



SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

**Statement of the Society for American Archaeology
On the Proposed Renewal of the Memorandum of Understanding
Between the People's Republic of China
And the United States of America**

**Before the Cultural Property Advisory Committee
U.S. Department of State**

April 23, 2013

The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) strongly supports the proposed renewal of the *Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the United States of America and the People's Republic of China Concerning the Imposition of Import Restrictions on Categories of Archaeological Material from the Paleolithic Period through the Tang Dynasty and Monumental Sculpture and Wall Art at least 250 Years Old*. The progress made in the preservation of China's cultural heritage since the implementation of the MOU is substantial. A renewed agreement will continue to build on that success.

SAA is an international organization that, since its founding in 1934, has been dedicated to the research, interpretation, and protection of the archaeological heritage of the Americas. With more than 7,000 members, SAA represents professional archaeologists in colleges and universities, museums, government agencies, and the private sector. SAA has members in all 50 states as well as many other nations around the world.

Perhaps the greatest advancement made under the existing MOU is the exchange of scholarly information and knowledge between China and the U.S. Large exhibits of Chinese art and other cultural materials travel to museums around the U.S. and the world, allowing the general public to experience and learn about Chinese history and culture. China has made a concerted effort to expand the numbers and knowledge of its heritage experts. Its students now regularly travel to U.S. universities to study, particularly focusing on anthropological archaeology, a discipline that was unknown in China until recently. SAA can attest to the increase in overseas travel by Chinese cultural scholars, with the steady growth of their numbers at our annual meetings over the past few years. Through the Confucius Institute, China also underwrites the studies, in China, of archaeology and cultural resources preservation students from America and elsewhere. Finally, while progress has not been as great as in some other areas, permits for collaborative field work between Chinese and non-Chinese archaeologists are slowly growing.

In its domestic efforts to protect threatened patrimony, China boasts one of the world's largest networks of local and regional cultural museums. These facilities, supported by substantial public funding, foster awareness of heritage resources among the Chinese public. The government also takes an active role in the registering of archaeological sites and the cataloguing of materials. Though the government's overall presence and involvement in cultural preservation is extensive, offices at the local level often lack the authority they need to be optimally effective. Central officials need to place a greater emphasis on the protection of cultural patrimony.

Though hard numbers are difficult to come by, import restrictions under the existing MOU seem to be having a beneficial effect, in dampening the availability of stolen or looted materials for the illicit market. Looting remains a problem. While opponents of renewal will point to China's domestic art market as the primary destination for illegally-excavated goods, we have little doubt that a discontinuation of the U.S. import restrictions would result in even greater pillaging of archaeological sites than is presently occurring.

For these and other reasons, SAA believes that the proposed renewal of the MOU between China and U.S. is warranted, and urges the CPAC to recommend that the Secretary approve the request.