



Smithsonian
Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage

Intangible Cultural Heritage: An International Dialogue

Executive Conference Room, Fourth Floor

National Museum of Natural History

Smithsonian Institution

June 30, 2014

Conference Proceedings

9:30 a.m. Guests gather at entrance to National Museum of Natural History
Constitution Drive entrance; CFCH staff and interns escort guests to the Fourth Floor

10:00 Welcome

Dr. Richard Kurin, Under Secretary for History, Art, and Culture, Smithsonian

Richard Kurin welcomes everyone to the Smithsonian campus for this conference. He notes that we gather during the Smithsonian Folklife Festival—a natural time to talk about intangible cultural heritage (ICH)—because the Festival has been one of the most public celebrations of ICH for the past half-century.

This particular conference grows out of our collaborations with members of the Chinese delegation who have been working on this summer's Festival. It also mirrors the 1999 UNESCO conference, hosted by the Smithsonian, which informed the *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*. Kurin recognizes the many participants and organizers of the 1999 conference who join us today.

Though the United States' relationship with UNESCO is fraught, the Smithsonian remains deeply interested in documenting, understanding, safeguarding, and celebrating the traditions of cultures around the world; despite political complacency, we want to continue learning from one another. Convenings like ours recognize—even value—the states and bureaucracies that inform ICH work, but more urgently they recognize cultural expression as a human right. Today's conference embraces this perspective by bringing scholars, practitioners, and culture bearers together to discuss the importance of ICH work, and the various challenges and opportunities it offers.

10:15 Opening Remarks

Dr. Michael Atwood Mason, Director, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage

Michael Mason opens the conference by recognizing the many special guests who helped put it together, including the Secretaries of Cultural Affairs from China, the director of the National Museum of Kenya, the Smithsonian's Consortium for World Cultures, as well as the conference's co-PIs and main organizer, Sally Van de Water.



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These groups are responsible for bringing over one hundred guests to the Smithsonian today—about one third international guests, one third from across the Smithsonian, and one third from organizations across the United States.

The Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage works to support the sustainability of cultural heritage and diversity in communities across the United States and around the world. As a part of our mission, we collaborate with a broad spectrum of individuals and groups to promote cultural scholarship, traditional artistry, and participation as forms of civic engagement. Intellectual convenings like the conference we are gathered for today feed this mission—they help us “think” around issues in ICH, and more urgently provide a bridge for translating “thinking work” into action. They help us change the conditions for culture bearers on the ground who are working to sustain their intangible traditions.

Additionally, as an international dialogue, today’s conference invites us to explore the immigration and migration of cultural practices—the movement of living traditions that people carry with them as they start new lives in places around the world. This transnational movement, which we know is not *new*, adds important dimension to the work that we do. So in addition to addressing issues of sustainability, practice, and representation, today’s conversations must also address the issue of movement, and the ways in which movement both challenges and inspires our ICH work.

10:30

Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage: Vexing Questions, Issues, and Challenges
Meredith Holmgren, CFCH, Moderator

- Dr. Gao Bingzhong, Peking University, China Folklore Society

Gao Bingzhong talks about how developments in cultural heritage policy, specifically around ICH, have changed China’s approach to safeguarding cultural practices over time. By tracing the history of the dragon tablet in the context of Chinese ICH policy, Gao shows how a cultural icon and the cultural practices associated with it—once viewed skeptically as “dangerous superstition”—have become an important part of China’s “cultural ecosystem.”

Whereas many Chinese have long worked to protect the dragon tablet and its associated traditions, they struggled to do so under older policy paradigms that associated the tablet with peasants and its traditions with “superstition.” But once these practices became “ICH,” China began “safeguarding” the tablet and its associated activities. This transition can be understood within the context of several policy changes, including China’s enactment of the UNESCO Convention, its establishment of specialized institutions to support ICH, the designation of a “National Cultural Heritage Day,” the creation of representative ICH lists that honor



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both the practices and their transmitters, and the identification of protection zones that constitute China's "cultural ecosystem."

