

Maritime Silk Road still yields rich heritage

By ZHANG QINGLI

At the extended 44th session of the World Heritage Committee in July, “Quanzhou: Emporium of the World in Song-Yuan China, China” was inscribed on the World Heritage List. The success of the application embodies the international community’s high recognition of Quanzhou’s outstanding universal value as a window for China’s foreign economic and cultural exchanges in the Song (960–1279) and Yuan (1271–1368) dynasties, an instrumental node along the Maritime Silk Road, and a paragon of a world maritime trade center port.

Spanning from the Maritime Silk Road, which covered more than half of the earth, to the age of exploration, the maritime history of human activities is the global history of civilizations constantly moving towards interconnection. It is of high necessity to research the history of China’s overseas communication within the global view of history.

Heritage landscapes

“The precious cultural heritage left by the Maritime Silk Road has witnessed the prosperous ocean trade and the advanced seafaring level of ancient China,” said Jiang Bo, a professor from the School of History and Culture at Shandong University and vice chairman of the International Council on Monuments and Sites, who experienced the entire process of the Quanzhou project application. The Quanzhou project encompasses 22 heritage sites, which mainly highlight marine trade facilities, economic ecology, and religious relics. Externally, the Quanzhou Port as a trade hub was a center of the international maritime trade network; internally, it formed a transportation system consisting of river systems, roads, and bridges.

Since the 20th century, myriad underwater archaeological discoveries have been made in China. Evidence of magnificent historical stages of seafaring and trade has gradually surfaced with the successive refloating of sunken ships. In Jiang’s view, the Nanhai No. 1 has been the most significant achievement of underwater

archaeology on the Maritime Silk Road so far, possessing immeasurable historical, scientific, and artistic value. In addition, the shipwrecks excavated in Houzhu Harbor in Quanzhou Bay in 1974 and the site of Huaguangjiao No. 1 shipwreck, discovered in 1996 in the waters off the Xisha Islands and further explored in 2007 and 2008, allow people to imagine the grand spectacle of the Maritime Silk Road during the Song and Yuan dynasties, revealing the development of ancient China’s navigation technology at that time. Porcelain salvaged from the shipwreck of Nan’ao No. 1 between 2009 and 2012 demonstrates the overseas porcelain trade during the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties.

Since 2014, the Center for the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage at the National Cultural Heritage Administration and the Guangdong Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology have jointly conducted a series of fieldwork and underwater archaeological work in the discovery site of the Nanhai No. 1 off the coast near the Shangchuan and Xiachuan islands in southern Guangdong Province.

According to Xiao Dashun, deputy director of the Underwater Archaeology Center at the Guangdong Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, marine cultural remains of various periods can be seen everywhere in the harbors and bays of Shangchuan Island. They show the maritime historical and cultural traditions of Shangchuan Island, ranging from pre-Qin (prior to 221 BCE) pottery shards and stone tools, to Ming and Qing and even modern blue and white porcelain shards, and sites of Catholic church buildings. Since at least the Song Dynasty, Shangchuan Island has been a major navigation marker along the ancient Maritime Silk Road. After the Portuguese came to the East, it became an even more iconic island for Chinese-Western cultural exchanges.

Rethinking maritime prohibition

When talking about the world entering the era of globalization, people often trace

back to the age of discovery from the late 15th century to the 17th century. However, Liu Yijie, a professor with Fujian Normal University, noted that the seven voyages that Admiral Zheng He made to the Western Seas between 1405 and 1433 predated the Western voyages by decades. The huge fleet led by him visited more than 30 countries and regions in the Pacific and Indian Ocean regions, reaching as far as the Red Sea coast and the east coast of Africa. This could be called the Chinese era of maritime adventure.

The maritime history of ancient China, from the heyday of the Song and Yuan dynasties to the climax of Zheng He voyaging to the Western Seas in the early Ming Dynasty, stopped abruptly and seemed to enter a historical low ebb. Previous studies tend to form set views that maritime trade and exchanges between China and foreign countries stagnated as a result of maritime prohibition policies implemented for the majority of the Ming and Qing eras. Recent research is altering this habitual opinion.

Scholars engaged with Ming overseas trade history generally view the port opening policy under the reign of the Longqing Emperor (*r.* 1567–72) as a watershed. Prior to such policy, the Ming court imposed a strict maritime ban, allowing only official tributary trade and prohibiting merchants and commoners from going to sea.

