

Iran, China strengthen cultural ties through museum collaboration



Hadi Mirzaei
XINHUA

IRNA – In a bid to enhance cultural diplomacy and deepen historical ties, Iran and China signed a comprehensive agreement to boost cooperation in the field of museums and cultural exchanges.

The agreement was formalized during a meeting between Hadi Mirzaei, the director general of the General Office of Museums in the Iranian Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, and China's Deputy Minister of Culture and Tourism Li Qun, who is also head of the National Cultural Heritage Administration.

The meeting facilitated discussions on fostering mutual understanding and collaboration in cultural heritage.

Mirzaei expressed gratitude for the efforts of Li Qun in organizing the event, emphasizing its significance in establishing a comprehensive collaboration between the two nations.

The agreement encompasses 24 joint projects aimed at promoting research, educational initiatives, and cultural exchanges to strengthen diplomatic ties, Mirzaei noted.

"The visit of our delegation to China aligns with Iran's cultural diplomacy policies and regional engagement strategies, promoting the ancient civilizations of the two nations," Mirzaei remarked.

Li Qun underscored the profound historical connections between Iran and China, dating back to thousands of years ago.

He highlighted the Silk Road as a historical route that not only facilitated trade but also fostered cultural exchange, leading to the development of unique artistic and technological achievements.

Li Qun further emphasized the importance of the upcoming museum delegation from Iran, set to visit China in January 2024.

He noted that the collaboration would focus on innovative digital museum displays, digital cultural products, and creative cultural methods within the museum sector. The expected exchange of ideas with Chinese experts is anticipated to enhance opportunities for the development of cultural organizations in both countries.

Moreover, Li Qun revealed that Iran has been designated as one of the four tourist destinations for Chinese travelers. He encouraged the Iranian delegation to witness the rich cultural and historical landmarks in Beijing and Chongqing, reflecting the longstanding friendship between the two ancient civilizations.

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FM urges Ancient Civilizations Forum to address Gaza crisis

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian called upon the Ancient Civilizations Forum to utilize its potential to halt the ongoing crisis in Gaza.

Speaking at the seventh edition of the forum, Amir-Abdollahian condemned the atrocities in Gaza and the West Bank as a "great disgrace" in human history.

Amir-Abdollahian urged the Ancient Civilizations Forum to condemn these crimes and use all available resources to address the critical situation, emphasizing the need for the establishment of a war crimes tribunal.

He listed one of the missions of ancient civilizations to fight the discourse of supremacy, dominance, exclusivity and racism, and emphasized that the world today continues to suffer from the effects of the discourse of domination and violence, instrumental use of international principles and norms, and double standards. He underscored the significance of the forum's role in fostering a more cultural and peaceful world, considering inter-civilizational cooperation as a crucial element of soft power for member states. The foreign minister criticized the silence of some nations regarding the prolonged occupation of Gaza, emphasizing the importance of holding the "fake Israeli regime" accountable for its actions.

He condemned the killing and displacement of over tens of thousands people in Gaza and the

destruction of Islamic cultural and civilizational monuments by Israel.

He also condemned the insulting of holy books and the Holy Qur'an, urging responsible governments to play their roles in maintaining civilized, cultural, and religious interactions.

Also present at the forum, Iran's Deputy Tourism Minister Ali Darabi highlighted Iran's rich cultural heritage, spanning over 7,000 years and being among the top 10 countries on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Darabi spoke about the symbolic representation of Iranian heritage, such as the 54 Iranian caravanserais registered as world heritage, which depict art, architecture, environment, nature, seas, mountains, caves, valleys, urbanization, and civilization throughout different eras, from ancient Persia to the Qajar period.

The deputy tourism minister expressed hope that the forum would contribute to the development of international relations through cultural diplomacy.

Darabi stressed that culture is the best way for countries to engage with each other, and the cultural aspect takes precedence over other factors in bringing countries and civilizations closer.

He highlighted the unique role of ancient civilizations in interacting with all cultures, emphasizing cultural and natural diversity as integral to their existence. The Iranian representative ad-



Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian (c) speaks at the seventh edition of the Ancient Civilizations Forum held in Tehran on December 21, 2023.
IRNA

vocated cultural dialogue to promote peace, democracy, tolerance, resilience, and sustainable development.

He noted that cultural heritage could unveil historical artifacts to prevent distortions and present the truth correctly, fostering peace and avoiding conflicts. Darabi concluded by stating that cultural heritage is linked to the identity and roots of every nation and society, and introducing it to the global community is a crucial mission of the Ancient Civilizations Forum.

He proposed the initiation of a project titled, "Countries' Meet-

ings Through Cultural Dialogue" to elevate the discourse and cultural flow in the global community.

