

Chinese Vernacular Culture in the Global Midwest: A Workshop Held at Indiana University, September 4-6, 2014

Jason Baird Jackson

The Mathers Museum of World Cultures (MMWC) and the College Arts and Humanities Institute (CAHI) at Indiana University hosted a workshop on **Chinese Vernacular Culture in the Global Midwest** on September 4-6, 2014. The workshop brought together students of cultural diversity in the China-influenced social world and public humanities scholars working in three university museums and two university-based public folklore programs from the Midwestern United States. Workshop effort focused on developing a collaborative, multidisciplinary, multi-institutional program of research and public programming to explore the experience of Chinese peoples in, and moving through, the American Midwest. A secondary—but impactful—activity accompanying the convening was a successful campus panel discussion on the present and future of “**Museums and the Public Humanities.**”

The Chinese Vernacular Culture in the Global Midwest workshop was supported by a Global Midwest seed grant awarded to MMWC by CAHI. This grant is part of the broader Global Midwest “grand research challenge” initiative of the Humanities Without Walls consortium. The Humanities Without Walls consortium, and its initial activities, have been generously funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

A key element of the workshop was the inclusion of two Indiana University doctoral students who brought both a desire to learn more about the development of large public humanities research and programming projects (i.e. grant writing, project formulation, budget preparation, collaboration strategies, etc.) and rich knowledge of cultural and social circumstances in the diverse and globalized world of “Chinese” peoples. Selected through a competitive application process and funded in recognition of their time and contributions, these two participants made significant contributions to the workshop’s efforts. **Sara Conrad** is a dual doctoral candidate in the Departments of Central Eurasian Studies and Anthropology. Her research focuses on commonalities and differences characterizing the experiences of Tibetan mothers in diaspora. Her studies have included extensive preparation in Chinese language and culture. **Lijun Zhang** is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology. Her research focuses on the impact of international and national heritage policies and practices on life in rural Hakka communities in eastern China that are being rapidly and dramatically transformed by cultural tourism. Conrad and Zhang greatly enhanced the workshop and both reported greatly benefitting from the opportunity to participate.

Student participation in the workshop as well as the accompanying panel discussion were pursued in response to the special emphasis that the Humanities Without Walls consortium places on preparing humanities doctoral students for so-called alt-ac (alternative academic) careers. Museums and public folklore programs have long represented vital sites for research-based humanities careers and workshop participants shared rich knowledge of this world with panel attendees.

The Museums and the Public Humanities panel included all of the non-student workshop participants. The event attracted an overflow audience to CAHI and included Indiana University humanities faculty, administrators in the College of Arts and Sciences, undergraduates, a large number of graduate students, and campus curatorial professionals representing a range of

heritage collecting agencies such as the Archives of Traditional Music and the Glenn A. Black Laboratory of Archaeology. Many faculty and students conveyed regret at being unable to attend the event. For this reason, a recording of the event was made for purposes of developing a podcast. Audience members standing outside the room made compilation of a full headcount difficult, but 37 attendees, not including the panelists were noted. Project PI and **Mathers Museum of World Cultures** Director **Jason Baird Jackson** hosted the panel discussion.

Other panelists/workshop participants included the following colleagues. **Jon Kay** is a faculty member in Indiana University's Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology and Director of **Traditional Arts Indiana**, a statewide arts agency and a partnership between Indiana University and the Indiana Arts Commission. **Marsha MacDowell** is a faculty member in the Department of Art and Art History at the Michigan State University, Director of the **Michigan Traditional Arts Program**, and Curator of Folk Arts at the **Michigan State University Museum**. Like Traditional Arts Indiana, the Michigan Traditional Arts Program is a statewide agency and partnership between MSU and the state of Michigan. **C. Kurt Dewhurst** is a Professor in the MSU Department of English and Director *Emeritus* of the Michigan State University Museum. He continues at the museum as Curator of Folklife and Cultural Heritage and also serves the MSU campus as Director of Arts and Cultural Initiatives and as Senior Fellow for University Outreach and Engagement. Also participating from the MSU Museum was **Mary Worrall**, Curator of Cultural Heritage and Education Team Co-Manager. Participating from the University of Nebraska Lincoln was **Marin Hanson**, Curator of Exhibitions at the **International Quilt Study Center and Museum**).

Participating in the workshop virtually was **Dean Rehberger**, Director of **MATRIX: The Center for Digital Humanities and Social Sciences** and a faculty member in Writing, Rhetoric and American Cultures at MSU.

Among the scholars gathering in Bloomington, Hanson is a specialist with a research focus on Chinese textiles. All of the non-student attendees have career-long experiences focused on the ethnographic study of cultural diversity in the American Midwest. MacDowell and Dewhurst also have extensive experience pursuing collaborative projects with overseas partners in South Africa and the Pacific. All of the attendees are now part of a broader Luce Foundation-funded collaboration between the Chinese Folklore Society and American Folklore Society and are participating in a program of professional exchanges, conferences, and exhibition development linking a network of US and Chinese museums of ethnography. These collaboration, research, exchange, and program development engagements in China provided a key context for the Midwestern United States-focused Chinese Vernacular Culture in the Global Midwest workshop and the larger project that the workshop initiated.

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