. At the same time, it also aims to lay the foundations, for the first time, for the study of the memory of the exile in the digital domain. We start by recounting the burgeoning creation of websites and social media groups devoted to the republican exile, from 1998 to 2015, and link it with both contemporary Spanish political events and an in-depth look at recent Twitter activity. We then move to a fresh look at the digitised literature in Spanish on this topic present in the Google Books corpus, and finish by exploring the results from an online survey

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The original version of this chapter was revised. The erratum to this chapter is available at DOI [10.1007/978-3-319-29544-2\\_16](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-29544-2_16).

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conducted in order to gain an insight into the motivations behind the increasing interest in the Spanish Republican Exile in contemporary global society.

## 1 Introduction

This paper aims to analyse how the memory of the exile has spread through the Web with the passing of time and to examine the channels of communication that have become places of identity and belonging for the exiles, creating and enhancing a culture that permeates not only communities interested in the subject, but also people not directly linked to it. In the last decade, websites, social network groups, and digital resources about the Spanish republican exile have increased significantly. The global nature of the exile itself fits very well with the Web, which has become widely used by individuals and groups related to this topic wishing to recover its historical memory.

Why this global character? The exile resulted from the republican defeat after the Spanish Civil War which lasted 3 long years (1936–1939). While the exile began early in the conflict, when the war fronts between republicans and rebels kept changing, the largest diaspora of peoples occurred over January and February 1939. As the Catalan front was falling during that hard winter, about 500,000 people crossed the border with France. Ranging from republican soldiers and officers, government officials, to women, children and the elderly, people travelled primarily on foot supported by only a few motor vehicles. The French Government improvised concentration camps on the beaches of Argeles-Sur-Mer, where most of them were placed. Shortly thereafter other camps were organized: Saint-Cyprien, Arles-sur-Tech, Barcarés, Bram, Gurs, etc.; not forgetting the French colonies in North Africa where the concentration camps of Morand, Suzzoni and Relizane, amongst others, were created to locate those exiles arriving by sea from Cartagena and Alicante. In September that same year World War II broke out. Many of the republican refugees could not escape overseas to Mexico, Chile and other Latin American countries, so they had to fight for a second time alongside the French government or for the resistance, while others perished in the Nazi death camps.<sup>1</sup>

Initially, the interest in recovering the memory of these exiles began within the walls of universities and associations of exiles, but then the Web gave voice to the interests of the anonymous exiles, internationalising the collective memory of this Spanish historical event and narrowing the gap between the people and the culture of exile. In other words: what started as a subject owned by historians and the family members of exiles, soon, thanks to the Internet, spread out organically and spontaneously throughout society, in the multitude of countries concerned by this phenomenon. Thus, the culture of the exile reached the common citizen, becoming more accessible.

Finally, this paper also aims to lay the foundations, for the first time, for the study of the memory of the Spanish republican exile in the digital domain. Unfortunately, due to space limitations in this chapter we cannot make a comparative

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<sup>1</sup>To learn more about the republican exile see the following bibliographical list: <http://exiliadosrepublicanos.info/en/bibliography-exile>

analysis with the Spanish Civil War, which has an even stronger presence on the Internet and also generates great interest.

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## 2 The Republican Exile on the Internet

### 2.1 Methodology

A workflow protocol involving several steps have been established to locate and describe those active websites and social networking pages that directly or indirectly deal with the republican exile, producing a wide range of qualitative and quantitative data to analyse.

1. We started with an existing list of 71 active webpages collected during the e-xiliad@s interactive project,<sup>2</sup> run since 2010 by Lidia Bocanegra Barbecho, author of this chapter.
2. This list was supplemented with other sites mentioned by users who participated in an online survey conducted specifically for this analysis. However, of all the websites identified by the surveyed users, all but 12 were already included in the initial list. This is significant because it reinforces the importance of the e-xiliad@s list as a reference source for the republican exile.
3. This expanded list was then checked against new Web searches in Spanish, French and English.
4. Additional searches were performed against social network platforms, mainly Facebook and Twitter and to a lesser extent Google+, YouTube and Pinterest.
5. Once the complete list was defined, we proceeded to split it into two main groups. Firstly, websites and social network pages that focus exclusively or mainly on the republican exile, and secondly those that refer to this topic indirectly, dealing for example with the Second World War or with French and German concentration camps. The final list comprised 183 webpages,<sup>3</sup> but for this analysis we will focus only on the first group, subsequently divided into two: 74 standalone websites and 36 social network pages.
6. Four main languages were used for the Web screening: Spanish, being the language spoken originally by the people involved in this historical event; Catalan, as primary language of an affected region; French, being the main host language of the diaspora; English, being a sort of *lingua franca*, widely used on the Web.

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<sup>2</sup>The e-xiliad@s international project is dedicated to obtaining unpublished sources of Republican exile directly from the users themselves (<http://exiliadosrepublicanos.info/>). The material obtained within this project, and the data collection methodology developed, resulted in several publications on the theme of exile, including in the field of digital history (Bocanegra and Toscano 2015).

<sup>3</sup>For the full list please visit: <http://exiliadosrepublicanos.info/en/links>.

7. For each of the selected websites we made an effort to find out the original date of publication on the Internet, in order to discern the frequency that new pages about this topic were created.

### 2.1.1 Identifying Publication Dates and Languages

A variety of methodologies and techniques have been used to identify the publication date of webpages on the list. In some case it has been fairly simple, sometimes it was necessary to combine several methods together, in few cases it has been impossible.

For Blogs we used the date of the first post in the archive. For Wikipedia pages the publication date is stated on the Page Information section. For standard websites with a proprietary domain, the publication date is sometimes given on the Home or About Us pages or in the footer section, but for the vast majority we had to rely on several online tools to read WHOIS data ([Whois Domains Tools](#); [Whois lookup](#); [EURid](#)): these identify the owner of a domain and the date of registration, which is generally quite close to the publication date. Another very useful tool in this process has been the Wayback Machine ([Internet Archive](#)) available on the Internet Archive website, which stores random copies of websites since 1996. Even if these snapshots cannot give an exact date of publication, at least they establish a close *terminus ante quem*. They have been used for all those websites that are a subdomain or a section within a more general webpage, as the WHOIS only provides data for the root domain. Examples of this kind of websites come from research groups or projects affiliated to universities ([Exilio Network](#); [Mostra bibliográfica](#); [Spanish Music in Exile](#)), foundations ([Biblioteca del Exilio](#)) or governmental institutions ([Chemins de mémoire. L'internement](#); [Ministerio de Cultura](#)), among others. Finally, in some cases, it has also been useful to perform Google searches<sup>4</sup> looking for news published on digital media regarding the creation of a particular page.

Sometimes websites change domains over their lifetime, increasing the difficulties of tracking down the publication date. For example, the *Asociación para el exilio cultural español: Hamaika Bide Elkarte* initially used the domain hamaikabide.org but then changed the extension to .eus, while the *Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica* (Documentation Centre of Historical Memory) moved its root domain from mcu.es to mecd.gob.es<sup>5</sup> due to the change of government and ministerial nomenclature in 2011.

