

Abstract

Seeking Unity in Diversity: CultureWear and Diaspora Museum

The Second International Conference on CultureWear and Diaspora Museum

Presented by Hesung Chun Koh, on August 27, 2010

at The National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, Japan

The rate of multi-cultural and multi-ethnic growth has accelerated even more rapidly world-wide than demographers had projected. Fostering people of different cultures to live and work harmoniously and productively together has become critical in diverse societies. In this increasingly complex, multi-cultural world, understanding one's own cultural identity is crucial to one's self awareness and confidence. Moreover, understanding one's neighbors and the bases for their ways of thinking and behaving has become just as critical, with the growing need to achieve cultural competency, i.e., the ability to live within more than two cultures.

The CultureWear and Diaspora Museum movement serves as a building block for the establishment of greater cultural competency. The re-fashioning of children's clothing incorporating ethnic flair and contemporary design has helped promote fashion-forward cultural exchange and inspired children and communities to enhance their cultural and global competency.

Through developing CultureWear in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and eventually the entire world, those behind the movement hope to advance cross-cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills to bring about peaceful co-existence. Diaspora has contributed to the fusion, creative integration, and preservation of homeland cultures. However, still today, there exists no single center that houses the study of diaspora within a comprehensive framework. This raises some important questions including the following: Where may growing numbers of multi-cultural families go to try to comprehend their own cultural identities? How can world history be complete without a record of significant changes contributed by diasporas? These and other questions argue for the establishment of a new and innovative diaspora museum that embraces all cultures, not just specific cultures such as Jewish and African American diaspora existent today.

The CultureWear and Diaspora Museum movement was first announced by East Rock Institute at the December 11, 2007 Conference on Sustainability of Non-profit Organizations, sponsored by the Community Foundation for Greater New

Haven in Connecticut. The first workshop began the day before the Conference entitled “Bridging Culture through the Korean Fashion Show,” sponsored by East Rock Institute with Sungshin Women’s University and Korean Students at Yale, and was held at First Summerfield United Methodist Church, New Haven, CT on March 29, 2008.

Encouraged by the enthusiastic response of over 200 non-profit leaders at the 2007 meeting, ERI has since expanded its international partnerships and embarked on three international conferences focusing on further research on the beauty, social and cultural implications of clothing from different cultures, with Sungshin Women’s University contributing CultureWear designs. Proceeds from CultureWear will eventually be directed toward endowing the establishment of a diaspora museum.

This presentation discusses lessons learned through various conferences, workshops, and fashion shows held in New Haven, CT and Sungshin Women’s University in Korea since 2007. It introduces some observations related to cultural identity, globalization and diaspora, synthesized from ERI’s research. It is hoped that in-depth analysis of the role of clothing in society and culture will demonstrate its implications on cultural values, power and politics, cultural identity, multi-cultural education, as well as highlight the role of diaspora in globalization.

It is hoped that this second international conference at the National Museum of Ethnology in Japan will help generate an innovative model for a diaspora museum that strives toward “unity in diversity” and underscores the contribution of diaspora to globalization and the fusion of cultures. It is greatly hoped that this conference will help provide an innovative direction for the 2011 Conference in New York and spur dynamic collaboration toward the establishment of a virtual diaspora museum.