

**INITIATIVES AND PLATFORMS IN
THE MARITIME SILK ROAD FOR
SOCIO-CULTURAL EXCHANGES**

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Executive Summary

1. China is preserving the cultural heritage in Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) cities to increase its soft power by linking different countries with China's historical past through the Maritime Silk Road (MSR).
2. By June 2021, 205 BRI-related documents were signed by 140 countries and 31 global organisations; at the subnational level, provincial/municipal authorities had economic-cultural interactions based on mutual developmental objectives.
3. The central theme in all these cooperation items is the MSR. Historically, the MSR was conceived by scholars at the start of the 20th century as cultural and commercial exchanges between countries in the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea.
4. Archaeological excavations' output was then deciphered by museums to confirm the connections between China and other Asian countries to deepen social memory of the MSR.
5. Chinese assistance to Sri Lanka in excavating MSR wrecks from the early 2010s culminated in the October 2018 memorandum of understanding between Sri Lanka Central Cultural Fund and Shanghai Museum. The five-year archaeological programme is to excavate Northern Song (960–1127) porcelains in the Jaffna port.
6. Guangzhou historians and policymakers collaborated to produce evidence that their city was an early port for Chinese explorers to venture into the South China Sea. They used maritime archaeology through funded underwater research/excavations to uncover Chinese ships/ceramics in local and regional waters such as the Sri Lankan coast.
7. The constructivists in international relations worldviews believe that connections between states are influenced by historical and social ideational constructions related to cultural perspectives; they seek common identities to bind their interests and value systems together for cooperation.

8. Very often, architecture, fine art and food cultures are shaped by ancient explorers/travellers' routes and today, such routes and left behind artefacts are important and precious cultural heritage for tourism.
9. Unlike the competitive nature of nation-state interactions, subnational actors, local institutions and communities may not face the same geopolitical challenges; City-to-City Cooperation allows communities of common interests to utilise culture in everyday life to resolve local development challenges and outreach to diverse national groups.
10. Future cultural exchange platforms do not even have to be in a physical form. The Silk Road Online Museum Project 3D exhibition titled 'Gathering in the Galaxy: Great Treasures from the Silk Roads' was inaugurated in June 2021.