

# Fishermen and the Sea: Construction of a Peaceful Marine Space and a Harmonious Marine Society in Northeast Asia

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**Abstract:** The long-term friendly interaction in the East Asian waters has formed a “community” of regional politics, economy, and culture, providing many achievements and possibilities for constructing a peaceful marine space and a harmonious marine society in Northeast Asia. Relying on sea as the medium and exerting the power of fishermen community provide an important foundation and guarantee for constructing Northeast Asian marine humanistic network, which is also the “civilization mission” that Northeast Asian fishermen should undertake. The natural linkage of the sea, the convenience of geographical conditions, the integration, symbiosis and similarity of cultures, plus the common aspiration for security interests and economic development, provide opportunities for the construction of Northeast Asian marine humanistic networks with fishermen and the sea as a medium. Promoting the exchange and mutual learning of Northeast Asian fishermen via diverse forms, constructing an interactive system of fishermen community, and developing marine economic cooperation in the Northeast Asian coastal fishermen community are important ways to optimize and expand the Northeast Asian marine humanistic network.

## 1. Introduction

Throughout the development of the human world, historical processes are more often presented in the form of networks and movements. Asia as a whole does not have strict boundaries in history, but is a network society that is closely connected through trade and religion. Where, the formation of economic and social networks with Northeast Asia as the core exerts a profound impact on the dialogue and infusion of different civilizations and societies in the entire region. The reason why Northeast Asia creates a miracle of all-inclusive civilization continuity lies in its construction of cross-sea politics via linkage of the sea, its maritime economic and trade, maritime personnel exchanges, cultural integration at home and abroad, exchanges and mutual learning. In this way, not only multi-structure connotation of humanities is developed in the local coastal and sea areas, but also a diversified Northeast Asian humanistic network connecting the overseas world is constructed by virtue of natural mobility of the sea as well as cross-ocean and cross-regional nature, which provides many achievements and possibilities for constructing a peaceful marine space and a harmonious marine society in Northeast Asia.

In the history of Northeast Asia, there has been a marine network with fishermen as the main body for a long time. The Pacific Rim provides a traditional fishing ground for Northeast Asian fishermen to engage in fishery production and life. The fishermen community with different national and cultural backgrounds has detailed modes of operation, shares the same sea area and marine resources within it, and frequently exchanges and interacts with each other in various forms and contents, thus forming a Northeast Asian humanistic network with multiple elements such as maritime transportation network, production and trade network, immigration network, cultural network, religious network. In this way, Northeast Asia is shaped as a closely connected whole. The fishermen have created enormous economic and social value, adding a heavy touch to the long-term exchange history of Northeast Asian countries. Therefore, relying on the sea as the medium and exerting the power of the fishermen group that best reflects the livelihood and public opinion of the coastal communities provide an important foundation and guarantee for constructing Northeast Asian marine humanistic network, which is also the “civilization mission” that Northeast Asian fishermen should undertake.

In recent years, although there have been many relevant studies on the historical construction of Northeast Asian humanistic network, due to limitations of the research from the perspective of national state, many existing Asian studies view geography as a constant geographical boundary, thus obscuring the regional interaction and exchange between China and other Northeast Asian countries in long history. Moreover, researches mainly focus on inspection and demonstration of relics and literature, and there is little detailed description and in-depth research on the bottom groups, especially fishermen group flowing across the sea. In this way, the marine subjective status of fishermen group and their role in the construction and maintenance of Northeast Asian humanistic network are ignored. This is one reason why the author starts this study.

## **2. Historical perspective of traditional northeast Asian marine humanistic network**

### **2.1 The formation of marine ports and routes around the “East Asian Mediterranean” as well as the northeast Asian marine humanistic network**