With the formal recognition of ICH, infrastructural changes provided more support for tradition bearers and improved relations between the government and Chinese citizens. Intellectual shifts also mark this transition: professionals stopped discussing "superstition" and started talking about traditional cultural practice. ICH provides a new "space" for scholars, government leaders, and Chinese citizen groups to interact more positively and collaborate to solve domestic problems.

- John Kamanga, Director, SORALO Southern Rift Association of Landowners

John Kamanga discusses that, beyond the stories sung and the clothing worn by the Maasai, there is a story that "cannot always be told in a museum setting." Kamanga explains that the Maasai community "see[s] the aspects of intangible heritage as the tool with which we navigate every day." He advocates for the necessity of educating young people in the intangible cultural heritage of their communities. However, ICH preservation is changing with modern schooling.

In Maasai culture, individuals are increasingly responsible for protecting the cultural traditions of their communities as the individuals age. Along the way, important rites of passage help young people transition to their roles as culture bearers, who support the transmission and maintenance of Maasai knowledge and practices. It is important to consider how institutions of formal education can support this type of cultural education—how schools can serve as a space that both respects Maasai tradition, and helps students prepare for lives and careers in the global economy.

For the Maasai, several spaces and opportunities have helped in this regard: the Maasai Cultural Centre supports students' cultural education, local schools have begun to teach local languages, and political action has helped maintain open rangelands—critical because free cultural expression requires shared space.

- Dr. Robert Baron, New York State Council on the Arts

Robert Baron recognizes Kenya and China as exemplars in protecting ICH, particularly when it comes to the issue that he plans to explore: policies and practices regarding community participation. Though UNESCO sees a "privileged place" for communities in safeguarding ICH, its identification and documentation schemas privilege academically trained scholars and limit community involvement. Further complicating the situation is the fact that states are the main stakeholders in ICH policy, and each state has a different approach to working with individual citizens, cultural groups, and community-based NGOs. Mikhail Bakhtin's concept



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of dialogism can help us think about the relationship between folklore and community agency, as well as the persistence of curatorial authority in cultural policy planning. Using Bakhtin, Baron argues for the continual withdraw of the “authoritative mediator” moving forward.

In the United States, ICH policymaking and safeguarding programs are decentralized; they are centered in state programs, folklorist-directed, and supported by community-based NGOs, outside of the federal government’s policy direction. Public folklore in the United States has been dialogic from its outset, as opposed to “applied folklore” which applied expertise and scholarship unidirectionally, leaving interpretive authority with the academic folklorist.

Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism refers to the construction of meaning through multiple voices; it is a continual process of reciprocity, anticipation and response, proximity, and openness to who the “other” is and can be. Features of public folklore dialogism include sharing representation and interpretive authority with communities, collaborative program development, mutually developed modes of presentation with “cultural conversations,” equipping communities for self-representation, and engaging community members and traditional practitioners in developing cultural policies and making funding decisions. Some illustrative projects include *Surviving Katrina and Rita in Houston*, in which folklorists trained hurricane survivors to document each other’s narratives, and *NYC City Lore*, which uses the Internet as a dialogic platform for communicating with communities.

- Invited response, Dr. Tim Lloyd, American Folklore Society

Tim Lloyd draws on the fact that cultural participation was the key theme in each of these presentations, even though not explicitly framed as such, in order to assert the importance of cultural participation in ICH work in the United States and around the world. As today’s speakers illustrate, it is a mistake to look at ICH only from the top down, as individuals and communities use ICH policy for their own ends. In particular, Kamanga’s presentation speaks to the idea that ICH can be a navigational tool for dealing with everyday life, and Gao shows that the “miracle” of ICH is that it allows—and invites—multiple definitions of the same practice to exist in collaboration, and to productively inform one another.

The differences in ICH work from nation to nation also illustrate this “miracle”: though differing broadly in their approaches to ICH, the American Folklore Society and China Folklore Society have collaborated on many important projects. They have also informed one another: while Chinese folklore documentation vastly exceeds similar work done in the United States (particularly since 2000, when China



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increased its ICH work), China has benefitted from ideas and processes that have been “part of the American toolkit” since about the 1970s.

