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## Project launched to salvage ancient ship

Hu Min

A WOODEN vessel, dating back to the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) and found sunken in the Yangtze River estuary, will have its mysterious veil lifted after eight years with the launch of China's biggest-scale ancient vessel salvage and protection project in Shanghai Wednesday.

The vessel, named Yangtze River estuary No. 2 ancient vessel, is a wooden sailing boat built around 1862-75 during the reign of Emperor Tongzhi.

It is buried in sludge 5.5 meters deep and the water area where the ship sank is 8 to 10 meters deep.

The remains of the ship are about 38.5 meters long and 7.8 meters wide and it has 31 cabins based on current findings.

The upper deck and mainmasts of the ship are complete.

The ship is probably a sand vessel with flat bottom, widely used for water transportation in Shanghai during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing dynasties, according to Zhai Yang, deputy director of the Shanghai Cultural Heritage Protection and Research Center.

In 2015, an underwater archeological investigation in the Hengsha area of Chongming Island detected a sunken iron vessel via sonar scanning technology.

The iron warship was named the Yangtze River estuary No. 1 ancient vessel. As archeologists expanded the scanning scope, the wooden vessel was found north of the warship. Exquisite items, including porcelain kilns of Jingdezhen, a world-famous porcelain

capital in northeast Jiangxi Province, have been found in four cabins.

A large number of cultural relics such as Yixing zisha (purple clay) wares, hookah cans made in Vietnam, wooden buckets, ship masts and iron anchors have been unearthed near the ship.

"There are diverse categories and large amounts of cultural heritage items which are well preserved or can be repaired," Zhai revealed.

Between July and September last year, big wares, including porcelain works of the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) and a 60-centimeter-high blue and white porcelain vase, were found.

"Some porcelain wares have signs indicating they were made during the reign of Emperor Tongzhi, providing important proof of the vessel's history," said Zhai.

Zhai revealed that they have only one photo of the ship due to the water quality of the estuary, and the porcelain are well placed in lines as seen in the photo.

"We were excited and stunned when we saw the photo," he gushed. "It is the first time that we saw the real face of the ship."

"There are still many mysteries behind the ship, such as its name, where it was built, and what was its destination, to which we hope to have answers," said Zhai. "We will solve these one by one, but it may take a long time."

The Yangtze River estuary No. 2 ancient vessel is another milestone finding in China's underwater archeology history after the Nanhai No. 1 cargo ship from the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279).



Experiment on the removal of the Yangtze River estuary No. 2 ancient vessel. — Xinhua

Tourism and director of the Shanghai Administration of Cultural Heritage, stated.

"It is a precious cultural legacy with significant history, and scientific and art value."

The whole salvage work is scheduled to finish by the end of this year, or September as hoped, according to Fang.

"But it depends on weather, hydrology conditions and there are some uncertainties during the salvage process," he added.

The finding of the ship provides important support for research on the "Maritime Silk Route" and is a witness to Shanghai's position as a world trade and shipping center in modern times, Fang pointed out.

Nanhai No. 1 is widely believed as the largest and best-preserved Song Dynasty ocean-going merchant trade ship.

"The Yangtze River estuary No. 2 ancient vessel is one of the biggest and best-preserved ancient wooden sunken ships with the largest amount of cultural relics onboard found so far in the world," Fang Shizhong, director of the Shanghai Administration of Culture and

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