The eastern coastal area of China features a long coastline and many excellent harbors. Coastal residents have started fishing, solar salt production since a long time ago, who use canoes for offshore navigation. As early as the pre-Qin period of Shang and Zhou Dynasties, the route from the Shandong peninsula to the Korean peninsula and the Japanese archipelago has been opened. Its shipbuilding and navigation technology have long led the world. The early route of the East China Sea started from the Shandong Peninsula. During the Warring States period, the route departed from the Shandong Peninsula, passed through Miaodao Islands and Liaodong Peninsula and then arrived at the Korean Peninsula. Navigation along the northeast of the Korean Peninsula led to coastal and island areas in northeastern China, while navigation to the southwest led to the Japanese archipelago. However, due to the backward shipbuilding and navigation technology, most navigation at this time “followed the coast” and resorted to offshore geographical signs for guidance. With the increasing frequency of navigation activities, a large number of ports appeared along the coast. By the Warring States Period, five ancient ports of Jieshi (now Qinhuangdao), Zhuanfu (now Yantai), Langya (now Qingdao Jiaozhou area), Kuaiji (now Shaoxing) and Juzhang (now Ningbo) have appeared from north to south, initially linking the Korean peninsula, the Japanese archipelago and the East China Sea. With it, two ocean-going routes to the Japanese archipelago with Korean peninsula as an intermediary were opened: one route departed from coastal areas of Gyeongsang, North Korea and reached Sanin, Hokuriku, etc. in Honshu, Japan by taking advantage of left-handed circulation of Japan; the other route started from the southern part of the Korean peninsula and directly arrived at Kitakyushu, Japan through Tsushima. [1] During the Sui and Tang Dynasties, many sea routes across the Yellow Sea, Bohai Sea and East China Sea appeared between China and North Korea, Japan [2]. After the Tang and Song Dynasties, with the southward shift of economic center of gravity, Quanzhou Port and Ningbo Port on the southeast coast rose up in Song and Yuan Dynasties, becoming ports where Chinese and foreign maritime merchants gathered. The Song and Yuan Dynasties government also set up Bureau for Foreign Shipping to manage overseas trade [3]. Since the early Ming Dynasty, the route from Fuzhou Port to Ryukyu has been basically mature, so Ryukyu developed close contacts with China through frequent navigations. Since then, a complete navigation network has been formed, covering ports from north to south, Korean Peninsula, Japanese archipelago, and Ryukyu Islands and playing a steady role.

### **2.2 Political, economic and cultural exchanges within the eastern Asian marine humanistic network**

Routes and ports have woven the ancient East Asian maritime transportation network. This transportation network is both a trade network and a marine humanistic channel, which plays an important role in the exchanges between neighboring countries and nations, and also promotes economic and cultural development of each country. The Northeast Asian Marine Humanistic Network not only promotes material and cultural exchanges in Northeast Asia, but also carries the important mission of spiritual culture and humanistic exchanges.

People's main purpose of navigation is to carry people and goods. The former is mainly to carry out political and cultural exchanges, while the latter is mainly to carry out economic and trade, and ocean provides an important channel for economic and trade exchanges. From navigation along the coast in the pre-Qin period, to the gradual development of navigation and maritime trade in the Qin, Han, Sui and Tang Dynasties, and then to the maritime political and economic activities in the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties, the East Asian waters have been an important area with very frequent marine activities. With the advancement of navigation technology, there are more East Asian sea routes, and personnel exchanges, economic, political, and cultural activities have become more frequent. As early as the period of the Qi Kingdom, there were legends of alchemists and gods along the coast of Qi, and the legend of "Three Gods at Sea" was widely circulated. During the Qin and Han Dynasties, with the support of central unified country, First Emperor of Qin and Emperor Wu visited the sea frontier many times. A series of large-scale maritime activities like Xu Fu's eastward sea voyage marked the official opening of large-scale navigation business in the East China Sea. During the period of Emperor Guangwu of the Eastern Han Dynasty, in the second year of Jianwu middle era (Year 57), "King of Japanese pirates dispatched an envoy to present gift" [4], which is the first record of official Sino-Japanese exchanges in Chinese history books. In terms of government-level exchanges, a large number of tribute envoys and diplomatic envoys appeared. In the Northern Song Dynasty, Xu Jing traveled Korea under the order of Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty, who wrote the "Map and Record of Envoy's Visit to Korea", which provided a very detailed record of route to Korea and navigation technology. Moreover, it offers a very detailed record of influences of Song Dynasty tea culture in Korea, social, political, economic and cultural circumstances of Korea, reflecting the grand occasion of cultural exchanges between China and North Korea.

Regardless of people or goods, navigation personnel actually had no regard of life or death. Such fearless spirit is also one of the traditional marine humanistic spirits. It is precisely under the support of this spirit that East Asia achieved fruitful results in marine humanities and spiritual and cultural exchanges: the imperial examination system was introduced into the Korean Peninsula, becoming the main system for the education, training and selection of talents in Korea and Lee's Korea, which greatly promoted Korean Peninsula's culture and education development. During the Tang and Song Dynasties, a large number of overseas students and scholarly monks came to China, and a large number of Chinese monks traveled to Japan and North Korea, which promoted the spread of religion, literature, and art in East Asia. The envoys and overseas students traveling to China carried a large number of Chinese books and records of laws and decrees at their return, which virtually affected the political systems of the countries of Japanese archipelago and Korean peninsula. As maritime activities became more frequent, shipwrecks in the East Asian seas were still relatively frequent despite the advancement in navigation technology. In this regard, all countries in East Asia have strengthened rescue, compensation and repatriation measures for drifting refugees, gradually forming a relatively complete rescue mechanism for drifting refugees. All these invariably embody the marine humanistic spirit of "harmony", "tolerance", "openness" and "benevolence", and promote the formation of East Asian "community"-based spiritual bond with "harmony" as the core concept.