- Discussion

Question: (for Timothy Lloyd): What were the “beginnings” of documenting tradition in the United States?

Lloyd: The beginnings of folklore studies go back a long way in the United States, with early attempts to protect environments, rather than just study them. However the enactment of specific policies to aid in the safeguarding of specific traditions and their contexts is somewhat newer in our field.

Question (for John Kamanga): Can you speak to the extent to which the rising valuation of education among local Maasai communities can ultimately reinforce the valuation of traditional Maasai practices?

Kamanga: Kenya has reached a “critical mass,” where people are starting to value their own cultures. There is a growing interest in preserving heritage and a growing ability, from an academic standpoint, to come back and study local cultural practices.

Question: What is the role of mediation, particularly in the context of festivals?

Lloyd: Festivals are all about mediation, but that mediation takes place on multiple levels, including by participants themselves. What is interesting is the unmediated interaction between visitors and participants that takes place in festival settings and the power of these interactive experiences.

Baron: There are differences between theatrical and spontaneous expressions of heritage at the festival—for example, the differences between staged presentations and the interactive experiences available at the People’s Park area within this year’s China program.

Kamanga: Dialogue is important at the festival; even those who traveled together, like this year’s Kenyan participants, found opportunities for new kinds of dialogue among one another.

Gao: Areas like People’s Park help people to think about the importance of cultural communities.

Question: How do you see the understanding of educational systems—specifically, indigenous knowledge systems—interfacing with ICH?

Baron: Folklore is about informal learning, and education, in a formal sense, is constrained by educational standards which many communities find limiting. Education more generally could benefit from learning about informal education.



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Kamanga: Open space is critical; we need to value and protect environments where the transmission of cultural practices happens.

Gao: The crisis in public folklore comes from the division between formal modern schooling and tradition.

12:00 p.m. Lunch (provided)

1:00 Transnational Theory and Practice in Action

Dr. Anthony Seeger, UCLA/Smithsonian, Moderator

Anthony Seeger explains that the challenge of ICH in the UNESCO scheme is that nation states are designated by the Convention as the main caretakers of ICH—responsible for identifying, documenting, and safeguarding each country’s traditional cultural practices—and yet culture is not confined to states. Cultures have been moving for a long time, especially in terms of refugees and migrations. As traditions move, it becomes challenging to determine which country gets to “claim” them as masterpieces, or if multiple countries can and will claim them together. Transnational culture challenges our terms, our categories, and our policies. The terminology and landscape of transnational culture has changed as well. Any particular piece of heritage is often part of a place; there are monuments, buildings, and tangible heritage, but ICH was invented to document the other aspects of culture.

- **Danny Yung, Artist, Hong Kong**

Danny Yung discusses the multimedia work that he will show. Because this film was created for display in a Japanese pavilion and he is a Chinese director, Yung wants his work to represent both countries’ traditional arts; it therefore reflects styles of both the oldest form of Chinese theater, the Kun, and the oldest Japanese form, the Noh. Work like Yung’s embraces art as a historical and political form—and one that can raise important questions about tradition. *What does it mean to preserve “tradition”? Is it something that is fifty years old? Is it one hundred years old? Is it two hundred years old?*

In working on this particular piece, Yung had many conversations about how institutions affect artistic process, from human resources to architecture and discussions of space. Informed by these conversations, Yung explains that he is showing a collaboration inspired by ghosts—by artists. Artists are like spirits, he explains, because they are everywhere. Bureaucrats are afraid of artists.

- **Kathryn Coney-Ali, Lamu Cultural Museum and World Monuments Fund, Kenya**



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Kathryn Coney-Ali lives on a small island off the coast of Kenya called Lamu, whose history as a trade center reflects Arab, Indian, and Persian cultures. Lying at the conflux of these styles, Lamu has the largest number of documented and historical sites in Kenya. Preservation of heritage is therefore integral for the survival of the community. But few in Lamu are educated about the relationships between these monuments and histories behind them; this lack of contextual understanding threatens the integrity of Lamu's historical sites, which are increasingly commercialized by residents. Coney-Ali is attempting to engage the community in taking ownership in their cultural heritage by involving them in nominations for the 2014 Monuments World Watch List, but she is fearful that, with the construction of a new port in Lamu and the entrance of the international community, the risk of uncontrolled development can severely damage the region's Swahili culture.