In terms of social networks, in some cases we found pages registered on exile topics, but with little ([Operació Stanbrook Facebook](#)) or no ([Interacción de los exilios](#)) activity, probably in order to reserve a space for future exploitation.

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<sup>4</sup> In Google, we used the Custom Range option available within the Search Tools to filter news from a specific period of time, then word sorting results by date.

<sup>5</sup> The actual website link changed from <http://www.mcu.es/archivos/MC/CDMH/index.html> to <http://www.mecd.gob.es/cultura-mecd/areas-cultura/archivos/mc/archivos/cdmh/portada.html>.

Of the Facebook pages on the list, only the public ones had a visible publication date, while Public or Closed groups and Unofficial pages lacked this information. For Google+ we used the date of the first post, while Twitter profiles and YouTube channels normally show that info in the About section. It has been impossible to identify the publication date for the Pinterest pin-board<sup>6</sup> about the republican exile (Pinterest).

To determine the language of social network pages we especially took into account the association, institution or person in charge, who normally also managed a website or a blog on the same topic, double checking such data against the language used in the page description. With regard to the content, the language of posts vary according to the source of the news published and comments based on their author.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, I would like to highlight that this is the first effort to conduct a study about how the republican exile is memorialised on the Internet, so there are no previous reference points and the literature is sparse.

## 2.2 Analysis

### 2.2.1 Web Pages Dedicated to the Republican Exile

Figure 1 below illustrates the rate of creation of active webpages on the Spanish republican exile. In total we have 74 webpages listed among those who either deal exclusively with the republican exile or who devote a large part of their site to it (Chemins de mémoire; Ministère De La Défense). Social networks have been excluded from this section.

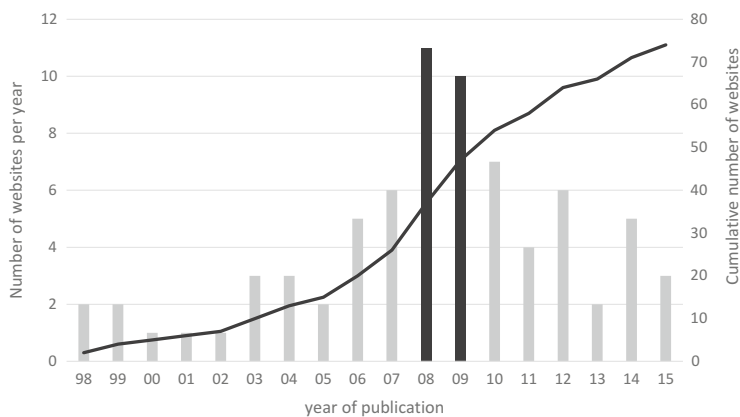
As shown in Fig. 1, the republican exile appears on the Internet very early, with at least 4 pages online before 2000. Furthermore, the creation of new websites is uninterrupted, albeit with some variability, since the advent of the Web until today. Looking more closely, we can see that until 2006 there is little difference from year to year. Yet in 2008, after the publication in December 2007 of the *Ley de la Memoria Histórica*<sup>8</sup> in Spain, there is an explosion in the creation of new websites on this topic. Almost 30 % of all webpages listed here were created between 2008 and 2009. The following year, 2010, the rate of creation drops significantly, yet doubling from the pre-2007 frequency (an average of 4.5 new webpages per year versus 2.2).

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<sup>6</sup> Pins are visual bookmarks and links back to the original site.

<sup>7</sup> This pattern is reflected on the e-xiliad@s project Facebook page (created in 2010 by Lidia Bocanegra) where general info is offered in Spanish, post and news are published in Spanish, French and English but the vast majority of the comments are in Spanish: <https://www.facebook.com/exiliados.republicanos>.

<sup>8</sup> The Law of Historical Memory (Ley 52/2007, 26th of December) was passed by the Spanish Parliament in 2007, under the mandate of the Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero. This Act includes the recognition of all victims of the Civil War (1936–1939) and the subsequent dictatorship of General Francisco Franco (1939–1975).



**Fig. 1** Creation frequency of websites relating to the republican exile from 1998 to 2015, with cumulative curve. *Source:* compiled by the authors

Within this boom, eight pages are in Spanish, six in Catalan, five in French and only two in English. The preponderance of websites from Spain in this period strengthens the connection that can be inferred with the implementation of the above mentioned Law of Historical Memory: either as an influence coming from the spirit of the law or in terms of financial support from the government to carry out research projects on that subject. The vast majority of these websites are monolingual, with just 13.5 % having more than one language. In order of representation,<sup>9</sup> the Spanish language includes 44 pages, followed by 21 in French, 14 in Catalan, 11 in English and 1 each in German, Basque and Galician.

Out of a total of 74 websites analysed here, 50 had their own domain or subdomain, 19 were blogs and 5 Wikipedia pages.

Website blogs can be divided into several categories. Many are primarily designed to disseminate a specific topic about the exile and offer photographs, audio-visual material and documents with a purely didactic purpose (*Art, Mémoire et Exil*; *Operació Stanbrook*). Other blogs are essentially biographical (*Diari d'un exiliat*) and, from the point of view of microhistory, offer valuable and unpublished information about the anonymous exile. Finally, those from associations and forums for the cultural memory, generally inform readers about related cultural events, publications, conferences, seminars, celebrations and commemorative field trips.

Websites with their own domain or subdomain can belong to three groups: associations, institutions or private people. The first ones (*Fills i nets*; *Association Retirada 37*; *FFREEE*), generally managed by descendants of exiles, often provide very similar information to blogs belonging to associations.

Webpages belonging to academic institutions, which offer information about research projects (*Spanish Music in Exile*), exhibitions, conferences and

<sup>9</sup>To calculate percentages, multilingual web pages have been counted many times as languages available.

publications, have a scientific rather than informative approach ([Exilio Network](#)). Non-academic institutional sites are mostly thematic ([Chemins de mémoire](#), [L'internement](#)), or dedicated to providing archival sources, acting as important repositories for specific exile topics ([Ministerio de Cultura](#)).

Private sites vary a lot from specific to generic subjects, but often become valuable repositories of precious unpublished information about the diaspora and the anonymous exile ([e-xiliad@s](#); [Espagne au Coeur](#)). These kind of websites are generally managed by specialists: historians or relatives of exiles very involved in collecting and publishing information about the republican exile.

### 2.2.2 Social Network Pages Dedicated to the Republican Exile

This section is focused on examining social network platforms like Facebook and Twitter as well as Google+, YouTube and Pinterest. We compiled a list of 36 pages about the republican exile: 17 on Facebook, 12 Twitter profiles, 3 Google+ pages, 3 YouTube channels and 1 Pinterest pinboard. Most of the Facebook pages are public so their content is accessible to anybody, while the seven public ([Buscando a hij@s y niet@s](#)) and closed ([Mapa Colaborativo](#)) groups require a Facebook account.

Figure 2 shows that the creation of webpages about the Spanish exile on social networks became significant in 2010, since before that date we found just two examples.

