

CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF CERAMIC ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES ALONG THE MARITIME SILK ROUTE

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Introduction

Throughout history, there have been two trade routes that stretched across Asia, Africa and Europe. The first route was known as the overland Silk Road, which started in Xi'an and passed deserts, plateaux and snow-capped mountains through Central Asia and Eastern Europe before finally reaching Italy. The second route was the Maritime Silk Route, which began from the ports of Guangzhou and Quanzhou in South China, passed by countries in Southeast Asia and South Asia and then entered the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf, before finally arriving at the east coast of Africa. As main routes of communication which survived as such for more than two thousand years, they not only enhanced the silk, ceramics and spices trades, but also cultivated the exchange of knowledge, culture, technology, and religion between the Orient and Occident thus propelling human civilization forward.

However, there is not yet a clear understanding of the cultural significance of the Maritime Silk Route due to the extent of its coverage in terms of time and space, in spite of the wide variety of studies that have been conducted. Many of the studies are fragmented and lopsided, lacking an integral and macroscopic research framework. In 1988, the UNESCO launched a 10-year project entitled "Integral Study of the Silk Roads: Roads of Dialogue". It invited experts on different disciplines from various countries to participate in a series of expeditions and exchange activities to facilitate an international study of the Silk Routes. Nevertheless, the question of how a long-term, steady platform of co-operation can be established still needs further exploration.

The majority of the heritage sites along the Maritime Silk Route are located in Asian coastal cities and their nearby waters. Most of the cities where the sites are located have experienced the fastest economic growth rates in the world in the past two decades. Rapid urbanization has imposed a great burden on the conservation of these heritage sites. In the past few years, the governments in these areas have paid much attention to the conservation of the heritage sites, and are actively promoting heritage tourism. Expeditious social and economic changes have brought forward unseen

challenges in the protection of these sites. These challenges can be viewed as both a crisis and an opportunity.

To meet these challenges, it is essential that we define the settings of this cultural route; assess the threats and vulnerabilities from physical, historical and cultural setting of the heritage sites along the Silk Route; and draw up an integral and long-term conservation policy while respecting the diverse cultural traditions and heritage conservation systems of the different regions through which the route meanders.

The cultural significance of the Maritime Silk Route

In 1993, the Pilgrim's Route to Santiago de Compostela was added to the *World Heritage List*. In 1994, the International Scientific Committee on Cultural Routes was formed. Cultural routes began to draw much attention of the international community and became recognized as a significant part of World Heritage. Compared with a single heritage site, a cultural route offers richer cultural context as well as a larger coverage of time and space. A cultural route can act as a dynamic context within which we can continue to study human history in terms of migration, encounters, dialogue, and interaction among different civilizations. The route covers different aspects of cultural heritage, be they man-made or natural, tangible or intangible, and offers a diverse but integral interpretation of our history.

There is no question that the Maritime Silk Route carries exceptional cultural significance, for it facilitated the trade of such commodities as silk, ceramics and spices between the East and the West, which in turn, stimulated cultural exchange. For some two thousand years, based on a relationship of mutual benefit and mutual trust, peoples from different regions, races, and cultures peacefully and amicably participated in trading activities. Exchange of commodities brought about exchange of culture including religion, art, philosophy and technology as well as the spreading of crops – sweet potato, potato, corn, , peanut, chilli, tomato, onion, cotton and tobacco were all imported to China from the 15th to the 17th century through the maritime trade. These cultural and economic exchanges

imposed far-reaching repercussions on the evolution of human civilization.

A good example of the cultural exchange is the dissemination of religious beliefs along the Silk Route. Missionaries of various faiths such as Buddhism, Christianity and Islam accompanied the Silk Route traders with the hope of expanding the reach of their own religious persuasion and making converts to their faith. China became their final destination. Islam, for example, was transmitted to China in the mid-7th century by the envoys and traders from Arabia and Persia via the Overland and Maritime Silk Routes. The full diversity of Islamic culture, ranging from philosophy, science, law, art, music, dance and literature, flourished in China thereafter. The Silk Route traders and missionaries also brought advanced Chinese scientific technologies and inventions to Arabia and the Western world.

