



# Conservation Office 2013/14 Annual Report



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# *Chapter 1*

## *Message from the Head*

I am honoured to present the major conservation accomplishments in the past action-packed year. It is gratifying to note the on-going effort made by our colleagues in preserving the heritage treasures and promoting the conservation awareness to the community.

This report underscores the highlights of our conservation projects. Subsequent to the delightful success in consolidating “Wen Pang Guan” for I Shing Temple, we commenced another challenging project of preserving the carved swing wooden doors, eaves boards, etc., of the Tat Tak Communal Hall. The hall built in 1857 is the only remaining communal hall in Hong Kong; most of the relics in it were badly damaged as a result of flooding. As always, we continued to support a variety of thematic exhibitions in the Museums. Certainly, the most eye-catching one was the “Bruce Lee: Kung Fu•Art•Life” exhibition.

Without doubt, the most magnificent and ground-breaking project was the planning and organisation of the 25th International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (IIC) Congress. Hong Kong is very honoured to be chosen as the first city in Southeast Asia to host the Congress in 2014. The biennial Congress was held on 22-26 September 2014 at Hong Kong City Hall with the theme “An Unbroken History: Conserving East Asian Works of Art and Heritage”. Hong Kong is known as a place where “East meets West”; it attracted specialists worldwide to gather for professional exchange. By virtue of its geographical location in a sub-tropical region, Hong Kong has its own very specific issues of preventive conservation. The Congress also addressed this unique subject in a special panel discussion session titled “Preventive Conservation and the Environment”.

After a vigorous review on hundreds of papers and posters received worldwide, a total of 52 papers and 45 posters were chosen for presentation. An interactive thematic website was launched to publicize the Congress, to disseminate the up-to-date information to the delegates from time to time, and to provide on-line registration. We were encouraged by the enthusiastic responses to the on-line registration. The figures reached nearly 80 in a few weeks since it went live in mid-March 2014. Equally, many conservation suppliers had shown interests to showcase their products in the Trade Fair of the Congress.



Apart from delivering various education and extension programmes for the School Culture Day Scheme and International Museum Day, we also engaged the community through our Conservation Volunteer Scheme. The support of an outstanding group of volunteers is a hallmark of the Conservation Office. Their generous contributions of time and talents made all of our conservation and education programmes possible. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all conservation volunteers for their devotion and continuous support.

After 36 years of dedicated service, our colleague, Ms Rosa Pang retired in Dec 2013. She excelled in textile conservation with high level of manual dexterity and technical supporting work in the exhibition and manning conservation laboratories. We would like to thank her for her unfailing contributions and wish her a happy and relaxing retirement. Succeeding Rosa is Lai Ching Lui. We look forward to working with him in his new capacity.

Taking this opportunity, I am pleased to introduce the conservation services at the Hong Kong Central Library and Hong Kong Film Archive covered in this report. The conservation colleagues there played, in parallel with us, a pivotal role in preserving cultural legacy.

Last but not least, I would like to congratulate my predecessor, Shing-wai Chan on his professional advancement and thank him for his marvellous contributions and leadership during his years in Conservation Office. Thanks too to the colleagues of Conservation Office, whose teamwork and dedication are the foundation of Conservation Office's success; they fill me with optimism for the future.

*Evita*

Evita YEUNG  
Head of Conservation Office

## Chapter 2

### Conservation Services

*In keeping local history, art and culture alive, our conservation specialists in the areas of Archaeological Finds, Ceramics & Inorganic Materials, Historical Documents, Metals, Organic Materials, Paintings, Photographs & Prints and also Textiles & Natural History Specimens, have been actively supporting the preservation of the museum collections embedded with historical, artistic, and cultural merits. Some of the projects that were carried out during the year 2013-14 are highlighted in the following sections.*

### Conservation Treatment

#### Tat Tak Communal Hall

We devoted much time and effort this year in restoring more than 20 artefacts from the Tat Tak Communal Hall. Tat Tak is the only surviving building in Hong Kong that serves as an assembly hall and a place of worship for a joint village alliance and also as a management office for an open market. The hall was flooded in 1990 because of a new town development project nearby. As regards, the local underground water level was raised and hence caused damage to many items in the hall. Amongst the artefacts that required conservation attention, the main entrance doors and eaves boards were in need of immediate treatment due to their extremely poor physical and structural condition.

