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To cite this article: Edyta Roszko (06 Oct 2023): Heritagising the South China Sea: appropriation and dispossession of maritime heritage through museums and exhibitions in Southern China, International Journal of Heritage Studies, DOI: [10.1080/13527258.2023.2263755](https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2023.2263755)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2023.2263755>



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Published online: 06 Oct 2023.



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Heritagising the South China Sea: appropriation and dispossession of maritime heritage through museums and exhibitions in Southern China

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ABSTRACT

With the emergence of critical heritage studies, scholars show that ‘bottom up’ initiatives that blur the boundaries between private, civil, and state have arisen not as a modernising vision to legitimise national authority but as ‘rooted in identification with local community’, linking past and future. In China, such studies demonstrate the emergence of a different kind of museology – with ‘private’ heritage initiatives on behalf of individuals and groups – tolerated by the state authorities through investments that link heritage tourism to development. However, when a maritime vision of national history is at stake, the central state would co-opt ‘private’ heritage initiatives to subsume them under the wider, sanitised narrative of Chinese maritime civilisation that requires a different relation to the past and its extraction from the localities that do not inscribe their heritage into these universalised visions. Zooming in on three museums in Hainan related to the South China Sea (SCS), I reveal the contradictory claims made by different actors regarding the use, representation and ownership claims of historical seafaring in terms of cultural heritage. Therefore, I argue that heritagisation of seafaring in the SCS represent proprietary and thus territorial claims for China’s rhetoric of maritime ecological civilisation.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 16 June 2023

Accepted 23 September 2023

KEYWORDS

Seafaring; maritime ecological civilisation; muzealisation; heritagisation; South China Sea

Introduction

‘The state will have its own museum and we would have our own!’ – this was the response of young female entrepreneur Ying Hui to the rumours I passed to her, namely that the Chinese government decided to move the construction of the National South China Sea Museum from Tanmen to the nearby resort town of Bo’ao.¹ The upsetting news about the change of the museum’s location to Bo’ao – which got its fame for hosting the high-level Annual Asia Forum that brings together statesmen, businesspeople and academics to discuss frontline issues of development in Asia and the world – came from a provincial journalist whom I met on one of his visits to Tanmen. In 2013, Tanmen – a fishing port and a cluster of fishing villages with a population over 32,000 located on the east coast of Hainan Island, China – was selected as a civilisational eco-village and a site of ‘nostalgic culture of traditional fishing’ (Zhu, Liu, and Li 2020) in a state development programme.

Hearing the news about the museum’s relocation, Ying Hui was surprised but she quickly shrugged, as if it was not her concern. Building upon the legacy of her late grandfather, a well-known fisherman who made several daring seafaring trips to the Paracels and Spratlys, she and her

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brother, whom I call here Da Zhong, were in the process of constructing their own family museum. The museum was intended to display their grandfather's navigational guide and show the process of turning fossilised giant clamshells into fine artwork. The centuries-old fossilised shells of highly endangered bivalve molluscs (*Tridacninae* subfamily) that are on a brink of extinction were extracted by Tanmen fishermen from coral reefs in the Spratlys and Paracels, two archipelagos claimed in whole by China and Vietnam and in part by Taiwan and a number of Southeast Asian states, as well as from the Scarborough shoal, which is claimed by China, Taiwan and the Philippines (Roszko 2023). The extraction required the use of propellers set on small boats, which broke coral that concealed the shells. Although most of these giant clams were already dead when harvested, their extraction by crane-equipped modern trawlers destroyed entire coral reefs (Roszko 2023). Attractively polished, giant clamshells were sold in more than one hundred shops belonging to Tanmen fishing families, reaching prices numbering in the thousands of dollars (see Figure 1). One such shop was owned by Ying Hui and Da Zhong, and it was there that I first time met the provincial journalist.

Ying Hui not only reacted to my news about the museum's location with a witty riposte, but also dismissed another museum in Tanmen owned by a Shanghai-based businesswoman who originally was from a northeast province of China, close to the border with Russia. Known as 'South China Sea Culture Museum' (南海文化博物馆), this civil museum was built with authorisation from a local fishing association and the Tanmen government. The museum narrated the local history of fishers and their daring voyages to the disputed archipelagos as well as their role in safeguarding the South China Sea (SCS). In the few past years, Tanmen fishers gained a reputation as China's maritime militia and for shoring up China's maritime sovereignty through their heavy involvement in the construction of artificial islands in the SCS. With the support of heavy subsidies from the state, many of these fishers started joint-stock companies and purchased steel-hulled fishing trawlers that operated in the Paracels, Spratlys and Scarborough Shoal waters (Zhang 2016; Zhang and Bateman 2017; Roszko 2021, 2023). The Shanghai-based businesswoman who owned this museum struck a deal with one of these companies from which she purchased the finest pieces of fossilised giant clamshells collected from the coral reefs around the Scarborough Shoal, whose clear waters guaranteed the highest quality of this marine product. In one of the local workshops in Tanmen,

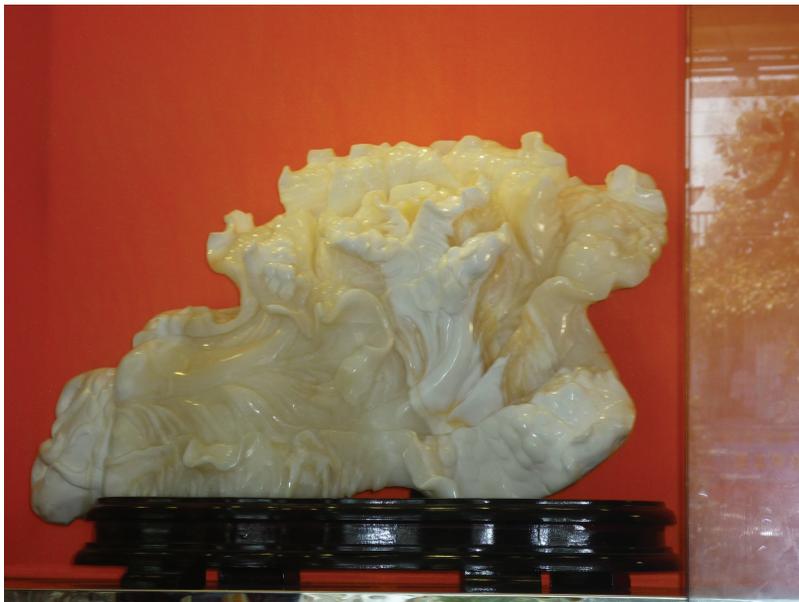


Figure 1. Giant clamshell artwork, Tanmen, Hainan. Source: Roszko 2015.