Social networks are increasingly used by institutions, private associations and individuals interested in spreading the memory of the exile, attracted by the ease of use and sharing potential of these new platforms. Sometimes these social pages become more popular than existing websites managed by the same people, and can then attract the main flow of information.<sup>10</sup>

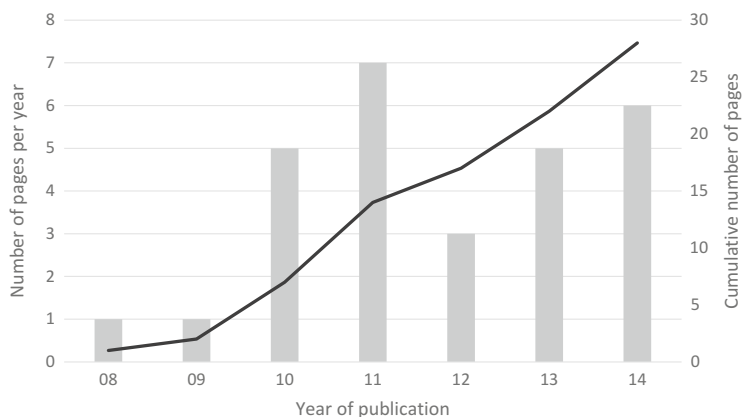
In terms of languages,<sup>11</sup> Spanish is again, as expected, the majority with 28 pages, followed by Catalan and French with 4 pages each.

### 2.2.3 All Together: Websites and Social Networks

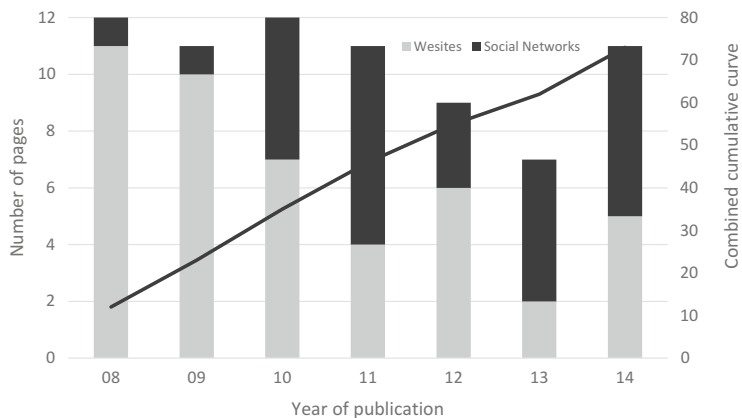
Considering both websites and social network pages together, we can clearly see in Fig. 3 that the pace of new sites creation stays almost steady between 2008 and 2014. As the number of new websites wanes, social network pages increase, showing a growing interest in disseminating this topic to a wider audience and recovering the memory in a different, more social way. Looking at the whole Web, the previously described boom extends until 2011, when the pace drops in an interesting correlation with the change from socialist (*PSOE*) to centre-right government in Spain (*Partido Popular*).

<sup>10</sup> An example is the *Asociación de Descendientes del Exilio Español* (Association of Descendants of Spanish Exile) that, despite having their own website, use YouTube, Google+, Facebook y Twitter to publish the main flow of information.

<sup>11</sup> For Facebook pages, we took into account the language specified in the section *About*.



**Fig. 2** Creation frequency of social network pages about republican exile from 2008 to 2014, with cumulative curve. *Source:* compiled by the authors



**Fig. 3** Combined graph of creation frequency of new websites and social network pages from 2008 to 2014, with cumulative curve. *Source:* compiled by the authors

The growing interest in the republican exile on the Web, observable in the cumulative curve of Fig. 3, runs parallel with the subject of the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939). Indeed, a recent study (Eiroa 2014), shows that the civil war is still very popular in digital media, illustrating that the Internet is the most successful means to spread educational, cultural, informational, political and social material.<sup>12</sup>

The presence of the Spanish republican exile on the Web roughly follows the widespread growth of websites and social networks. As we have seen, the first

<sup>12</sup> This study provides a partial analysis of the Spanish Civil War on the Internet because, as indicated by the author, it analyses only four Spanish digital newspapers and other blogs, websites and social networks often without specifying them.



pages on this historical phenomenon were published in the late 1990s, in parallel with the outset of the Internet in Spain or France: before 1998 the Internet was used in these countries on a monthly basis by less than 3 % of the population (Eurostat; AIMC). In a similar way, the first page on social networks analysed here appears in 2008, the same year that Facebook was translated in Spanish and French (Wikipedia).

#### 2.2.4 Twitter Activity

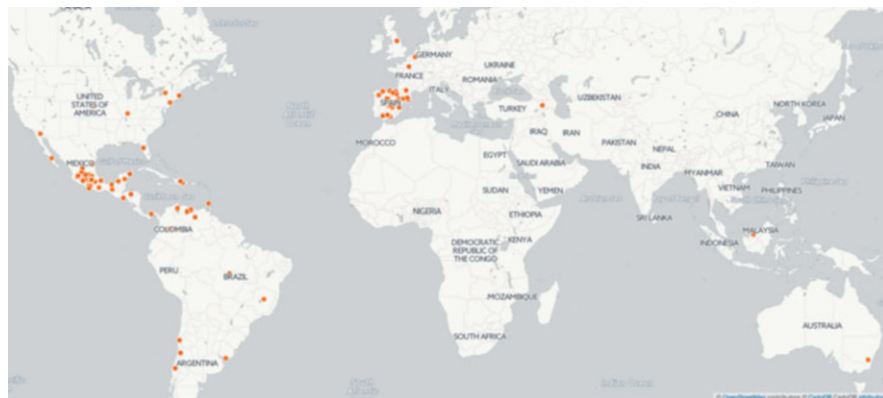
Social networks are increasingly becoming primary sources for social research. Among them, Twitter is taking a leading role, because with its hashtag norms, consistent length ( $\leq 140$  characters) and more accessible application programming interface (API), it is easier to gather, sort and search when collecting data. Several tools have been developed to help the researcher but we will limit our focus here on a qualitative assessment of tweets relating to the republican exile and a visual representation of their geographic provenance.

For this study we collected tweets about ‘exilio republicano’ and ‘exiliados republicanos’ over a period of almost 3 months between June and August 2015.<sup>13</sup> We gathered a total of about 300 tweets of various type: news sharing, retweets and original comments. In the timeframe analysed, the visits of Felipe VI to Paris and especially to Mexico produced a lot of activity on Twitter, because the monarch commented on the republican exile in these countries. 80 % of the tweets related to these visits were just news sharing, the rest were personal comments, mainly critical. Other events that produced Twitter activity were a documentary about the republican exile in northern Africa, a paper about Mexico, a documentary about the Maginot Line presented by the Spanish national broadcaster in mid-July and the survey implemented for this study: none of these produced a lot of original content from the users. In general, the activity on Twitter relating to the republican exile seems to be more focused on sharing news rather than on personal thoughts and opinions about related events.

