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EDITORIAL WELCOME

## Introduction: Public History in the Global Context

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Overlooking the Pacific Ocean, I am writing from my apartment. The beauty of working in the field of public history, like living near the coast, is that waves of surprises, opportunities, challenges, uncertainties emerge every day; the continuous expansion of the boundaries is a daily reality.

Back in February 2019, I was planning on flying back to Hangzhou to teach my regular public history seminar. The COVID- 19 pandemic hit and it has subsequently changed not only my plan but the rest of the world. I adjusted the field project, an integral part of public history training, and re-designed a remote oral history project, *Experiencing History: Listening COVID-19 Pandemic in Place (name of your city/town/village)*. Ten student projects, the final products of this seminar, ranging from frontier workers, students, entrepreneurs, migrant workers, across professional and geographical boundaries, send a powerful message: the splintered, even conflicting uses of history, is indeed not an isolated endeavor: the world is connected as a global village.

As the pandemic has evolved across the world, it has also unleashed a series of hidden social sentiments, from racism, hate, xenophobia and scapegoating to populism and nationalism. Black Lives Matter, or rather, new Civil Rights Movement, and Stop Asian Hate in America epitomize the fights against white supremacy. Such radical social movements are not only unique to a specific country; they are indeed part of a global movement. What does this mean for public history as a field and as a social movement?

We face a critical moment to experience history, to reflect upon how history is reinterpreted, contested and commemorated in the public space, and further along the line, how that space is going global, and how public historians confront an evolving, thinking public. We also stand at another threshold to revisit the idea of ‘public’. In her influential writing about justice

and the politics of difference, Iris Marion Young analyzed the primary meaning of public is what is open and accessible. She elaborated that 'in open and accessible public space and forums, one should expect to encounter and hear from those are different, whose social perspective, experience, and affiliations are different.'<sup>1</sup> Thirty years later, her ideal of 'a heterogeneous public' still resonates.

As public history has engaged in a dynamic process of self-definition, innovation in media technology has allowed the public to access, produce, interpret and disseminate historical knowledge. Various public history practices around the globe have prompted scholars and professionals to reflect on theories and methodologies that dissolve boundaries between professionals and the public. Increasingly, we are confronting a more demanding public that yearns for a more complex understanding of the past.

This special issue of *Public History Review* responds to such urgent global debates. It explores public history in the global context. Nine essays from nine countries represent diverse ways of how public history works, struggles or fails in different cultures. Together, they inspire us to ponder public history in an increasingly diverse and polarized world. We hope our authors' insights prove useful to such a collective quest for our professional identity.

A note on the editorial process. Exploring public history globally, this issue is a global collaboration on many scales. Paul Ashton, founding editor of *Public History Review* and former director for the Australia Center of Public History at University of Technology Sydney, and Marla Miller, former director of the Public History program at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, and past-president of the National Council on Public History, have offered their insights to frame the idea.

Three doctoral students, Guanhua Tan from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, Yushi Liu and Lishi You from Zhejiang University were actively involved in the production of this issue. Their creative and diligent work make it all possible.

Most important of all, our reviewers, who adjusted their hectic schedules during this time of deep uncertainty, have provided critical comments: Paul Ashton (University of Technology Sydney), Sharon Babaian (Canada's Museums of Science and Innovation), James Brooks (University of Georgia), David Dean (Carleton University), Jerome de Groot (University of Manchester), Theodore Karamanski (Loyola University Chicago), Constance Schulz (University of South Carolina), Julia Wells (Rhodes University) and Yafu Zhao (Beijing Normal University)

At the end, discussions about public history in the global context are nothing novel. In *What is Public History Globally*, the editors question the possibility of 'global public history'.<sup>2</sup> With the *public* turn in history, national forms of public history are now internationally connected through the Internet. 'Public historians focus on *local* case studies that are now compared *internationally*; that is, they create new *glocal* forms of public history.'<sup>3</sup> We leave our readers to ponder: how history making in the public has transformed, and what kind of role we are call to play in this transformation.

Enjoy the journey!

## Endnotes

1 Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton University Press, 2011, p119.

2 Paul Ashton and Alex Trapeznik (eds), *What is Public History Globally?: Working with the Past in the Present*, Bloomsbury Academic, London and New York, 2019, p6. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350033306>

3 Serge Noiret and Thomas Cauvin, 'Internationalizing Public History', in Gardner, James B. Gardner and Paula Hamilton (eds), *The Oxford handbook of public history*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2017, p26. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199766024.013.1>