

2021 Anthropology Summer Internship Report

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Institution: Hong Kong Museum of History

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I am grateful of having this precious opportunity to work as an intern in Hong Kong Museum of History during the summer. I was assigned to the unit of Urban and Oral History, under the supervision of two assistant curators, and worked with a research assistant and another intern from CUHK History Department. During the short period of internship, although the Unit had not been assigned to prepare for the coming exhibition, it allowed me to take part in various research projects, and enriched my understanding of the operation and work flow of a museum unit.

My first duty of internship was tidying up archives of past research projects and exhibitions. Archives were stored in CDs, in which the content included documentation works of exhibits, video demonstrations which played during the exhibitions, photographs taken in fieldworks, recordings of interviews and historical documents of toy manufacturing companies. Most of the documents I handled were related to the past exhibition “The Legend of Hong Kong Toys” in 2017. Afterwards, I had to make record of these archives into an excel form. Through reading the archives, I better understand the process of documentation of exhibits, and in what ways the museum collects and engages various types of research sources in curating an exhibition.

Besides handling archives, my main duty during the internship was conducting research, which closely related to different duties performed by the Unit. My colleagues and I were responsible for the primitive stage of annual research project of the Unit. We spent around one month in researching on culture of bird-keeping (養雀文化) in Hong Kong during the 50-60s’. In the research, we had studied old newspaper articles, past TV and radio programmes

related to bird-keeping, including sub-topics such as activities which bird-keepers participated in, the history of bird street, and most crucially the traditional Cantonese restaurants (茶樓), which deemed as an important location for bird-keepers gathering everyday and retailing birds and bird feed such as grasshoppers. The assistant curator launched meetings with us per week to discuss the new findings during the research, and guided us in discovering research gap and considering new research perspectives lacking in the sources we handled. Another research projects related to researches on objects donated by the general public. The assistant curator had also guided us in researching on two donations—the tools used by a hairdresser, who had served Lady MacLehose (麥理浩爵士夫人) for 10 years, and one watch manufactured by J. Ullmann & Co., a leading watchmaker of Swiss watch in Hong Kong in late 19th century to early 20th century. Through the two research projects, I had the great opportunity to learn about the process of accepting donations from the general public, as well as the criteria and consideration of selecting collections that attached historical significance, and proving the collections which meet the requirement of “contributing to Hong Kong history”, which was deemed crucial by the museum in examining their own collections. Moreover, my colleagues and I had discussed together and prepared for an interview with the hairdresser, as the museum would like to conduct an oral history with him in order to enrich the understanding of the industry. Although the Unit could not arrange a meeting with the hairdresser within our internship period, the experience of designing semi-structured interview deepened my understanding on oral history, and enables me to apply my knowledge from anthropology lessons.

Till the last week of internship, I am grateful to participate in one session of “handover”, which was the standard progress of managing artefacts and collections. My supervisor had encouraged me to wear a pair of gloves and tried to handle the collections. Cooperated with another assistant curator and research assistant, we had to number the collections, check the

status of each piece of collections, and renovate them into plastic shields which typically utilized to protect the organic artefacts. Most of the collections we handled were photographs, postcards, stamps, newspapers, together with some groceries, toys and household adornment. It was definitely a memorable experience as I was given an opportunity in dealing with museum collections, in which I learn more on the preservation work done by the museum.

To conclude, I am truly thankful that my colleagues were willing to teach me a lot when I encounter difficulties, and share their experiences with me. Not only about comprehend the operation of museum and understand the daily routine of museum curator, also provide helpful suggestions in future career planning. It was a fruitful experience for me to engage in the behind-the-scene of the museum, and arouse my enthusiasm for working in the museum. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to the Department of Anthropology and HKMH for granting me this precious opportunity, and colleagues in the Unit who are always patient and supportive.