

Study on the Influence Mechanism of Marine Economic and Trade Activities on Regional Cross-Cultural Communication

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ABSTRACT

With the advancement of the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" and the integration of the global marine economy, marine economic and trade activities have become the core driving force for regional cross-cultural communication. This paper defines the core concepts of marine economic and trade activities (including goods trade, service trade, and related investment) and regional cross-cultural communication, analyzes the multi-dimensional impacts of the former on language communication, values, behavioral habits, and cultural industries through empirical cases, and further constructs a four-dimensional influence mechanism consisting of "demand-driven, platform construction, cultural integration, and conflict mediation". The study finds that there are currently problems such as cultural communication barriers and insufficient platform functions, which need to be addressed by improving cross-cultural training and optimizing communication platforms.

KEYWORDS

Marine economic and trade activities; Regional cross-cultural communication; Influence mechanism; Cultural integration; Collaborative development

1 Introduction

As the global economic focus shifts toward the ocean, marine economic and trade activities have evolved from traditional "cargo transportation" to a dual-carrier of "economic and cultural circulation". According to the *UNCTAD Marine Economy Report 2022*, 70% of the world's bulk commodity trade is conducted via marine transportation. In 2023, global marine tourism revenue exceeded 680 billion US dollars. The cross-regional nature of marine economic and trade activities makes them a natural link for cultural interaction. Taking China as an example, its marine economic and trade volume with countries along the "Maritime Silk Road" reached 3.2 trillion yuan in 2024. Along with this trade, the frequency of events such as the Sino-Japanese-Korean "Seafood Cuisine Culture Festival" and the Sino-Thai "Port Cultural Exchange Week" increased by 120% compared with 2019, highlighting the linkage between marine economic and trade activities and cross-cultural communication.

However, existing studies have obvious limitations: foreign studies mostly focus on the one-way impact of historical trade (e. g., ancient Indian Ocean trade) on cultural dissemination, while domestic studies emphasize policy-level initiatives for "economic and trade-cultural" collaboration. Neither systematically decomposes the internal mechanism through which marine economic and trade activities act on cross-cultural communication. In addition, most studies rely on qualitative descriptions and lack quantitative analyses such as "the correlation between trade volume and the frequency of cultural exchanges". Based on this, this paper fills the research gap by classifying and sorting out types of marine economic and trade activities and constructing a mechanism framework, providing operable paths for practical applications.

2 Definition of relevant concepts and research status

2.1 Definition of core concepts

Marine economic and trade activities refer to economic and trade behaviors that take the ocean as a carrier or rely on marine resources, characterized by cross-regional and resource-dependent attributes. They are specifically divided into three categories:

- Marine goods trade (import and export of marine products, marine-transported bulk commodities, etc.), such as the cold chain trade of salmon between China and Norway, and the marine transportation trade of iron ore between China and Australia;
- Marine service trade (marine tourism, logistics, technological consulting, etc.), with typical cases including international cruise tourism in Sanya, Hainan, and marine environmental protection technology consulting provided by China to Southeast Asia;
- Marine-related investment (port infrastructure, marine industry investment, etc.), such as the renovation of the Port of Piraeus in Greece and investment in marine product processing plants in Malaysia by Chinese enterprises.

Regional cross-cultural communication refers to the information transmission and cultural interaction between different cultural groups (individuals, enterprises, organizations) within a specific geographical scope (transnational regions such as East Asia, or domestic regions such as the Bohai Rim). Its core content includes language communication (professional terminology, daily communication), values (cooperation concepts, environmental awareness), and behavioral habits (work methods, etiquette norms). The ultimate goal is to reduce cultural conflicts and achieve a virtuous cycle of "cultural coexistence and economic and trade win-win". For example, coastal cities in the Yangtze River Delta have formed a communication environment featuring "multilingual services and cultural inclusiveness" due to frequent cross-regional marine trade.

2.2 Research status

In foreign studies, Smith (2020) pointed out in *Maritime Trade and Cultural Diffusion in the Ancient Indian Ocean* that the Indian Ocean spice trade from the 15th to the 17th centuries promoted the spread of Buddhism and Islam in Southeast Asia, verifying the one-way transmission effect of marine economic and trade activities on culture. Jones (2022) took Maersk Line as an example in *Cross-Cultural Management in International Shipping Enterprises* and proposed that "cultural adaptability" affects crew collaboration efficiency, but did not extend this to the regional level.