Coney-Ali elaborates that increases in commerce and tourism have led young people to lose interest in promoting Kenyan culture and instead imitate Western culture. The most pervasive aspects of the loss of cultural heritage are the loss of oral tradition, calligraphy, and handicraft, and language corruption. There is also an inability to classify who the Swahili are within the community, what their history is, and how their traditional heritage has adapted over time, particularly with the influx of modern institutions and infrastructure. Information about Swahili culture is also often misrepresented. Swahili cultural integrity and Lamu's Islamic culture have become endangered as traditional practices, such as bone-setting, become obsolete and no new jobs are produced to support them.

- Vera Nakonechny, artist and ICH practitioner, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

As a child of post-WWII refugees, Vera Nakonechny learned Ukrainian embroidery and beadwork from her mother and other refugees first in Brazil and then in the United States. After her skills advanced, she had difficulties finding Ukrainian traditional integrity in America, and was prompted to search for "pure" Ukrainian art through firsthand information from villages. She recognized that there has been a recent rebirth of traditional Ukrainian art forms, which had been stifled during more than fifty years spent under communist occupation. Because Ukraine is composed of so many different regions, each region has a distinct look, style, and color. The current challenge in Ukrainian ICH is to piece together traditions that were lost or subdued during Soviet occupation and identify their relationships within the diverse cultural and geographic landscape of the country.

Since 1992, Nakonechny has been traveling to Ukraine to learn directly from craft masters. She asserts that it is through the efforts of individuals that the preservation



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of cultural heritage has been possible. Nakonechny has worked in conjunction with museums in Ukraine in order to find pieces which are either difficult to obtain or missing from archives. Along with the support of museums, archives, and funding for the traditional arts, Nakonechny's work has thrived among young people, on the Internet, and within the present Ukrainian folk revival.

- Dr. Elizabeth Peterson, American Folklife Center

Peterson begins by explaining that ICH work is very decentralized, often fragmented, and seemingly peerless to those working in it. Also, it is often difficult to discuss local culture and knowledge, especially in the context of transnationalism, because there is often overlap. Wishing to discuss work in ICH from two different perspectives, Peterson uses her experience in the NGO nonprofit sector and her experience as a federal employee and bureaucrat in order to illustrate the dynamics surrounding the safeguarding of ICH.

In the NGO nonprofit sector, Peterson mostly worked on capacity building and relays that one of the most important roles of the folklorist is to connect practitioners with the tools they need to complete their work. Through capacity building, folklorists can best offer technical assistance, connections, and networking opportunities, so that practitioners can receive the resources they need.

Speaking of her experience as a federal employee, Peterson explains that one of the issues of dealing with ICH at the federal level is that it is “high perch”—often far from the people with whom you are dealing, creating distance between the scholar and the culture which he or she is attempting to safeguard. But important work can be done at this level. The World Intellectual Property Organization, a counterpart to UNESCO, is now working on issues of copyright and traditional knowledge and cultural expression, which gives us the opportunity to see folklore as something emergent rather than residual.

- Discussion

Question: One of the biggest problems at Smithsonian Folkways is that, in the realm of intellectual property, we have no laws for moral rights. Who owns the pattern for your weaving? How do we navigate that and what will happen in the future?

Peterson: It is not the case that there is no author; these materials belong to individuals and communities, and we need to work with them to make their work accessible, because restricting access is also a problem.

Coney-Ali: Because Lamu has historically been a melting pot of culture, traders have always brought traditions which fused with existing African heritage.

Working with the local government, as well as grassroots CBOs, we work on



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capacity building and educating the community on heritage. However, the British Museum has artifacts such as manuscripts of poetry written in Arabic. We want to work with the international community, but we want training on ethics and morals and how to protect our home.

