Entangled Images (Hamburg, 11-12 Jun 26)

Center for the Study of Manuscript Cultures, Hamburg University, Jun 11–12, 2026
Deadline: Feb 28, 2026

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Early 20th-Century Chinese Popular Culture and Western Collections.

This workshop grows out of the DFG-funded research project “Early 20th-century Chinese popular prints: The collection of the Museum am Rothenbaum, Hamburg” (DFG project no. 517637735). The project examines a group of around 1,300 Chinese popular prints preserved today in Hamburg, including about 360 industrially produced lithographic and offset prints from 1920s–30s Shanghai.
Rather than forming a unified or systematically assembled corpus, these prints entered the collection through heterogeneous acquisition contexts between the late Qing period and the early 1930s. A significant part of the material was acquired in the context of a scientific collaboration between Hamburg’s Museum of Ethnology (today MARKK) and the Academia Sinica in Nanjing around 1930, embedded in wider Republican-era projects of ethnological, folkloristic, and sociological research in China. These acquisition contexts shaped not only what was collected, but also how popular images were classified and interpreted within different institutional frameworks.
The prints coexist with other objects of material culture and were shaped by overlapping regimes of classification: Ethnological, folkloristic, art-historical and even political. As such, they offer insight not only into Chinese popular visual culture, but also into the institutional and epistemic frameworks through which “China,” “the popular,” and “the modern” were constructed in both Chinese and European contexts.
Taking popular prints as a point of departure, the workshop approaches early 20th-century Chinese popular culture as a field of multiple entanglements: between print, performance, and other visual media; between industrial technologies and inherited forms; between popular religion, opera, science, and political reform movements; and between Chinese institutions and transcultural networks of collecting and knowledge exchange. While material from Hamburg provides the concrete empirical anchor, this workshop is conceived with a broader and comparative perspective, inviting engagement with other Western collections of Chinese material culture as well as Chinese institutional and disciplinary contexts.

Participation and Applications
The workshop will bring together a small group of 10–12 early-career researchers (PhD candidates and postdocs). Applicants are invited to submit a brief statement outlining their research interests and how these relate to the workshop, as well as a proposal for a short presentation until February 28. All applicants will be notified of the acceptance decision by March 8.

Aims and Questions

The workshop welcomes applications for participation and presentations engaging with Chinese popular imagery and culture, print culture, and related visual and material media from the late Qing period to the early People's Republic, with particular attention to institutional, transmedial, and transcultural entanglements.

Possible guiding questions include:
- How did popular stories, theatrical repertoires, myths, and moral narratives circulate between prints, performance, illustrated publications, and other media?
- In what ways did industrial production, serial formats, and new printing technologies interact with theatrical, ritual, didactic, or scientific practices?
- How are narrative image forms and serial visual formats situated in genealogies of visual storytelling in twentieth-century China?
- How did popular visual and material media intersect with projects of social reform, scientific classification, racial knowledge, or national identity in Republican China?
- How were Chinese popular images and objects collected, classified, and reinterpreted within museums, archives, and research institutions in China and Europe, including beyond explicitly ethnological settings?
- What can comparative perspectives on different Western collections of Chinese material culture reveal about the production of knowledge, the circulation of objects, and the historiography of Chinese popular culture?

Format
- Participants: 10–12 early-career researchers (PhD candidates and postdocs)
- Presentations: 20 minutes + 10 minutes discussion
- Activities: Keynote lecture, thematic panels, final roundtable, and an exhibition visit at the MARKK
- Support: Accommodation and (partial) travel support available
(Details will be confirmed individually.)

Organiser
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Reference:
CFP: Entangled Images (Hamburg, 11-12 Jun 26). In: ArtHist.net, Feb 12, 2026 (accessed Nov 18, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/51737>.