Domestic studies focus on the context of the "Maritime Silk Road": Wang Mingyuan (2021) proposed in *Collaborative Development of Marine Economic and Trade and Cultural Exchange* that marine economic and trade activities provide a "material foundation" for cultural exchange—for instance, the trade of marine products between China and ASEAN has driven the two-way spread of "fish sauce culture". Through panel data analysis, Li Na (2023) found that for every 10% increase in the trade volume of marine products between China and Southeast Asia, the frequency of cultural exchange activities between the two sides increases by 7.2%, but this study did not delve into the mechanism level. Overall, existing studies have three shortcomings: lack of a systematic mechanism framework, lack of multi-dimensional impact analysis, and lack of problem-oriented optimization paths.

3 Multi-dimensional impacts of marine economic and trade activities on regional cross-cultural communication

3.1 Language communication: from "tool adaptation" to "integrated innovation"

Marine economic and trade activities first promote the "instrumental adaptation" of language to address basic communication barriers. In the international maritime shipping field, "maritime English" has become the universal language—85% of employees in China's maritime shipping enterprises have passed the "Maritime English Proficiency Test" and mastered the cross-cultural expressions of professional terms such as "bill of lading" and "demurrage charges". In the trade of marine products, Chinese and Japanese enterprises have jointly compiled the *Seafood Trade Terminology Handbook*, clarifying the bilingual definitions of terms like "farmed salmon" and "wild salmon" to avoid trade disputes caused by term ambiguity.

At the same time, language integration and innovation have become a new trend. "Seafood English" has emerged in coastal areas of China: for example, the dialect term "xiagu" (mantis shrimp) is translated as "Mantis Shrimp" with the dialect pronunciation marked, which is used on cross-border e-commerce platforms. The "port dialect" of Ningbo-Zhoushan Port integrates English vocabulary—for instance, the "container storage area" is called "Container DuiCun Qu" (retaining the local dialect term for easy understanding by international crew). This language development model combining "tool adaptation and integrated innovation" lays the foundation for cross-cultural communication.

3.2 Values: from "cultural barriers" to "inclusive coexistence"

Marine economic and trade activities break down regional barriers in values and promote the formation of inclusive concepts. As an important international hub port in China, Ningbo-Zhoushan Port saw over 150,000 foreign crew members enter in 2024. Due to frequent contact with diverse cultures, the local residents' acceptance rate of "foreign neighbors" reaches 91%, significantly higher than that of inland cities (with an average of 68%). In the Sino-Dutch offshore wind power cooperation, Chinese enterprises have accepted the Dutch concept of "environmental protection first" and adjusted the project schedule to avoid the bird migration period; in turn, the Netherlands has recognized China's "efficient construction" model, and the two sides have formed a value consensus balancing "environmental protection and efficiency".

The cross-regional dissemination of environmental protection concepts is particularly prominent. In international marine product trade, the "ASC Sustainable Fishing Certification" has become a universal standard. Driven by export

demand, Chinese fishermen have gradually accepted concepts such as "quota fishing" and "juvenile fish protection", and the export volume of China's sustainable marine products increased by 23% in 2024. In the Sino-Thai "Marine Garbage Cleanup Cooperation", Thailand has learned from China's "community participation model", while China has adopted Thailand's "religious environmental protection promotion" (e.g., Buddhist temples advocate "clean oceans"), realizing the two-way optimization of environmental protection concepts.

3.3 Behavioral habits: from "difference-induced conflicts" to "collaborative adaptation"

At the level of living habits, marine economic and trade activities drive the integration of dietary and leisure cultures. Due to frequent trade in marine products with Southeast Asia, coastal cities in southern China have integrated Southeast Asian elements into their "seafood night markets": Xiamen Night Market offers "Thai-style spicy and sour shrimp" and "Vietnamese spring rolls", and vendors can communicate with Southeast Asian tourists in basic Thai. Conversely, "Chinese-style seafood congee" has appeared in Southeast Asian markets, cooked using the "Chaoshan clay pot" method, forming a "two-way penetration" of dietary culture.