The Maritime Silk Route carries another level of cultural significance. In the process of studying its history and culture, and conserving its heritage sites, scholars from various regions and disciplines, while respecting each others' differences in culture, are striving to co-operate to arrive at a representation of the history of the Silk Route, and to ensure the proper protection and management of both heritage sites and relics. Such contemporary cultural exchange activities help to revive the spirit of the Silk Route, which was to seek co-operation and mutual understanding among diverse cultures, and to peacefully propel the history of mankind.

There is difficulty, however, in precisely defining the scope of activity, in terms of time and space, of the Maritime Silk Route. Historical records which give a detailed account of the activities on the route are scarce. The land and underwater archaeological sites discovered provide important physical evidence for the reconstruction of the history of the Silk Route. Based on this information, the Maritime Silk Route trade development can roughly be divided into three periods:

(1) 3rd century BC to 7th century AD – from China's Qin and Han dynasties to the early Tang dynasty. At that time, there were two trade routes which went to both the East and the West. The East trade route connected Shandong and Zhejiang in China, with Korea and Japan. The West route started at Guangzhou in South China, and passed through Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia and Myanmar and then went on to India and Sri Lanka. The Tribute System was then the mode of trade, and the commodities traded were mainly silk and gold.

(2) 7th century AD to 13th century AD – China's

Tang and Song dynasties. The importance of the Maritime Silk Route had surpassed the overland route by then. Due to the advancement in navigational technology, the trade route extended Southeast to Taiwan, the Philippines and Indonesia, and West to Arabia and the East African coast. The Tang and Song governments, seeing the substantial profits to be gained from maritime trade, established maritime trade offices at such trading ports as Guangzhou and Quanzhou.

(3) 13th century AD to 19th century AD – China's Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties. Trade along the Maritime Silk Route reached its climax. Overseas trade routes covered South China, Southeast Asia, South Asia, West Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, and even the Mediterranean Sea, and a huge distribution and market network was thus formed. Trade encouraged migration. Many Chinese emigrated overseas while a number of Arabic merchants and their families settled in Guangzhou and Quanzhou.

Chinese silk, ceramics, tea and ironware were the most popular products in the overseas trade markets along the Silk Route, while China mainly imported spices. Thus the Maritime Silk Route was also known as the "Ceramics Route", the "Spices Route" and the "Tea Route". Silk was once the most popular commodity along both the Overland and Maritime Silk Routes, but its importance was gradually replaced by ceramics. Due to the heavy weight and fragility of ceramics, shipping was seen as a more reliable mode of transport than overland carriage. The refined quality of Chinese ceramics gained much popularity among people in different regions and, as a result of the huge demand, plenty of kilns, which specialized in the manufacture of export ceramics, were established in Fujian, Guangdong, Zhejiang and Jiangxi in China. After the 14th century, Vietnam and Thailand also set up kilns to produce export ceramics to compete with Chinese ceramics. These ancient Chinese and Southeast Asian kilns, gradually abandoned and replaced by new ones, were discovered by archaeologists some 20 years ago when plentiful export ceramics and production tools were unearthed.

The heritage of the Maritime Silk Route has diverse content and is not limited to kiln sites and ceramics. Some of the major trading ports along the Silk Route such as Quanzhou and Guangzhou have preserved a number of historical buildings and relics, including temples, monasteries, burials, carvings, inscriptions and bridges, which were related to the trading activities of the Maritime Silk Route and which reflect the different aspects of the cultural exchange between East and West. However, in this

paper, we intend to focus on the trade in ceramics, the major commodity along the Maritime Silk Route, and to discuss the conservation and management of their archaeological sites.

Archaeological sites along the Maritime Silk Route

The Chinese ceramics manufacturing industry boasts a long history. Enormous local and overseas markets for ceramic products resulted in the spreading of kilns all over the country. Nevertheless, detailed written records of the operations of the various kilns, the sales of ceramics, and the extent of consumption, have long been absent. We can only rely on the physical archaeological finds to achieve an understanding of the role that ceramics played in the trade activities along the Silk Route.

