

2017 Anthropology Summer Internship Program

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Institution: Hong Kong Museum of History

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Background

I am very grateful to work as an intern at the Natural History Unit, Hong Kong Museum of History under supervision of the assistant curators, in July 2017. During my internship, the museum was holding a grand exhibition titled “*Longevity and Virtues: Birthday Celebrations of the Qing Emperors and Empress Dowagers*”. The Unit at which I worked was responsible for attending to matters concerning this exhibition, as well as preparing for other upcoming exhibitions.



Figure 1. The “Longevity and Virtues: Birthday Celebrations of the Qing Emperors and Empress Dowagers” exhibition

My duties during internship

My first assigned task was to proofread the captions and titles on the TV screens and printed billboards displayed at the “*Longevity and Virtues*” exhibition, with reference to an internal archived document. It was important for me to ensure that they were consistent and to report discrepancies

my supervisors, if found. The museum staff was incredibly meticulous about every single detail; from the Italicization of the title of *Zhonghe Shaoyue* (中和韶樂), an ensemble of Qing palace music, to the adaption of the Chinese character regarding the name of xun flute (埙 vessel flute), a Qing musical instrument. By the time of proofreading, I also came to appreciate and respect the museum's professional translators, for their brilliantly done English translations.

My second task was to research on recent-decade archaeological findings in Xinjiang and Afghanistan. It was found that Xiaohe cemetery (小河墓地) and Hami region in Xinjiang (新疆哈密地區), as well as Begram, Bamiyan and Ai Khanum were some of the most popular sites with rich archaeological excavations. It was not complicated to collect a great number of academic reports or journal articles about these sites; and the assistant curator reminded me: the most difficult lied with how to capitalize on such information to organize a widely understandable exhibition for the general public. Information of topics arousing greater public interests and published reports about past exhibitions, for example, exhibitions of Afghan treasures in the US, Japan, London and Beijing, would be useful references at this point. I learnt to develop effective research methods, including making good use of search-friendly tags linking to pools of particularly topics. For instance, the tag "Zoroastrianism" frequently appeared under the article or book titles when I researched on Xinjiang archeological sites. So I considered Zoroastrianism a commonly studied theme in the academia, yet not widely known in Hong Kong. Hinting at its exotic mysteriousness from the far west, Zoroastrianism might attract Hong Kong audience's attention, and was thus worth exploring. I went on collecting information on other intriguing topics using similar research tactics.

Thirdly, I was assigned to the task of studying the *"Painted Panel Depicting Emperor Qianlong Celebrating the Eightieth Birthday of Empress Dowager Chongqing"* (乾隆帝祝母后萬壽圖貼落), which was at the *"Longevity and Virtues"* exhibition. Depicted in the panel was Empress Dowager Chongqing receiving birthday felicitations from her son Emperor Qianlong and his concubines, the Qing princes, princesses and ministers. We were to find out the identities or ranks of the illustrated characters in the panel. The Qing Emperor in this panel had once been mistakenly identified as Yongyan (顥琰), i.e. Emperor Jiaqing. Later it was clarified by the experts from the Palace Museum that the main characters were Empress Dowager Chongqing and Emperor Qianlong.



Figure 2. Empress Dowager Chongqing and Emperor Qianlong in the “Painted Panel Depicting Emperor Qianlong Celebrating the Eightieth Birthday of Empress Dowager Chongqing”

The females sitting in rows on the two sides of the Empress Dowager and the Emperor were very likely the Emperor’s high-rank concubines, or/ and other imperial consorts. We found that, by the time of Empress Dowager Chongqing’s 80th birthday ceremony, Imperial Noble Consort Ling (令皇貴妃), Noble Consort Qing (慶貴妃) and Consort Rong (容妃) were the highest-rank concubines of Qianlong. Presumably, the lady, due East to the Empress Dowager and the Emperor, dressed in bright yellow robe, was Imperial Noble Consort Ling; whereas the one due West, in golden yellow robe, was Noble Consort Qing. According to the *Qinding daqing huidian tu* (欽定大清會典圖), only the Empress Dowager (皇太后), the Empress (皇后), and the Imperial Noble Consort (皇貴妃) would be dressed in bright yellow (明黃). Noble Consorts (貴妃), consorts (妃), first-rank consorts of princes (皇子福晉), and princesses (固倫公主、和碩公主) were entitled to golden yellow robes (金黃). Concubines (嬪) were allowed to use incense-yellow (香色).