An image is worth a thousand words, so taking advantage of a new feature available on the CartoDB platform (CartoDB), we decided to visualize this activity on a map. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the republican exile is a historical event that affected several countries so we hypothesised that it would be worthwhile to visualise the relative location of collected tweets. Fig. 4 confirms that the exile remains a global phenomenon today, with Twitter activity from 17 countries, spread across several continents. The most prolific countries, as expected, are Mexico and Spain; while other less anticipated countries like USA, Brazil and even Armenia and Australia are also represented.

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<sup>13</sup> We performed searches in French and English as well, but the results were so scarce that we decided to exclude them from this analysis. Moreover, some tweets from French users use the Spanish words to refer to this topic.

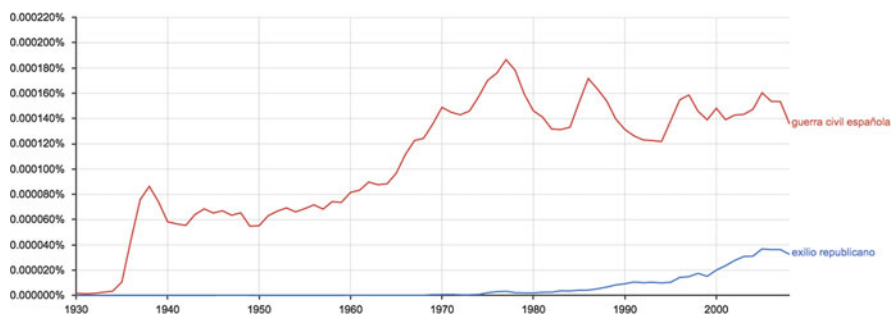


**Fig. 4** Visualization of the geographic provenance of the Twitter activity related to the Spanish republican exile in the period June–August 2015. *Source:* compiled by the authors on CartoDB platform

### 2.2.5 Google N-Gram Analysis

Does the Internet have something to do with the increase of Spanish-language literature relating to the republican exile that appears from the end of the 1990s? The republican exile is a global phenomenon that connects people from disparate geographic locations and links them back to the origin of this historical event, Spain. The Web drastically shortens these distances, with the power to turn a worldwide phenomenon into something deceptively local. The increasing number of websites and social network pages on the republican exile is largely due to its international nature that perfectly fits with the Web. Using [Google Books Ngram Viewer](#) (VV. AA. 2011) we examined the frequency of the words (or n-grams) “exilio republicano” in books written in Spanish for the period from 1930 to 2008 (Fig. 5). In other words, we looked for the frequency of the republican exile topic in this literature. The most recent numbers found show more than eight million volumes digitised in Google Books, of which about 855,000 are in Spanish, the second largest corpus after English (VV.AA. 2012). We also included in the analysis the Spanish Civil War, because it is a closely related topic and an established subject in literature since 1936.

The republican exile appears in traditional books right after the death of dictator Francisco Franco (1975) and its presence grows very slowly until the end of the 1990s, when a relatively significant increase is recorded. This sudden rise in the literature coincides with the first websites dedicated to this topic, as seen in Fig. 1. We hypothesise here that with the advent of the Internet at the end of the 1990s, the topic of the republican exile takes on new life thanks to the Web’s information sharing over long distances. This new wave of awareness goes beyond the digital sphere and is reflected in new printed books since the late 1990s.



**Fig. 5** Chart showing the presence of the republican exile and the Spanish Civil war in the Spanish corpus of Google Books. *Source:* Google Books Ngram Viewer

### 3 Identity, Belonging and Memory: The Online Poll

#### 3.1 Methodology

In June 2015 we carried out an online survey in order to obtain qualitative data about users interested in the Spanish republican exile. The aim was to look at the pattern of behaviour of these users on the Web, including such things as which websites they visit and why.

The survey was conducted in three languages: Spanish, English and French and remained open online for a month from its start date on June 16, 2015. It was publicised in the three relevant languages on websites, mailing lists and social network groups, with the latter being the most effective. Overall the survey was sent to about 60 web pages and social networking sites focused on the republican exile or related topics. Posts were also added to online projects ([e-xiliad@s](mailto:e-xiliad@s)) and academic channels: GrinUGR ([GrinUGR](#)) and Academia ([Academia](#)). Throughout the month, a new round of dissemination was held as a reminder, focused especially on previously contacted Facebook pages.

The survey ([Survey](#)) was divided into three parts with relative sub-sections, six of which were mandatory:

1. Personal data
  - (a) Name\*
  - (b) Surname\*
  - (c) e-mail\*
2. Relationship with the Spanish republican exile
  - (a) What relationship do you have with the Spanish republican exile\*?
    - i. Exiled
    - ii. Family of exiled
    - iii. Researcher/student of the exile
    - iv. Interested in the exile

- (b) If you're just an interested person about the republican exile: what is it that attracts you about it?
3. Web pages about the republican exile
- (a) Which of these websites about the republican exile you have visited?\*
- (b) In case you usually check other sites not listed here, please specify which ones.
- (c) Why do you visit websites about the republican exile?\*
- i. due to a feeling of belonging to a group
  - ii. because you feel identified with the exile
  - iii. because you can share ideas about the exile
  - iv. to know people close to your ideas and principles related to exile
  - v. because in that way you think that the memory of republican exile recovers
  - vi. looking for information and to be updated on the latest news about the exile
  - vii. OTHER
- (d) In case of "other", please specify

For questions 2(a), 3(a) and 3(c) the user had the possibility to select more than one answer. In 3(a) we added a list of 36 websites dedicated to the republican exile to choose from, also leaving the option to the end user to indicate other sites. In general, we focused on creating a concise survey that was easy for respondents to complete.

### 3.2 Outcomes

While expecting greater participation,<sup>14</sup> we received a significant number of responses, 186 in total with 182 in Spanish, 2 in French and 2 in English.

Users were mainly relatives of exiles (63.2 %), while 6.5 % say they are exiles themselves. Although not stated, the latter most likely be children or relatives of exiles, in fact some of them have also marked the option 'family of exile'. It is noteworthy that, based on age and familiarity with the Internet, it was unlikely that actual exiles could participate in the survey.

The remaining audience was made up by 51 researchers, 14 of which were also relatives of exiles, and 44 people interested in the topic. This last group gave a variety of reasons to explain their interest: having had direct contact with the exiled in countries such as Bulgaria, Cuba, Chile and Mexico; close proximity with people deported to Nazi concentration camps; professional, intellectual or literary connections; or reasons related with memory recall, as indicated by a person who

<sup>14</sup> For example, on the Facebook page of the e-xiliad@s project alone, with 464 followers to date July 29, 2015, the poll reached 655 people through 11 share and it was then published on other Facebook pages with many followers, i.e. Eco Republicano with 56k to date July 29, 2015.

wrote: “I’m interested in terms of historical memory, social justice, vindication and denunciation of the past” (M.C.A.). In fact, almost all the groups quote the interest in recovering memory.