The archaeological sites of Chinese and Southeast Asian export ceramics can be divided into two categories: land and underwater. The former includes kiln sites where ceramics were produced, trading points where ceramics were distributed, and sites where ceramics were consumed such as burials and dwellings. The latter category mainly includes shipwrecks where export ceramics have been discovered. These sites and unearthed finds have helped scholars reconstruct the history of the manufacturing, distribution and consumption of the export ceramics transacted along the Silk Route.

Most of the Chinese export ceramic kilns were situated along the seacoast so that the products could be conveniently transported to the ports nearby for export. Ceramics produced by different kilns are characterized by their own craft, type, color, decoration and pattern, and can thus be seen to have been catering for the different tastes and needs of different overseas markets. In the past two to three decades, archaeologists have discovered these abandoned kilns that once produced ceramics for export. At these kilns several ceramics, kiln stoves and kiln equipment were found. These ceramics are in line with the export ceramics collected by antiquarians and facilitate the determination of the age and history of the operation of these ancient kilns.

Fujian and Guangdong were the two main regions where export ceramics were manufactured, with Quanzhou and Guangzhou respectively as their major trading ports. The ceramic kiln sites discovered in Fujian were Jian, Chayang and Yulinting in the Minjiang River Basin; and also Dehua, Cizao, Tongan, Anxi, Yongchun and Nanan in the Jin River Basin. These kilns produced a wide range of black-glazed wares, blue-and-white ceramics and celadons that were sold to Southeast Asia and Central Asia. The major kiln sites for

export ceramics in Guangdong were Xicun in Guangzhou, Qishi in Foshan, Bijiashan in Chaozhou, Dongping in Huizhou, and the Luizhou on the Luizhou Peninsula. In particular, the blue-and-white and enamel wares produced in the Xicun and Bijiashan kilns were most popular with overseas buyers. Zhejiang boasts a long history of ceramic production, with Yue and Longquan wares being the most famous. Many celadons produced by these two kilns were exported to Korea, Japan, Southeast Asia and even to the Middle East via ports such as Ningbo and Wenzhou. Jingdezhen in Jiangxi, well-known as the “Capital of Ceramics”, produced blue-and-white ceramics that were used by the Royal Court and also sold in the domestic market, as well as being exported to regions along the Maritime Silk Route.

Most of the above-mentioned kilns were scattered civilian businesses. Their development was mainly affected by foreign demand and the external trade policy of the Chinese government. From the 14th to the 16th century, the Chinese government’s prohibition of overseas trade dealt a severe blow to the ceramics industry. After the 15th century, therefore, many kilns ceased production and were abandoned. Because of the lack of literary sources, the history of the operation of these kilns is still unclear.

The Chinese government’s ban on overseas trade caused a scarce supply of Chinese ceramics to the overseas markets. Some Southeast Asian countries, including Thailand and Vietnam, took advantage of this situation and produced their own export ceramics to replace China as the leading producer of ceramic products. These kilns include the Thai Sukhothai, Sawankhalok, Singburi, and Suphanburi, as well as Binh Dinh in southern Vietnam and Chu Dao in northern Vietnam. However, due to the lack of documented records, in the past scholars were only aware of the presence of these ancient kilns through the study of antiquarian collections. They could confirm neither the exact locations of the kilns nor their operation. Fortunately, archaeologists have since discovered the sites of the kilns, and together with deductions based on the artifacts found from the shipwrecks, they have managed to obtain a better understanding of the production and sale of ceramics produced in these Asian kiln sites.

At the same time, archaeologists have also discovered many archaeological sites along the Silk Route, including burials and dwellings, where ceramics made in China and Southeast Asia have been unearthed. These findings reveal the consumption of ceramics by the peoples of the past. Many of these unearthed ceramics are now preserved and displayed in local museums, and provide important information for the study of Silk Route trade.

For historians, shipwrecks can be described as a time capsule of artifacts, unraveling a lot of the mysteries of the history of the Maritime Silk Route. In the past two to three decades, shipwrecks have been discovered and salvaged in the waters along the Silk Route. Although most silk products had already decomposed, some ceramics, several ironware pieces and spices have been preserved. A variety of ceramics salvaged help to determine the provenance and age of the export ceramics, and to broaden our understanding of the market network and mode of consumption along the Silk Route.

