聚沙成海：海上及陸地的古絲路貿易
To See a World in a Grain of Sand: Ancient Maritime and Overland trade

展覽“聚沙成海”，集中討論古代海上及陸上絲路的文化藝術交流，強調貿易品、思想和人的相互流通。一沙見世界，展覽啟發自英國著名詩人威廉·布萊克（1757-1827）詩歌中首句對沙粒的歌頌。透過沙粒的比喻，象徵海陸兩大絲路之互通與文化交流。

是次展覽透過各類有趣的古絲路文物，以小觀大，激發觀眾思考兩條延續交替的海陸古絲路上，中國是如何與亞洲、中東和歐亞地區在文化、藝術、宗教和技術等多方面交流。展品多元化，包括：中國和東南亞的出口陶瓷、中亞、東南亞、蒙古和地中海之貿易的珍貴寶石飾物、遊牧民族使用的金銀器、仿金屬造型的中國貿易瓷、手繪絲織圖案的土耳其馬鞍，以及在中國使用的羅馬玻璃。

In ‘To See a world in a Grain of Sand’, a small number of objects communicates about the extensive maritime and overland trade routes of the past. Sand is an interesting metaphor for the land and sea trade that characterised the ancient Silk Road. The objects chosen for this exhibition highlight key themes around the circulation of commodities, people and ideas across the Silk Road over time.

Inspired by the first line of the poem by British poet William Blake (1757–1827), this exhibition explores the idea that the miniature can capture the essence of the vast. For the Silk Road, this includes both the maritime and land routes and the fascinating cross-cultural exchanges on art and culture across China, Asia, the West Asia and Europe.

This exhibition offers visitors a glimpse into the spread of decorative style, religious ideas and the development of technology that came about as a result of centuries of trade and cultural connections between China and the world. The artefacts on display include materials from different cultures related to China — far and near. They include export ceramics from China and Southeast Asia; gemstones from Southeast and Central Asia, Mongolia and the Mediterranean; Turkish saddles decorated with textile patterns; and ancient Roman glassware used in China. Some of the Chinese export ceramics on display demonstrate the influence of nomadic and Central Asian metalwork.
I. Asia’s Tea Culture

Drinking tea was an essential part of Asian culture since antiquity. The objects assembled here show how tea culture was practiced in Northern and Southern China and the manner in which it spread across East and Southeast Asia during the Tang and Song dynasties (7th–13th centuries). Maritime archaeological excavations have shown that large quantities of Changsha ware, such as tea bowls, were exported during the Tang dynasty (618–907) to East Asia, Southeast Asia, and as far as Arabia, for example, to the Abbasid Empire. From the period of the Song dynasty (960–1279), Japanese tea ceremonies included practices influenced by Chinese tea culture, such as the manner of preparing tea by whipping tea powder, and the use of Chinese export black-glazed tea wares. By the seventeenth century, the growing global demand especially from Europe for Chinese tea propelled the tea trade in Canton.

II. Chinese International Ceramic Trade

The Song (960–1279) and the Ming (1368–1644) dynasties saw significant expansion in maritime trade in China. Chinese ceramics and silks were exported in large quantities to overseas cities in Korea, Japan, Sumatra, Java, India, Arabia, and even East Africa. During the Song dynasty, export tax as high as 15 percent was one of the major revenue generators to the imperial coffers. Fujian-exported Song wares, imitating metalwork and a rare underglaze-red Yuan bowl exported to Southeast Asia, are also on display.

The Ming during the Yongle (1402-24) and the Xuande (1425-35) reigned strongly supported maritime trade, first financing the seven expeditions of Admiral Zheng He to thirty-nine countries along the sea routes to the west, and later encouraging trade between Canton and the Americas along the sea routes to the east. The global taste for Chinese porcelain, particularly in Europe for items such as Kraak porcelain and Dehua wares, opened up a huge market.

Competition between Chinese and Vietnamese exported wares

The bans on maritime trade during the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties provided golden opportunities for export wares manufactured in Southeast Asia. This group shows a Vietnamese blue-and-white dish, a Longquan-type celadon saucer from the Ban Pa Yang kiln in Thailand, as well as a cobalt-blue glazed box made in Vietnam.

