



UPCOMING CCSC EVENTS



Lin Xi, 5 June 2015, Chinese Cultural Studies Center

DEAR FRIENDS,

Many of us have purchased an antique piece before, or inherited an heirloom, or perhaps traveled to a foreign country and bought a “cultural” souvenir or keepsake. In each of those instances, when we come into possession of something that has a history, do we stop to consider how much we actually know about and could learn from the piece? Do we have the patience to explore and become informed about the piece?

These are some of the questions posed by Lin Xi in his talk on 5th June, in Chinese Cultural Studies Center. While most people would only know Mr. Lin Xi primarily as the award-winning lyricist who is behind the songs of many of Hong Kong’s top echelon of singers, he is also an avid collector of antiques and art, and it is in this latter role that he presented how he makes sense of the cultural past and present around him. Through the presentation, it is clear that his knowledge and devotion towards Chinese words and traditional culture has cultivated a guileless sense of enquiry. More than just a mere collector, he also has the heart to understand, on a personally meaningful level, the antiques he purchases.

We felt great pleasure in receiving positive feedback from attendees of the talk, and sincerely thank Mr. Lin Xi once again for his presentation. We hope that CCSC will continue to provide more opportunities and events that can help those who come develop or renew an investigative curiosity towards Chinese culture.

Last but not least, CCSC hopes to keep closely connected with you all and we are excited to see all of you in the events of the next half of 2015! Thank you for your support. We wouldn’t be anywhere without it!

25 July 2015**HK Museum of History Guided Tour, Han Exhibition (Cantonese)**

CCSC will be offering a guided tour of the special exhibition, the Hong Kong Jockey Club Series, “The Rise of the Celestial Empire: Consolidation and Cultural Exchange during the Han Dynasty.”

6 August 2015**Gu Qin presentation (English)**

John Thompson, who has devoted 40 years to reconstructing, analyzing, and performing guqin music published during the Ming Dynasty, will be performing and discussing the earliest versions of melodies he learned from his teacher, Sun Yuqin.

9-10 October 2015**China Archaeology Symposium**

CCSC and Chinese University of Hong Kong will be holding a lecture series on archaeology in China, with invited speakers from the top archaeological academic and research institutions in China.

For more information, including registration, please visit www.chineseculturalstudiescenter.org

OTHER CULTURAL EVENTS

There’s always a lot going on in Hong Kong-- here are some cultural events happening at other places:

24-26 July 2015**Calligraphy & Painting Exhibition**

Organization: Greenfield Calligraphy & Painting Society of Hong Kong
Venue: Hong Kong City Hall (Exhibition hall)
Ticket Price: free admission

31 July 2015**Talk on Kungqu opera and Su opera-staging, performance & their legacy**

Organization: Chinese Opera Festival
Venue: Hong Kong Cultural Center
Speakers: Wang Fang, Zhao Wenlin, Fan Jixin
Ticket Price: free admission

15 August 2015**Traditional Chinese Puppet Show**

Performance group: Sky Bird Puppet Group
Venue: Hong Kong Central Library
Ticket Price: free admission

HIGHLIGHTS

HIDE AND SEEK: UNCOVERING THE SECRETS OF CHINESE CULTURE WITH LIN XI



As part of Asia Week Hong Kong 2015, Chinese Cultural Studies Center hosted a talk on June 5, by Lin Xi, award-winning lyricist that is behind some of the most well-known songs of Hong Kong's star singers such as Faye Wong, Leslie Cheung, Andy Lau, and Miriam Yeung. Lin Xi's is a name that is recognized by both young and old, and in mainland China and Hong Kong.

Perhaps it's the same nature that can grasp nuances of meaning in language to create meaningful lyrics that also makes Lin Xi inquisitive and actively reach for deeper understanding in other areas of life that other people by comparison may only passively or reactively engage with. One such area is his engagement with Chinese culture, and the various influences and products of it that are seen around us every day. A recurring theme of his talk—as shown by the examples he gives from his own life—is the reminder to always keep a sense of enquiry and curiosity about the cultural traditions that have been passed on to us, and what we in turn will decide to pass on.

