

## Observation & Protection Stations-Network of Grand Canal: A Case of the Involvement of Communities Along Cultural Routes

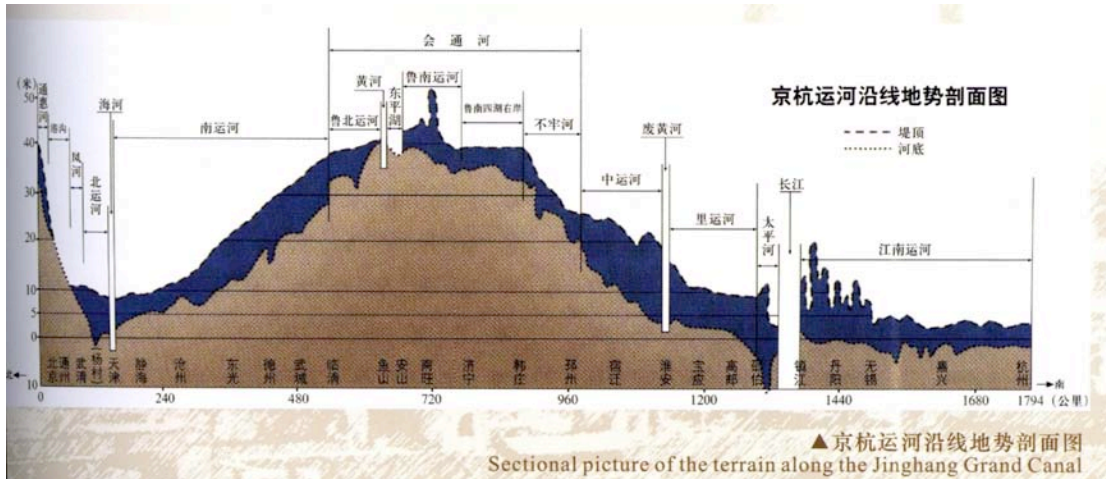
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**Abstract.** Although it's too early to announce the success of the Observation & Protection Stations-Network of Grand Canal, this network surely offered an example of the involvement of communities along the cultural routes. To protect the Grand Canal, World Heritage Candidate in China and the oldest and longest canal in the world, the Ruan-yisan Heritage Conservation Foundation established this project in 2006, providing a positive force for the protection of the Canal and encouraging the communication between governments and the public, as well as the collaboration between academics and field workers. To keep the commemorative integration of the cultural route, the stations-network tried to link different towns along the heritage route together, and protect heritage from bottom to top. The paper not only introduced the structure and work of this network; it also discussed the problems during the practice, such as the financial resources and the role of NGO.



### General Introduction to Grand Canal

The Grand Canal, or the Beijing-Hangzhou Canal, was a giant irrigation project of ancient China. With a history of over 1,400 years and a length of 1,794 kilometers, it is one of the world's oldest canals and is the longest man-made river in the world. The canal goes from Tongxian County, Beijing in the north to Hangzhou, the capital of Zhejiang Province in the south. It flows to Beijing, Tianjin, Hebei, Shandong, Jiangsu and Zhejiang, and connects five large rivers, the Haihe, Yellow, Huaihe, and Qiantang and Yangtze River.



## History of Grand Canal

In the late Spring and Autumn Period in the 5th century B.C., a canal was first cut near Yangzhou, Jiangsu Province, to guide the waters of the Yangtze River to the north. This was lengthened first during the Sui Dynasty of the 7th century, and finally during the Yuan Dynasty of 13th century, to become what has been known as the Grand Canal. The Grand Canal was the major transport artery between north and south China during the Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties, contributing greatly to the economic and cultural exchange between north and south---a role denied to the large natural rivers that mostly flow from west to east. Owing to the development of the maritime transport between north and south and the opening of the Tianjin-Pukou and Beijing -Hankou railways after the mid-19th century, the role of the Grand Canal was greatly reduced and many sections of it fell into disrepair or became choked with mud.



## Prof. Ruan and His Ruan Yisan Heritage Foundation

The Ruan Yisan Heritage Foundation (RHF) is a non-governmental, non-profit organization founded by Professor Ruan Yisan to support and promote urban heritage conservation in China. The RHF conserves and enhances urban heritage

by: --providing grants and awards for individuals and organizations who have made significant contributions to the conservation of urban heritage in China; --promoting research, education and academic exchange activities; --purchasing, restoring and sustaining historic buildings; --fostering awareness of heritage conservation through public education programmes; --consulting on urban heritage conservation projects.

