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Letter from the Editors

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

This year, 2019, marks the fiftieth anniversary of CHINOPERL, The Permanent Conference on Chinese Oral and Performing Literature. In celebration, this year's two special issues of the journal aim to suggest the wealth of perspectives that CHINOPERL welcomes.

CHINOPERL has been published continuously since 1969, and it is the only Western-language journal in its field. One of CHINOPERL's strengths is its interdisciplinary nature. Scholars in such diverse fields as cultural studies, history, literature, linguistics, language, music, theater, dance, folklore, anthropology, and sociology have found a common interest in CHINOPERL. We also have been expanding into media studies, gender studies, religion, and digital humanities.

Recently many scholarly disciplines have been pushing to de-center our understanding of nations, of modernity, and of history, in favor of a more global approach that focuses on flows of culture, information, and material things. CHINOPERL is part of that new wave. The special issue on Chinese Opera and New Media (CHINOPERL 36.1 [2017]) showcased innovative approaches to the impact of new technologies and ideas of modernity in China. Other articles have focused on non-Han traditions within China, such as Tibetan crosstalk (*kha shags*; CHINOPERL 32.2 [December 2013]), or on Chinese traditions in diaspora, such as *gezai xi* in Singapore (CHINOPERL 37.1 [July 2018]).

This year's special issues in celebration of CHINOPERL's fiftieth anniversary emphasize China's participation in a global web of cultural transmission, focusing on cultural flows both within China and between China and the United States, Russia, and Central Asia. The approaches in these articles are not only profoundly interdisciplinary, they also work to break down the perceived boundaries between "China" and "the West," and to suggest a more nuanced understanding of "China."

In this issue, Bell Yung's account of the early conferences makes clear that CHINOPERL has always been interdisciplinary by nature. It foregrounds the importance of performance; in the words of Catherine (Kate) Stevens from the first meeting of CHINOPERL, the emphasis is on "that literature in which performance makes a difference."

Karl Reichl focuses on the interplay of orality and literacy in Turkic epics of Xinjiang. He provides a thorough overview of the oral and written folktale traditions of three major Turkic-speaking peoples of Central Asia: the Uyghurs of Xinjiang, China; the Kazaks of Kazakhstan and Xinjiang; and the Kyrgyz of Kyrgyzstan. The substantial exchanges between these traditions show both the fluidity of oral traditions and the arbitrariness of geographical boundaries, although clearly policies in each state have had impact on the transmission of these traditions.

Anne McLaren explores several other facets of the complexity of defining what "Chinese" means: the many regional languages and performance traditions within China, and the interaction of traditional cultural forms with Western-influenced ideas. Specifically, she examines the publication of vernacular texts in regional

languages through the lens of extant opera texts (*tanhuang*, written as 灘黃, 灘王, 攤黃, 彈黃, or 彈王) produced in Shanghai for Wu-speaking audiences and readers in the Republican era. How did a folk genre that often included erotic and scandalous content present itself as “reformed” (*gailiang* 改良) in the early twentieth century? The clash between the traditional corpus and new notions of gender equality reveals much about the adaptation of this genre by authors and publishers as they grappled with “modernity.”

David Johnson reflects on what “fieldwork” means to a historian. In so doing, he highlights the incredible diversity of cultural practices in China, some of which were documented by the project that inspired this reflection, “Chinese Regional Theatre in Its Social and Ritual Contexts” led by Wang Ch’iu-kuei.

The emphasis on performance means that CHINOPERL includes not only scholars but also practitioners and performers. The interaction between study and practice provides valuable insights that we might otherwise miss.

The next issue will also be full of fascinating interdisciplinary scholarship on Chinese performance and the world. Stay tuned!

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