#### Main Entrance Doors

The pair of wooden swing doors at Tat Tak, decorated with carved door gods, is one of the few surviving examples of folk art in Hong Kong. As a consequence of prolonged exposure to rain water, the bases of the doors were rotten. To reinforce their structural strength, the rotten wood structures were replaced. 3D laser scanning was employed to trace the two blurred door god images on the doors prior to the formulation of conservation proposal.



▲ *A conservator scanning the blurred engraving on the wooden door*

### *Eaves Boards*

The finely carved fascia boards portraying auspicious motifs suffered from termite infestation and serious structural damage. To reinstate the soundness of their structure, the backs of the boards were lined with carbon fibre cloth. Original colours were traced by examining the remnant colours of the motifs on the eaves boards under the microscope and the boards were repainted at appropriate locations to revive their artistic and cultural merits.



▲ *A conservator re-applying gilding onto the eaves boards*

### *A Marble Sculpture*

Marble is a popular sculptor's material. However, it is a particularly challenging natural material to be preserved, especially when the marble art in question is displayed outdoors. Sunlight, atmospheric pollutants, acid rain and biological agents are some of the threats that can trigger deterioration of marble. Discolouration caused by air pollutant induced sulphation or oxalate formation as a result of fungal growth is not only unsightly; the change can be very difficult, if not impossible, to reverse. As a preventive conservation measure, we undertook a comprehensive study to investigate the mechanisms of deterioration.

In addition to monitoring the condition of sculptures, a series of tests and analyses were carried out. Non-destructive testing methods such as ultrasonic measurement, laser scanning and colour measurement were carried out on a regular basis to monitor the changes. To identify the most appropriate conservation means, conventional cleaning methods, laser cleaning and nano-materials had been tested to assess their impact on sculptures. In fact, the method chosen for surface cleaning is highly dependent on the nature of surface dirt and the state of the marble surface. On occasions, conventional methods work much more effectively and efficiently than others.



▲ *A conservator monitoring the surface colours of a marble sculpture*

## *Fireboat “Alexander Grantham”*

Temperature and humidity are the two main environmental foes when it comes to preserving open items on outdoor display. Notwithstanding that full conservation treatment was carried out on the historic fireboat “Alexander Grantham” to restore its overall structural strength and to revive its aesthetic appeal before the vessel was put on display in 2006, the efforts could not stop corrosion of metal work once and for all. In fact, deterioration is inevitable since the fireboat has been displaying in an uncontrollable environment. The problem is particularly serious on the vessel’s exterior, including its hull and some of the superstructures. In collaboration with professional contractors, detailed inspections and interventive conservation treatment were conducted every week to arrest the deterioration on-board to enhance the longevity of the vessel.

## *Tablet in Yeung Hau Temple, Tai O*

Apart from the fireboat, we also worked on various metal artefacts, including an oversized Qing dynasty metal memorial tablet originally on display at the Yeung Hau Temple in Tai O. Structural damage was evident on the tablet after years of hanging on the temple wall with nails and wires. The material composition of the tablet was revealed to be 50% lead and 50% tin by an analytical equipment (SEM/EDS), with minor percentage of gold at places where decorations and inscriptions were gilded. A restoration approach was adopted to rectify structural deformation and damage, such that the tablet could be made fit for on-site display again. Formulation of a treatment methodology was undertaken by our metal conservators together with conservation volunteers possessing engineering knowledge.



▲ *Contractors scraping off corrosion and the deteriorated coating from the fireboat “Alexander Grantham”*

