

Department of Anthropology,  
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

# Summer Internship 2015

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**Institution: Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge, UK**

This summer break, thanks to the Department of Anthropology, I was so glad to be chosen to participate in the internship which took place in the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology which is under the University of Cambridge, United Kingdom.

The Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology was founded in 1884 originally and it was one of the nine university museums. Its collections include mainly all kinds of artifacts related to archaeology within Cambridge, the United Kingdom, and also the world; and also a variety ethnology objects from all around the world, including Europe, South and North America, Australia and the Pacific regions, and also Asia.

Museum works cover a wide range of works, far more than my first impression.

I was arranged to work with the Anthropology Department. The Museum was very busy in summer as researchers kept coming and leaving for short-term research on their interested objects. In the first week of my internship, it was the opening of a new temporary exhibition – “River Stars Reindeer”. It was an exhibition showing many photograph collections of two communities called Evenki and Orochen, which are settled in Inner Mongolia and Siberia. The Museum prepared numbers of activities which were related to the event. Numbers of researchers from Orochen communities were invited to look at the objects from their communities as the objects did not have much descriptions and information. I served as a translator and interpreter at that time as the Chinese researchers usually spoke Mandarin and hardly spoke English. Those researchers helped contribute to the museum by looking at the objects and tell details like what materials the object was made of, what the functions of it, who was supposed to use the object, etc. This is quite an important



Discussion about certain objects

process as there were not always much people who knows these artifacts well in the Museum and as there were too many collections in the store room, it is impossible to analyze and study all the objects the Museum owns. Therefore, every time researchers come, it would be a great chance to take the objects out and give them a detailed study, which could benefit future exhibition planning. Some Russian researchers were invited also to the Museum for the study of related artifacts as well, as the communities share similar culture in Inner Mongolian, Siberian and Russian region.

Other than looking at the artifacts, all the researchers and some of the museum staff were invited to participate in a number of seminars held by the researchers themselves. As different people had their own profession fields, they share their knowledge on the theme in the seminars and they discussed what other things they can do for the events. I was also invited to the seminars, listening to the scholars from all over the globe sharing their findings about the Orochen community.

Besides, the Museum also welcomed post-graduate scholars to study the artifacts and archives, because of the reason I mentioned earlier. There was a scholar from Zurich coming for the objects from West Irian, New Guinea. As she needed to look at all the related objects, this is also a great chance to tidy up the messy database and artifact storage. As each object must be given an accession number, the Museum, due to some reasons, has used many numbering systems in different period so the accession number of the artifacts may not be recorded correctly and clearly. Therefore, when the scholar was looking at the object, she needs to help recording the correct information of the artifacts, including the right accession number, object details and the use of the object. And for artifact storage, this is the major work I've done during my internship.

Considering the Museum has the history lasted for over a decade, people tried different methods to store the artifacts. From earlier time, people may not think much about what the most appropriate way is to store the objects so they just wrapped all the collections together and put it in a box. Then, later, people realize it is important to separate the artifacts from each other as the physical contact of objects may affect their appearance. Therefore, people started wrapping the objects one by one. Now, the staff in the Museum believed that it would be the best way to have the collections stored separated from each other, but also being easily visible to the person who opens the box later, so that he/she does not need to move or touch the object. For this reason, when I helped the scholar when she was looking at the objects, I helped repacking the box: checking if there are loose pieces of the artifact or pest traces, putting giffy foam and tissue paper for protecting the artifacts from the contact of the wooden box, and finally placing



A repacked box

the artifacts back to the box with tissue puffs for the separation of the artifacts and giving cushion effect when the box was moved or even dropped.

Of course, I also needed to help with recording the basic information of the artifacts, including taking measurements of the artifacts and updating the Museum database, and also taking photographs of the different sides of the artifact because the Museum tries to turn the information into a digitalized way, so that people can have a first view on the online database and they do not need to open boxes every time they want to check something. Other than the artifacts, the Museum also tries to digitalize the catalogue cards, which contain information of the artifact when they first came into the Museum. What I needed to do is to photograph the cards and put them into the computer with renamed file names. This in fact gives a great convenience to researchers as they can search for the information faster than flipping through the cards one by one and try to find the appropriate one out of hundreds of cards.



Objects to be measured and photographed

Other than working with the objects, I needed to do the evaluation of the museum, which is called tracking. This kind of evaluation is by observing what a visitor route of the visiting is, what objects he/she has looked at, how long he/she has spent on looking at a particular object, etc, to know what artifacts attract visitors' attention and evaluate whether the galleries are in good design. And of course, a follow-up questionnaire has to be finished in order to get a whole picture on how a visitor thinks about the museum.

Last but not least, the museum was so generous to give chance to student interns to do what they are interested. I am particularly interested in the conservation field and the supervisor arranged some time for me to work with the conservators in the museum. As the field requires professional science knowledge, although I am not acquired with it but I can help cleaning the objects in the museum, including those in gallery and the objects which are about to be on loan. And cleaning is never an easy job as one may imagine.



Karol, Tommy and other museum staff

Issues like how much a conservator should clean an object so that the historical trace could be left, are always questions that every conservator is trying to answer in their whole career life.