Regarding the websites listed in the survey and most visited by users, the following should be highlighted:

- *Asociación de Hijos y Nietos del Exilio Republicano*: 111 mentions
- *Asociación de descendientes del exilio español*: 87
- *Guerra Civil española y Exilio Republicano*: 68
- *Españoles deportados a Campos de Concentración Nazis 1940–1945*: 51
- *Amical de Mauthausen y otros campos y de todas las víctimas del nazismo en España*: 50
- *Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes–Biblioteca del Exilio*: 49
- *El barco del exilio*: 49
- *Fils et Filles de Républicains Espagnols et Enfants de l’Exode (FFREEE)*: 48
- *Niños de Morelia*: 48
- *Proyecto e-xiliad@s*: 45
- *Los niños que nunca volvieron. Españoles emigrados en tiempos de guerra*: 45
- *MUME: Museu Memorial de l’Exili*: 38
- *Centro de Estudios de Migraciones y Exilios (CEME)*: 36

As shown, the most visited websites are those belonging to associations of descendants of the exile, a correlation with the biggest group of respondents. Other quite popular sites are those focused on offering information, acting as repositories and those on Nazi concentration camps.

Among those websites suggested by the users but not listed on the survey three stand out: *Asociación para el estudio de los exilios y migraciones ibéricos contemporáneos (AEMIC)*, *Asociación para la recuperación de la Memoria Histórica (Memoria Historica)* and *Basque children of ‘37 (Basque Children)*.

When asked for the reasons they visit such websites, 68.1 % of all respondents expressed an interest in memory retrieval, and 50.3 % to look for information and be updated about the topic, just under 20 % chose the last one as the only reason.

Of all respondents, 44.9 % say they identified with the exile<sup>15</sup> while 36.8 % visit this kind of websites due to a sense of belonging to a group.<sup>16</sup> One of the respondents that specified a sense of belonging to a group, responded to the question of why visit the websites about the republican exile, saying: [I visit] “because of a loving feeling of being part of my father’s story who lived during the Spanish republican exile to France. I lived his memoirs beside him. . . they are indirectly part of my life too. I learned to share his political and social ideas as an out-and-out Republican and I join the recovery of this historical memory to make

<sup>15</sup> For example, one respondent says that his father was exiled and because of this he has a special feeling with Spain (C.F.C.).

<sup>16</sup> Of all people that marked the option of belonging to a group, just 3.3 % chose this option alone.

justice. I would love to be in Spain and participate in some way in this great work. Thanks, thanks, thanks.” (A.N.C.).

While both identification and belonging are comparable motives, a subtle difference lies between them. For example, it is possible that those exiled or their descendants identify themselves with this specific historical event, without necessarily being part of a group sharing ideas and memories. Let us remember that many women left Spain to be with their families and not necessarily due to professed political ideology. We are reminded of this by one of respondents, who commented: “I was raised by my grandmother who left a deep mark on me and, although it sounds like a paradox, it was her husband that was the republican, but she decided to follow him into exile” (A.G.B.). Sometimes the integration with the culture of the host country was such that, although the arrival was the result of a forced exile, it did not create the need to belong to any other group.

28.1 % of respondents visit those sites to find people with similar ideas and principles, while 25.4 % stated the more general reason of sharing ideas about the republican exile, even if many people chose both along with other motivations such as memory retrieval, or the feelings of belonging to a group. Comments have been offered both by the descendants of exiles and researchers with the common thread of recovering the past: “I think we should recover those stories to do justice in memory of those who deserve it”, says J.G.M.

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## 4 Conclusions

In recent decades, stakeholders in the republican exile have seen the Internet as an excellent tool to disseminate and exchange information. Blogs and social networks have more and more become tools of expression and spaces of identity. A common goal is evident: recover the past with an emphasis on collective memory. Events such as the 1939 diaspora to France, the arrival in Mexico or the concentration camps are subjects that are shared, analysed and discussed, creating an online collective memory, leading to new social and sharing networks. It seems that now that the memory of the republican exile has moved to the Internet, it has been internationalised more than ever and it is influencing people who had no direct relationship with it. The impetus behind all these sites is connected to the descendants and researchers who have created a new dynamism for understanding and disseminating this subject. Such is the influence of the Web on this topic that we think it has influenced production in printed publications as well.

The process of recovering the collective memory of republican exile has received a strong boost with the implementation of the Law of Historical Memory by the Spanish Government, enacted in December 2007. On the Web, this translates into a period of increased creation of new websites between 2008 and 2011, of which most are in Spanish. The steady increase of pages on this subject, along with social networks starting from 2008, shows an on-going interest in spreading the reality of the republican exile through modern digital media.

The families of exiles, direct heirs of their culture, feel identified within these digital places, many considering them communities that they belong to. Some webpages are more influential than others, especially those more active and with larger channels for outreach, thus leading to a wider audience. This strong connection with those families fosters the sharing of information, especially unpublished and historically valuable private documents.

Research groups, university projects and libraries as well have quite a large presence on the Web with regard to this research topic, both with websites of large institutions or private researchers. The academic footprint is rather lost in social network groups, where researchers share and discuss informally with exile descendants or simply amateurs in this field, wide-spreading scientific knowledge.

The Internet has become the panacea of the anonymous exile, a voice for those who were not famous intellectuals, artists or politicians, giving them a name and sometimes a face. Thousands of photographs circulate on the Web through these digital channels: many taken out from the drawers of relatives rather than from institutional archives. In these identificatory communal spaces, collective memory about a past event that still remains unresolved and continues to create tensions also seeks acknowledgment.

“[...] The drama lived in my family, the silence and the forgetfulness of that period still lingers. The exile, the forced uprooting because of war and the following forgetting of a whole generation are really tragic events, so difficult to visualize!” (N.T.B.).

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# Growing Up in the ‘Digital’ Age: Chinese Traditional Culture Is Coming Back in Digital Era

Situ Xiaochun

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## Abstract

This work focuses on how going ‘digital’ had an impact on and still influences Chinese culture. After a period in which Chinese tradition and culture has been undermined, since the 1980s until now China has entered a phase of rapid economic development, but the development of culture and education has not always equally kept pace. Universal education is still a problem for China, and Chinese tradition risks becoming a ‘relic’. Now, we want to rebuild our culture, get back our traditions. With digital technology, getting knowledge from our history becomes easier for everybody. It will let people understand tradition faster, and be educated faster. It will also let us protect our cultural heritage better. This chapter also investigates how Chinese artists work with the ‘digital’ and how Chinese people are experiencing the cultural changes of this digital era.

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## 1 Foreword

I am a Chinese artist born during the Cultural Revolution (an isolated and chaotic period), grew up during the period of economic reforms (a period of cultural and conceptual subversion), matured in a period of information explosion (where the digital has had tremendous impact on society), and am now striving for a better life in the age of digital revolution (where digital technology is taking over the world). As someone living in the digital world, I have experienced many shifts in cultural values and social transformations. I hope I can use my experiences to provide an additional insight and understanding on how the ‘digital’ changed China, as well as its impact on cultural production in China.