There are several shipwrecks discovered along the coast of China. The best preserved one, dating back to the Song dynasty, was found in Houzhuwan in Quanzhou, in which a few export ceramics produced by the Jian and Longquan kilns were found. From another shipwreck “Nanhai-1” in Taishan, Guangdong, abundant export ceramics of the Song dynasty produced by the Cizao and Tongan kilns in Fujian, the Jingdezhen and Jizhou in Jiangxi, and the Longquan in Zhejiang were discovered. Found in the shipwreck of Yuan dynasty in Sandaogang of Suizhong in Liaoning were abundant ceramics manufactured by the Cizhou kiln. These ceramics were intended for export to Korea and Japan. There are many other shipwrecks, along with a discovery off the Paracel Islands, from which export ceramics dating from the Northern and Southern dynasties to the Qing dynasty, were found.

Outside the waters of China, a number of Silk Route shipwrecks have been discovered. Over 20,000 different types of export ceramics were found in a Chinese ship of the Yuan dynasty which had sunk off the coast of Korea near Sinan. Products were salvaged from the kilns of Jian in Fujian, Jingdezhen and Jizhou in Jiangxi, Longquan in Zhejiang and Cizhou in Hebei. In the waters off the Philippines, the major shipwrecks discovered were Pandanan, Lena Shoal, San Isidro, San Diego and Santa Cruz, in which abundant export ceramics were discovered. These ceramics, which dated back to the period from the 15th to the 17th century, were produced in Fujian, Jiangxi and in Thailand. Many shipwrecks have also been discovered in Malaysia, including Turiang, Nanyang, Longquan, Royal Nanhai, Xuande and Singtai, from which a lot of Thai export ceramics, dating from the 14th to the 16th century, were found. Among the shipwrecks found in Vietnam, Hoi An is the most famous. Some 250,000 pieces of Vietnamese blue-and-white ceramic items dating back to the 16th century were found. Moreover, shipwrecks have been found in the waters off Indonesia, Thailand and Myanmar. Some sites have also been discovered in the Indian Ocean.

Evaluation of the setting of the Maritime Silk Route

Since the area covered by the Maritime Silk Route was very large; the archaeological sites are widely scattered; and furthermore, due to the lack of written records, many site locations have still not been confirmed. As a result, there is not yet a complete inventory recording all locations of the ceramic archaeological sites along the Silk Route. Moreover, without careful protection, the archaeological sites are in fragile physical condition; they can easily be damaged and their condition is prone to deteriorate. Before formulating solutions for the protection of these sites, we have to define and assess the impact and threat that the settings themselves impose on these precious cultural resources.

A cultural route linking the heritage sites at different geographical locations could create a significant linear cultural system. Such a system, together with the historical temporal factors, would thus become a dynamic cultural heritage entity. Therefore, the concept of “setting” is an important factor to be taken into consideration when analyzing the pressure exerted by the social and economic development on the heritage sites along the cultural route. The setting is also of great significance when formulating management strategies for the discovered sites. We can identify the setting of the Maritime Silk Route as follows :-

- (1) **Physical setting**: The features of the Maritime Silk Route sites are diverse. There are four types of sites as follows: (a) sites discovered on land, which are preserved in-situ; (b) discovered underwater shipwrecks which have not been salvaged; (c) land or underwater sites where excavation has been conducted and from which artifacts and information have been collected; and (d) land or underwater sites which have either not been confirmed or have not yet been discovered. Different land or underwater sites have their own unique man-made or natural landscape. For ceramics making, for example, besides the sites of kilns used for the firing of ceramics, we should also conserve sites where raw materials such as kaolinite clay were collected, fuel supply sites, water sources and sites evidencing modes of transportation. We also have to link together different sites to form a linear site system, identify their interrelationship, and thus confirm the overall man-made and natural setting of the cultural route – by putting together points to form a line, and by putting lines together to form a surface.
- (2) **Historical and cultural setting**: Integrated diversity is the main characteristic of the historical and cultural setting of the Maritime Silk Route. The route,

which operated for over 2,000 years, driving the trading, cultural, technological and religious exchanges between East and West, is a linear cultural concept with abundant content, obvious integrity, and historical continuity. However, the different regions along this cultural route, having their unique history and culture, played different roles in the process of culture exchanges. These cultural exchanges had different influences on the evolution of the civilization of different regions, therefore, the Silk Route heritage sites bear different cultural implications for these regions. It is necessary, therefore, to identify this feature of integrated diversity.

