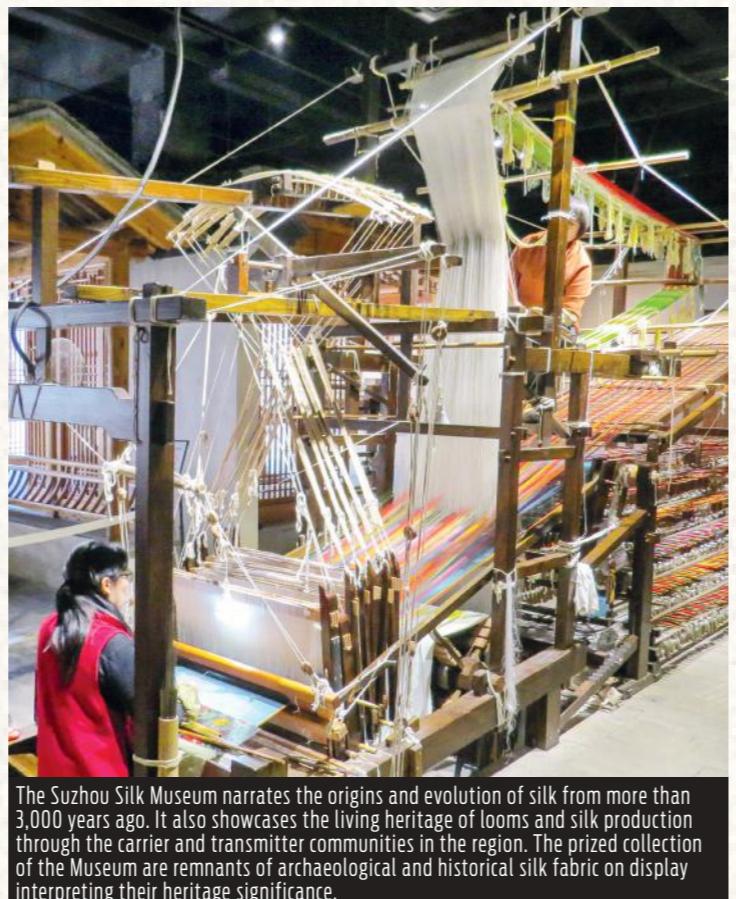




* Kun Qu*, one of the oldest forms of Chinese Opera was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2008. It evolved under the Ming dynasty (fourteenth to seventeenth centuries) in the city of Kunshan, situated in the region of Suzhou in southeast China. Its roots are in the popular theatre. It combines song and recital as well as a complex system of choreographic techniques, acrobatics and symbolic gestures. It had considerable influence on contemporary Chinese opera, especially the Sichuan or Beijing opera. It is safeguarded through dedicated connoisseurs and supporters and a new generation of younger performers.



UNESCO World Heritage Listed Classical Gardens of Suzhou: Classical Chinese garden design, which seeks to recreate natural landscapes in miniature, is nowhere better illustrated than in the nine gardens in the historic city of Suzhou. They are generally acknowledged to be masterpieces of the genre. Dating from the 11th-19th century, the gardens reflect the profound metaphysical importance of natural beauty in Chinese culture in their meticulous design. Ms. In Kyung Chang, Museum Director visiting the Gardens.



The Suzhou Silk Museum narrates the origins and evolution of silk from more than 3,000 years ago. It also showcases the living heritage of looms and silk production through the carrier and transmitter communities in the region. The prized collection of the Museum are remnants of archaeological and historical silk fabric on display interpreting their heritage significance.

HERITAGE MATTERS

THE GOOSE COULD LAY GOLDEN EGGS

China's tourism revenue reached about \$832 billion in 2017. Domestic tourism is the staple. On average, every Chinese person made 3.7 visits last year. That is over 5 billion trips across China. It is a 69 per cent increase from 2012, an average annual growth of 15.8 per cent. 129 million trips were also made last year. Tourism created more than 80 million jobs. Major GDP earner. An important cultural industry helping to reduce poverty. From a distance, aspirational statistics for us in Andhra Pradesh. What lessons can we learn? I was in the Lower Yangtze Region a few days ago, especially the water towns around Suzhou, as a UNESCO World Heritage expert and guest of the Government to speak on my global experience on Region Based Tourism.

Last week, Chinese National Tourism Authority issued guidelines promoting Region Based Tourism (RBT). RBT identifies a whole area as a tourism destination. It requires integrated local area planning for quality tourism. Advancing the "tourism plus" program, RBT promotes industrial integration. It explores new functions in RBT. New modalities feature diversity and environmental protection. The main goal is to develop an integrated, quality and regulated tourism ecosystem. It generates maximum benefit to the stakeholders and ecosystems. Integration with urban planning is mandated to build tourist towns and counties, with agriculture and forestry for sightseeing agriculture and forest parks and with technology for development of high-end healthcare tourism.