Seeger: We have to be careful about what our imaginings about communities are; we think about unity in communities, but often they are divided and people have trouble having rights recognized.

Question (for Danny Yung): All of the materials-made masterpieces were supposed to be constantly recreated or have the opportunity to be constantly recreated. Are you preserving these masterpieces, or is this a departure in which you are doing something different?

Yung: I ask the artists to think more deeply about what they are doing and why they want to change aspects of each performance. As an outsider, I facilitate how they look at themselves. When you put something in a museum, you can't touch it. But, these artists in the sixties and seventies think it should be changed. *Is preserving a teacher's work, or a teacher's teacher's work—or what?*

Question (for Tony Seeger): How do we deal with UNESCO and constant re-creation?

Seeger: Safeguarding was developed to indicate the maintenance of conditions, but in principle they are of course allowed to change. The writing of the 2003 Convention was an elaborate process; there was a deep debate over every word in that declaration—each of which could have spawned the existence of an entire field. Now different countries are involved in acts of interpretation—and in particular of interpreting “safeguarding.” We see these interpretations playing out in Kenya and China, but not in the United States. I believe the U.S. doesn't have a ministry of culture because, here, culture is the marketplace. But we should allow knowledge bearers the room to do what they need to do and change it as they wish. UNESCO did not really want culture to be static or fixed.

Question: Is capacity building in communities a form of safeguarding, and how is it managed from a community standpoint?

Yung: When you talk to an artist, they do not know what UNESCO is about. Rather than spending time trying to understand UNESCO documents, the key is community-based capacity building on economic, political, and international levels. There is also still the issue of who preservation is really for.

Coney-Ali: In Lamu, with the support of the World Monuments Fund, we are attempting to build capacity among craftspeople and for the community because they are being left out with increases in tourism and commerce. Because people are not trained and don't know the history of their culture, they are damaging



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our cultural integrity. I'm from the United States, but I serve as the voice of the community, and my job is to stand up to the government. When they say they're going to include stakeholders, they are worried about business and not connecting to community.

Peterson: The issue is sustainability. WIPO worked with Maasai cultural heritage and members of the community for a cultural capacity building project focused on documentation, so now the community can use the materials in the way they want to. The project went for about two years with qualified or mixed success because problems arose in follow-up: how do you keep it going? How do you bring in national and state actors?

Nakonechny: I'm an individual working with a group, and my main concerns are to collect, teach, and share. Everything I've collected I will keep until I know it is safe somewhere and people are able to use it for the right reasons. I want it to be *live* so people can touch it and work from it. This art must keep living through individuals.

Question (for Vera Nakonechny): Since the Convention, people have concentrated on conscriptions but less on safeguarding. Is your work being used as a model for safeguarding?

Nakonechny: Sometimes, my work is not handled properly; when I send my work to the Ukraine, it comes back eaten by moths. I try to clean everything and document what I do; I make patterns and write how to weave them; I make sure everything is well-preserved. Documentation is very important as well as collaboration with archives.

Question: Attempts to protect or preserve culture are affected by economics imperatives. Can you respond to the current problem which is that the international community is so focused on elite arts but is not opening the market for arts that promulgate culture?

Seeger: Pay the artists, because they can get prestige from it and earn from it.

Nakonechny: In Ukraine, young people want to learn these crafts and go to college for this, but when they put their products up in market, no one wants to pay what they are worth. So, the artists compromise and make cheaper versions, which is very sad.

Yung: We need individuals who have the right mind to safeguard it. Those individuals still have to institutionalize their act. There is a constant individual versus institution battle, and we are looking for an ideal institution that can do the safeguarding.

Coney-Ali: It was UNESCO that reached out to me because Lamu's status was in danger. This is unique because they are usually more hands-off.



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Peterson: Pay the artists, and there is strength in numbers—organize.