Figure 2. The National South China Sea museum, Tanmen, Hainan. *Source:* (Roszko 2019).



Figure 3. Family museum in construction. *Source:* roszko 2015.

the carvers from Hunan, Fujian, and Zhejiang – where historically nineteenth century Qing dynasty imperial workshops were based – were turning the thick fossilised shells into artwork and jewellery exhibited and sold in the South China Culture Museum.

In 2013, the local government proclaimed Tanmen’s giant clamshell processing to be a pillar industry, a designation that made available subsidised loans and other benefits to local fishers (Zhu, Liu, and Li 2020), 542 (Roszko 2023).; During my conversations with fishers, many of them attributed the growing market prices for giant clamshell artwork to President Xi Jinping’s visit to



Figure 4. The South China culture museum, Tanmen, Hainan. *Source:* roszko 2015.

Tanmen in April 2013, when he launched a new policy promulgating the ‘development of the sea economy’ (发展海洋经济) and personally encouraged them to actively support land reclamation and construction work on the new islands in the SCS (see Xi 2020, 463–464). While it might not have been intended as such, in the eyes of Tanmen fishers, Xi’s visit legitimised giant clamshell mining and industry. When I arrived in Tanmen in early March 2015 to conduct four months of ethnographic fieldwork, the giant clamshell industry was in full swing and local fishers were full of optimism about the future. Nevertheless, there were also the first signs of caution on the part of the Tanmen government. Officially, Tanmen authorities banned the harvesting of giant clams in 2015, just two weeks before the Forum for Asia Annual Conference in nearby Bo’ao. In practice, however, fishers and local authorities alike used a loophole in the regulation that allowed the sale of shells turned into artwork.

While concerned about the newly announced ban, Tanmen fishers were excited by the state’s plans to build the South China Sea Museum in Tanmen. They saw the museum project as both official recognition of their fishing legacy and as an additional boost to the local economy that should bring more tourists, and thus potential customers, to Tanmen. For example, while Ying Hui agreed that the state museum could be beneficial to the local community, she considered it to be complementary to her own museum project and giant clamshell business. Therefore, it is understandable that any plans of building the state museum outside of Tanmen would thwart these expectations, as they might divert tourists – and potential customers – to other locations. However, she refused to grant any legitimacy to the South China Sea Culture Museum owned by the Shanghai-based businesswoman, accusing her of usurping Tanmen’s culture for her own financial gain.

When I returned to Tanmen in late autumn 2019, the hundreds of elegant shops along the main street selling giant clamshell artwork were empty and closed. The local workshops that once employed thousands of carvers from the mainland turning the fossilised shells into the finest artwork were also gone. I could not find Ying Hui’s museum nor her chic shop anymore. To my disappointment, the stylish wooden building of the ‘South China Sea Culture Museum’ with the only coffee shop in the town, which I fondly remembered from my first visit, had been demolished and replaced with a fish market. While the entire giant clamshell craft industry in Tanmen

生态环保 Ecological Conservation and Environmental Protection

资源保护 Resource Conservation

中国在海滩的伏季休渔政策从1999年开始实施。2015年5月，中国发布7天短休渔令，从5月16日12时起，南海进入为期两个半月的伏季休渔期。北纬12度以北至“闽粤海域交界线”的南海海域(含北部湾)，除单层刺网、作业外，禁止其他所有作业类型生产。

三沙市政府高度重视岛礁生态环境保护，积极

保护海鸟和海龟等海洋生物栖息地。在晋卿岛上建立永乐群岛管理委员会海龟繁殖保护站；在甘泉岛上建立海龟等海洋生物保护站，开展人工孵化和增殖放流活动。同时，开展专项行动整治违法捕捞和海洋污染，依托基层居委会、工委、动植物保护站整治三沙辖区海域内各种非法捕捞、销售行为；打击非法采挖、捕杀、交易珊瑚、珊瑚、绿海龟、玳瑁等珍稀物种的行为。大力整治海洋环境卫生，治理海洋污染。



绿化工程 Afforestation and Greening Projects

2012年9月28日，三沙市在赵述岛开展“绿化宝岛”活动，种植环岛绿带绿化树和海防林。2013年，三沙市实施岛礁绿化一期工程，在鸣公岛、羚羊眼、银屿、晋卿岛等各岛共种植3500多棵绿树。

2014年7月，三沙开启岛礁绿化二期工程。以西沙洲为试点，全面实施绿化，在西沙洲上种下了1500余株木麻黄。

2014年10月，三沙市工作人员和3名植物专家，带着木麻黄、草海桐、马鞍藤、椰子树等12个品种共1200余株树苗，从三亚出发，到达南沙5个岛礁，种下一片新绿。

为了更好地开展岛礁绿化工作，三沙市于2015年底开始在西沙洲开展现场培育树苗试点工作。首批2000多株草海桐树苗已经全部成活。三沙岛礁现场育苗试点工作获得成功，将大大节省育苗成本。

垃圾处理 Waste Management

为改善市容和环境卫生，保障公众健康，永兴事务管理局出台了《永兴岛垃圾分类管理办法》(试行)，对渔民村等区域试点开展垃圾分类投放与收集，对渔民广泛进行垃圾分类宣传，并为渔民免费提供垃圾分类袋。永兴岛居民按照可回收垃圾、餐厨垃圾、生活垃圾、有害垃圾分别投放到垃圾分类收集桶。由环保中心定期收集转运处理，枯枝叶、建筑垃圾进行定点投放，大件垃圾由环保中心上门收取。

2016年7月，总量为5吨/天的垃圾由环保中心负责清运，对岛内垃圾桶进行分类，有效垃圾在垃圾收集点进行分拣处理，垃圾回收率达95—97%。

永兴岛环保中心污水处理站每天处理污水约470吨，产生污泥约400吨，其中腐化、腐化污泥约100吨，约400吨，腐化污泥约100吨，约400吨，腐化污泥约100吨，约400吨。

可循环分类垃圾收集桶

环卫工人将垃圾投入垃圾分类收集桶中



Figure 5. Sansha municipal government's ecological protection of islands and reefs in the Paracels. Source: (Roszko 2019).

disappeared overnight, one thing materialised and prominently featured in the town's landscape, namely the state-sponsored National South China Sea Museum (see [Figure 2](#)). In contrast to the previous rumours about its relocation to Bo'ao, the government built the museum 10 km away from Tanmen town. The gigantic building in the shape of a boat floating in the sea covered more than 7 hectares at Tanmen fishing harbour, accommodating bus tours that daily brought school pupils, students and state employees from all over Hainan and the mainland to appreciate the 'national' history of the SCS. However, these bus tours rarely entered Tanmen proper.