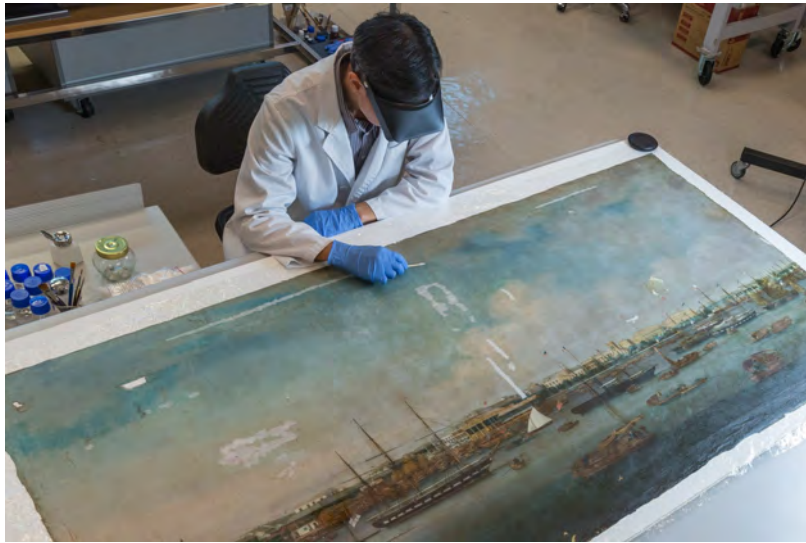


▲ *Metal tablet originally displayed at Yeung Hau Temple, Tai O suffering from severe structural damage and surface deterioration*



## *China Trade Oil Paintings*

We have been working on three 19th century China trade oil paintings from the important Historical Pictures Collection of the Hong Kong Museum of Art. The paintings suffered considerable damage as a result of aging. Large areas of overpainting had become discoloured as a result of the use of unstable materials during past restorations, rendering them unfit for display. A number of treatments, including consolidation, removal of extensive overpainting and yellowed varnish, flattening of deformations, relining, infilling and retouching were performed.



▲ *A conservator removing varnish from a China trade oil painting, “Guangzhou New Factories”, circa 1847, by Sunqua*

## *Oversized Calligraphies “The Moon over the River on a Spring Night” by Wang Dongling*

We took up the challenge of mounting and displaying a large-scale artwork in a public area by coordinating, preparing and mounting a set of six gigantic calligraphies for display during the Lunar New Year holidays. This donated set of calligraphy works, measuring 7 m x 12 m, was the work of acclaimed Chinese calligrapher Professor Wang Dongling. To present these artworks at the donation ceremony held at the Hong Kong Cultural Centre (HKCC), we were tasked to mount them for the public appreciation.



## *Treatment and Mounting*

A professional team comprising our Chinese painting conservators, a traditional mounter and a group of volunteers was formed to accomplish the task. The team's significant dexterity skills and broad experience in mounting ensured accurate measurements and proper decisions made in each mounting step.

The team spent nearly a month on logistics planning, setting up facilities and preparing materials prior to the actual mounting. Two exceptionally long mounting tables were made specially to facilitate the mounting and conservation work. The entire practical work lasted for a continuous period of six weeks. The steps conducted included back lining, dry mounting and paper treatment. Some of the writing papers were quite flimsy, with some serious creases which required gentle relaxation before backing. Moreover, additional silk paper strips were also put at the edges of both sides of the calligraphies to provide extra protection and to redistribute tension imposed on the big scrolls.



▲ *A conservator removing creases and wrinkles from the artwork*



▲ *A conservator injecting paste into voids between the artwork and its original backing layer*

## Display

The tremendous size of the set of calligraphy works resulted in huge difficulties in terms of its setup. In order to solve the problem, the calligraphy works were mounted on hanging scrolls, with two rods each on their upper and lower mounts. This setup made it safer to handle the artworks by holding their upper rod and bottom roller on a 7-metre-high platform. The six scrolls were hung up using robust screw-eye bolts. The scrolls could then be easily opened and stretched out once the screw eyes on the upper rod had been fixed to the wall. A lighter plastic roller was chosen over a hard wood version to reduce the weight and tension on these gigantic scrolls, thus lowering the risk of tearing the entire pieces during display.

With the team's great effort and dedication, the challenging task was finished on time with the calligraphy works successfully on display at the foyer of HKCC before the donation ceremony.



▲ The hanging of Professor Wang's calligraphy works were completed

## Wood Carvings

We supported the maintenance of collections on display by treating three panels decorated with vertically mounted wood carvings. They were displayed above the entrance to the teahouse inside a gallery at the Hong Kong Museum of History. Three pieces of carvings fell off the panels. As each panel consists of many elaborate carving elements, it was painstaking to trace the original locations of the pieces. After analysing the carved patterns, shapes and adhesive residues on the panels, we were able to identify their original locations, and the detached pieces were reattached with appropriate adhesives. Loose parts were also consolidated during the examination.