Lin Xi is a thoughtful collector of various Chinese antiques, and while some of his purchases may have been impulsive (such as his purchase of a Tang Dynasty Buddha head, that he bought because it was “instinctively handsome”) he takes the time afterwards to ask questions of the pieces. Lin Xi is fascinated with what each piece has to tell about how our ancestors arranged their

world, and the life views espoused in their designs: “Take Chinese furniture, for example. Maybe it's so much more ergonomic and convenient to use a modern office chair today when practicing your calligraphy—you could roll from one end of the long table to the other—but there's something about using those old wooden Chinese chairs that gives the whole experience a different feeling. These old chairs are heavy and hard to move, but think of the focus that it gave the Chinese scholar when he was engaged in his studies and calligraphy.

They weren't pushing their chair back every minute to get a drink, go to the bathroom...I think the weight of all the furniture around them gave an air of steadiness and concentration to whatever they were doing. I think this idea of setting a deliberate pace for all their activities was something our ancestors consciously incorporated into the arrangement of their world around them, including their furniture.”

“ I think this idea of setting a deliberate pace for all their activities was something our ancestors consciously incorporated into the arrangement of their world around them, including their furniture. ”

One to back up his curiosity with careful study, Lin Xi has made it a habit to fervently delve into historical and contextual research for each of his pieces, becoming an aficionado of sorts for each of them. But this research process is organic: once, in an extemporaneous moment, he had measured the dimensions of all the Chinese chairs in his house, and discovered that all of them were approximately the same in height, with only a variation of 0.5cm, spurring further exploration into traditional Chinese design philosophies.

“It's not about just asking questions, but it's asking the right questions that count. Of course, sometimes the trappings of traditional rituals seem superfluous, and perhaps not all traditions are worth keeping. But one should at least consider why these rituals came to be. Maybe it's a pain to have to go through all these little prescribed steps before you can have your of tea. But the result is that you are so much more appreciative of that cup of tea when it is finally ready, and will take your time enjoying it. Maybe that's the whole point.”





MEET OUR INTERN

CCSC's summer intern, Joanne Ng, shares with us her evolving views on Chinese Culture.

Tell us a little about yourself

Hi! My name is Joanne Ng, and I'm currently studying English Studies (BA) at City University of Hong Kong. I am a born and bred Lamma Island girl. My mother's love for Chinese opera has rubbed off on me, and I always make sure to go to the Chinese opera shows during the Tin Hau Festival every year. The make-up and clothing and the actors' interactions with each other and the beautiful lyrics all fascinate me. My interest in Chinese opera was a starting point and an influence in me looking at other aspects of Chinese culture, and led me to my current position, as an intern at Chinese Cultural Studies Center!

What are some things that have caught your interest during your time here? What would you like to learn more about?

A large portion of the workload of my internship here happened to be on the topic of incense, since CCSC conducted a symposium on Chinese incense back in May, and I helped with organizing the material from the conference. I got the chance to explore and learn about the history of aromatics, censers, as well as legends and stories concerning incense. But in my work of translating the transcripts and presentations of the conference, I also learned more about the historical contexts surrounding this practice. It turns out that you can learn a lot about the economic, social, and religious practices of the different dynasties just by looking at one cultural tradition (incense).

CCSC has provided me a great working environment to rebuild my interests in Chinese culture. I would like to learn more about

the different terracotta pieces from the Han Dynasty that I saw in the current Han Exhibition at the Hong Kong Museum of History. I find it intriguing that these are small, captured portraits of how life was like back then. Clothing, hairstyles, equestrian and military practices...such a lot of information in each of these vibrant pieces.