At a recent seminar on East Asian maritime history through the lens of global history, Chen Shangsheng, a professor from the School of History and Culture at Shandong University, proposed that during the reign of the Chenghua and Hongzhi Emperors between 1465 and 1505, the private trade in the coastal areas of Guangdong and Fujian carried a certain degree of domestic consumer demand, as well as the purchase demand from foreign merchants presenting tribute in China. This reshaped China’s role in the East Asian ocean trade system. In the reign of the Jiajing Emperor (1522–66), the larger-scale private trade activities in China’s southeast coastal area brought tremendous energy to the emerging world market.

Also against the backdrop of maritime prohibition in the Ming Dynasty, the Shuangyu Port in Zhoushan, Zhejiang Province, has the reputation as the “Shanghai of the 16th century.” According to Xue Liyu, a research fellow from the School of Humanities at Shanghai Normal University, Shuangyu Port was a large-scale private maritime trade base established near the Zhoushan coast in the 16th century, under the joint efforts of businessmen from China, Portugal, Japan, and Southeast Asian countries. After more than 20 years of development, it grew into the most prosperous private trading port in East Asia. The prosperity of Shuangyu Port illustrates the strong vitality and prospects of East Asian maritime trade.



Ceramics from the Huaguangjiao No. 1 shipwreck, dating back to the Song Dynasty (960–1279), salvaged in the waters off the Xisha Islands Photo: CFP

<<FROM PAGE 1

Scholars at the webinar believe that the COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed the humanistic crisis in the linear center of Western culture, and highlighted the urgency and importance of thinking about humanism from the environmental dimension. Environmental humanism represents the transformation of humanism in the post-pandemic era. On the road to

sustainable development, environmental humanism systematically integrates science and art, morality and personality, tradition and modernity, aesthetics and ethics, desire satisfaction and equality and justice, short-term benefits and long-term well-being, emotion and rationality, potential and responsibilities.

“Ecoaesthetics maintains a keen reflection on the development of the

times,” said Xu Bihui, a research fellow from the Institute of Philosophy at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The pandemic has changed people’s ways of living, communication, thinking, and emotions. An ecological civilization is especially needed in this era, and it is important to think about the direction of human civilization from the perspective of ecoaesthetics.



Research on Jiao Fang
in Tang Dynasty

By Zhang Danyang
China Social Sciences
Press
September 2020

Imperial music office in Tang era

By HU KEXIAN

Jiao fang was the official bureau of court music, which started in the Tang Dynasty (618–907) and ended in the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911). *Research on Jiao Fang in Tang Dynasty*, written by Zhang Danyang, a lecturer from the School of Chinese Studies at Dalian University of Foreign Languages, focuses on Tang’s *jiao fang* system, Tang’s *jiao fang* music, and the relationship between Tang’s *jiao fang* and literature.

The book runs through the core concepts of “regional-spatial,” “internal-external,” and “synchronous-diachronic” research. It sorts out the structural attributes and evolution of the Tang’s *jiao fang* system from the central to the local and from inner court to outer court, while analyzing the spatial distribution of and interaction among *jiao fang* officials, music, and literary activities.

Zhang gives a geographical introduction to *jiao fang*’s musical institutions, including left and right *jiao fang* [in charge of folk music], *zhangnei jiao fang* [in charge of percussion music for military ceremonies], and *liyuan* [literally Pear Garden, an imperial performing arts and musical academy]. The author carefully inspects the establishment, changes, and mutual relations of these institutions. Concerning the evolution of ceremonial music and folk music, with the growth of folk music *jiao fang*, the function of inner *jiao fang* for ceremonial music gradually degraded after the Tianbao period (742–756), and eventually withdrew from the historical stage.

In terms of Tang’s *jiao fang* officials, the author explains that “*jiao fang shi*” was always a part-time post, whose responsibility was mainly to deal with daily affairs of *jiao fang*. After the mid-Tang Dynasty, “*duzhi*” appeared among *jiao fang* officials, which had official and folk dual identities and showed the trajectory of changes in *jiao fang* officials. The author chooses Mei County of Shaanxi and Wenxi County of Shanxi to exemplify local *jiao fang* officials and musicians, proving the familial tendency of *jiao fang* officials with extensively collected data.

The author adopts the research methods of spatial geography to review connections among music, literature, geography, politics, and culture, such as from the perspective of specific spatial locations, exploring the nature and connection of various music institutions in the Tang Dynasty. In the context of extremely scarce literature on *jiao fang*, such research proceeding from the stability of regional space is a feasible way to open up *jiao fang* studies.

Hu Kexian is director of the Department of Chinese Language and Literature at Zhejiang University.