Envisioned as a 'platform of declaration of sovereignty over the South China Sea', the museum's permanent exhibitions narrated China's seafaring history and the country's administration and protection of the Xisha Islands (Paracels), the Nansha Islands (Spratlys), the Zhongsha Islands (Macclesfield Bank and Scarborough Shoal), and the Dongsha Islands (Pratas Islands) – referred to as the 'Four Islands' (四沙).² The museum's exhibitions were centred on China's Maritime Silk Road, the Chinese seafaring technology and historical artefacts found underwater around the disputed SCS archipelagos. Additionally, the museum displayed Tanmen fishers' *Geng Lu Bu* logbooks (更路簿), which the museum claimed to be a few hundred years old, as evidence of an ancient historical Chinese presence in the disputed archipelagos and the proof of China's sovereignty over the SCS. Walking through the exhibition galleries narrating the 'South China Sea human history' I wondered about Tanmen's vanished 'private' museums and how their vernacular perceptions of the local past and cultural heritage could constitute any threat to the monumental state vision of the SCS? Harriet Evans and Michael Rowlands (2015, 289) explain that the 'private' character of museums often involves the 'interaction between official, entrepreneurial and local civil interest' – where the boundaries between state, political, economic or cultural interests and investments are fluid. The demolition of the South China Culture Museum particularly puzzled me since in the past few years 'private' museum ventures have mushroomed across China, often drawing on powerful political and entrepreneurial connections (Rowlands, Feuchtwang, and Zhang 2019). What went wrong with the local South China Sea museums in Tanmen?

To solve this puzzle that emerged during my ethnographic fieldwork, in the following section I propose a twofold – ethnographic and theoretical – argument, suggesting that heritagisation of seafaring in the SCS serves as a proprietary and hence territorial claim for China's grand vision of itself as a maritime and ecological civilisation. In its definitive ruling in the matter of the SCS arbitration at The Hague regarding the Philippines' allegations of China's environmental violations in the SCS, the Tribunal concluded that destructive and hazardous fishing practices by Chinese fishers caused irreversible destruction of coral reefs in the SCS, including in waters within the Philippines' EEZ.³ The Tribunal also stated that Chinese authorities were 'fully aware of the practice and actively tolerated' it before the reefs were fully destroyed by the island-building activities.⁴ This, however, raises the question how the actual extraction of giant clams from the SCS reefs – called in Western media 'ecocide' to denote widespread, long-term and severe destruction of natural environment – and China's current rhetoric of being a maritime and ecological civilisation could be reconciled?⁵ In addition, what happens when local articulations of a central state discourse on history through local heritage museums become inconvenient for geopolitical reasons? To substantiate my argument and address this tension that arises from the seeming contradiction between the actual practice and the discourse, in the next part I will take a closer look at the 'private' museum initiatives *vis-à-vis* the state-sponsored National South China Sea Museum. In my ethnography I show that the idea of private and local is not homologous to binary oppositions of private – public or local – central state, but rather forms an arrangement that takes different shapes in (or through) the three museums. The National South China Sea Museum is important for our discussion because it not only subsumes local community interests under the state's vision by appropriating the heritage of Tanmen's seafaring and fishing traditions, but is also clearly linked to control of the South China Sea and the discourse of China's maritime civilisation through the Belt and Road Initiative. As a result, the museum's exhibition depicts Chinese mariners as inventors of long-distance navigation and developers of the sea routes that connected China with Southeast Asia and

the rest of the world across the SCS and the Indian Ocean. As visitors walk through museum galleries, Southeast Asia emerged as reduced to a passive transit area of Chinese maritime connections (Kwa 2012a; 2016), while long-standing historical, cultural and ethnic interconnectivities are simplified to project China as the civilisational and ecological cradle of the SCS and foreground China along trade routes stretching from China up to the ancient civilisations of the Indus Valley, Mesopotamia, Egypt and Turkey. In this way, I demonstrate that heritagisation and musealisation are two parallel processes in which sites, objects, practices and lifestyles are alienated from the community to become a showcase of civilisational and cultural accomplishment of the nation (Salemink 2021; see also; Karp and Kreamer 1992; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998). In the process, fishing and seafaring are turned into heritage, an added value to lifestyles that ceased to be economically viable (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998), but through their connection to the past gained a new validation in a tourist industry and the state's vision of development (Salemink 2021, 4).

To support my argument, I draw on my intermittent ethnographic fieldwork in Tanmen in 2015 and 2019, totalling five months. My focus on fishing livelihoods determined how the ethnographic research was carried out. While some of my interviews with local authorities or representatives of fishing organisations were more structured and more formal, most of my interactions with the shops' owners and Tanmen inhabitants were spontaneous and unstructured. I followed people, their narratives and artwork, which helped me to form a fuller picture of political and economic developments in Tanmen, of the emergence and disappearance of various museal projects, and of the contested visions of what constitute local and national 'maritime heritage'. During my fieldwork in 2015, I frequently visited the South China Sea Culture Museum and regularly talked to the family who was in the process of constructing their own small museum that would narrate local seafaring history. In 2019, when I returned to Tanmen, I followed up on developments and changes in both the physical landscape and people's livelihoods. I visited a freshly built state-sponsored National South China Sea Museum and discussed the project with the people of Tanmen. While I did not have occasion to talk to the museum's curators, the ethnographic mapping of events, practices, institutions, and various groups of actors over a longer time allows me to trace connections and conflicts in both people's practices and the evolving state vision of maritime heritage in China.

Family museum

At the time of my fieldwork in 2015, Ying Hui and Da Zhong was in the process of constructing a private museum that focused on the maritime legacy of his family (see Figure 3). In 2013 Da Zhong received a phone call from his grandfather, an experienced fishing captain, who informed him that President Xi Jinping was about to visit Tanmen. The grandfather persuaded him to return to his native village where he claimed the conditions for living had become better and a range of new 'life opportunities' (生活机会) was opening up with fresh state investments into the town and fishing port. Listening to his grandfather, Da Zhong decided that it was time to interrupt his musical education in Beijing and return to Tanmen to capitalise on these new prospects. As many other residents in Tanmen, he set up a handicraft workshop, brought carvers from the mainland who processed fossilised giant clams, and together with his sister Ying Hui opened a stylish shop that sold high-quality giant clamshell artwork. However, Da Zhong also started to explore how he could combine his 'artwork' product with 'cultural value' to ensure that his entrepreneurship stood out. This required authoritative recognition and validation of giant clamshells as artwork 'embodying high cultural value' by cultural institutions (Salemink 2022, 8).