The traditional East Asian material exchanges are mainly reflected in tribute trade and private trade. Tribute trade under the "tribute-diplomatic" system is the most traditional and basic trade form in East Asia. Different from the traditional view that political purpose outweighed economic purpose in tribute trade, tribute trade brought very considerable economic profit. Regardless of trade scale and trade frequency, tribute trade played a huge role in East Asian material exchanges. Corresponding to tribute trade, private maritime business activities represent a form of trade spontaneously organized by coastal private merchants. Although such trade has always been strictly controlled by the government, it has always been the main form of East Asian marine trade. With it, a large amount of Chinese silk, tea, porcelain and other handicraft products were continuously transported to North Korea and Japan. The trade development has greatly enriched East Asian people's material life, and also enhanced friendly exchanges between the people of East Asia.

### **3. Opportunities for constructing the northeast Asian marine humanistic network using fishermen and the sea as the medium**

#### **3.1 Convenient geographic conditions and natural linkage of the sea**

The natural mobility of the sea and the neighboring geographical relationship or separation by a narrow strip of water have created natural needs and conditions for the construction of a peaceful and harmonious sea in Northeast Asia. Position in the entire Asia-Pacific rim, the long coastline, excessive islands and peninsulas have fostered rich fishery resources, diverse marine industries and splendid marine culture in Northeast Asian countries. Throughout the thousands' years of history, the sea has formed a marine transportation network in Northeast Asia with its natural mobility and cross-ocean and cross-regional nature, thereby promoting the establishment of official political and cultural relations as well as private interactive development in Northeast Asia. Fishermen "share" a sea of peace, engaged in fishing, solar salt production freely and enjoying frequent humanistic exchanges. In recent years, based on similarity in ecological environment and fish resources within the common sea area, the coastal countries of Northeast Asia with China, Japan and South Korea as the core have jointly developed the sea area through shared fishery administration planning, carrying out fishermen exchanges and fishery development cooperation. Moreover, with reference to advanced fishery administration experience [5], fishermen's cooperative organizations are set up to build multilateral cooperation platforms. Under the linkage of the sea, both "sharing" between ancient fishermen and "cooperation and exchange" in modern times have laid the foundation for communication and interaction between fishermen in Northeast Asia, creating natural needs and conditions for marine humanistic network exchange in Northeast Asia.

#### **3.2 Profound historical humanistic origin and cultural similarity**

Cultural identity and exchange based on the "East Asian Cultural Circle" have brought strong radiant force, exchange volume and interactive effect to the Northeast Asian marine humanistic network. The ancient Chinese nation formed a "cultural network" through cross-sea links and areas surrounding the China Sea, including the Korean Peninsula, the Japanese archipelago, the Ryukyu Islands, and Southeast Asia [6], which enabled extensive spread and radiation of "harmony"-centered Confucian, promoted the social and cultural development of these countries, and jointly created brilliant East Asian civilization. For coastal countries, there are ships due to the sea, so mutual communication, exchanges and migration between the offshore and then far sea areas are possible, which brings radiation and communication between heterogeneous cultures in terms of spirit, material, speech art and social systems, results in cultural infusion and symbiosis and therefore cultural identity. In the process, marine culture plays a considerable role. The ancient China's marine culture, such as marine knowledge, navigation experience, marine business experience, and marine belief is spread, inherited and expanded to other Northeast Asian countries and then gradually localized, forming local basic understanding (ocean currents, monsoon, fish school trend, etc.) towards the sea. They use natural laws in fishery activities, show respect to natural laws, but still share deep origins and similar appeals in marine cultural activities such as sea god beliefs, sacrifices and customs [7]. Many similarities are shown in marine folk customs, beliefs, life customs, etc. For example, believing in Mazu and Dragon King, they would perform a grand sacrificial ceremony before going to sea. For Northeast Asian fishermen, these fishing cultures playing a pivotal role in marine culture have formed a cultural identity among them that deepens their marine civilization and concept. Therefore, there is stronger connotation of integration formed in multiple interactions with overseas heterogeneous cultures, thus consolidating the folk foundation for the construction of Northeast Asian marine humanistic network.