Figure 3. This lady (circled) is likely Imperial Noble Consort Ling

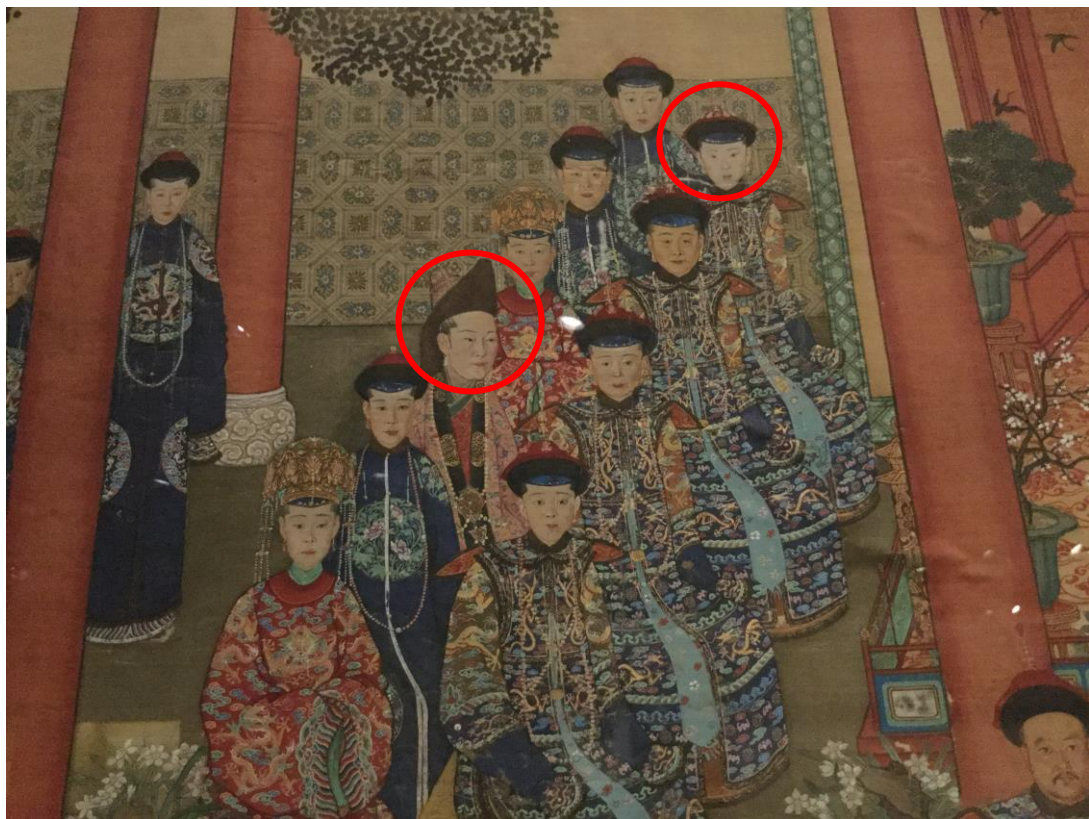


Figure 4. These two ladies are likely Consort Rong (left) and Noble Consort Qing (right) respectively

Despite the explicit hierarchal sense in the Qing court, there could have been exceptions. The research assistant taught me to meticulously work with the exceptional cases: the lady due West to the Empress Dowager, whose clothing was particularly different from the Qing imperial jifu (吉服), was said to be the Uyghur Consort Rong. In *daqing huidian* (大清會典) it was written that hualing (花翎) could only be worn by male imperial nobles with ranks lower than beizi (貝子) in early Qing. However, hualing became a gracious endowment to Qinwang (親王) and junwang (郡王) as well during Qianlong reign. All these reminded me of the importance of extensive literature review.



Figure 5. A male Qing court noble/ minister wearing hualing

In addition to the assigned tasks, thanks to my supervisors, I also had opportunities to visit exhibitions in other local museums, along with the visiting professionals from the Palace Museum, who told me about interesting episodes of their work experiences in Beijing.

Conclusion

Through this four-week internship program, I have learnt to work meticulously with microscopic details, as well as drilling my research skills.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Hong Kong Museum of History and the Department of Anthropology, CUHK, for giving me this precious internship opportunity, enabling me to gain fruitful hands-on experiences of working in a museum.