III. The Canton Trade

Lying at the heart of foreign trade in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Canton artisans were adept at customising their products to satisfy foreign tastes. Until the mid-eighteenth century, silver comprised 90 percent of imports into Canton, where it was traded for Chinese tea. White porcelain manufactured in Jingdezhen decorated and re-fired in Canton according to Western aesthetic taste, was known as Canton enamelled porcelain. These Canton exported wares are characterised by their rich colour palette, including gold.
IV. 宗教
佛教、基督教、祆教等多宗教思想均经海陆古丝绸之路传播。传入中国后，其宗教传播途径，不仅有通过陆路或海路的贸易、商旅、使节等途径，同时也有通过外交和文化交流的途径。佛教在唐代以后逐渐成为中国主流宗教，对中国文化产生了深远影响。基督教传入中国后，主要通过东汉末年的传教士传播，对中国文化产生了影响。祆教则在中国西北地区传播，对当地文化产生了影响。丝绸之路的宗教传播，促进了中国与国外的宗教交流，丰富了中国文化内涵。

V. 珠宝与玉器贸易
珠宝和玉器是中国古代的重要商品，具有很高的收藏价值。其传播方式主要有通过贸易、商旅、使节等途径，同时也有通过外交和文化交流的途径。珠宝和玉器的传播，促进了中国与国外的贸易交流，丰富了中国文化内涵。

VI. 奇珍异宝与异国情调
此组在丝绸之路上出现的器物，具有鲜明的异国情调，是丝绸之路上的珍宝。例如，五世纪波斯琉璃角手瓶，直接影响了七至九世纪唐代的伊斯兰水晶瓶式样。九至十世纪西藏金银器，同时具有浓厚的波斯和唐代风格，属于十世纪到唐后期中亚各民族器物的典型代表，具有明显的中国和波斯风格。此外，丝绸之路上的传教士和商旅，将中亚的宗教和文化带入中国，丰富了中国文化内涵。

IV. Religion
Religious beliefs were exchanged between China and other countries, as Buddhism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism spread along the trade routes. Between the second and ninth centuries, some of the Roman glass containers on display were either imported to Xian, or transported via the maritime silk route to China. Objects from other cultural contexts were adopted for domestic use. For example, Roman glass containers were used to hold rosewater as part of Buddhist ritual practices.

The kendi was one of many exotic and highly desired items manufactured in China. Various forms of kendi were created for export as the versatile utensil could be employed in not only religious rituals, but also during important secular occasions in Southeast Asia. A pair of fifteenth- or sixteenth-century glazed Sawankhalok figures manufactured in Thailand are regarded as ceremonial items of an indigenous religion. The blue-and-white jar holding wafers for the Holy Communion was produced in Jingdezhen and used in Macau during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

V. Gemstone and Bead Trade
Beautiful gemstones and beads have been essential decorative materials since ancient times. They made their way along both the maritime and land silk routes mainly by trade. Since they were small and portable, they were easily passed on from one generation to the next. The materials, shapes, and technology reflected the style of respective cultures. On display here are biconical-shaped beads from the Indus River Valley that were probably made in the second millennium BC. They share similar forms with beads from the Western Zhou (1046–771 BC) found in Central China. It is believed that the former's stylistic influence lasted for a thousand years. The filigree technique used in the Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 220) was probably influenced by techniques from Persia. The nomadic Khitan people valued amber, and a large quantity of their jewellery was mainly made from it. The Mongols from the north favoured coral and turquoise jewellery. It is very likely that most of the coral used by the Mongols was imported from the Mediterranean Sea and transported via the overland silk routes to the Mongol kingdom. The maritime expeditions of the Ming Admiral Zheng He supported a golden age in China's maritime trade. His voyages helped introduce foreign goods into China, including semi-precious stones from Southeast Asia. These imports were much sought after by the Ming royal family and the nobility. Inlaid precious stone became fashionable in the decorative arts at that time.

VI. Mythical Beasts and Exotic Motifs
The artefacts in this group share a cross-cultural style found along the silk trade routes, as a result of the long-term cultural exchanges between the East and the West. For example, the fifth-century Persian silver wine horn cup with a horse head strongly influenced the design of the crystal cup with a buffalo head made during the Tang dynasty (618–907). Similarly, the lion-shaped gold plaque from the ancient Tubo kingdom (7th–9th century) in Tibet shares similar features to plaques in Persia and in Tang China. The nomadic Khitan people used amber, and some of their jewellery featured the Song Chinese dragon motif. Last but not least, the fifteenth-century Mongol-Turkmen saddle with gilt lacquer floral and geometric patterns shares similar decorative elements with the Islamic floral patterns used in the Moghul kingdom.