Thus it can be seen that the physical setting, and the historical and cultural setting of the Silk route are more complicated than that of a single heritage site, posing more challenges to the protection work. After identifying the background setting of the route, we should assess the possible threats to the archaeological sites and their surrounding environments. In general, the threats come from the following:

- (1) Rapid urbanization: Most of the Maritime Silk Routesites are located in Asian coastal cities, which have experienced the fastest economic growth rates in the world over the past two decades. Rapid urbanization threatens the conservation of the heritage sites. As the urban areas expand, they will gradually intrude into the surrounding rural areas so that more land can be provided for industrial and commercial purposes. Many kiln sites in the rural areas have already been damaged by bulldozers. In some kiln sites, while the major kiln stoves may have fortuitously been preserved, the neighboring natural landscape, including the sites providing soil, timber and water for firing the export ceramics, may not receive proper protection. The conservation of shipwrecks faces similar difficulties. The exploitation of ocean resources, including economic activities such as fishing, construction of bridges and oil drilling, can also be a great enemy to the underwater heritage.
- (2) Treasure hunting: The rich cache of the underwater heritage in Asia has long been attractive to some professional divers and treasure hunters. In the guise of underwater archaeologists, they often perform destructive treasure hunting activities at the shipwrecks. Since their only purpose is to make a profit, their salvage does not follow the practices of professional underwater archaeology. They concentrate on salvaging all the valuable items from the shipwrecks at the highest speed within the shortest time frame in order to sell them in antique markets. Articles of no commercial value are damaged, and many artifacts and historical information of much academic value are lost. Two shipwrecks in Indonesian waters, namely the Geldermalsen found in 1985 and the Tek Sing discovered in 2000, have been thus damaged by illegal treasure hunting.
- (3) Lack of governmental protection: Many Asian countries have the legacy of a colonial system. In the post-colonial era, these countries strove to build up a new national identity in the context of a new culture. Many governments do not give proper attention and protection to the history and heritage belonging to the colonial era. Plenty of regions do not enact legislation to protect the land and underwater heritage of the Silk Route; moreover in these regions there is also a lack of heritage conservation professionals. Apart from that, many governments have still not offered sufficient support for research and education on the history and culture of the Silk Route.
- (4) Lack of international co-operation: The Maritime Silk Route is a diverse cultural concept. Concerted participation and co-operation of different regions are required in order to uncover the integrated cultural value of the route. So far, however, scholars have not fully overcome geographical, cultural or linguistic barriers. A plenty of the artifacts and information discovered along the route are still not available to foreign scholars, and internationally integrated research collaborative programmes are seldom established for studying different research topics. Localism and insularism have impeded research of the route, and have thereby prevented the heritage sites from receiving proper attention.
- (5) Lack of techniques and funds: Protection and management of underwater cultural heritage requires special techniques, which are more intricate and complicated than the techniques required for the protection of overland heritage. To become an underwater archaeologist, one has to receive special training and to have mastery over both diving and archaeology, so that one's own safety and that of the heritage can be guaranteed. The required high-tech equipment and tools are extremely expensive. As a result, governments must invest a respectable amount of their resources for the effective protection of their underwater heritage. However, lack of techniques and funds are common problems in Asia, making the protection of the underwater archaeological sites difficult.
- (6) Lack of public awareness and participation: The

general public has little knowledge of the culture and history of the route. They are not even aware of its cultural significance, let alone participation in its protection work. At present, governments and heritage professionals in various countries dominate the work of protection of the archaeological sites with minimal support and participation by the community, public and other stakeholders. Without consensus from society on the protection of the heritage along the Silk Route, it is difficult to obtain non-governmental funding and steer protection work. Public participation is especially important for protecting certain underwater archaeological sites. Many shipwrecks have been discovered by fishermen when they are fishing. Their immediate notification to the government can result in instant emergency protection being given to the heritage sites. On the contrary, if the fishermen steal and smuggle artifacts from the shipwrecks, irrevocable damage will be caused to the underwater heritage.

