

Asia-Pacific Conference on Underwater Cultural Heritage  
27 November to 2 December 2017  
Hong Kong Maritime Museum  
Hong Kong

## **Purpose**

The Asia-Pacific Conference on Underwater Cultural Heritage (APConf) aims to address management and protection strategies of underwater cultural heritage in Asia and the countries of the Indian and Pacific Oceans in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, facilitate regional cooperation through the development of academic, non-governmental organisations (NGO) and governmental networks in the Asia-Pacific region, and provide a forum for discussion of technical and ethical issues related to underwater cultural heritage and underwater archaeology.

## **Theme**

### **The Maritime Cultural Landscapes and Seascapes of Asia-Pacific: Voyaging, Migration, Colonisation, Trade, and Cross-Cultural Contacts**

Underwater archaeology investigations are but a small part of the complex relations that humans have with the aquatic environment. Boats, harbours, and fish weirs are, among many others, examples of the utilization of maritime spaces by communities. Some of this material is found under water, but other remains related to maritime activities can be found on land. In many parts of the Asia Pacific region, cultural practices, customs, songs and dances related to the maritime world—intangible cultural heritage—are still greatly valued. Whilst the main purpose of the APConf is to provide a forum for discussion on issues related to underwater cultural heritage management and protection, for the third conference we want to broaden the theme of the conference to encompass the maritime cultural landscapes and seascapes of the Asia-Pacific region, looking specifically to the sea (and inland waters) as highways of trade and colonisation, as well as cross-roads of cultural contacts.

The concept of the maritime cultural landscape was brought forward by Christer Westerdahl in the 1990s and almost twenty-five years later it has developed into a solid theoretical framework for the study of maritime communities. The key of Westerdahl's approach is the integration of underwater cultural heritage within the landscape in order to understand how space provides a context for culture. The uniqueness of cultures in the Asia-Pacific region not only requires researchers to look at the landscape, but it also forces us to re-examine how the sea acts as space for human action in what can be called seascapes.

Without losing sight of what lies under water, this conference will encompass the values and issues that affect land-based maritime sites and heritage. It is hoped that by providing this broad, holistic framework, governments, institutions, and individuals involved in the management of underwater cultural heritage sites in the Asia-Pacific region will have additional tools that will help them define their priorities in the context of maritime cultural heritage.

The sub-themes for the APConf 2017 that have been drawn up based on this approach are the following:

*NOTE: Anyone interested in chairing one of the proposed sessions should contact the committee to nominate themselves as chairs. Alternatively, other sessions can be proposed to the committee.*

### **1. A Highway and a Crossroads: Voyaging, Colonisation and Cross-Cultural Contacts in Asia-Pacific**

The seas have acted as corridors for migration and cultural exchange between the peoples of Asia-Pacific since prehistoric times. This sub-theme explores these activities, including the cross-cultural contacts that may be identified in a variety of sources, from mixed complex cargoes from shipwrecks, points of transit and cultural exchange such as ports, and linguistic borrowing between communities.

The committee suggests, among other possibilities, the following session titles:

- Pacific Islander voyaging and colonisation
- Interactions between Asia-Pacific peoples and the Iberians: the Manila Galleon and the Roteiro
- Archaeology and History of Asian Diaspora
- Connectivity and Interactions between the peoples of Asia-Pacific
- Remembering—roles and examples of Intangible Heritage
- Archaeology and history of Asia-Pacific slavery

### **2. Maritime Cultural Landscapes and Seascapes: Interdisciplinary Approaches**

This sub-theme aims to explore the ways in which cultures of the Asia-Pacific region have made use of the environment to create maritime communities. From rivers and lakes, to the coast and the sea, the communities of the past have developed complex societies deeply intertwined with their landscape. This sub-theme welcomes sessions related to the study of human-environment interaction in the context of rivers, lakes, seas, and oceans.

The committee suggests, among other possibilities, the following session titles:

- The archaeology of boat and water dwelling people
- Connections between Intangible and Tangible Heritage with Asia-Pacific communities
- World War II UCH—local community perspectives and values
- Ethnographic studies of maritime cultural landscapes and seascapes

### **3. UCH in Asia-Pacific: Regional Studies and Projects**

The aim of this section is to provide a platform for researchers to present ongoing projects in the different regions of Asia-Pacific in the hope that they will exchange knowledge and interact with researchers from other regions of the world. This sub-theme covers current regional investigations and initiatives on UCH in the Asia-Pacific region, focusing on all aspects of underwater explorations, local management initiatives, and studies on communities.

