

New horizon set for underwater relics

Updated rule to help better protect cultural artifacts

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Earlier this month, the archaeological excavation of a shipwreck known as *Changjiangkou No 2* began off the coast of Shanghai. Work on the wreck — the largest found so far in China, with the most artifacts — is widely expected to mark another milestone in the country's underwater archaeology. It will be the first large-scale shipwreck to be managed under updated regulations overseeing the protection and supervision of underwater artifacts. Officially approved by the State Council, China's Cabinet, on Feb 28, they take effect on April 1 and are designed to better manage protection of artifacts and curb crimes involving them in Chinese waters.

"It's a milestone in China's legal cultural heritage protection system," Jiang Bo, director of the Center of Maritime Archaeology at Shandong University, told China Daily. "Our understanding of underwater artifacts has been clarified. The country now has more rigid and sound regulations on archaeological research and underwater excavation."

The law extends to all artifacts predating 1911 — the end of the Chinese monarchy — in national waters, as well those related to significant historic events that occurred after. It also applies to relics of Chinese origin in international waters.

Additionally, the functions and responsibilities of government departments in charge of maintaining cultural heritage, public security and maritime safety are clearly defined.

"The law creates protection zones for underwater artifacts," said Cui Yong, a researcher at the Guangdong Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology. "It'll offer practical guidance for such work in China."

Cui said that fishing often hinders research at key underwater sites, but once the protection zones are established, this will end and artifacts can be better protected.

Archaeological excavations must now also be conducted before the construction of any underwater infrastructure, and for the first time, this has legal support and detailed protocols.

"Projects will provide us with more opportunities to excavate," Cui said. "We don't have the people or the money to conduct comprehensive archaeological surveys of all Chinese waters. However, new projects will now trigger excavations, which they must pay for, a cost that is trivial compared to the investment for infrastructure."

Nanhai One, a Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279) shipwreck discovered in 1987 off the coast of Yangjiang, Guangdong province, marked the beginning of underwater archaeology in the country. The fully loaded cargo vessel was carrying porcelain, iron and other commodities.

Over the past few decades, underwater excavations have revealed a great deal of information about trading along the ancient Maritime Silk Road, particularly after *Nanhai One* was salvaged in 2007 for follow-up examination.

According to Jiang, who is a veteran underwater archaeologist



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and member of the expert panel in charge of revising the regulations, *Nanhai One* led to the establishment of the first rules on underwater artifacts in 1989.

"In the 1980s, Western treasure hunters swarmed the South China Sea and went on massive expeditions at ancient shipwrecks," he said. "Many precious cultural relics, particularly exquisite porcelains, were salvaged and appeared in overseas auctions. That was painful and forced us to accelerate our research and draft a national rule protecting maritime relics."

Many positive changes have occurred in the past 30-odd years. The need to safeguard underwater finds has become international consensus, especially since the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage was ratified in 2001.

Nevertheless, Jiang said that updated regulations were urgently needed as the maritime economy

continues its rapid development, making protection more difficult.

"The old rules established a series of general principles," he said. "But the new version has quantified regulations, and that makes it more practical and scientific."

For example, once an artifact-related situation is reported, protection workers must arrive on site within 24 hours and draft a solution within seven days.

Despite having only existed for a little over three decades, China's underwater archaeological research programs have resulted in a number of achievements. Besides *Nanhai One*, research of ironclad battleships sunk in Liaoning province during the first Sino-Japanese War (1894-95), also known as the Jiawu War, and the establishment of the Baiheliang underwater museum in Chongqing, home to a hydrometric station dating to the Tang Dynasty (618-907), are among the most notable.

The past few years have also seen closer cooperation between Chinese underwater archaeologists and their overseas counterparts, particularly in countries along the ancient Maritime Silk Road.

"Given China's increasing global influence in underwater archaeology, the new rules echo the spirit of international conventions," Jiang said.

Offering specific guidance on joint cross-border archaeology, Jiang said the law also emphasizes that projects should be carried out for the pursuit of knowledge, not monetary gain.

"The possibility for treasure hunting and commercial salvage operations is ruled out in cooperative efforts," he said. "Only licensed archaeological institutions can conduct research."

According to a statement jointly released by the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Culture and Tour-

ism and the National Cultural Heritage Administration, more research centers for underwater archaeology will be set up, and nationwide campaigns on artifact crimes will be launched.

Archaeologists are not the only ones responsible for underwater heritage protection. The law notes that, "All individuals and organizations have an obligation to protect underwater relics in accordance with law."