2:30 Break

3:00 Roundtable Discussion: Producing and Consuming Heritage in the Public Sphere
Dr. Michelle Stefano, UMBC/Maryland Traditions, Opening Remarks and Moderator

Michelle Stefano introduces the roundtable and draws on a few key ideas that have emerged throughout the day, as they relate to this discussion. First, museum professionals present are very involved in producing exhibitions, archives, documentaries, etc., but there is always an awareness that heritage is first and foremost a *process* and not a product. It is important to ask how those who practice and embody cultural heritage “own” it and partake in decision making processes. Second, it is important to examine the idea of shifting or sharing authority. Lastly, the notion of adopting a more holistic and integrative approach to heritage has formed a significant thread throughout today’s conversations; heritage practices cannot be separated from their more holistic contexts, which complicates the notion of “itemizing” culture.

- Ren (Leon) Hexin, Dimen Dong Cultural Eco-Museum, China

Ren Hexin discusses how the Dong village discovers, evaluates, and learns to export their cultural “value.” An ecological museum is different from a traditional museum because “for us, the entire village is the museum.” Because the Dong do not have a written language, preserving knowledge through other means is essential to the sustainability of their culture. To support this, the museum has four main functions: recording, heritage education, development, and sustainability.

Conceptualized in 2002 and opened in 2005, the Dimen Dong Cultural Eco-Museum is one of the largest ecological museums in China, because it includes forty-six villages. There are three major cultural characteristics of this place: traditional agrarian culture and self-sufficiency; the immigration of groups who then took on the Dong ethnicity; and the preservation of handicrafts and folk art technique and technology.

- Lily Kharrazi, Alliance for California Traditional Arts

Lily Kharrazi’s work for ACTA has led her to a particular concern with sustaining memory and practice. She is currently attempting to find ways to discover how traditional arts practice can serve as “a method and a means” for community wellbeing. The partnership between California Endowment’s *Building Healthy Communities* initiative and ACTA was built to support and acknowledge the relationship between cultural vitality and human wellbeing. Cultural sustainability



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means sustaining ways of knowing, both horizontally and democratically, and cultural sustainability leads to cultural equity and creates new leaders. Sustainability fosters innovation.

- Dr. Nicholas Spitzer, Radio Host, *American Routes*

Nicholas Spitzer asserts that there is a need to go out on the road and prove we can address cultural preservation through presentation. There is also a need to embrace the democratizing potential of creolization. Bringing extraordinary performers from ordinary communities to share their work around the world can be very powerful in preservation efforts.

Spitzer reflected on his experience in 1989 of folklore exchange with the former Soviet Union, and the United States and USSR's stark differences in cultural performance philosophies. Noting the challenges that such differences can create, Spitzer argues that, in cultural exchange, one should start with something the two groups share an interest in; his own experience bringing American cowboys to Mongolia through "American Routes Abroad" provides a useful example—both groups care deeply about horses. In addition to performances and conversations during such exchanges, there should also be workshops, local news and outreach, etc., to deepen the impact of cultural programs.

- Dr. Kurt Dewhurst and Dr. Marsha MacDowell, Michigan State University Museum

Marsha MacDowell begins by talking about quilting as a vehicle for cultural exchange. She draws on several quilt-related projects to highlight the transnational nature of culture and ICH but also the apparent pitfalls that are encountered through cultural exchange. Kurt Dewhurst joins the conversation to talk about the role of museums in the preservation of ICH and offer actionable steps toward both preserving ICH and creating more sustainable relationships moving forward.

Drawing from work on several quilt-related projects (*The Sum of Many Parts; The Beauty, Knowledge, and Inheritance of the Chinese Quilt Tradition; To Honor and Comfort; and The Spirit of Conscience*) MacDowell illustrates how quilting influences move transnationally and how the commodification of certain styles fixes particular traditions as those of primary value, at times neglecting the other styles that populate traditional practice. Her in-depth discussion of *The Spirit of Conscience*, a collection of quilts inspired by Nelson Mandela, highlights several important issues, including cultural differences in terminology and audiences, cultural protocols in project management, social media restrictions, the impact of the Internet on homogenization of styles, the importance of traditions to cultural identity and sustainability, the appropriation and production of intellectual cultural



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property, the commercialization of selected elements of a tradition, and the fact that indigenous leaning systems must also be recognized, understood, and supported.