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## 2 The 1970s: “There Was Almost no Television, One’s Family Was the Cultural Oasis”

My childhood was simple and boring. Culturally speaking, China was enclosed and isolated at that time. Both my parents are artists, and their jobs were assigned by the state. They were always busy and had to travel for work, so I rarely saw them. At that time, what you ate, drank, learned, listened to, looked at, or even the person you would marry were planned. Money was useless, because the meat and the eggs you received per month were rationed; even if you had money, you would not be able to purchase anything. During that period, people did not have any way of getting entertainment, cultural activities or personal space, because almost all of your personal time was taken, and everything was planned. You were only allowed 1 day off per week, and you would be exhausted after taking care of your home. Visiting the Forbidden City with my parents was a rare treat; it is ironic that all the teachers, media and people said: “we have happy life” in that period, while I remained doubtful of ‘this happy life’. In an era of material scarcity, one’s spiritual life was not the concern for most people, where ‘culture’ seemed unreachable.

I lived with my grandparents. My grandfather was a historian, who liked to read late at night. He saw I was bored, he gave me *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* to read—a classical text portraying China in the 1800. The characters written in this book were the traditional ones—those used in 200 A.D., a traditional way of writing developed from pictorial characters. From 1956, Mainland China adopted the simplified characters to replace the traditional. People of my age no longer had to study traditional characters in school. There was no punctuation in this book, which made reading quite tiresome, but soon, I got used to it.

It was only after I grew up that I realised that Chinese literature was developed from pictorial characters, and every character originates from a visual symbol. In other words, writing Chinese is like drawing an image. However, the simplified characters terminated the relationship between language and its visual form, as well as its connection with traditional culture.

Chinese calligraphy is a visual art based on the structure of the characters, using text to convey the content and meaning through self-expression. The critical essence of this artistic form is how the artist carries out the text in the content of his expression through the energy he exerts on the page. The simplified characters lack the structural and visual relationship in its writing, which is not apparent to the calligrapher. This is also the reason why calligraphers today are still writing in traditional characters, and their content is still primarily classical poetry. This is probably also due to the essential flaw of simplified characters being unsuitable to practicing calligraphy.

The simplified characters were invented for practical reasons and in fact they can save a lot of writing time. As people started to use simplified characters widely, their ways of thinking also began to change. More practical ways of painting were also developing—for example oil painting—and realistic forms began to replace abstract and symbolic concepts of Eastern painting, or ink painting that focuses on rendering the form.

The initial goal of simplified characters was to get rid of excess strokes in a character, so as to improve writing efficiency. Today, with the emergence of computer and digital portals, people's necessity to write is reduced, and like the Chinese phrase says "always forget how to write some words when they take up the pen". Yet with the emergence of computers, *pinyin* input method initiated another revolution. Thus, I think this may be the time to reinstate the usage of traditional characters, because the complication of writing is no longer an issue.

Ultimately my childhood was uneventful, every day was the same, getting up, lining up, having my name called, being criticised, . . . but everyone tells me that my childhood was happy, why did I never feel it was? What is culture? What is art? I had no idea. What are other people doing? What does elsewhere look like? Why are foreign countries mesmerizing? These are the questions I wondered at that time.

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### 3 The 1980s: "What Might Have Been Wrong May Be Right, We Seem to Look at New Things"

With the opening of the economic reforms, myriads of new things rushed into the country. I thought music was supposed to be sweet, yet it sounded like mad people screaming and this was considered a famous tune. People began to make money. While in the past our teachers would tell us that being a materialist is bad, some people began to buy expensive clothes, and the teachers were still saying "It's not good to focus on vanity". Some people played guitar by the side of the street, and the teacher said they were products of capitalist class. I was a teenager, and began to think money was good, that it was nice to wear nice clothes, play guitar and dance disco, making me feeling free. So did I become bad? Life became more interesting, I wanted to listen and look at new things, I wanted freedom to express myself, so I decided to study art.

The economic reforms opened a window through which we could see the world, I remember that many people began to suspect that their life was not how it should be. People's desires became insatiable, the change made people look for a new life.

The telephone became popular, a household item in many families. Even though it was still an expensive item, its availability brought people closer. Television also became a necessity in every household, and many were colour televisions. The daily news after dinner was a way people learned about what was happening in the world. All these phenomena are attributed to the economic reforms, when it became possible to make money and to buy things as one wished.

I still rarely saw my father, because he had to travel abroad or out of town. My mother said he had to give lectures to government administrators on urban building and sculptures. It was a period when making urban building and city sculptures was booming.

Because of my father's love for music, he brought back a Sony Stereo system, which had a CD-player—still a rare device at that time! As the CD was recorded digitally, it had better sound effect than audio-cassette, so we could better enjoy the music we liked. In fact, I had not heard before any music I enjoyed. From then on, I

discovered music such as *Carmen* and *Swan Lake* with my father. I did not like the sound of the violin, but I enjoyed listening to the clarinet, I was mesmerised by a concerto played with clarinet and cello.

After 1985, my father gave me two CDs that foreign friends of his had given to him; he thought they were good, but were not his style. One was by Madonna and the other by Michael Jackson. I must admit that I was shocked discovering that music can sound like that! I began to look for that kind of music, it was not easy, I re-taped from others, but what was available was rather limited.

At the end of the 1980s, I began to learn rock n' roll, but any material was difficult to find, and even teachers at the music conservatory were unfamiliar with that genre. Any foreign material on the subject was valuable, and it was copied until the text was illegible.

In 1988, I decided to study art. The decision was partially due to the new era, which opened up new ways of seeing myself and what I could do. The affiliated high school of the Central Academy of Fine Art taught classical art; it is still the best art school in the country, and also the most difficult to be enrolled at. It was one of the few high schools in the country that opened up its admission nationwide; it was a lot more competitive than other schools.

Chinese students are under greater pressure than most Western students. I had to get up at 7 in the morning to go to school, and came home at 5 in the evening. The first thing I had to do was to draw 30 sketches, and then quickly have dinner, then draw another 4 h of sketches, then quickly finish all my homework, sleep for 6 h, then the day was completed. On the weekend, I had to paint a gouache. This kind of training went on for 3 months, repeatedly, over 90 days. Eventually, I was lucky to pass the exam. This was due to the right training methods: my father trained me in sketches—he is an acclaimed sculptor in China, who studied in the former Soviet-Union—; and Mrs. Pang Tao, a master in colours in China, a friend of my parents, helped me with colours. They were all professors of the Central Academy of Fine Art.

For artists, catalogues are important, and luckily, I have been able to see many of them with my parents. However, for a regular Chinese family, at that time, the art catalogues were extremely rare, since 2–3 months salary of both parents may only be sufficient to buy one art catalogue. In the present digital era, even though very expensive catalogues still exist, we can use our mobile phone to look at the best art works in the world. This was not possible at that time.

Compared with other countries, China was a country with limited pedagogical resources. Still now, there is a significant disparity between the city and the countryside. Going to school and finding a job in a city can change the fate of the entire family. Thus, from the 1980s, competition in pedagogical resources became fierce, and even mad. The digital era blurred the boundary of intellectual fields. In the past, it was difficult to gain knowledge about other fields than those you were involved into. Vice versa, now, all you have to do is to use a search engine on the Internet to find relevant materials, which you can make up to in a few minutes.

