

East Meets West. The Maritime Silk Road during the 13th-17th Centuries

National Museum of Palazzo Venezia– Fifteenth-century halls

September 29, 2017 - January 28, 2018

Among the trade routes that have developed over the centuries, the Silk Road is the oldest and historically most important, with its road network extending over 8,000 kilometers across Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia. His name for us Italians evokes the ventures, travels and narratives of Marco Polo and his "Il Milione", linked to images of perfumes, exotic spices and caravans packed with precious goods.

Perhaps less well-known, but equally relevant is the other "Silk Road", the maritime one. Thanks to extensive archaeological research, today we are aware of how much **the Maritime Silk Road - or that corridor of routes from Asia which reached Africa and the Mediterranean basin, by connecting China with many foreign countries since the Han Dynasty period (206 BC- 220 AD)**. Thanks to extensive archaeological research, today we are aware of the fact that **the Maritime Silk Road** has been much more than a purely commercial route. Through the exchange and transport of goods, nations and peoples have reciprocally acquired new ideas, technical and philosophical knowledge and religious cults, in a mutual exchange that has contributed to the development of successive modern societies.

From September 29, 2017 to January 28, 2018, in the fifteenth-century halls of Palazzo Venezia, the exhibition East meets West: The Maritime Silk Road from the 13th to the 17th century will present over 100 objects from the period between the 13th and the 17th century, from the Song dynasty (960 - 1279) to the late Ming dynasty (1368 - 1644). In the four thematic sections: **the Silk Road, the Way of Spices and Porcelain, the Way of Religions and the Way of Cultures**, countless precious artifacts will be displayed: porcelain, jewels, thirsts, spices, paintings, objects of common use of carved stone, metal or wood, witnessing the vitality of commercial activities and cultural and technological exchanges. Among the most significant pieces are **the Silver Ewer with a dragon-shaped handle** (XIX sec.) Featuring scenes from the traditional Chinese opera; **the porcelain statue of Guanyin Bodhisattva** (Ming dynasty, 1368-1644 AD) from the Dehua kiln - a site devoted mainly to the exportation - showing particular affinities with Marian iconography of Christianity; **the white and blue ceramic with the crucifixion of Christ** (Qing Dynasty, 1662 - 1722); and also the **carved ingot** produced by the fusion of Western gold; or **the gold crown decorated with precious gemstones** found in the tomb of Prince Liangzhuang (Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644 AD) along with other jewels produced in the West. Some of the objects on display come from ancient wrecks, such as the one found in the shipwreck of **Nanhai I** in the Song Age (960-1279 AD), and those of the **Wanli** and **Nan'ao** of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 AD).

The exhibition, curated by **Wei Jun**, Director of Guangdong Provincial Museum, is promoted by the Guangdong Museum and the National Museum of Palazzo Venezia in Rome, with the collaboration of the Institute of Archeology and Cultural Heritage of Guangdong. The project is based on the collaboration between the State Administration for Cultural Heritage of the People's Republic of China and the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism of the Italian Republic (MiBACT) and is part of the **Memorandum of Understanding on the Partnership for the Cultural Heritage Promotion** signed on October 7, 2010 by the Ministers of Culture of China and Italy.

The agreement envisages the exchange of permanent museum spaces dedicated to their cultures, in order to promote greater and deep knowledge and understanding between the two states. The first significant Italian model of museal display outside the national boundaries is realized at the exhibition site given to the former General Directorate for the Valorization of Cultural Heritage, today the Museum General Direction, the State Administration of Cultural Heritage of the People's Republic of China within the National Museum of China, on Tiananmen Square, in Beijing, where our country presented the exhibitions: "Rinascimento a Firenze. Capolavori e protagonisti" in 2012, "Roma.

Seicento verso il Barocco” in 2014, “Gloria di luce e colore. Quattro secoli di pittura a Venezia” in 2016; Serie Fuori Serie, on the history of Italian design in 2017.

The reciprocal agreement for the realization of exhibitions on Chinese culture in Italy provides for the granting of the space of the Fifteenth-century halls within the National Museum of Palazzo Venezia. This year's exhibition is the fifth of the five exhibitions provided by the agreement after “Cina Arcaica” in 2013, “Le leggendarie tombe di Mawangdui” in 2014, “I tesori della Cina imperiale” in 2015 and “Capolavori dell’antica porcellana cinese dal Museo di Shanghai X-XIX Century AD” in 2016.

The importance of the cultural value of exchanges along the Silk Road also plays a central role in today's China. A few months ago, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced, in the presence of several world leaders - including the Italian Head of Government - the desire to pursue two international level multilateral cooperation initiatives dedicated to the land routes of the “economic zone of Silk Road” and the “21st Century Maritime Silk Road ”, also jointly called” *One Belt, One Road*. In this scenario, Italy participates as a protagonist, actively supporting the enhancement of Chinese culture through various forms of cultural cooperation.