#### **3.3 Common aspiration for marine security interests and marine economic development.**

Economic globalization and regional integration make it difficult for a country's marine development to "detach itself from the world", and it is imperative to create peaceful and harmonious marine society through cooperation. Peace and harmony are the eternal themes of Northeast Asian waters. In particular, under the current rampant global expansion of the West,

establishment of marine development community has become the general trend and public appeal of Northeast Asian countries. Northeast Asian countries have carried out deep cooperation in marine economic development, marine environment governance, and protection of historical and cultural heritage. However, there is little communication and exchange between fisheries and fishermen, leaving much room for the construction of humanistic network. The sea is a unified whole, so the development of fishermen's livelihood and public opinion is not restricted to one domain or one place. To build a new type of Northeast Asian fishermen's cooperative body with spirits of win-win cooperation, joint construction and sharing is a wise choice for a country to guarantee people's livelihood and develop marine business, which is also Northeast Asian people's common expectation and identity towards a peaceful marine space and a harmonious marine society in Northeast Asia.

#### **4. Ways to build northeast Asian marine humanistic network using fishermen and the sea as a medium**

The natural linkage of the sea, the convenience of geographical conditions, the integration, symbiosis and similarity of cultures, plus the common aspiration for security interests and economic development, provide good opportunities for the construction of Northeast Asian marine humanistic network. Under such a context, what is fundamental is to make full use of collective force of the Northeast Asian fishermen community via linkage of the sea to build a peaceful marine space and a harmonious marine society in Northeast Asia, thus optimizing and expanding the Northeast Asian marine humanistic network.

##### **4.1 Establish a non-governmental organization for northeast Asian fishermen cooperation, use fishermen to increase trust among people, and improve the non-governmental exchange mechanism in northeast Asia.**

The construction of folk trust is the utmost important to development of national trust. The construction of a peaceful marine space and a harmonious marine society in Northeast Asia depends not only on the formulation and implementation of national policies, but more importantly, on the deepening mutual cognition and understanding between people of all countries, so that people "increase trust and dispel misgivings in unification". Therefore, first of all, Northeast Asian fishermen should understand the existence of diverse and common cultures. The word "harmony" is the core. The government should play an active guiding role in promoting fishermen's cognition towards it, and direct fishermen to love and cherish their own nationalities. At the same time, they should respect, accept and understand the excellent culture of other nations, blend with heterogeneous cultures, learn from excellent culture, thus achieving cultural reciprocity and mutual prosperity, ultimately developing rational appeals for multicultural identity towards equality, stability and harmony. Such cultural identity towards "harmony" is the fundamental prerequisite for building folk trust among Northeast Asian fishermen.

Secondly, Northeast Asian fishermen's cooperation is indispensable. It is necessary to establish non-governmental organizations for fishery cooperation, view fishery management and the development and protection of Northeast Asian people's livelihood and public opinion from a developmental perspective, jointly undertake responsibilities and face difficulties in building a peaceful and harmonious sea area. Non-governmental organizations in fishery cooperation can incorporate Northeast Asian fishermen groups living on the sea into a big organizational environment, so that more exchange opportunities are created, and non-repetitive information and resources are accessible. Like an extremely rich data package, such information and resources simplify the communication process and break the geographical restrictions, so that Northeast Asian fishermen can save time and effort in direct communication and exchanges with external organizations, thus building new trust over a big span.

Finally, in addition to establishing Northeast Asian fishermen's cooperation organization, it is necessary to carry out diversified exchanges and interactions among Northeast Asian fishermen. Not only modern high-tech media like Internet, multimedia, mobile platforms can be utilized for online exchange and communication, but also off-line face-to-face exchange and learning should be valued.

Through personnel exchange, co-cultivation of talents, and joint development of research, Northeast Asian fishermen can conduct exchanges and mutual learning activities like in-depth experience, learning, training, thus enhancing sincere interest and emotional connections among them, adding a solid stroke to the construction of Northeast Asian marine humanistic network.