The threats to the archaeological sites are affecting, to varying degrees, different regions along the Silk Route. We should carefully evaluate the adverse impact caused by these threats to the archaeological sites both individually and collectively so that a set of suitable protection and management solutions can be formulated.

Protection and management of Maritime Silk Route archaeological sites

For the effective protection of the Silk Route archaeological sites, we should formulate a set of integrated and long-term management solutions. The solutions must comply with the two guiding principles as follows:

- (1) Respect differences in cultural traditions and existing heritage conservation systems throughout different countries and regions. The Maritime Silk Route is a mutually owned cultural heritage belonging to all the regions along the route, but different regions have different perceptions of the route's cultural significance. We should respect the cultural diversity of the Silk Route and the cultural uniqueness of the regions along the route as well, and should ensure that the ruling principles do not impose unilateral values on all the regions.
- (2) Advocate cross-regional co-operation under the principles of fairness and mutual benefit, and effectively co-ordinate the resources and techniques of different regions, so as to work out a set of integrated management solutions such that the principle of the value of the Silk Route as a whole is greater than that of the sum of all its parts can be

achieved.

As we have pointed out, the Maritime Silk Route is characterized by *integrity with diversity*. In fact, the above two guiding principles also embody this concept. As for the protection and management solution for the archaeological sites, it should include five action plans as follows:

- (1) Establishment of a sound legal system: This includes legal clauses that can effectively protect the archaeological sites and unearthed finds. Such clauses should be compatible with internationally recognized charters, declarations and resolutions, and should also meet the specific practical situations and requirements of the different regions concerned. The governments and officials should closely observe the execution of the heritage laws, and should enhance the public's awareness of such laws through promotion and education. Of the different types of law that govern the heritage protection, those for the protection of underwater cultural heritage are the most imperative. The *UNESCO 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage* provides an effective legal framework for the protection of the Maritime Silk Route shipwrecks. Members States concerned should ratify this convention as soon as possible and regard this convention as the guiding principle for laying down professional guidelines for the protection of shipwrecks and for the prevention of treasure hunters damaging the underwater cultural heritage.
- (2) Establishment of a platform of co-operation for cross-regional protection of heritage sites: The governments and heritage practitioners should compose joint forces to establish a platform for the exchange and co-operation in theoretical analysis, techniques, experience and resource deployment. This platform of co-operation can also establish exemplary standards and practices for three types of heritage conservation tasks listed below: (a) conduct research on the archaeological sites along the Silk Route to identify the cultural resources that a region has cached, and compile a comprehensive land and underwater archaeological site inventory that clearly states the protected areas of these sites; (b) in accordance with the widely accepted professional guidelines, formulate a sound protection and management plan for identified archaeological sites that describes the cultural value of the sites in detail with in-situ preservation as the basic principle. It should also cover the protection of the surroundings and cultural landscape of the heritage sites, and

should be elaborate and clear;(c) for those land or shipwrecks for which in-situ preservation is not possible, consider conducting rescue archaeological excavation, which should comply with the professional guidelines for field archaeological practices.

(3) Professional capacity building: This pinpoints the protection of underwater cultural heritage particularly. The countries should provide better professional training for underwater archaeologists in order to improve their overall professional capability, which is important for the effective protection of the shipwrecks. To accelerate such training and to save resources, the training should be organized on a cross-regional basis. Advocated by UNESCO, the first field training school in underwater heritage for the Asia Pacific region will be established in Galle, Sri Lanka. The school will adopt a strategy of *training of trainers* to train up professional underwater archaeologists for the countries in the region. International donations and subsidies are needed for the operating funds for the school.