With the aim of building a long-term vision for his business and its cultural value, Da Zhong looked for inspiration from various sources. For example, he took a *guoxue* (国学, literally 'national learning') course in ancient Chinese thought and culture offered by Qionghai County to entrepreneurs. Tracing its roots to the nineteenth century, *guoxue* teaching aimed to preserve 'national essence' from the 'foreign imperial despotism' of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) and the intellectual Western traditions that entered China (Dirlik 2011, 8). While with the changing conceptions of

China and its place in the world, *guoxue* interpretations varied over time, the concept has been closely identified with the Confucian tradition (Dirlik 2011, 6). Indeed, Da Zhong understood *guoxue* as part of Confucian philosophy, but he also explained that the concept helped him to shape his business. Thanks to *guoxue* classes he was able to select those elements of Tanmen culture that he deemed representative of Chinese civilisation.

However, *guoxue* was not the only route Da Zhong was pursuing to ensure his entrepreneurial success. The Family Museum he was constructing emphasised his and Ying Hui's filial piety as moral debt and giving respect to ancestors and their home. Da Zhong's attempt to exhibit proper filial love and respect was also linked to the visit by President Xi to Tanmen and to the preservation of 'national essence' expressed in Chinese values and beliefs. A newly published biography of China's President Xi Jinping titled *The Governance of China* [习近平谈治国理政] provided another source of inspiration for his vision of business embedded in Chinese culture. Da Zhong explained that reading Xi's biography was important for him to understand the direction his country was heading and to plan his business accordingly. He was aware of the new Maritime Silk Road initiative and tried to tap its cultural potential for his giant clamshell business by representing his family fishing past as both local and national maritime heritage. Da Zhong was particularly proud of his grandfather who died a year after he returned to Tanmen, but whose photos and personal story of daring voyages to the Paracels and Spratlys were displayed on the town's streets. He saw himself as a 'child' of Tanmen who owed a debt to his ancestors and had a responsibility (责任) to his community to introduce local fishing heritage to the outside world. By building the family museum on the property of his giant clamshell workshop, Da Zhong paid respect to his late grandfather's seafaring legacy and fulfilled his entrepreneurial ambitions to enhance the 'authenticity' of his product. The choice of location was strategic, allowing Da Zhong's customers to see the production process of giant clamshell artwork – from raw organic material to polished and luxury products sold in his shop. Called by locals 'jade of the sea' (海玉), the polished giant clamshells were described as a spiritual and secret treasury that was hidden for centuries at the bottom of the sea and only known to Tanmen fishers. For many Chinese tourists, the shells have become proof of China's superior maritime knowledge.

Here, the 'authenticity' of giant clamshell artwork was not only upheld by Da Zhong's family's 'fishing tradition' but also translated into economic profit. Evans and Rowlands (2021, 9–10) argues, 'in conditions where cultural heritage offers substantial economic returns, the evocation of "authentic cultural heritage" may cement a subjective and collective sense of belonging and memory that paradoxically both reproduces and seeks to resolve possibly violent competition for resources'. In Tanmen, Da Zhong had to compete with hundreds of fishing families who also processed and sold giant clamshells. Bringing memories of his grandfather's daring fishing voyages to the contested archipelagos of the SCS, he translated the economic value of the giant clamshell artwork into high cultural value desired by tourists. He was convinced that his education and the seafaring legacy of his grandfather gave him an advantage over other residents in Tanmen, allowing him to enhance his business. On one occasion, he said: 'Tanmen people do not know how to talk about culture, how to present culture. Because I took the *guoxue* classes I know exactly what a potential customer wants to hear'. Da Zhong was convinced that thanks to *guoxue* he was better positioned than others to run a giant clamshell business.

At the time of my fieldwork, the museum was not yet completed, though wooden and glass cabinets were already mounted on the walls with the aim of displaying giant clamshell pieces harvested from the various reefs in the SCS. In an attempt to narrate Tanmen seafaring history, Da Zhong divided the museum into four galleries and named them after Xisha, Nansha, Dongsha and Zhongsha. A gigantic image of the SCS and the disputed archipelagos, enclosed by a dotted U-shaped line that allegedly referred to customary presence of Chinese fishers in *Nanhai* (南海, literally 'South Sea'), covered the middle wall, giving the idea of the vast sea spaces 'owned' by China and protected by daring Tanmen fishers. In the right corner of the map, Da Zhong placed an image of a fishing logbook with a headline running *Geng Lu Bu*. Da Zhong explained that his family was

one of very few in Tanmen who managed to preserve the navigational records of his ancestors. Da Zhong was aware that fishers' logbooks have been sought and used by the Chinese government as evidence of a long-standing Chinese presence in the disputed archipelagos and 'ironclad proof of China's sovereignty over the South China Sea'.⁶ While his entrepreneurship built on the idea that the logbooks represented China's maritime heritage, he was reluctant to hand the document to the state museum. Departing from the main image of *Geng Lu Bu* as a national symbol of China's maritime sovereignty, he used the logbook as a trademark (品牌) for his giant clamshell business and his family's seafaring past.

At times when navigational and nautical charts were not available, Tanmen fishers relied on local navigational knowledge that flowed down generations and was preserved in the form of *geng lu bu*. In most cases, *geng lu bu* was a secret book written and kept by the navigator himself during his sailing career. Here 'geng' means the time or distance that fishing boats travelled from one place to another, 'lu' stands for 'zhenlu', a travel route or travel course indicated by the compass pointer, while 'bu' indicates 'book'. Each 'geng lu' indicated the starting point, the travel direction and the time to travel the distance (Liu 2005). Apart from these, the content of such logbooks recorded mostly personal sailing experience, including currents, tides, the position of stars and other important details for navigation that usually were incomprehensible to others.

When I asked Da Zhong what local authorities think about his museum project, he quickly answered that this was a secret, and they did not know about it. However, a few seconds later he corrected himself by saying that they were of course aware of the museum. He explained that when visitors looked at the trademark of *Geng Lu Bu* they learned about his family's fishing tradition. However, by learning about his family they could understand the whole history of Tanmen. Da Zhong pointed at the fishing boat that he exhibited in the middle of the museum's hall and then said that he understood Tanmen culture because he himself represented that culture. Therefore, for him and his sister the idea of 'private' included both public and local because his own family did not exist in isolation but was part of Tanmen's wider community. He attributed the success of his only two-year-old giant clamshell business to his cultural awareness and ability to imbue his economic interest with cultural value of his natal village. Since harvesting of giant clamshells was massive, I asked him: 'What do you do when one day there will be no more fossilised giant clamshell in the SCS to bring to Tanmen?' Without hesitation, Da Zhong answered:

Extracting giant clamshells is one of many ways Tanmen people make a living. Tanmen people are themselves 'intangible heritage' (非物质文化遗产) and, therefore, the best thing I could offer to the tourists in Tanmen is local culture. Even if giant clamshells finish one day, Tanmen people would have their thousand-years-long culture which they can show to the world (...). Look, the young people in Tanmen do not want to become fishermen but they want to protect fishing culture. *Geng lu bu* stands for our sea culture and because of that the state protects us. *Geng lu bu* and sea culture are intangible heritage.

