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WHAT IS WOOD AND FOREST CULTURE RESEARCH AND DOES IT MATTER?

In October 2011, I had the pleasure of attending and presenting at the International Conference and Exhibition on the Art and Joy of Wood in Bangalore, India. After 3 days of scientific talks, there was a technical, industrial, and culture tour, which included the town of Channapatna, famous for the production of lacquered wooden dolls and toys. The wooden toys are made in 250 small home workshops as well as 50 small factories and provide employment for about 6000 people. In the United States, we would call this a large “cottage industry.” Soon after in December 2012, I attended and spoke at the 4th International Symposium on Forest Culture in Kunming, China. The Symposium was followed by a biodiversity field trip organized by the International Wood Culture Society (IWCS) to Xishuangbanna Prefecture near the Laotian border to experience Wood and Forest Culture. There we met with Dai villagers who have been cultivating and processing tea leaves from the Nan Nuo Mountain. One tea tree was over 800 years old. Tea is and has been a valuable domestic and export commodity. This area was near the center of the ancient Tea and Horse Caravan Road, which transported tea, horses, and other products to many lands. These two trips provided living examples of how Wood and Forest Culture play an important role in the economic, social, and cultural life of many societies throughout many parts of the world.

Since SWST’s main interest is wood science, it is important to note that Wood and Forest Culture share and encompass many of the same concepts. Wood Culture is an interdisciplinary science area which provides a better understanding of the use and social aspects of wood from

cultural perspectives. Research in Wood Culture improves people’s relationship with nature and opens new ways to understand wood from an economic, environmental, and social value perspective. In 2007, the IWCS was formed by Mr. Mike Wen Pin Hou (Director) as a non-profit, nongovernmental international network of a variety of wood professionals dedicated to the research, education, and promotion of Wood Culture. The IWCS website is: <http://www.iwcs.com/>. The IWCS also established World Wood Day, celebrated every year on March 21, the spring or vernal equinox of the Northern Hemisphere. Planned for this year is the first Wood Culture Tour in the United States and the inaugural online edition of the *Wood Culture Journal* (see <http://woodculturejournal.org/index.html>).

Wood Culture is increasingly being recognized internationally as an important area of study. At the 2007 International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) Division 5-Forest Products Meeting in Taiwan, the Wood Culture Working Party (5.10.01) was formed (<http://www.iufro.org/science/divisions/division-5/50000/51000/51001/>) and the IWCS became a member of IUFRO in recognition of its work to promote Wood Culture. The research areas emphasized by the Wood Culture Working Party include:

- The historical and contemporary use of wood in different regions or countries in the world;
- The development and culture of the use of wood products, including, but not limited to, furniture, paper, housing components,

lumber, veneer, plywood, oriented strand board, and sculptures;

- The culture of wood in different societies as part of religion, literature, philosophy, and art;
- The promotion of the use and culture of wood in all societies and at all levels of education; and
- The education and promotion of the positive aspects of wood, such as the beauty and strength of wood, the benefits of wood to ecology and the environment, and the historical and social aspects of wood.

North America has a rich history of Wood Culture, starting with early native peoples, through the European settlement, to today. Our housing has always used considerable quantities of wood, our trains have run over wooden ties and trestles, and much of our art makes use of wood, yet Wood Culture is often not well understood. High-quality international research focusing on the science and technology of Wood

Culture is used as a marketing, educational, and academic tool. This research not only addresses the beauty, utility, and nature of wood, but also economic and environmental benefits together with wood's historical and scientific significance.

To gain more knowledge about the exciting and diverse area of Wood Culture research, I recommend that you attend the SWST 2012 Annual Meeting this August in Beijing, China, that includes a Wood and Agri Fiber Culture Session planned for Thursday afternoon, August 30. Just follow this URL: <http://www.swst.org/meetings/AM12/index.html> to register for the meeting. The study of Wood and Forest Culture is not only an examination of aesthetics, but also is a researchable scientific area with impact and importance that should be included in worldwide scientific forums and literature.

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