

14 April 2023

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to give my strongest possible support to Christian Havrehed, Sun Haibin and fellow Korean and Japanese rowers of the Yantu 2 Project (also known as the New Xu Fu Voyage East), which aims to retrace the routes taken by early Chinese explorer Xu Fu around the North Pacific Rim.

I have known Christian, the project lead, for over 30 years now. We initially met as classmates in Durham University, where we studied Chinese language, society, culture and history together. During this time, we also spent a year at Renmin University in Beijing. Here we had the opportunity to advance our Chinese language ability and travel around China. My own personal journey then took me into academia and the further study of Chinese culture, history and society, which I continue to do to this day at the University of Nottingham as Professor of Chinese Society and Disability. For his part, Christian continued to follow his own passion to learn more about China and develop Chinese-Western friendship through his work, rowing and research projects.

When I first heard about the Yantu 2 project and Christian's desire to shed new light on the history of Xu Fu, I was very intrigued for a number of reasons, not least as Chinese Studies in Western academia has often used Xu Fu's journeys as the backdrop to the historically more 'important' story of Qin Shihuang. Indeed, if you look in more detail, his story as relayed in these works are often word-for-word identical based solely on the evidence from Grand Historian Sima Qian's *Shiji*. There has been little attempt to really uncover more about the man (indeed he is often dismissed as 'quasi-historical' or described derogatively as an 'occultist' or 'sorcerer') or the history he created through his now legendary voyages. Chinese and Japanese academics, by contrast, have revealed a much more complex history of the ways in which Xu Fu and the stories associated with him contributed to intra-regional connections and exchanges that have continued to this day.

There is clearly more work to be done to bring attention to the history and contribution of Xu Fu to a more global audience. The fact that it is being carried out in such a dynamic and adventurous way (in stark contrast to the sometimes dry manner of academic history books) will make the story of Xu Fu and the intertwined cultural development of the region come to life for new and future generations. I am thinking particularly here of the work carried out

under the banner of the Confucius Institutes where I know (as former co-founder and Deputy Director of the Sheffield Confucius Institute) that this type of living history work is enjoyed and more easily digested by younger learners.

Last but not least, it is notable that the expedition plans to set off from Ningbo, a site of great historic significance in terms of China's seafaring traditions as well as the site of our own Nottingham University's China campus. Having visited the city on many occasions, I would imagine that this project would also throw a spotlight on the ways in which this now large, modern port city was once a key trading point on the land-based silk route and major hub for international ocean-borne commerce and diplomacy. How fitting, then, that the project should commence its journey of discovery and international cooperation here.

I wish Christian, Sun Haibin and the Yantu 2 project all the very best of luck in their adventures! 一路顺风!

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dauncey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Sarah Dauncey
Professor of Chinese Society and Disability
sarah.dauncey@nottingham.ac.uk