▲ *A conservator examining wood carvings and reattaching pieces which had fallen off*

## Ship Model “Ji Fung”

The model of the ship “Ji Fung”, is donated by Outward Bound Hong Kong to Hong Kong Museum of History. “Ji Fung” is a wooden brigantine built by local craftsmen at Junk Bay in 1980. When the ship model was received, some of the rigging (threads) were broken and in disarray; some parts were detached due to adhesive failure and deterioration, and some parts were missing. After a careful study of the vessel plans, we re-arranged the rigging and identified the original locations of the detached parts. Old adhesive was removed and replaced. The missing parts of the railings at the stern were also reconstructed to improve the integrity of the model.



▲ *A conservator conducting treatment for “Ji Fung”*



## *Woodblock Print*

Woodblock print is a traditional art form which makes up an important part of the collections of the Hong Kong Heritage Museum. Woodblock prints depicting images of folk story characters and deities to birds and flowers have been used as common household decorations. A woodblock print with the image of a deity suffered from deep creases, loss of paper material and exhibited various degrees of wear and tear when it arrived at our laboratory. It was extremely vulnerable to further handling or display. We treated the print by placing it on a sheet of silicon-coated mylar sheet for further flattening with a humidifier. After infilling losses and repairing tears, the print was flattened horizontally on a table with weights on the edges to prevent creasing during drying. The print was nicely conserved and then stored in an encapsulated mylar envelope for further display and study.



▲ *A conservator infilling losses (left) and flattening (right) a woodblock print*

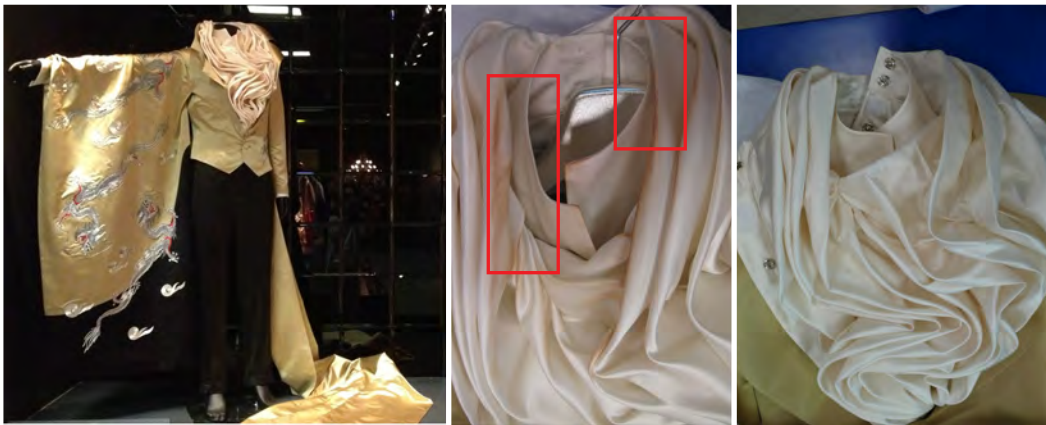


## *Stage Costumes designed by Eddie LAU*

To support the display of the stage costumes headlining the “Fashion• Eddie Lau• Image” exhibition at the Hong Kong Heritage Museum, we conserved a peacock feather couture worn by Cantopop diva Anita Mui in her 1990 concert. The distorted peacock feathers were reshaped using an ultrasonic humidifier with cold water mist emitted. By adhering new shafts to the cracked ones with acrylic adhesive, the strength was restored. Cosmetic stains on another custom-made stage costume worn by William So in his 2011 concert were successfully removed by swabbing with ethanol. The aesthetic appeal of the three-dimensional wavy neckline of the costume was thus restored.