(4) Encouragement of research of the heritage sites and finds: Academic research on the archaeological sites and relics can help with the representation of the Silk Route history and identification of its cultural value. The research should be conducted with openness and mutual co-operation as the principle. The finds and information collected from different archaeological sites by different countries should be shared among scholars for research purposes, and there should be little restriction on the use of information resources. Different regions should establish a shared digital database with information on the finds collected from different regions. Scholars of different countries should also further co-operate in research work, and should start the study on certain cross-regional and cross-disciplinary research topics. A long-term academic research platform should also be established for the researchers to exchange the latest research results through regular academic symposia or publications.

(5) Enhancement of education and participation of the public: We should solicit the consensus and acceptance from society for the protection of the heritage sites, incorporating the integrated cultural value of the Silk Route into local social, economic, historical and cultural contexts, as well as making the said cultural value a part of their cultural identities. We should firstly define the identities and backgrounds of the stakeholders related to the Silk Route, analyze their connections with the heritage sites, and encourage the stakeholders to participate, in various ways, in the protection of the Silk Route heritage. We should also

proactively advocate education on the protection of the heritage sites and relics. In addition, we should enhance public awareness of the Silk Route heritage by displaying the artifacts unearthed in museums or in publications. Protected shipwrecks sites could also be open for public admiration, provided that their integrity will not be impaired. Tourism related to the cultural aspects of the Maritime Silk Route could on the one hand boost the educational value and public awareness of the Silk Route heritage, and on the other bring economic benefits which would fund both the heritage site protection and underwater archaeologist training.

The solution for the conservation and management of the Maritime Silk Route archaeological sites should be laid down by governments and heritage practitioners together, with adequate consultation with the stakeholders. The solutions should on the one hand put forward clear guidelines for integrated protection measures of the Silk Route sites, and on the other hand lay down detailed regulations for individual heritage sites according to their circumstances. However, their basic principles should be congruent and compatible.

Conclusion: the Maritime Silk Route and the World Heritage

There are at present three cultural routes inscribed on the *World Heritage List*. Although the outstanding universal value of the Maritime Silk Route is globally recognized, there is no foreseeable plan to nominate the route for inclusion on the *World Heritage List*. There are two reasons why the route has not been considered as a World Heritage site: (1) At present, according to the *World Heritage Convention*, the applications for inscription as World Heritage properties are individual signatory States Parties. The *World Heritage List* includes mostly the outstanding examples of heritage properties in each signatory country. Cross-border heritage properties requires joint application by various countries which cause certain difficulties in co-ordination, especially in the application quota restriction; (2) The inventory of Silk Route's heritage sites is not complete, and there is no integrated solution for the protection, conservation and management so far, resulting in a failure to meet the stringent requirements regarding conservation and management of cultural properties laid down by the World Heritage Committee.

There are currently 628 World Cultural Heritage properties, including different types of monuments, historical sites and building complexes that reflect the full spectrum of our world's historical and cultural treasures. Most of the listed items are static and unitary. In contrast, the Maritime Silk Route is a dynamic cultural route that links heritage sites of different regions and forms, and

embraces the protection of both tangible and intangible heritage, and both cultural and natural landscape. The Maritime Silk Route can enrich the concept of World Heritage.

The regions along the route should consider submitting a joint application for inscription of the Maritime Silk Route as a World Heritage. Another domain of significance for such an application is to make use of the framework and conservation guidelines of the World Heritage system to equip the regions with better standards and capabilities for protecting regional heritage properties. However, we should understand that the nomination process may take quite some time and effort, so long-term and integrated planning must be established, and should commence with surveys and researches, followed by devising suitable protection, conservation and management measures; so that the cultural resources of the Maritime Silk Route can be protected and utilized in a sustainable manner.

Abstract

From the 12th to the 17th centuries, Chinese export ceramics were the major commodities in the maritime trade between China and the West. This “Maritime Silk Route”, spanning the waters of Europe and Asia, accelerated the economic and cultural exchanges between various ancient European and Asian countries. In recent years, plenty of Chinese export ceramic wares have been excavated from shipwrecks and kiln sites. Addressing to the proper conservation and management of the archaeological sites and finds along the Maritime Silk Route, the author has the following recommendations: (1) to establish a holistic and long-term conservation policy while respecting the diverse heritage conservation systems of different regions; (2) to set up an inter-regional co-operation platform in order to strengthen the conservation of and research on archaeological sites and finds; (3) to strengthen the conservation of shipwrecks and training of underwater archaeology personnel; and (4) to open and establish a database for the information of archaeological finds unearthed in different regions in order to facilitate research work.