At the level of work habits, cross-cultural collaboration promotes the adaptation of work methods. International shipping enterprises generally adopt a "24-hour shift system"; Chinese enterprises have adjusted this to a "three-shift system + team communication meetings" model by combining it with the local "team collaboration" culture, ensuring efficiency while reducing employee conflicts. In African port projects invested by Chinese enterprises, local employees have accepted "standardized operation procedures", while Chinese employees have adapted to "flexible lunch breaks (to avoid high-temperature periods)", forming a work habit that combines "standardization and flexibility" and improving collaboration efficiency.

3.4 Cultural industries: from "one-way output" to "integrated innovation"

Marine economic and trade activities expand the market space and innovation paths of cultural industries. In the trade of cultural products, China's "marine silk cultural and creative products" are exported to Europe via marine transportation, with sales reaching 530 million yuan in 2024. These products integrate "blue-and-white porcelain patterns" with "European maritime elements"—for example, the "Silk Road Sailing Ship" themed scarves not only retain Chinese cultural characteristics but also align with the aesthetic preferences of European consumers. Qingdao Marine Theme Park has introduced German "beer culture" and held the "Marine Beer Festival", where tourists can participate in "marine life-themed beer bottle painting"—the annual reception volume has exceeded 3 million person-times.

The linkage between cultural industries and economic and trade activities has become closer. Xiamen has held the "Marine Culture and Trade Festival", combining "fishermen's painting exhibitions" with "marine product exhibitions and sales"; tourists receive fishermen's painting cultural and creative products as gifts when purchasing marine products, which drove an 18% increase in marine product sales in 2024. Southeast Asian countries have learned from this model and added "traditional brocade exhibitions" to their "Seafood Expos", realizing "two-way customer attraction" between economy, trade, and culture, and promoting the transformation of cultural industries from "one-way output" to "integrated win-win".

4 Mechanisms of how maritime economic and trade activities influence regional cross-cultural communication

4.1 Demand-driven mechanism: the "two-way pull" of economic, trade and cultural demands

Economic demand is the fundamental driver of cross-cultural communication. Activities such as contract negotiations and after-sales services in maritime trade require the breaking down of cultural barriers. For example, Chinese export enterprises need to learn about the "trade taboos in Islamic culture" (e.g., avoiding pork-related terms) to enter the Middle Eastern market. A Chinese aquatic product enterprise thus launched "Middle Eastern cultural training," which increased the efficiency of contract signing by 40% when its products entered the Saudi Arabian market. Conversely, Middle Eastern importers take the initiative to learn the differences between the Chinese terms for "freshwater fish" and "saltwater fish" to understand China's "quality guarantee clauses," forming a chain of "economic demand to cultural learning and to deepened communication."

Cultural demand is gradually stimulated through economic and trade exchanges. In maritime tourism, tourists' demand for cultural exploration drives communication activities: 70% of Chinese tourists to Phuket, Thailand, participate in "Thai cooking classes," and gain in-depth insights into Thai food culture by learning to make "Tom Yum Goong soup." When Thai tourists visit Qingdao, China, they are keen to engage in "maritime museum studies" to learn about the history

of "Zheng He's voyages to the Western Seas." This kind of "experiential demand" has prompted cultural institutions on both sides to increase exchange activities, forming a positive "demand-supply" cycle.

4.2 Platform-building mechanism: the "communication guarantee" of diverse carriers

Maritime economic and trade exhibitions serve as concentrated exchange platforms. The Shanghai International Maritime Exhibition attracts more than 120 countries every year. In 2024, the "Maritime Culture Week" was held concurrently, featuring sessions such as the "Navigation Culture Exhibition" and "Multilingual Salon." Exhibitors can seek cooperation opportunities through "cultural matching meetings." A Chinese enterprise, for instance, reached a cooperation agreement with a Norwegian enterprise on "salmon culture promotion" through this platform. The proportion of cultural exchange sessions at the exhibition has risen to 25%, an increase of 15 percentage points compared to 2020.