The new policy underlines the importance of researching cultural traits and both tangible and intangible heritage in RBT. It calls for upgrading quality of traditional arts and crafts products. It highlights new technologies adding value for tourism products. It encourages entrepreneurship and innovation programs. It profiles the importance of diverse investment entities and strategies. RBT mandates enhancing service quality. Building high-quality tourism brands. Promote services such as free Wi-Fi and online booking and payment. Public facilities must be upgraded. It calls for efforts to move ahead with the "toilet revolution" and improve transportation network, consultation service centres in traffic hubs and guideposts.

China National Tourism Authority has geared itself up to better regulate the domestic tourism market. All tourist destinations classified as 4A sites or above must offer free Wi-Fi, audio guides, online reservations and other information services by 2020. The 4A rating is the second highest in a five-level assessment system. It has recently downgraded three 5A destinations. It warned more than 400 scenic areas for poor service and substandard hygiene over the past three years. Tourism plays a key part in China as the country moves to build an economy driven by the service sector and consumer spending rather than trade and investment. China aims to increase annual investment in the tourism sector to \$290 billion by 2020.

What is interesting is that China has planned and set a target for investment in online tourism businesses to account for 15 per cent or more of total tourism investment. It envisages that by 2020, online travel spending should take up at least 20 per cent of total tourist spending. Video surveillance and environmental monitoring in tourist areas are both to be increased to ensure safety. The policy urges protection of cultural and heritage resources and the environment. It calls for carrying out poverty-alleviation work maximizing on the potential of responsible tourism and through benefit analyses of investment and integrated lo-

cal area planning. Government will increase policy support in finance, land use and human resources.

Through out my visit to the beautiful water towns around Suzhou and in meetings and public lectures, I kept reflecting on my homeland of Andhra Pradesh. Being in the birthplace of silk in China and the much discussed and planned silk route, I could not help thinking about the birth place of muslin, the Lower River Krishna Valley. I could only bemoan the degradation of once famous weaving towns such as Bhattiprolu, Machelra, Repalle, Chirala and Amaravathi and others. I see the idea of Cotton Route from the soils of the Deccan and Andhra a heritage tourism reality. We have history, heritage and an incredible pool of highly creative and talented carriers and transmitters of heritage and cotton traditions. But short-term profits through mechanisation and rabid exploitation by middle men and lack of protective measures and incentives has posed an endangered situation to our unique strengths.

Can Andhra come up with a deeper and strategic tourism policy and directions that could draw on our cultural and heritage strengths? Can we promulgate legal tools compatible with international standard setting instruments

to protect the intellectual property rights of our creative talent in textiles, weaving and all forms of culture and heritage? How many of us have questioned when we see representations of Kondapalli wood carving traditions and art work by non-Kondapalli people, whether the carriers and transmitters from Kondapalli benefit or even actually know that their intangible heritage is being exploited when they are struggling with low incomes. Can we develop and create cotton, textile and craft routes that are unique to Andhra Pradesh? When I first started advising the Chinese government nearly two decades ago, one of the first things I noticed was that they reviewed and disbanded the 'relics' approach as it was called then. Instead, they developed a heritage policy and framework compatible to UNESCO international standards and established the State Administration of Cultural Heritage. This systematic paradigm shift has led China to conserve and develop user value of its heritage assets. A national asset mapping exercise was carried out establishing categories and providing investment based on criteria of significance of heritage resources.

So, this year when the Chinese government brought together tourism, culture and heritage under one umbrella, heritage administration was well prepared to be an equally empowered strategic partner to benefit the country's economy without diminishing its heritage assets.

I intentionally asked in recent months several younger people in Andhra whether they heard of the Panchatantra fable of the Goose that Laid Golden Eggs. Few did. Few in the relevant industries care or have empathy. Rapid use of our arts, culture, heritage and environment has its challenges. We will benefit in the short term. But in the long term, it will be the proverbial goose that we would have killed. There is a sense of urgency to rethink the archaic antiquities paradigm and adopt the state of the art sustainable heritage development framework. Tourism is the world's fastest growth industry for almost two decades. It is important for Andhra and it contributes to the state's GDP. We need to work on the heritage value and the responsible user potential of our heritage assets prioritising conservation. Lower Yangtze Region in China has been able to bring about the transformations and we can also as a new and young state. I am optimistic and prepared to address the challenges. We have no choice.



The traditional architecture and ambience of theatre and opera have been carefully restored with due regard for the intangible heritage of the region. The performance sites in Suzhou and surrounding water towns have become popular in heritage tourism.



Suzhou and its surrounding waterways and the Grand Canal impressed Marco Polo in the 13th Century with the subsequent influence on the evolution of Italian cities such as Venice which is sometimes called aptly as the Suzhou of the West.



PROF. DR.
AMARESWAR GALLA

a.galla@yahoo.com.au

(Professor Dr. Amareswar Galla, an unhyphenated Indo Danish Australian, was in China last week for UNESCO World Heritage Cities expert's meetings. He now lives in the ancient Amaravathi Heritage Town.)