**4.2 With the help of the common origin, identity and integration of marine culture, jointly promote the exchange and mutual learning of northeast Asian fishermen in terms of inheritance of marine folk customs, development of marine culture, and protection of marine cultural heritage, build coastal communities, especially community interaction system among fishermen.**

The sea world connects all parts of Northeast Asia through the sea. For fishermen at the grassroots level, they share basic knowledge about the sea (such as ocean currents, monsoons, fish school trends, etc.) [8], showing many similarities in folk beliefs, joint sea operation, division of labor, life customs and other lifestyles. In addition to the ecological knowledge of living on the sea, the integration, inheritance and cooperation of diverse marine cultures play an active role in formation of these similarities [9]. From the current point of view, the connotation of Chinese marine culture is mostly concentrated on the exchange and spread of marine culture, fishery culture, marine folk beliefs and folk customs [10]. Japanese marine culture focuses more on sea people as the main body of marine culture and their marine life, such as fishery technology, belief inheritance, fishermen, etc. Korean marine culture is more vibrant in island-centered folk culture, beliefs, cultural ecology, fishery, etc. It can be seen that fishermen and fisheries are areas of common concern and importance for the major coastal countries in Northeast Asia, and the fishermen community has carried out considerable exchanges and communications in the context of common Northeast Asian marine culture. In view of this, we should get rid of constraints in historical view of a single country, build a community interaction system among Northeast Asian fishermen, proceed from the perspective of regional development of the entire Northeast Asia, think more broadly about exchanges between Northeast Asian fishermen communities with the help of origin and commonality in marine culture, conduct exchange and mutual learning among the Northeast Asian fishermen in terms of inheritance and protection of marine folk customs and beliefs, joint development and enrichment of marine culture, excavation and protection of marine cultural heritage, etc. give play to the role of fishermen group in developing marine culture as the strongest folk force, thus providing soft power association and guarantee for marine culture and emotional connection in the construction of peaceful marine space and harmonious marine society in Northeast Asia.

**4.3 With the help of natural and economic conditions, carry out marine economic cooperation among the coastal fishermen communities in northeast Asia, achieve joint development and utilization of sea areas through shared fishery administration planning, cooperatively develop a new type of marine economy, realize the transformation and upgrading of fishermen and fishing villages**

On the one hand, in Northeast Asia, although the fishery agreements between China and Japan, South Korea have caused large-scale loss of traditional Chinese fishing grounds to a certain extent and increased ecological bearing pressure of offshore fishing ground resources, it has also won short opportunity for fishery structural adjustment and fishermen's switch to other production in China, and makes China develop professional ocean-going fleets which improves ocean-going fishing capabilities. Moreover, it promotes the transformation of fishermen from marine fishing to marine aquaculture and aquatic product processing. What's most important is that, the recent vigorous development of leisure fisheries has brought about the development of a new type of fishery economy and realized the transformation and upgrading of traditional fishing villages and fishermen. On the other hand, the three Northeast Asian coastal countries with China, Japan and South Korea as the core have similar fishery operation structure and fishery resource base. Although there is fierce fishery competition, in the long-term development of fisheries, the governments and people have properly handled contradictions in the development and utilization of fishery resources based on the fishery resource development principles of mutual understanding, common utilization and friendly

cooperation [11].

Therefore, in view of the above conditions and status quo, the Northeast Asian coastal countries should build a multi-national fishery co-administration system based on bilateral fishery administration system and organizational framework, and carry out marine fishery economic cooperation among Northeast Asian coastal fishermen communities. For example, Japan and South Korea have increasingly mature and perfect fishery policies, but have not yet formed unified statistical standards and corresponding mature administration policies for new marine fishery economy. On the other hand, China can absorb and learn from their fishery administration experience while providing fishermen of other countries with ideas of new-type fishery economic development. Through the exchange and cooperation of coastal fishermen communities, it is possible to establish recreational fishery development models with different levels, different modes, and complementary advantages, such as fishery leisure base, marine park, leisure fishing center, fisherman's family, fishery production experience park, etc. thus achieving diversified life guarantee for the fishermen community as well as transformation and upgrading of fishery economy, providing hard power association and guarantee for marine fishery economy in the construction of peaceful marine space and harmonious marine society in Northeast Asia.

## 5. Conclusion

To build the sea on which we depend for survival and development into "peaceful and harmonious" sea, there is no doubt that we must rely on and give full play to individual's subjective strength, develop Northeast Asian marine humanistic social network, and release humanistic power. This is a strategic means to build a peaceful marine space and a harmonious marine society in Northeast Asia, and also a strategic purpose. Giving play to the role of fishermen community as creative and participating subjects is a basic foothold in the construction of Northeast Asian marine humanistic network, which can best reflect social harmony, fairness and justice of a country and region, and can best reflect the essence and current situation of aspirations in people's livelihood, thus deserving to be well valued, protected and developed. Fishermen constitute basic force in the construction of harmonious and peaceful ocean in Northeast Asia, who will forcefully promote the construction of a truly beautiful marine world.

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