Zhou Gangzhi, a law professor at Central South University in Changsha, Hunan province, said it should also help inject the need to protect underwater relics into public consciousness, referring to a series of clauses focused on the exhibition and use of artifacts.

"The whole of society needs to help," he said. "By better demonstrating the significance of relics through education, we can deepen our understanding of traditional Chinese culture."

Policy Digest

Airport cluster planned for Chengdu, Chongqing

China will accelerate the construction of a world-class airport cluster for the development of the Chengdu-Chongqing Economic Circle, the Civil Aviation Administration of China said in a guideline published on March 16.

By 2025, the cluster will consist of 12 airports able to handle 210 million passengers and 3.7 million metric tons of cargo on about 1.5 million flights annually.

The Chengdu-Chongqing Economic Circle is one of the nation's most important regional development projects, along with others such as the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, the Yangtze River Delta and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

By 2035, a safe, convenient, intelligent, green and highly efficient airport cluster will be fully established, boosting the economic development of the Chengdu-Chongqing Economic Circle, the guideline said.

Some small businesses to get three-year tax cut

The Ministry of Finance and the State Taxation Administration have announced new tax cuts for the country's low-profit small businesses for three years to further support their development.

From Jan 1, 2022 to Dec 31, 2024, businesses earning between 1 million yuan (\$158,000) and 3 million yuan will only be taxed on 25 percent of their earnings at a rate of 20 percent, according to a notice published on Friday.

The businesses in question refer to legitimate enterprises with annual taxable incomes of under 3 million yuan, no more than 300 employees and total assets of under 50 million yuan.

Family doctor services to cover more people

The Chinese authorities plan to expand family doctor services to more than 75 percent of the population by 2035, according to a guideline jointly issued on March 15 by the National Health Commission in conjunction with five other departments.

The guideline is part of an effort to implement the Outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) for National Economic and Social Development and the Long-Range Objectives Through the Year 2035.

The government will work to raise the percentage of people registered with family doctors by 1 to 3 percent every year from 2022 so that a healthcare system with family doctors as gatekeepers will gradually be set up.

By 2035, family doctors are expected to serve about 85 percent of priority patients, including the elderly, pregnant women, children, people with disabilities, people with chronic diseases and people with mental illnesses.

Family doctors can be general practitioners, clinicians, village doctors or even retired clinicians.

They will provide services ranging from health assessments to psychological counseling to registered residents through a variety of means including face-to-face consultations, phone calls, social media and professional communication systems.

Fees will be jointly covered by patients, China's medical insurance scheme and government expenditures on public medical services, according to the guideline.

MO JINGXI-XINHUA

Policy looks to better integrate heritage resources into China's education system

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Last month, a notice about making full use of cultural heritage resources in educating elementary and high school students was jointly released by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Ministry of Education and the National Cultural Heritage Administration.

The new policy requires the creation of cultural products and services specifically tailored to students, including properly orga-

nized study tours to historical sites and the provision of detailed books with plenty of pictures to help students better digest what they learn during visits to these heritage sites.

Liu Guoxiang, a researcher with the Institute of Archaeology at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said the move will help further integrate these resources into the national education system.

"Cultural heritage plays a crucial role in helping us objectively learn about Chinese history and

civilization and consolidating our cultural confidence. New archaeological discoveries and artifacts can add to what students have already learned from textbooks," he added.

"Only when they understand the value of our cultural heritage can they better protect and pass down these treasures."

Liu suggested that undergraduate, graduate and doctoral students of history and archaeology at university can also train to be volunteers and act as guides for younger

students on visits to cultural heritage sites.

He also emphasized the importance of easier supervised access to excavation sites so students can learn about the newest archaeological findings and feel the excitement experienced by archaeologists for themselves.

Tsinghua University Press has long been exploring ways to better promote traditional Chinese culture to youngsters.

It is the publisher of teaching materials for the Mogao Class, a

study tour launched by the Dunhuang Academy to help adults and youngsters develop a deeper appreciation of the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang city, Northwest China's Gansu province.

Ji Haihong, director of the culture and communication department, said the publishing house has incorporated elements from children's picture books into textbooks in an effort to spark greater interest.

As the mother of a 17-year-old attendee of the class, Ji found that

its teachers are all senior researchers specializing in arts or history. Their ability to engage students and their understanding of what sparked their interest motivated her to produce the teaching materials on the Grottoes.

She often takes her son on visits to historical attractions during holidays.

"Sometimes, he even seems to be more connected to these time-honored relics than me," she said. "And I find that his awareness of the need to preserve cultural heritage has been greatly enhanced."