About Ruan Yisan, RHF President Professor Ruan Yisan\_ Director of National Research Center of Historic City at Tongji University, is emeritus professor of Urban Planning at the College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Tongji University. He is also a member of the Urban Planning Expert Committee of the Ministry of Construction, the National Conservation Expert Committee of Historic Cities, and Vice Director of the Academic Committee of Historic Cities. Professor Ruan Yisan has been working as a consultant for many historic cities such as Suzhou, Yangzhou, Hangzhou, Shaoxing, Pingyao, and Lijiang. He has made a major contribution to the education and research of urban development history and urban heritage conservation. He has helped safeguard many historic cities and towns from imprudent development and made them important heritage sites through conservation planning and practice, such as Pingyao, Zhouzhuang, Tongli, Luzhi, Nanxun, Wuzhen, and Xitang. Under his supervision, the project of the Yangtze River Water Towns (including Zhouzhuang, Tongli, Luzhi, Nanxun, Wuzhen and Xitang) was granted the Award of Distinction by the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage Awards for Culture Heritage Conservation in 2003. In 2005, Professor Ruan Yisan was awarded a Knight Metal of Art and Literature by the French Ministry of Culture.

### **The Research of Grand Canal with the help of RHF**

The research on the Grand Canal in Tongji University has lasted more than 20 years. Since 1980, Prof. Ruan Yisan, the dean of the Tongji University's Research Center of National Historic City, began to publish his books and papers on the water-towns along the canal south of Yangzi River, totally about 10 books published during 1990s and 1980s. From 2004 to 2005, Prof. Ruan and his scientific assistants began to prepare the investigation of the whole Grand Canal, and then in 2006 and in 2007 they finished all the investigation on Grand Canal north of the Yangzi River with the financial help of RHF.

However, many questions have arisen: what is the intension and denotation of the Grand Canal? Could the canal be a large heritage system? How to protect and make use of this great heritage? How to define the authenticity of the Grand Canal and how to conserve the integration the canal since it enjoyed so long history and so many chances have been shaping the heritage? What is the concept of Cultural Routes and Heritage Routes? How about the heritage routes in foreign countries such as those in France?

To answer these questions, Prof. Ruan organized his students and guided them to write dissertation as well as book series on Cultural Routes Study.

Book Series on Cultural Routes, edited by Dr. Yuan Ding, the assistant of Prof. Ruan, will publish the best research on the heritage routes study works in China. The first three books which will be seen in 2008 include 3 dissertations.

## **The Grand Canal Observational Stations**

In 2007, Prof. Ruan Yisan and his Ruan Yisan Urban Heritage Conservation Foundation started to build the network of the Grand Canal Observational Stations, and tried to make this network to play more important role in the work of the Grand Canal's conservation. The aim of the network is to create a platform for the communications of the residents, officials, scholars and practitioners. This network has been becoming the part of the mainstream of the Grand Canal Study and the work of its World Heritage Application.

To make the station-network goes smoothly, RHF tried to create some rules on the structure and the everyday work.

To the structure, the station network is divided into the two different parts: one is the main station in Shanghai, the other, in fact, the others are the about 30 stations along the Grand Canal.

The work of Shanghai Main Station is administration. It is responsible for the basic regulations' making, training programs organization, contacting with the governments' offices, and the academic guide and information announcement.

Besides, the website of the network is built by the clerks of the main station, which will be responsible for the contacting of the volunteers all over the world.

To the branch-stations, their work is focus on the information collection, and write the regular papers. The workers of the branch station are mainly from the volunteers and the local people who love the work of heritage conservation. Most of them will not ask for the salary, but ask for fun.

However, the financial resource of the station network is the big problems. Until now, the resource is mainly from the private money of Prof. Ruan, the founder of RHF, but obviously, it is not a sustainable way to continue. Now the RHF is looking for the factories owners to be the supporters, and promised to do some advertisements during the activities of the stations.

## **Conclusion**

Although it's too early to announce the success of the Observation & Protection Stations-Network of Grand Canal, this network surely offered an example of the involvement of communities along the cultural routes. To protect the Grand Canal, World Heritage Candidate in China and the oldest and longest canal in the world, the Ruan-yisan Heritage Conservation Foundation established this project in 2006, providing a positive force for the protection of the Canal and encouraging the communication between governments and the public, as well as the collaboration between academics and field workers. To keep the commemorative integration of the cultural route, the stations-network tried to link different towns along the heritage route together, and protect heritage from bottom to top.