The committee suggests, among other possibilities, the following session titles:

- Underwater and maritime archaeology in Asia
- Underwater and maritime archaeology in the Pacific Islands
- Underwater and maritime archaeology in Australia
- Underwater and maritime archaeology in South East Asia
- Underwater and maritime archaeology in South Asia
- Underwater and maritime archaeology in Far East Asia

#### **4. UCH Politics, Law, Ethics and Values**

Management of underwater cultural heritage depends on political, legal and ethical decisions. These decisions will bestow the heritage with a value and will protect it by establishing legal frameworks. These legal frameworks should be carefully drafted in order to ensure an effective protection. If not, they can have the opposite effect and damage the heritage. They must also be regularly revised and updated according to new ethical challenges that arise from constant developments in the field of underwater cultural heritage. International law is particularly important for the protection of UCH, especially the existing international conventions. Furthermore, issues may arise if initiatives do not take into account regional differences. That makes the APConf an excellent arena to discuss the differences between Western, Pacific and Asian approaches to cultural heritage and to establish bridges that can be a point of reference for future legislations. This sub-theme will thus look at the management of underwater cultural heritage from different angles, and it will also cover valuation of underwater cultural heritage or ethical issues that are unique to the management of this type of heritage. Management of UCH is greatly influenced through the values and actions of local people. A session on community maritime archaeology would be beneficial to illustrate how local people in the different parts of the region interact with their UCH.

The committee suggests, among other possibilities, the following session titles:

- Unpacking the politics in UCH in the Asia-Pacific region
- Types of UCH capacity building required for the Asia-Pacific Region
- Pacific Islands legal protection through national laws and UCH Convention
- Linkage between UCH and sustainable development
- Difficulties in the application of the legislation on Asia-Pacific countries and solutions
- Cultural differences on management of cultural heritage between Asia-Pacific countries and European approaches
- The Convention on the Protection of UCH 2001
- Valuation of the underwater cultural heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region
- Community maritime archaeology

#### **5. Museums, Public Outreach and Conservation**

Museums are the visible face of archaeology; they often act as the interface between the academic world and the wider public. It is to their institutions that visitors go to view the objects found in archaeological excavations, and it is in their facilities that objects are conserved and stored for academic research. Their role is therefore to serve as a nodal point where researchers, administrators, local communities, and foreign audiences turn to in order to experience past and current maritime activities. This sub-theme welcomes sessions related to the different aspects of museology, public outreach, conservation, and site interpretation.

The committee suggests, among other possibilities, the following session titles:

- Conservation of coastal landscapes
- Public Outreach
- The conservation of waterlogged artefacts
- How to effectively display maritime archaeology material
- Interpreting maritime cultural heritage for a non-specialist audience

- Museums, Education, Outreach and Conservation

## **6. Technological Approaches to Underwater Cultural Heritage and Maritime Archaeology**

Scientific and technological developments are crucial in the systematic investigation, documentation, recovery, conservation and management of UCH. This sub-theme seeks to focus on new scientific methods and techniques, equipment, procedures and fieldwork methods that are currently being developed for the study of UCH and maritime archaeology. Studies on coastal geo-archaeology and techniques of *in situ* conservation are particularly welcomed.

The committee suggests, among other possibilities, the following session titles:

- Application of Science and Technology in UCH Studies: Historical Perspectives
- New scientific methods, equipment and techniques for Underwater Explorations, Excavations, Documentation and Recovery
- Coastal Geo-archaeological Studies
- Techniques of conservation for Underwater Cultural Heritage
- Information Technology (GIS mapping, Satellite based monitoring systems) for UCH Management
- Sharing technology with regional communities

## **7. Nautical Technology in Asia-Pacific**

Boats of different shapes and sizes are important objects that have enabled human interaction with the aquatic environment. Understanding the nautical technology of a particular social group allows researchers to extract crucial information of their use of space, as well as their understanding of the world that surrounds them. This sub-theme focuses particularly on the study of nautical technology; sessions exploring interdisciplinary approaches to the study of boat technology are particularly welcomed.

The committee suggests, among other possibilities, the following session titles:

- The hybrid boats of Southeast Asia
- Dugouts in Southeast Asia and the Pacific islands
- Pacific Islander voyaging canoes
- Boat ethnography in Asia-Pacific
- Sewn boats across the Asia-Pacific region
- Ethnographic studies of rituals in boat construction