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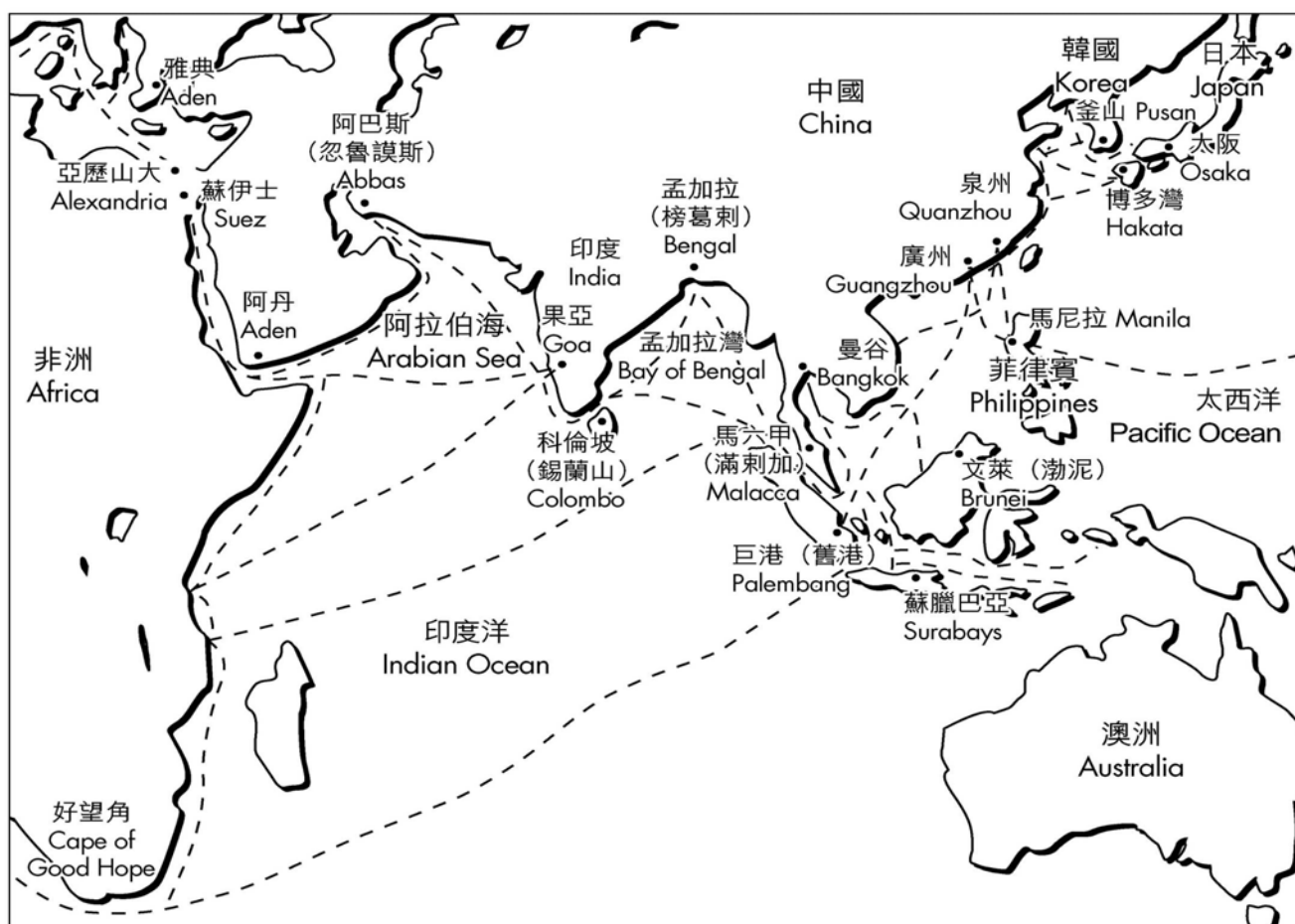


Figure 1. Trade routes of the Maritime Silk Route