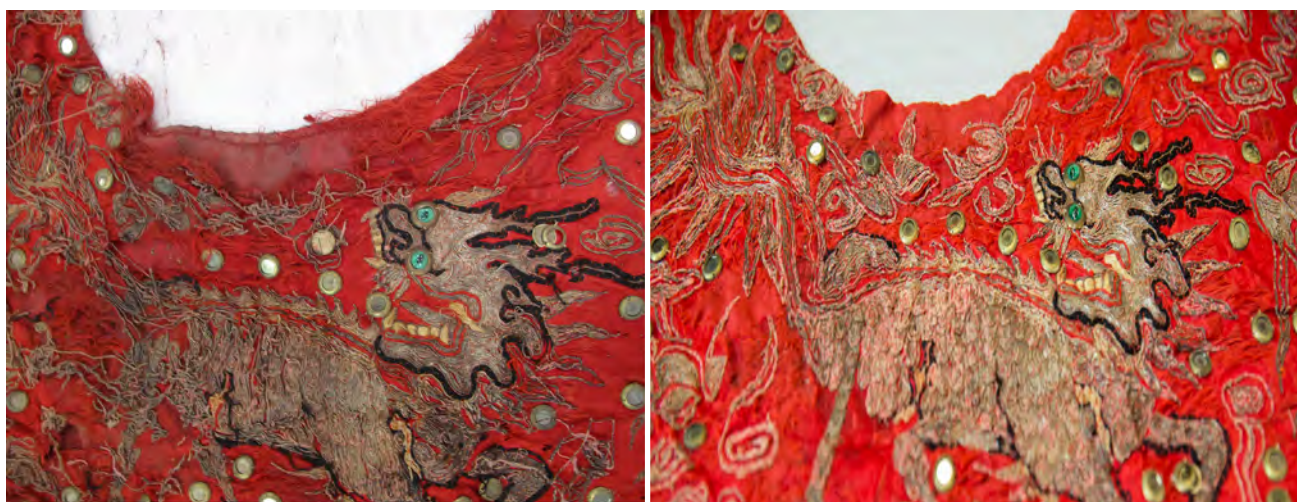
▲ *A conservator reshaping the distorted peacock feather couture with an ultrasonic humidifier*



▲ *Cosmetic stains on the collar (middle) of William So's stage costume (left) were removed using ethanol (right)*

## *Curtains of Bridal Sedan Chair*

We also worked on the curtains of a bridal sedan chair. The curtains were badly damaged and the tiny decorative glass mirrors attached to the curtains also required extensive treatment. By meticulously realigning the bundles of tangled metal threads, we were able to reform the motifs and secure the partly detached threads in place with fine needlework. In order to provide additional strength to support the fragile silk, custom-dyed silk was in-filled in the torn areas and reinforced by stitching. Over 150 tiny decorative glass mirrors on the curtains were finely cracked. The cracked mirrors had to be un-stitched before they were affixed in place and re-stitched onto the curtains. They were nicely adhered in place with a UV curing adhesive of a similar refractive index to retain their good reflective properties.



▲ *The torn areas and detached metal threads on the curtains of a bridal sedan (left) were repaired by stitching (right)*

## *Support to Exhibitions and Public Art Display*

### *“Ming and Qing Chinese Arts from the C. P. Lin Collection”*

During the preparatory work for the exhibition entitled “Ming and Qing Chinese Arts from the C. P. Lin Collection”, we were tasked to take care of some 200 art objects. These included ceramics, jade, wood, bamboo, horn, amber, ivory and lacquerware items, all of which were on loan from the collector C.P. Lin. Upon receiving the objects, the condition of each item was checked before treatment was conducted. The materials nature, physical condition and conservation needs of every item were studied and various treatments, ranging from surface cleaning to restoration, were carried out. Tailor-made brass and acrylic mounts conforming to the inherent shape of the objects were subsequently produced on-site to provide necessary conservation support for them during display.

As the artworks of the C.P. Lin collections have been passed down from centuries ago, they have inherited a wealth of historical evidence which necessitated us to carry out appropriate surface treatment to revive the original artistic and historic merits of the objects. A non-destructive computed radiography technique was used on a ceramic vase, which came with an unusual bottom section over-painted with a coloured pattern. The technique was used in an attempt to reveal any underlying inscriptions or patterns, but the investigation disproved our assumption.

Understanding that red lacquerware contains vermilion, a known light fugitive pigment, we controlled the ambient lighting closely and completely eliminated all ultra-violet lights in the exhibition area. The overall illumination level directed on the objects was carefully set at 90 lux. As part of the monitoring programme for the lacquerware collection, the surface colours of the displayed items were measured and checked at regular intervals using a colour spectrophotometer.