Highlighting Iran's successful efforts in repatriating historical artifacts, Darabi expressed hope that member countries would collaborate on education, sharing successful experiences, archaeological exploration, museum management, and other aspects of cultural heritage.

He encouraged joint efforts in compiling and registering shared tangible and intangible heritage on the UNESCO World Heritage List, fostering collaboration be-

tween Iran and other Ancient Civilizations Forum members.

The seventh edition of the Ancient Civilizations Forum was held on December 21.

The forum, held under Iran's chairmanship, was attended by representatives of its members, including China, Greece, and Egypt, according to a statement by Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Ancient Civilizations Forum was jointly launched by Greece and China in April 2017, with 10 members, namely, China, Iraq, Egypt, Iran, Greece, Italy, Peru, Bolivia, Armenia, and Mexico.

Excavations at 8,000-year-old site in Iran's Ardebil Province

Iranian historians shed light on the enigmatic origins of Ardebil, revealing a 1,500-year-old history that traces back to the reign of the Sassanid ruler, Firouz.

Situated as the administrative hub of its province, Ardebil's historical tapestry intertwines with pivotal eras, flourishing notably during the Sassanians, Abbasids, Great Seljuks and Safavids. Despite the veil of uncertainty shrouding its exact founding date, the city's rich heritage unravels a story that transcends time and civilizations, inviting exploration into its profound historical roots, Daily Sabah wrote.

While information about the ex-

act founding date of the ancient city Ardebil is not certain, there are many resources suggesting that Zarathustra, the founder of Zoroastrianism, lived there.

It is believed that Zarathustra wrote the Avesta on Mount Sabalan, located between Ardebil and Meshginshahr. Therefore, Mount Sabalan is considered sacred by Zoroastrians.

In this case, it is possible to trace the history of Ardebil, formerly known as Artavil, back to 2,500 years.

The city settlement of Shahar Yeri, located near Ardebil in Meshginshahr and dating back to approximately 8,000 years ago, is known as the oldest set-

tlement in the region.

The large stone structures in this historical area, reminiscent of tombstones, feature prominent owl figures.

In general, some of the stones depicting an owl landing on a tree branch also use the sign of a cross instead of a tree branch. Although the cross symbol on some of the stones seems to have been made later in terms of structure and shape, a closer examination reveals that some of them were originally like this. When viewed from above, the stones that initially seem randomly arranged follow a systematic order and are not randomly placed.

While the main outlines remain in the original form as discovered in excavations, stones found in the vicinity and transported to the area for preservation purposes are also displayed in the same area.

Excavation work is being conducted in the historical area. Archaeology expert Mesud Nakili, who spoke to an Anadolu Agency (AA) reporter about the historical site, stated that the Shahar Yeri archaeological site consists of 400 hectares.

Nakili explained that excavations began in 2003 when this area was discovered by a foreign

archaeologist, and they have been conducting excavation work on an area of approximately 1,000 square meters (10,760 square feet).

He explained: "We concluded that these stones were used for sacred and religious rituals due to their shapes and postures. We found about 500 stones with human figures on them and in front of these stones there are stones for placing offerings."

Nakili mentioned that they found pottery, jewelry and bones during the excavation and concluded that this location was a temple or a sacred area.

Regarding the absence of mouth structures in the human figures on the stones, Nakili said: "This signifies silence as an expression of respect. Therefore, it is an indication that this place is sacred."

Pointing out that some figures on the stones hold swords and that some of these swords lack scabbards, Nakili suggested that these figures may represent warriors.

Nakili mentioned the presence of a cave-like area just below the historical site and commented, "They would first cleanse themselves by performing ablutions in this area, then enter the temple to perform their rituals."

Nakili mentioned that there are two similar sites based on the positioning of the stones, located in France and Türkiye. However, he noted that the stones in those places are relatively few.

Assessing the arrangement of the stones and the shapes of the corridors, Nakili said: "If we look at this, we see that they benefited from astronomy, and we understand that the movements of the large stone served as a sundial."

Nakili highlighted that approximately 500 similar sites exist in the region; however, unauthorized excavations have led to the destruction of the majority of them.

He also noted that their findings from the excavations led them to conclude that this region dates back to the Iron Age.

He mentioned that some of the historical artifacts found in the excavation area date back to the Chalcolithic period, around 4,000 to 5,000 years before the Common Era, and these artifacts are preserved in the Meshginshahr museum.

Historian Hadi Pejuhan, visiting the site, also stated that the oldest name for this historical area is "Pirazmiyan," indicating its ancient origins dating back to pre-Christian times.

