

Beijing Forum 2019 Pulse of the World: Archaeology and Civilization along the Silk Road (III)

On the morning of November 3rd, the panel session “Pulse of the World: Archaeology and Civilization along the Silk Road” was inaugurated in Starlight Hall, Yingjie Exchange Centre, Peking University. Five speakers gave speeches on the topic of “Cultural Communication and Interaction along the Silk Road”.

Professor Ge Chengyong, from the Chinese Academy of Cultural Heritage, was the first scholar to present his research with a presentation titled “Askos: From Mediterranean to Daxing—Artistic Research on Askos found in a Sui Dynasty Tomb in Xi’an”. The Askos unearthed in the Sui Tomb of Xi'an in 2007 was an important cultural evidence of Mediterranean influence on China. After careful studies on the shape and artistic style of these ring shaped pots in the Sui Tomb, Professor Ge expressed his belief that they had a Mediterranean origin. To explain his point, he first presented an introduction of pottery history in the Mediterranean area in the time of the Byzantine, especially the stylistic and functional development of Askos. Based on historical evidence and archaeological findings, he discussed the circumstances and the possible means by which such pots may have prevailed in Eurasia. Ge further explored the process of Askos’ stylistic changes caused by Chinese cultural influences. He pointed out that studies on the origin of Askos from the North Dynasty to the Tang Dynasty maybe very helpful to the understanding of the trade and communications between China and the West on the Silk Road.

Professor Cheng Ling, from Peking University, was the second scholar to present his research with a presentation titled “Landscape of Han Culture along the Silk Road”. While people seem to pay more attention to the Western influences on China along the Silk Road, studying trade materials such as silk, Cheng said he preferred to look at the subject from a cultural and spatial constructive perspective. Based on archaeological findings, Cheng pointed out that the spread of Han culture was not only through materials, but also in a spatial aspect. In other words, the change of living space had a profound impact on people's daily lives, customs and ways of thinking. He stressed this point by presenting various burial sites in Xinjiang, showing that even in the imagination of the after-world, the Han cultural view still held considerable influence across the Silk Road.

Shashi Bala, Dean of the Centre of Indology in India, was the third to present her speech on “Dhyana to Chan and Zen Via the Silk Route: Enlightened Mind Peaceful World—A Way Forward”. She started by presenting the meaning of “Change” to the philosophy of Buddhism. Change has to be multidimensional, multipolar, involving multiple ethnicities. After explaining the principles of Ch’an and Zen, she turned to the historical development of how these ideologies and Buddhist practices travelled and transformed in China. By presenting examples of arts that reflected the Ch’an/Zen philosophy, she emphasized the importance of Buddhist philosophy to the development of spiritual communication along the Silk Road.

Yidilisi Abudouresule, Honorary Director of the Xinjiang Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, was the fourth scholar to present her study, “Keriya, the Memory of a River—Archaeology and Asian Civilization of the Oases in Taklamakan Desert”. In her lecture, she spoke about the archaeological investigation of the Kerry River Basin, which was conducted by a Sino-French Joint Archaeological Team over a period of more than ten years since 1993. She introduced the important archaeological findings of the Kerry team and highlighted the great significance of these findings for studying the rise of the Oklahoma [please check this translatin!] Desert Oasis Kingdom in the Taklimakan Desert, the origin of early irrigated agriculture in Xinjiang, and the spread of Indian Buddhist culture to and via Xinjiang. Moreover, the discovery of the remains of a Bronze Age site and cultural relics in 2005 and 2008 provided important new clues for exploring the early human activities in the area. In short, the joint team's investigation of the entire Kerry River Basin provides extremely valuable information for a comprehensive study of the occurrence, rise and fall of the Kerry River Basin civilization.

Ma Jian, Deputy Director of the School of Cultural Heritage at Northwest University, was the last scholar to present his research in a presentation titled “Cultural Interaction and Interflow between the Hexi Corridor and Eastern Tianshan Mountains from 2000 BCE to 800 BCE. Based on archaeological findings, he introduced the cultural, political and economic aspects of the ancient societies in the East Tianshan Mountains and Hexi Corridor since the second millennium BCE, focusing on migration, cultural exchanges and technological innovations. Professor Ma asserted that the expansion of the ancient population of the East Tianshan Mountains and Hexi Corridor from east to west, the integration with the local population culture, and the regional cultural landscape formed by environmental changes formed a diverse and splendid culture in the Hami area of the

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eastern Tianshan Mountains. Those activities laid an important foundation for the occurrence and development of civilization, and the communication and exchange of material and technology between the East and the West in the Hami Oasis grassland.