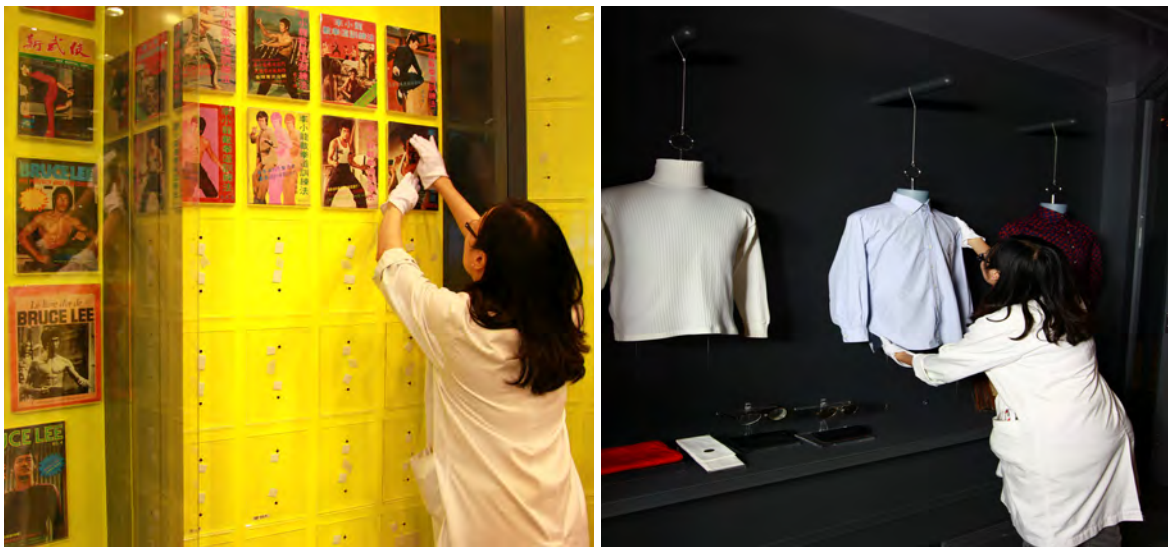
▲ A conservator treating a wood carving for the “Ming and Qing Chinese Arts from the C. P. Lin Collection” exhibition



## *“Bruce Lee: Kung Fu•Art•Life”*

The installation of the “Bruce Lee: Kung Fu•Art•Life” exhibition was perhaps one of the most interesting and challenging tasks since the exhibits were highly varied in terms of their nature. Artefacts associated with Bruce Lee, the screen legend were extremely diverse and included film props, traditional Chinese weapons, training equipment, historical photos and paper documents.

Some rarely exhibited pieces of his training equipment, such as punch pads and Lee’s custom-made head-shaped focus mitt with springs, not only demonstrate the martial artist’s innovative ideas in designing his own tools, but also his perseverance in training himself diligently. These tools showed heavy signs of wear and offered significant evidence of the intensity of Lee’s training. For this reason, it was vital to preserve and display these tools. Since some of the exhibits were not in a very good conservation state, specially designed mounts were developed in collaboration with designers to enable the items to be displayed appropriately for visitors’ appreciation while at the same time upholding conservation principles.



▲ *Conservators installing paper artefacts (left) and costumes (right) for the “Bruce Lee: Kung Fu•Art•Life” exhibition*



## *“The Splendours of Royal Costumes: Qing Court Attire”*

This co-presented exhibition was the largest of its kind ever launched by the Palace Museum outside the Mainland. It featured some 130 sets of valuable treasures, including imperial robes, armour and necklaces. To maintain the utmost integrity of the loan collection, we devised magnetic mounting methods for displaying the treasured clothing items on mannequins, such that the original fastening devices (e.g. buttons) could remain intact. The mounting approach was applied successfully to imperial robes and three sets of extremely heavy armour consisting of multiple parts. The armour was assembled mostly with the use of button magnets placed beneath their visible parts. Magnets camouflaged with fabrics similar to the colour of the armour were applied to the exposed parts to secure the armour in place.



▲ *The waistband of the mannequin was installed with a super strong belt of magnets (left) before the lower skirt of armour was placed on the mannequin (right)*



▲ *A conservator mounting the leisure robe of child Emperor Tongzhi using hidden magnets*

## *“A Century of Fashion: Hong Kong Cheongsam Story”*

As the opening programme for “Hong Kong Week 2013@ Taipei”, this outreach exhibition featured some 70 elegant cheongsams. Just like any bespoke cheongsam, the displayed items were tailored precisely for their owners. To display them in a way that could illustrate the superior needlework and cut for public appreciation, the cheongsams were put on different standard-sized mannequins and padded individually to reveal their original shapes.