Additionally, I have been really impressed with the level of dedication that people in this field (cultural management) have towards their work, and their firm belief in the importance of cultural heritage. I have had the opportunity to meet some people where it's clear that their passion has driven them to make this their lifework.

What kind of future involvement do you see yourself having in Chinese cultural activities?

Influenced by my mum's interests towards her favorite Chinese art form, Cantonese opera, I have watched about five shows with her during the first half year of 2015 alone. Cantonese opera has been a hot topic of discussion for me and my mom. We appreciate the acting skills of the experienced actors and actresses, but also pay attention to the upcoming actors and actresses. I think my interest in Chinese opera will continue for the foreseeable future.

I would say this year is a really special one to me because I had a chance to walk backstage of a Cantonese opera to take photos of the preparation process of the actors and actresses before the show. Clothing and accessories were hanging on clothes racks made of bamboo, and seeing the actors putting on their make-up all made it seem quite surreal.

One of the actresses, Wang Kit Ching, a big new star in the world of Cantonese opera has become our favourite actress after watching her performance during the Tin Hau Festival on Lamma Island. I am very delighted that she will be featured as an interviewee in the next issue of the CCSC newsletter.

What is the level of interest do you see university students your age having towards Chinese cultural events and activities?

I would say university students quite enjoy celebrating Chinese traditional events, such as viewing lion dances during the Lunar New Year holidays and celebrating Mid-Autumn Festival with mooncakes and Chinese lanterns. They generally accept and follow the traditions of these cultural festivities. I have friends who have joined lion dance troupes, or who have devoted a lot of time in practicing for the dragon boat competitions for Tuen Ng Festival.

However, it's sad to observe that a majority of university students seem to usually regard Chinese culture as old-school. You can easily find students nowadays who prefer Western culture over Chinese culture.

What is something that can be done to help foster and increase the interest of university students towards cultural events, activities, and projects?

Of course, holding events and activities to do with Chinese culture as well as using different social networking platforms are important. I also think that free-of-charge activities and events should not be underestimated. Students often like attending these activities accompanied by friends. Giving out free tickets not only enhances student exposure towards different aspects of the Chinese culture, but, if they found the events they previously joined to be interesting, such events will also help arouse their interest in joining other culture-related events in the future. Hopefully, that will create a sustainable desire in students to continue to be engaged in cultural events.

Any changes in your view of Chinese culture and history before the internship and now?

Before I worked in CCSC, even though I live in Hong Kong, I didn't feel that there was much of a Chinese cultural atmosphere. Being a former British colony and it's position as a leading international financial center, everything in Hong Kong seems very international. Even education nowadays is more focused on English than Chinese.

Under these conditions, Hong Kong people have somewhat ignored the roots and the value of Chinese culture. Doing my internship at CCSC has increased my exposure to many wonderful aspects of Chinese culture. Some may say that Chinese customs and beliefs are too burdensome; however, if you really spend time to understand the background knowledge and history about why our ancestors would follow and create these customs, you would realize how deeply the thought about things, and how perhaps we are the ones who are ludicrous in our superficiality and quests for convenience.



**“Return to the Sources:
A presentation of the
earliest known versions
of today's standard
guqin melodies”**

Presenter: John Thompson

Language: English/Cantonese

Thursday, August 6th, 2015

7:00-8:30pm

304 Lyndhurst Building,
29 Lyndhurst Terrace, Central

John Thompson began in 1974, in Taiwan, to study the modern guqin tradition from Sun Yu-qin, who was honored as a Living National Cultural Treasure by the Republic of China. Since 1976, his focus has been reconstructing, analyzing, teaching and performing guqin music published during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). He has recorded more than 200 melodies he has reconstructed.

In this presentation, John Thompson will be performing and discussing the earliest versions of melodies he learned from his teacher Sun Yuqin, as a commemoration of the 25th anniversary of his passing.

For reservations, please contact
info@chineseculturalstudiescenter.org

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