Elsewhere, I have written that the state's reconstruction of the past does not necessarily clash with people's view of it, but rather provokes the reconstruction of their memory in terms that are more acceptable for different groups of actors (Roszko 2020, 157). Zhong wrote his own version of history represented through objects such as giant clamshell artwork and showed that not only had the government authorities 'the power to declare and certify what is authentic cultural heritage', but so do residents who run their businesses and create a 'customized authenticity' in the tourists' imagination (Zhu 2018, 30). In the next part of this article, I will move to another local attempt to inscribe cultural value into a 'private' enterprise through the museum project.

The South China Sea culture museum

Located next to the Tanmen Port, the South China Sea Culture Museum was an elegant two-storey wooden building (Figure 4). While the first floor had residential and office spaces, the ground floor accommodated a coffee shop and a large hall filled with wooden and glass cabinets. The cabinets

displayed ancient ceramics recovered by local fishers from the sea and the artwork of giant clamshells. However, the central stage of the hall was reserved for a photo exhibition devoted to the Scarborough Shoal (Huangyan Island) and Spratlys (Nansha), and to Tanmen fishers' long-term relations with those waters. The visitors could read about China's 'indisputable sovereignty' over the Scarborough Shoal, the Filipino navy's 'unjust' arrest of Tanmen fishers who fished in the northern part of Huangyan Island, and the fishers' brave refusal to sign any documents in which they would admit that they had fished illegally in the Philippines' waters. The exhibition also displayed the map of the SCS engulfed by the U-shaped nine-dash line and the foreign colonial documents that mentioned Hainanese fishers and their sailing trips to the disputed archipelagos. There were also photos showing Chinese patriots who installed a national radio on the Scarborough Shoal and the celebration of the 'South China Sea 110' (*Nanhai 110*) communication system in Tanmen that allowed the coastal guard to reach fishers any time, check on their safety at sea or give them particular tasks to do. Life stories of the experienced Tanmen fishers, the photos of the *Geng Lu Bu* logbooks they used for navigation and a brief history of the extraction and processing of giant clamshells in Tanmen complemented the photo exhibition. In the process, I learned that over 500 shops in Tanmen and nearly 6,000 people were engaged in the giant clamshell industry, reaching an annual turnover of over 500 million yuan (around USD 73 million), with exports to Southeast Asia and Russia.

At the time of my fieldwork, the South China Culture Museum was part of Tanmen's prominent tourist complex, with a seafood restaurant nearby and a retired wooden fishing ship displayed on the beach as a tourist attraction. While the female owner of the museum politely declined my request for an interview, she delegated the task to Mr. An, an experienced captain and representative of fishers in Tanmen who was keen to answer my questions. From him I learned that the Tanmen fishing community had elected Mr. An to act as a broker between the government and fishers, but his position as a head of fishers was informal. Tanmen fishers invited a few potential investors into the town and offered them land to set up their business, but in exchange they demanded the museum be built to promote local culture and history. After careful consideration, fishers chose a Shanghai-based woman who was originally from Harbin and who 'had a head for business'. An explained that twenty years ago she started to collect giant clamshells because she knew that they had become rare and expensive. She struck a deal with fishers and the local government, which provided approval and financial support for the museum and restaurant in the form of a joint stock company. However, in our conversation, An repeatedly emphasised that the existence of the museum showed that 'not everything was for money' and that Tanmen people refused projects that focused exclusively on hotels or restaurants. An said:

Tanmen inhabitants wanted the local culture to be noted so that they could show this heritage to their daughters and sons, to the next generations . . . But the museum also serves business and it sells giant clamshell artwork. The museum is like a window for travelers, provides information about fishers, their history, culture and place.

As in the case of the Family Museum, the South China Sea Cultural Museum shows that the binary oppositions between local and state are not clear-cut or everlasting and that heterogeneous actors represent shifting categories of 'local' and 'state'. In that sense, the South China Sea Museum illustrated tangibly that the 'local' also included the Tanmen Government through its financial and political support that stimulated the localised giant clam industry. This linkage was particularly visible in the way An understood 'local' as the representation of community, business and state. He took pride in the museum and told me that thanks to the project, the tourists' impression of Tanmen was deep and did not focus only on 'seafood'. He also stressed that having a local museum in Tanmen was important for keeping and preserving self-identity. The museum itself did not bring in much income, and most of the revenue came from the restaurant, which supported the existence of the museum. However, An also made clear that the museum sold the highest quality of giant

clamshell artwork in Tanmen that the state-subsidised fishers had harvested from the exceptionally clear waters around Scarborough Shoal where they had official permission to operate.

As a shock to many, the final clampdown on the giant clamshell business came from the central government in January 2017, resulting in the closure of hundreds of shops and workshops and deprived the town of its commerce and income. As I already mentioned, when I returned to Tanmen in 2019, any traces of the museum's previous existence were removed from the landscape. The building was demolished in the crackdown on giant clamshells and replaced with a fish market. On the other side of the harbour, the spectacular building of the state-sponsored National South China Sea Museum dominated the local landscape.

The National South China Sea museum

According to the Chinese architects, the 'stretching and flowing shape' of the National South China Sea Museum 'comes from traditional elements of the South China Sea – the figures of sailboats, sea waves, traditional boat houses and fishing net' (Ma, Zhu, and Xiang 2019, 675). Integrated into the mangrove wetland, the museum building is shaped like a fishing boat with curved roof, a sea-view corridor and semi-outdoor landscape space. Seeking to reflect 'harmony between [hu]man and ocean', the architecture of the building heritagised Tanmen with seafaring-themed aesthetics and thematic exhibitions.⁷

As with the architecture, the location of the museum overlooking the 'Millennium Fishing Port' – the 'Gate to the South China Sea' – was not accidental. According to the *Geng Lu Bu* logbooks that were displayed at the museum, the port gate known as *Da tan* [大潭] was a starting point in the famous seafaring routes to disputed archipelagos developed by Tanmen mariners. In 2015, the steel-hulled trawlers and wooden boats regularly anchored their heavy cargo of fossilised giant clamshells along the coastline, just opposite the construction site selected for the museum. In 2019 when I visited the Tanmen Port, a smaller number of steel-hulled trawlers were still there but empty of their problematic cargo that turned out to be embarrassment to China after the definitive ruling and findings of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) at The Hague made global headlines. The PCA findings about the Tanmen fishers' massive destruction of coral reefs in the SCS demanded a response from China that came with new ecological measures.⁸