## 4 The 1990s: "Discovering a New World, Mad About 'Digital'"

The Internet arrived. In the mid 1990s, the Internet came to China. It was in 1996 that people started to use the Internet for personal use, but it was only between 1998 and the 2000 that the Internet started to be widely used outside the work place. During the 1990s, computers had not yet entered into people's home, and only a small number of professionals were using them. Most of the servers were located outside of China, bandwidth was limited, and speed really low. Nevertheless, it was another portal to the world. We began to retrieve knowledge from the world freely, and to establish a dialogue with the rest of the world. If the 1980s economic reforms opened the door to a new economy, then the Internet in the 1990s opened the door to new information. The rapid rise of the Internet, and the birth of Chinese websites, created the conditions for every urban family to have a computer and a telephone dial-up. The explosion of the information era arrived: people started to use email to communicate, read news on webpages, chat on social network software, play Internet games, etc. In just a few years, the Internet changed the way of life, especially for the young generation, and our distance from the rest of the world became shorter.

At the beginning of the 1990s, I was enrolled at the Central Academy of Fine Art and began to study sculpture. At the time, the computer was a hot topic, and my curiosity propelled me to learn. In those years, the computer had not yet entered private homes; it was used only by professionals and technology experts. As a student of an art academy, it seemed unreachable for me. It was because my uncle was a computer engineer, that I had the opportunity to come in contact with computers, and learned how to use them—my family resources helped me again. A lot of my creative proposals were developed on the computer, taking 3–5 days to complete jobs that nowadays take only 3–5 h.

Virtual and interactive technologies started to become popular, most typically, through computer games. Computer games were something that did not exist in my childhood, and it was only in the 1990s that I began to play games on the computer. The games provided a virtual environment, where I could do things beyond my actual real life, such as to pilot the airplane and learn, for example, how to use the gauges to take off and land, use weapons, radar, etc. At the same time, it was also a way to acquire knowledge on geography. After the year 2000, competitive games became more developed, requiring gamers to develop more accurate operational skills, perfect team collaboration, logical strategies. International competitions became widely popular, e.g. e-sport. I discovered that by playing a game that applies virtual and interactive characteristics of digital technology, one learns and nurtures various abilities through entertainment. The negative aspect was that many players became addicted and took refuge in their 'virtual lives', missing out on having a role in their real lives. For instance, they felt that by such gaming they could have a sense of achievement, have power, have relationships, say whatever they wanted. In the end, these people drifted farther and farther away from reality.

From the late 1980s, I spent a lot of time learning music and playing guitar, and organised many bands in high school and university, but I finally stopped in 1994. The 1990s was a nervous and restless era, everyone was busy making money, looking for a way out to change their lives. It was an era of opportunities, and it was difficult to find people with the same desire in creating music I was interested in. While computers can make digital recordings, and it is possible to edit the piece through various software, it was very difficult to organise live performances. But, at least, thanks to the digital, I was able to make music, and the work that had to be done previously with a team, was now possible to be completed autonomously. However, where musical composition becomes more personal, the work becomes quite lonely. What could have been created, previously, through spontaneity and interaction, with the digital it changed, and the creative input of the team was lost. Under the commercial drive, many successful bands signed up with music production companies. Many of those were individual contracts where the members of the band could be replaced at any time, and the instrument players were, in the better circumstances, only workers doing their jobs, with a lack of creativity. In this case, musicians had their survival conditions worsened; they were only called on to work for recording and performances, but were not involved in the creative processes. In the fast food style cultural era, with the help of digital technology, the making of pop music became especially easy. I have a friend who was a composer of pop music; now he often works with software to compose at home, moving back and forth a few parts enabling him to rapidly finish a few songs. This is commercial output, and there are countless customers in China, so products like this still have an enormous market.

In the summer of 1997, a British art school came to give lectures in China. Many lectures were on multi-media art. They introduced artworks completed on the computer by using digital technology. There was one work where the viewer could click on the various rooms in student dorms or offices with a mouse to see what is taking place in these spaces. With interactivity, the viewer may enter the art work through his/her own understanding and viewing habits. Various ways of viewing give different outcomes, digital technology is providing new methods for artistic expression.

Based on the interactive element, the digitally rendered work of art has also broken down our linear way of understanding time, as well as the elements of the 2D painting and space. It provides more creative possibilities so that the virtual space expands our space for thinking how sound, light, and electricity may be integrated into one. It was then that I was deeply mesmerised.

My focus at the University was on sculpture, while I also studied digital imaging and 3D. In fact, personal computing did not yet have the cutting edge technology in multi-media. In the 1990s most people were dilettante and were just beginning to learn about graphic design, advertisement, animation and, later on, attempts in making digital music.

## 5 The 2000s: "The Self Has Been Changed by the Digital, One Cannot Live Without Electricity"

The real digital era is imminent. As the new century dawned, I realised could no longer live without a computer. I could no longer write with a pen and paper, my drawings are done on the computer, and the materials for ideas are 'digital', which included videos, soundtracks, interaction, uploading, spreadsheets, programs, and annotations.

The way I thought was different from that of the people around me—often I wish I could just press CTRL+Z key. My curiosity towards the outside world became less, even new digital methods and novelties were not as appealing as they had been, and the necessity to reflect became more urgent.

Around the year 2000, digital technology rushed into traditional media, such as photography. Once expensive products, photographs became digital files. One day I suddenly realised I no longer cared about my photo album, and it was left in the corner to gather dust. Everything could be seen on the screen, and I bade farewell to my regular photo processing shop, replaced now by digital printing. Photography habits also changed from the analogue era: previously it was necessary to set the camera up to perfection and find a sufficiently perfect moment to press on the shutter, and almost every composition was excellent. In the digital era, with zero cost for post-production, I became almost careless about composition, because images can be edited after they are taken. Neither do I care too much about how to set up the image properly, I could take a shot with every shutter speed and focal length, thinking that I can look at them afterwards. The 'digital' made my photography habit rusty. At the same time, in the past there were only a few people who had cameras because they really loved photography; now, everyone has a digital camera, can take photographs, and use various fool-proof software for post touch up. What was highly technical, became common usage, the era of 'everyone is a photographer' is here.

Free access and information sharing are the basic concepts of the Internet. With the Internet, I rarely go to the bookstore anymore, because the amount of information available online allows me to learn whatever I want.

