

Beyond Print Literacy: UNESCO and Intangible Heritage

Supervisor: [Professor Peter D. McDonald](#), Faculty of English

This project entitled *Beyond Print Literacy: UNESCO and Intangible Heritage* will focus on UNESCO's founding commitment to books and print literacy, the questions this raised particularly for representatives from the global south after the 1960s, and the many twists in the debates that eventually led to the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2003) and the *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* (2005). This important story about the institutional and political supports for cultural expression beyond print is still largely untold, though Professor Peter D. McDonald, the proposed supervisor, touches on it in *Artefacts of Writing: Ideas of the State and Communities of Letters from Matthew Arnold to Xu Bing* (Oxford, 2017).

The project fits the rationale for *Publication beyond Print* in three key ways. It 'will question the assumptions that self-expression, political community and intellectual progress are best served by printing', it will address the 'contemporary concern with the political and social power of unprinted media' (oral cultures in particular but also their relation to digital media), and it will 'contribute to debates about unprinted communication in political life.' More particularly, since the great Malian scholar Amadou Hampâté Bâ was the first to voice concerns about UNESCO's fixation on print in the early 1960s and since the concept of 'intangible heritage' was derived from Japanese law (specifically the 1950 Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties, 文化財保護法 Bunkazai hogohō), the project will examine the ways in which 'the global south and emerging Asian superpowers' have started to reshape an essentially Euro-American post-war international order in the new millennium. At the same time, *Beyond Print Literacy* will extend the overall rationale for *Publication beyond Print* by focusing less on decentring 'printing within humanities scholarship' and on the intersections among bibliography, book history and literary studies, than on the legal, political, cultural and educational dimensions of decentring print within a major international forum like UNESCO and on the creative though as yet underdeveloped interactions among literary studies, intellectual history, book history, sociology and international relations.

Given the focused nature of the project and the accessibility of the primary evidence, it is well-suited for a three-year doctoral programme. Much of the relevant documentation is now available online (and in English) thanks to UNESCO's own digitisation initiatives, but the researcher will need to consult the organization's archive in Paris and will benefit from the extensive holdings in the Bodleian Law Library and the British Library. Professor McDonald has well-established connections with the archivists at UNESCO and with fellow researchers in the field, notably Gisèle Sapiro at l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales in Paris and Poul Duedahl at the University of Aalborg in Denmark.

Selection criteria

Essential

- First-class or equivalent undergraduate degree in English literature, including joint degrees with English
- Distinction or equivalent master's qualification in postcolonial studies, world literature and/or twentieth-century literary culture after 1945

Desirable

- Knowledge of book history, including orality and literacy
- Competence in a major world language other than English