With an agenda to 'promote exchanges and cooperation among countries along the maritime Silk Road', the construction of the National South China Sea Museum was hastily finished by 2017 as commanded by the central government, which wanted the building to be partly open to the public before heads of states, foreign ministers, academics and prominent CEOs would fly to Hainan to attend the annual Bo'ao Forum for Asia (Ma, Zhu, and Xiang 2019, 675–676). Not coincidentally, the full ban on the sale, purchase and processing of giant clamshells came from the central government in January 2017, just a few months before the Bo'ao Forum for Asia. Elsewhere, I have explained that the ban was enforced at the time when China's conversion of disputed reefs into artificial islands was nearly completed and Tanmen fishers were neither needed for keeping their presence in the disputed waters nor for collecting giant clamshells from destroyed coral reefs in preparation for the land reclamation (Roszko 2023, 88–89). Apart from forcing the residents to remove giant clamshell artwork from their shops, the ban also silenced the local narratives of the discovery, harvest and processing of the precious 'jade of the SCS' in the form of fossilised giant clamshells that had to be now kept out of the public eyes.

Available both *in situ* and online, the exhibition 'A Life by the Sea: The South China Sea Fishermen Cultural Exhibition (Hainan)', offering a carefully crafted local history of Hainan fishing communities, was only open to the public in April 2020 (Qitian 2022; Xu 2021).⁹ Cleansed of any reference to Tanmen fishers' harvest of fossilised giant clamshells in the disputed waters, the exhibition presented a romanticised picture of Tanmen fishers as the 'only group in the world that continues to develop the SCS islands' (Xu 2021, 30). Following trends in modern museology, the curators of the exhibition chose to focus on 'people' rather than 'objects' in their presentation of

the ‘historical evolution’ of fishers’ folk life and their ‘industrial transformation’ in the process of ‘development’ and ‘utilization’ of the SCS (Xu 2021, 29). Reflecting on fishers’ daily activities, the exhibition did not explicitly focus on Tanmen fishers, but rather on Hainan fishing culture to show ‘the great spirit of the Chinese people in cultivating the South China Sea’ (Xu 2021, 31).

At the time of my visit to the museum in November 2019, the local fishing history was incorporated into a wider story of China’s historical presence in the SCS. The exhibitions that were open to the public mainly targeted Chinese tourists. They focused on natural ecology and human history of the SCS told through the lens of a ‘China-centric Maritime Silk Road’ (Sen 2023, 9). The display of ancient Chinese texts, maps, objects and photos was accompanied by short explanations of how a potential museum visitor should understand their message. For example, the excerpt from ‘The Book of Later Han’ [后汉书] that told the story of a Chinese officer cursing the wind that almost caused his ship to sink was explained as providing written evidence for the Chinese navigation in the SCS going back to the Later Han dynasty (25–220). As the visitors walked through the exhibition halls, they learned about the ancient routes of the Maritime Silk Road in the Tang Dynasty (618–907) and China’s ‘territorial and jurisdictional administration’ of the SCS during the Ming and Qing Dynasties (1368–1911) and in the period of the People’s Republic of China since 1949.

Here, the visitors were reminded again that fishers from Qionghai and Wenchang in Hainan were the earliest people who fished in Xisha, Nansha, and Zhongsha and that their navigation guides, known as *Geng Lu Bu*, had been added to the ‘National Intangible Cultural Heritage List’. Furthermore, they learned that *Geng Lu Bu* narrated ‘how the Chinese people peacefully explored, developed, and utilized the South China Sea’ through giving geographical names to reefs and islands and through shipping routes that served fishing production and trade.¹⁰ The exhibitions also narrated China’s success in discovery and protection of underwater cultural heritage, ecological conservation and environmental protection of the SCS reefs and islands, as well as President Xi Jinping’s meetings with the heads of the European Union, Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei to promote cooperation in the SCS and China’s commitment to ‘peacefully resolving relevant disputes through negotiation with countries involved directly based on respecting historical facts and in accordance with the international law’ [(...)致力于同直接有关的当事国在尊重历史事实的基础上, 根据国际法, 通过谈判协商和平解决有关争议].¹¹ The stated aim of the museum was to present ‘historical facts’ related to China’s sovereignty over the SCS and educate mainland tourists about the country’s maritime heritage. Within this narrative, Hainan fishers figured as those who opened up the ancient routes to Southeast Asia and peacefully collaborated with its people through trade exchanges.

China’s engagement with Southeast Asia and the ‘World’ was shown through objects such as porcelain pieces, silverware, ivory, carvings, fans and paintings that Chinese mariners traded via the SCS and further along the Maritime Silk Road. While these exhibitions celebrated mutual cultural influences between China and the West, Southeast Asia was portrayed as passive, backward, and in need of development. One of the exhibitions’ commentaries reads as follows:

As recorded in travel literature of the Song and Yuan Dynasties, the aboriginal peoples inhabiting Southeast Asia led a rather primitive life. They used ‘banana leaves as plates’ and ‘wild ginger leaves as bowls’, and ‘much of their table ware was made of bamboo and coconut shells’ . . . Thanks to the Maritime Silk Road chinaware produced in China reached these areas in significant volumes permanently altering the dining habits of local people and profoundly impacting their culinary culture and even their lifestyle. In this sense, chinaware facilitated the advance of human civilisation.¹²

This China-centric narrative in the National South China Sea Museum stands in sharp contrast with the Asian Civilization Museum in Singapore that highlights the historical connections between various cultures and where Southeast Asia emerges as an important civilisational player that needs to be considered in its own right. Constituting a distinct trading circuit, the SCS did not exist in isolation but was connected to other maritime and trading worlds such as the Arab

Sea and the Bay of Bengal (Abu-Lughod 1993). However, what matters here is that long-term historical, cultural and ethnic connections and exchanges in the SCS and beyond are projected through China's 21st Century Maritime Silk Road to produce the historical and political effects of justifying contemporary territorial claims in the SCS. In this process, Tanmen fishing legacies have been appropriated by the grand imaginary of the Chinese maritime and ecological civilisation that is both ancient and future-oriented. Hence, the state strategies to restructure both local and national histories in the state-sponsored museum clearly illustrate that the category of 'local fishers' can be deliberately kept vague as a monolithic category frozen in time for geopolitical reasons.