Dewhurst explains that museums in particular have a special role to play within this work, but that ICH work in America is “kind of like riding a chicken”—there are many issues that complicate the relationship between ICH practitioners and the public, and the responsibility of museums to bridge this divide. Shared authority, reciprocity, communication, continual consultation, and reflective scholarship are all necessary steps moving forward.

Dewhurst calls for a connection between ICH policy and practice which requires building trust, equitable and mutual community engagement, principles of partnership, shared authority, legal and ethical frameworks to safeguard ICH without taking away community ownership, respect for intellectual property rights, and a focus on sustained collaboration to keep heritage alive. The key to shared authority is communicating through a shared common language and conceptual framework, having clear boundaries and expectations, being patient, committing to sustained relationships, and honestly assessing the success of collaborative work. Lastly, principles of partnership include reciprocity with direct benefits to both parties; having all relevant stakeholders at the table; making an impact beyond immediate individual projects; empowerment for all involved; agreement on the framework for the partnership; the belief that more can be achieved by collaboration than working alone; institution-based collaboration; transparency about aspirations and expectations; commitment to regular communication, timeliness, evaluation, and willingness to share concerns; continual consultation; and reflective scholarship and reporting.

- Discussion

Question: How can we think about the contradiction between what we are currently doing, the cultural appropriation that is occurring, and the initial progress and goals of UNESCO?

Spitzer: Though sensitive to the fact that my work brings American music to China, my organization has tried to carry the message that both continuity and tradition are valuable. We attempt to encourage individuals within various collectives to explore different options and perform their agency.

Dewhurst: There is an emerging participatory approach to giving meaning to collections. There are also issues of trust, authority sharing, and access when it comes to documenting and sharing sensitive cultural materials.

Ren: ICH is not a label—it describes a whole cultural system. We are dealing in China with a problem of fragmentation, because simply labeling individual acts



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as ICH neglects the larger contextual and cultural systems that imbue them with meaning.

Question: Please discuss the relationship between the tangible and intangible, as we witness increasing recognition within the field of the intangible aspects of tangible materials.

Dewhurst: This relationship is essential. There is an exciting emerging project on folklore, folklife, and museums; we should redefine what museums are in the twenty-first century.

Question: Culture is dynamic, and populations move beyond borders. Classification with UNESCO is not eternal—it is ephemeral. How do we establish some value that the community gets for safeguarding culture, or a link between development and this safeguarding?

MacDowell: The creation of community space is a really important part of this process, an essential part of facilitating access and sharing power.

4:30

Closing Remarks

James Counts Early, Director, Cultural Heritage Policy, CFCH

James Early closes the day's conference by asking participants to consider ICH work as part of a cultural "politic." And one political issue that ought to inform both our intellectual and advocacy efforts moving forward is that the United States has so far refused to sign UNESCO's *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*. Today we have done some important conceptual work, but we also have a responsibility to consider how we move the U.S. government to be involved in the world community's negotiation of new standards in cultural heritage policy. And, as today's conference has demonstrated, there is much to be gained by including tradition bearers directly in these negotiations.

Hopefully, today's meeting has inspired participants to engage in this type of work—to serve as a bridge between culture bearers and policy makers so that the policy arena becomes a more accommodating place for the communities we seek to serve.



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Thank you to the China International Culture Association, the Smithsonian Consortia for World Cultures, and the Human Origins Program at the National Museum of Natural History for supporting this event.

Thank you to all our speakers and participants.

Thank you to CFCH staff Chloe Ahmann, Dr. Betty Belanus, Dr. James Deutsch, James Early, Meredith Holmgren, Dr. Marjorie Hunt, Dr. Sojin Kim, Dr. Michael Atwood Mason, and James Mayer for your invaluable help in the planning process.

Thank you to Chloe Ahmann, Research Associate, and Elizabeth Walsh, Intern, for their able assistance taking notes during the meeting.

Thank you to National Museum of Natural History staff, especially Gwen Nield, Tina Karl, and William Branch, for your guidance in setting up the event.