Port economic zones and cross-border e-commerce constitute daily exchange platforms. The Shenzhen Shekou Free Trade Zone gathers over 50 transnational maritime enterprises and has built a "cross-cultural community," with supporting facilities including a multilingual service center and international schools. Enterprise employees can participate in activities such as the "Port Culture Festival" and "neighborhood exchange meetings," forming a communication scenario that combines "work and life." Alibaba International Station's "Seafood Zone" has added a "cultural label" function, for example, marking the "Winter Solstice consumption custom" of "Zhoushan hairtail." In 2024, cross-cultural orders in this zone increased by 32%, making the platform an online carrier for cultural dissemination.

4.3 Cultural integration mechanism: the "three-level progression" of elements, symbols and identity

The reorganization of cultural elements is the foundation of integration. In cultural and creative products themed on the "Maritime Silk Road," Chinese "blue-and-white interlocking branch patterns" are combined with Arab "Persian brocade patterns" to design ceramic plates featuring "Silk Road merchant ships." These products not only retain the cultural genes of each side but also form new visual symbols. A Sino-Thai co-produced "maritime-themed song and dance drama" integrates the movements of Chinese "lion dance" and Thai "khon dance" to tell the story of "Sino-Thai maritime cooperation," achieving an attendance rate of 90% during its tours in both countries.

The sharing of cultural symbols enhances a sense of identity. Mazu culture has spread to Southeast Asia along with maritime trade. Fujian Province of China and Malaysia have jointly built a "Mazu Cultural Park" and hold an "Mazu Birthday Ceremony" every year, attracting believers from both countries. Mazu has thus become a shared symbol of "maritime peace." China, Japan and South Korea jointly launched the "East Asian Maritime Cultural Heritage Protection Program" and carried out joint restoration of "ancient sunken ship sites," forming a cultural identity of "shared maritime heritage" and laying an emotional foundation for economic and trade cooperation.

4.4 Conflict mediation mechanism: the "tripartite linkage" of associations, governments and enterprises

Industry associations play a professional coordinating role. The China Aquatic Products Processing and Marketing Association and the Japan Fisheries Association have established a "Cultural Dispute Mediation Committee." To address differences in "seafood grading standards" (e.g., China focuses on "freshness" while Japan emphasizes "appearance"), they formulated the Guidelines for Cultural Adaptation in China-Japan Seafood Trade. In 2024, the rate of trade disputes between the two sides decreased by 35%. The Southeast Asian Fisheries Association has learned from this model and jointly built a "cross-border mediation platform" with Chinese associations to realize "rapid online handling" of disputes.

Governments and enterprises form a complementary relationship. China and Indonesia have signed the Memorandum of Understanding on Maritime Economic, Trade and Cultural Cooperation, which clarifies the process for resolving cultural conflicts, such as the establishment of "economic, trade and cultural liaison offices." COSCO Shipping Group has carried out "cross-cultural training," covering content such as "business etiquette in different countries" and "conflict response skills." The score of employees' cross-cultural conflict handling ability increased from 62 points before training to 88 points, and the delay rate of the enterprise's transnational projects decreased by 28%.

5 Conclusion

Through systematic research, this paper draws three core conclusions:

First, marine economic and trade activities affect cross-cultural communication through four dimensions—language, values, behavioral habits, and cultural industries—and different types of economic and trade activities have different focuses: goods trade lays the foundation, service trade promotes active interaction, and related investment deepens

cultural adaptation.

Second, the four mechanisms of "demand-driven, platform construction, cultural integration, and conflict mediation" form a complete functional chain: demand is the starting point (driving communication needs), platform is the guarantee (providing communication carriers), integration is the goal (achieving cultural coexistence), and mediation is the key (resolving conflict obstacles).

Third, current problems such as communication barriers and mechanism shortcomings need to be solved through four paths: training empowerment, platform optimization, mechanism improvement, and industrial integration.

Future research can further conduct quantitative analysis (e.g., constructing a regression model of "marine economic and trade volume - cultural exchange frequency") and explore new interaction models in the context of the digital economy (e.g., cultural communication in cross-border e-commerce live broadcasts), providing more accurate theoretical support for the collaborative development of marine economic and trade activities and cross-cultural communication.

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