Heritagising of seafaring traditions in the SCS

With reference to the question posed by the editors in this special issue about what it means to temporalise the ocean and how such temporalisation of seascapes could be materialised, I developed my argument by illustrating how material legacies are used by different groups of actors to write mutually exclusive histories of the sea, especially when China's and Southeast Asia's maritime pasts overlap (see Sen 2023; Winter 2019). It was critical heritage and museum studies (Clifford 1988; Smith 2006; Karp et al., 2006) that first brought attention to the need to recognise local communities and their claims to heritage. This position was eventually adopted by international organisations such as UNESCO (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) and ICOM (International Council of Museums), which started to emphasise the role of local communities in connection with museums, and those museums' commitment to promote and protect their cultural heritage. While this trend also exists in China, the 'local' usually takes the form of 'private' initiatives that drive heritage projects. The majority of these private heritage projects have links to art museums that are seen as less controversial, but there are exceptions such as the Red Age Museum narrating the history of the Cultural Revolution through the object of daily use (Rowlands, Feuchtwang, and Zhang 2019; see also Evans and Rowlands 2015; Catching 2019; Evans and Rowlands 2021). Different approaches in critical heritage studies show that these 'bottom up' initiatives that blur the boundaries between private, civil and state sectors – and thus the binary between state and society – have arisen not as a modernising vision to legitimise national authority but as 'rooted in identification with local community, and linking past and future' (Evans and Rowlands 2015, 282). These studies, therefore, demonstrate the emergence of a different kind of museology in China: with 'private' heritage initiatives on behalf of individuals and groups encouraged or at least tolerated by the state authorities through investments that link heritage tourism to development.

Nevertheless, I argue that when a particular vision of national history is at stake, the central state authorities would subsume 'private' heritage initiatives under the wider, sanitised narration of Chinese maritime civilisation that requires a different relation to the past and its extraction from the localities that only partly inscribe their heritage into these universalised visions. Therefore, the three museums with different ownership discussed in this article illustrate different processes of heritagisation and musealisation from those described in critical heritages studies of China, which emphasise the recent emergence of the new local conceptions and practices of heritage that take shape as private museum projects (Catching 2019; Evans and Rowlands 2015, 2021; Rowlands, Feuchtwang, and Zhang 2019; Wang and Rowlands 2017). These private initiatives are often authorised by state authorities and connected with domestic and international cultural tourism. As in other parts of China, in Tanmen, entrepreneurs, fishing companies, local authorities responded to the state call to transform local heritage of 'fishing village nostalgic culture' (Zhu, Liu, and Li 2020) into a new source of income. These took the form of the giant clamshell industry with their private museums offshoots in Tanmen, narrating local fishing histories and fishers' recent activities in the SCS. While local residents supported nationalistic rhetoric in China, not all of them were keen to give away their historical artefacts – such as logbooks – to the state museum and

materially support the territorial claims by exhibiting seafaring objects. The people of Tanmen saw these objects as belonging to their families and community rather than to the state.

Yet, this was not the only proprietary tension that arose between the heritage vision of the central state and that shared by the community and local authorities. While in the most literal sense, the extraction of fossilised giant clamshells from the disputed reefs of the SCS facilitated China's construction of artificial islands, in the long run the display of giant clamshell artwork in local museums and galleries turned out to be embarrassing for China, which in 2016 was found guilty by the Tribunal at the Hague for environmentally degrading the corals in the Paracels, Spratlys and Scarborough Shoal.¹³ As a result, Tanmen's family and 'private' museums linked with the giant clamshell industry but also with the local government vanished during the official crackdown on the sale of raw and processed giant clamshells in early 2017. In their place, the state-sponsored museum project materialised with its exhibitions narrating the SCS natural ecology and China's protection of the environment, underwater cultural heritage, and East-West cultural and material exchanges along the Maritime Silk Road.

Taking a closer look at the appropriation of local seafaring traditions as the 'maritime heritage' of China, the state museum project reveals the conflicting and contradictory claims made by fishers, local authorities and the central state regarding the use, representation and ownership of the long-term utilisation of the sea in terms of heritage. Therefore, on an empirical level, I argue that heritagising seafaring traditions in the SCS – understood here as a form of appropriation – serves not only proprietary claims for particular groups on behalf their locality, but also the territorial claims of the state. Here, by 'proprietary claims' I mean that certain cultural practices could be treated by community members and outsiders, who have a stake in those practices, as property that can be owned and defined as 'heritage' (Salemink 2013; Smith 2006). Territorial claims, however, imply that these cultural practices must be temporalised and sanitised in a particular way to fit into a wider national and political frame that is both past- and future-oriented. Preoccupied with the country's global image as civilised, technologically advanced, and environmentally aware, Chinese leadership defines what constitutes seafaring legacy to boost such an image. Consequently, local residents' heritage claims could be appropriated and made to serve the grand narrative of China as maritime and ecological civilisation. Here 'ecological civilisation'

is part of the carefully crafted imaginary of China as a 'restored' maritime power and 'maritime civilisation' (Roszko 2019, 2023; The State Council Information Office of the Peoples' Republic of China 2015) and the SCS as 'the sea of ancestors' [祖宗海] protected and developed by generations of Chinese mariners (The CPC Committee of Qionghai Municipality 2013, 93). In the context of China's environmental law, maritime ecological civilisation denotes a new understanding of sustainability as a harmonious relation between 'humans' and the 'ocean' that the Chinese nation is continuously developing and improving for a 'peaceful and prosperous 21st Century Maritime Silk Road' (see Figure 5).¹⁴ The story of the giant clamshells' extraction and its environmental impact on the SCS thus shows a temporal and discursive shift when harvesting practices of Hainanese fishers were literally used to create land at sea and then became an object of environmental governmentality to protect marine biodiversity. At the same time, such protection and conservation of the sea has been historicised and spectacularised as maritime heritage.

Such re-writing of the past is a simultaneous projection of the ocean-based future that requires envisioning heritage in its voluminous and horizontal dimensions as both *marine* and *maritime*. Here, 'marine' stands for the organic life and inorganic materials and movements under the sea surface and extraction of resources *from* the sea, while 'maritime' describes 'sea-borne activities and practices (...) on the sea surface' (Roszko 2021, 312). In that sense, China historicises volumetric *marine* space to display its technological advances in underwater archaeology and archaeological findings or to mark the world's first successful extraction of methane hydrate from the SCS. At the same time, China literally and discursively constructs its *maritime* geographies to encompass reefs, islands and ancient trading routes as representation of its civilisational development that cuts through the past, present and the future.