The Internet changed not only the path by which we acquire knowledge; the impact of the Internet on artistic consumption is also revolutionary. This is the case for music, for example. We can listen to music for free, and a very vast amount of information is accessible without borders. Popularisation of music is also a benefit brought forth by the digital age. Availability of rich and free resources allows more people, including the impoverished ones, to enjoy musical culture. What is surely worth celebrating is that music from all corners of the world is brought to our finger tips. Many Chinese of my generation were not be able to enjoy a live concert, nor did they had the financial means to learn music or buy CDs. With the beginning of the digital era, these people may buy an inexpensive computer, enjoy music from around the world, and use the computer and the Internet to learn music. All this was



unimaginable before. At the same time a more negative aspect is that many musical companies have been forced to transform because musicians could no longer make money through launching records, they had to do tours to support their livelihood. The low entrance standard broadened the scale of popular music, but also altered its value due to the demand for entertainment that imposed the fast-food model of popular music. In this vicious cycle, music became cheaper and cheaper and lower in quality.

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## **6 The 2010s: “Realizing I am a Member of the World”**

In recent years, with the popularisation of smart phones and the infrastructure of wifi, ‘digital’ living began to affect all aspects of our lives. Most Chinese own one or many digital portals, and China has formally entered the digital era, and the ‘digital’ is making drastic changes to society.

I live in Beijing, a densely populated city where it can be quite suffocating. Shopping at the supermarket is an unavoidable chore, although with the boom in Internet shopping in recent years, I almost do not have to go to the shops anymore. All daily necessities can be purchased online. I no longer need to be worry about pricing, because it is easy to compare prices around the world. Neither do I have to worry about traffic and expensive parking fees because I can plan my movements earlier online. And since e-vendors have lower costs for their physical premises, their prices are often cheaper than the shops. The low labour cost allowed logistics to develop, which also promised the development of e-business.

I often speak to many Chinese artists about the ideal of digital art. Most people think digital equipment is convenient; it offers the possibility to explore new forms of expression; and it serves the curiosity of getting out of technological blindspots. In my view, these are not forms of digital art. As one poet friend of mine says, “The one who is poetic at heart is a true poet.” Similarly, I think an artist should first be artistic “at heart”; then, when he/she thinks digitally, and uses a digital language, they can be a true digital artist. If you use a digital camera to imitate the effect of a film, I do not consider this digital art, because it does not consist of elements of digital language. Similarly, playing rock n’ roll with ‘overdrive’ timbre is the proper language of the electric guitar.

The language of digital art is what I am interested in. In order to apply this new artistic language, it is necessary to adopt a digital way of thinking, and I believe that, in this way, many artists like myself are exploring digital art.

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## **7 Contribution to Traditional Art in the Digital Era**

What Chinese culture refer to as ‘culture’ is not necessarily the concept we translate from the West, but includes ‘language and education’. For this reason, we appreciate digital technology and the resources made available on the Internet, because they provide an opportunity for many persons to learn about cultural heritage.

Moreover, it is the explosion of information through digital means that has allowed many people to have 'crash courses' in a short period of time and to quickly retrieve information on the traditional Chinese civilisation that has previously been overlooked.

For example, in August 2013, a netizen recorded the collapse of Longtian Temple at Xilianghe village in Shaanxi Province, and uploaded it on Weibo. In June 2014, the official Weibo account of China Daily reposted this video calling for a social response. Subsequently, the *China Daily* newspaper featured a special report calling on the protection of cultural heritage. In January 2015, the formal restoration project was launched, and by the end of the year, the project is planned to be completed.

There is much cultural heritage that is unknown to the public, like the Longtian Temple, housing valuable ancient murals, architecture and sculptures. In past years, these historical relics were not protected or studied. Digital technologies have provided convenient and multi-media platforms of communication that call the attention of the society and the government to protecting cultural heritage. Also, digital technologies can be used to supervise the progress of restoration of cultural heritage, so that valuable cultural relics may be better protected and the general population may gain knowledge of these art works.

In China, with the prosperity associated with its economic development, culture is gradually receiving more attention and more resources are allocated to cultural programmes. The 2014 governmental budget increased spending on supporting the protection of cultural relics in order to propagate the legacy of Chinese culture and tradition. According to data published in the newspapers, the central administration has allotted 88.43 billion RMB in 2014, which was 11.1 billion RMB more than 2013—a 14.35 % increase. The fund for cultural relics protection is primarily used for important national heritage, national immaterial cultural heritage, and the projection plan for national antique books and associated archival projects.

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## 8 Conclusion

Looking at the other chapters of this book, it becomes evident that Europe is deeply interested in researching the relationship between digital technology and cultural heritage over a longer time frame, while China has just begun. Museums and libraries are still working on building basic database structures and have started recently to develop a digital diffusion of culture. There is a gap between Europe and China, but in more recent years, the Chinese government is investing more and more in this area, and Chinese cultural and academic institutions are very active in the sector.

From the 1990s, China's digital and communication technologies developed very fast, and they are now almost synchronised with the rest of the world. Network

and virtual technologies influenced China as they did the rest of the world, and since the start of the twenty-first century, China has entered the process of globalisation, and this applies also to digital technologies.

Further, digital technologies have allowed a stronger impact and fusion with foreign cultures, letting multicultural experiences develop again in China. It has led to a profound impact on the society and on individual people's values, lifestyles, and social structure—everything is changing. I quite agree with many experts, who argue that building a global unified Internet management and specification is becoming a priority, not only for the sciences but for the arts too.

Digital technology has brought the development of the concept of 'multiculture', and as a Chinese artist, I have an open mind, different perspectives from before and the possibility to communicate with the world. *Heteromorphic Space* series (Figs. 1, 2, 3) is my recent work. I developed this idea by applying the language of digital 3D technology. I used virtual material as an artistic material. I researched it and then moulded in the virtual and then created it in the physical. Comparing the virtual material with the real, I developed a different understanding of shapes, and found a new artistic language. This series of works fully reflects the fact that the digital technology influences thinking and perception. I used the concept of digital elements, such as average, quantification, virtual realism, the dynamic, visual rationalisation, and symbolism. Finally, in these works, I expound and discuss the differences between human subjective thinking and the objective world that occurs with digital elements. *Heteromorphic Space* is a testimony of the new possibilities opened by the digital to artistic research.

What has the 'digital' contributed to China? In addition to opening new perspectives to digital art, I think that the most important impact of the digital on the society derives from its openness and its way of disseminating education among the public. Knowledge became accessible more quickly and easily to everybody, and this satisfied most people's desire for culture, improving the level of education. Opening up people's ways of thinking challenged the status quo and resulted in positive side effects in the whole society. This includes: how the protection and preservation of heritage through digital means increased the public's interest in traditional culture; how maximisation and explosion of information decreased people's more simplistic curiosity, giving space to enter into a phase of reflection, and a return to Eastern way of thinking. Live interaction and virtual communication has broken down the spatial distance and the confines of class, even generating influence on the political realm; globalisation of culture, and a return of self-consciousness, moving from obtuse points of view to reflection. It has progressed our thinking. We are living in an era where Eastern culture cannot be any more marginalised, and the 'digital' allows Chinese culture to have a new role in our life, in China and abroad.



**Fig. 1** Standing, 2014, 40 cm, cupronickel, (Photo: Yang Chao)



**Fig. 2** Opening, 2014, 40 cm, cupronickel, (Photo: Yang Chao)



**Fig. 3** Walking, 2014, 40 cm, cupronickel, (Photo: Yang Chao)