Conclusion: The South China Sea as civilisational history

The ethnographic examples of three museums of the SCS illustrate that China's promotion of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road opened up new economic opportunities for fishers who began to respond by writing their own version of history that heritagised the harvest of fossilised giant clamshells from disputed reefs in the SCS. The experience of fishers also highlights my theoretical point that 'private' within the frame of 'local' was not necessarily divorced from 'public' or 'state', as is clear from the way Da Zhong, Ying Hui and An promoted their museums. In light of this, the fishers' accounts show that the categories of private and public or local and state are interconnected and rearranged in tactical engagements with the authoritative state and its representatives who are themselves embodied in local communities. Tanmen thus became a place where fishers imagined a wide variety of future possibilities for themselves and for tourists coming from the mainland. Crucially, President Xi Jinping's 2013 visit to Tanmen and the government's acknowledgement of fishers' role in safeguarding the SCS sovereignty against neighbouring countries led local people to increase self-awareness of their maritime heritage and of the fact that Tanmen is not just one of many Chinese fishing villages, but an important and strategic location on the New Silk Road passing through the SCS. The story of fossilised giant clamshells, therefore, illustrates the process of translation of the state authoritative temporalisation of the SCS as heritage by fishers for whom the processed shells – carved from the sea coral and turned into artwork – demonstrated their superb navigational skills and knowledge of the sea in its maritime and marine dimensions.

Yet, the state vision of maritime ecological civilisation demanded a different foregrounding of oceanic geographies from the way Tanmen residents imagined. In that sense, the state-sponsored National South China Sea Museum represents a 'top down' interpretation of local heritage. Its construction, design and historical narrative provide a powerful example that the Chinese state might choose to change the cultural landscape and exert new policies on local communities in line with its geopolitical rather than moral or ideological considerations. What emerged in the process was as a form of temporal enclosure that projected the SCS as a 'space without human history' before it was discovered, cultivated and protected by Chinese civilisation. Fishers themselves were turned into objects of others' gaze in both the museum exhibition and in real life (Kirshenblatt- Gimblett 1998, 55) in a way that evolved and homogenised to display 'Chinese essence' – centred now on the sea. The National South China Sea Museum shows that writing a China-centric human history of the sea is not only about projecting the present concepts, such as 'administration', 'jurisdiction', 'maritime borders' or the 'Maritime Silk Road' into the past but also to envision these terms as future-oriented claims that consider all dimensional and material aspects of the sea (see Kirshenblatt- Gimblett 1998, 65). Here, China's maritime heritage narrative assembles not only its success in recovering shipwrecks as part of the 'long history of oriental maritime civilisation' (东方海洋文明悠长的历史); but also ancient voyages, sea routes, and geographical naming by Chinese people as part of historical 'administration'; as well as present-time environmental protection and conservation, scientific expeditions to reefs, explorations of the seabed, or marine surveillance as part of China's jurisdictional establishments and its efforts to 'properly' manage the SCS disputes.

Maritime heritage, therefore, became a tool in which new forms of claims and appropriations were devised and normalised through the construction of China's modernity and of the primitivity of others. Dislocating the SCS from 'subaltern' histories of Hainanese, Việt, Bugis, Cham, Arab, Persian, and others and re-locating the sea in the centre of Chinese civilisation, Tanmen fishers were portrayed as simultaneously exotic and familiar as their proprietary or customary rights to the SCS have been transferred to the 'nation'. To paraphrase Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998, 65), China's possession of 'fishing folk culture' celebrated in the National Museum of the South China Sea not only lays claims to maritime sovereignty, but itself is a mark of being civilised and ecologically aware. In this carefully devised national narrative, the ancient *Geng Lu Bu* has been replaced with modern navigation and communication systems, whereas 'illegal mining, fishing and trading of giant clams, coral, green turtles, hawksbill turtles and other cherished species' [非法采挖、捕捞、交易砗磲、珊瑚、绿海龟、玳瑁等珍惜物种的行

为] were eradicated by government crackdowns to ‘vigorously improve the marine environmental health’ [大力整治海洋环境卫生].¹⁵ Oscillating between past and future, the temporalisation of the sea encapsulates fishers who became ‘representations of themselves’ in an alienated appearance of reality (Kirshenblatt-Gimblet (1998, 151). In that sense, maritime heritage is an enclosure dissecting the sea not only into various national spaces, but above all, into temporally and spatially legitimised *practices* both on and under its surface. Such a compartmentalised aquatic environment becomes the bounded site of civilisational history and exclusivist territorial priorities rather than one of plural transoceanic identities.

Notes

1. All names of informants are pseudonyms.
2. ‘Sovereignty Declaration taking shape’, http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-07/12/content_26051484.htm
3. The South China Sea Arbitration (The Republic of Philippines v. The People’s Republic of China), PCA Case No. 2013–19, Award of 12 July 2016, para. 965. Available at: <https://www.pcacases.com/web/view/7> (Accessed April 21, 2023).
4. The South China Sea Arbitration (The Republic of Philippines v. The People’s Republic of China), PCA Case No. 2013–19, Award of 12 July 2016, para. 965. Available at: <https://www.pcacases.com/web/view/7> (Accessed April 21, 2023).
5. Xi Jinping Presides over Ecocide in the South China Sea, <https://victorrobertlee.medium.com/xi-jinping-presides-over-ecocide-in-the-south-china-sea-b3830d7afd67> (Accessed April 18, 2023).
6. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-36545565> (Accessed April 4, 2023).
7. ‘China Museum Of The South China Sea/Architectural Design Research Institute of SCUT’. Available at: <https://www.archdaily.com/928029/the-south-china-sea-museum-architectural-design-research-institute-of-scut> (accessed April 4, 2023).
8. The South China Sea Arbitration (The Republic of Philippines v. The People’s Republic of China), PCA Case No. 2013–19, Award of 12 July 2016, para. 965. Available at: <https://www.pcacases.com/web/view/7> (Accessed April 21, 2023).
9. Online Exhibition of the National Museum of the South China Sea available <http://www.nanhaimuseum.org/411899/418246/index.html> (Accessed March 3, 2023)
10. Exhibition’s photo and fieldnotes, November 2019.
11. Exhibition’s photos and fieldnotes, November 2019.
12. Fieldnotes, November 2019.
13. The South China Sea Arbitration (The Republic of Philippines v. The People’s Republic of China), PCA Case No. 2013–19, Award of 12 July 2016, para. 922. Available at: <https://www.pcacases.com/web/view/7> (accessed 9 March 2023).
14. ‘The Vision for Maritime Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative’. Available at: http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/publications/2017/06/20/content_281475691873460.htm. See also (Fabinyi et al. 2021; Li and Shapiro 2020; Roszko 2023).
15. National Museum of the South China Sea, Exhibition’s photos and fieldnotes, November 2019.

Acknowledgements

In researching and writing this article I have received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant agreement No. 802223). I am very grateful to anonymous reviewers for their supportive and insightful comments.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

This work was supported by the European Research Council [802223].

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