▲ *Conservators fitting Lydia Shum's cheongsam on a custom-padded mannequin*



▲ *Teresa Teng's cheongsam was prepared for display on site in Taipei*

## *Public Art Display in Dragon Park*

“Toad”, an artwork created by the renowned local sculptor Van Lau, is now blended harmoniously into the ambience of the Dragon Park in Tin Shui Wai for public appreciation. Its installation method was chosen after carefully taking into consideration of public safety, conservation requirements and the artist's intention. Prior to the installation, different methods and materials, including the use of internal stainless steel brackets and different sealants for mounting, were tested in the laboratory. They were further refined on site during installation so that the sculpture could be securely displayed. Regular monitoring and conservation treatment would also be carried out as part of the long-term maintenance of the “Toad”.

## Chapter 3

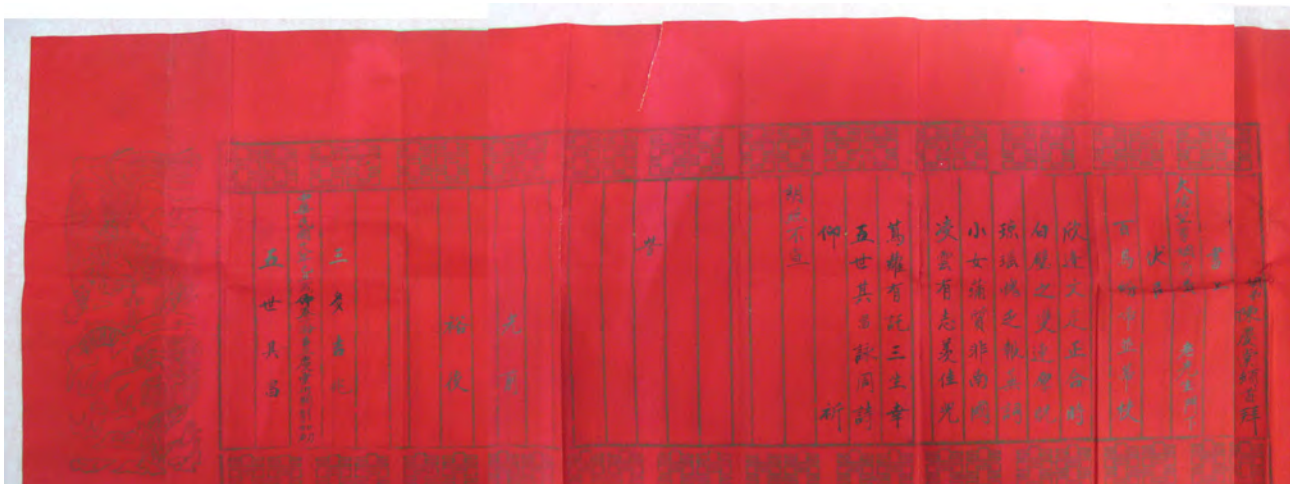
### Research & Development

*In addition to hands-on conservation work, we have also been engaging in research and development work as a means to expand our conservation know-how and excelling in our professionalism. During the past year, we conducted research on unlocking the ink components of a betrothal letter, consolidating an unfired clay statue, conserving a Chinese silk hanging and applying engineering techniques to preserve an aircraft.*

#### *Unlocking the Ink Components of a Betrothal Letter*

In traditional Chinese wedding rituals, the document known as “three letters” are essential. Two sets of betrothal letters written in black ink on red paper dated 1949 and 1959 were newly acquired by the Hong Kong Museum of History. The patterns on the covers are printed in golden ink but most of them are tarnished because of aging. The red paper also suffered from different degrees of deterioration.

The golden ink on the two sets of documents was analysed using a scanning electron microscope and energy dispersive X-ray spectrometer (SEM/EDS). Results showed that the type of golden ink on the letter dated 1949 differed from that dated 1959, although the patterns are of similar designs. Mosaic gold was identified on the former while a brass mixture ink was found on the latter.



▲ A betrothal letter dated 1949



Mosaic gold is a powdered yellow pigment that is scaly and crystalline that primarily consists of stannic sulphide. It is used as a pigment in bronzing and gilding wood and metal work. Brass mixture ink is a side product from the low zinc content brass refinery.

Research into the industry during the 1940s-1950s has revealed the reason of using brass mixture ink, a newly imported product from western countries, on wedding documents. It was a more cost-effective alternative compared to mosaic gold. While users do not normally pay much attention to such changes in the constituents of ink, the findings can serve as a historical evidence for the production period of the artefacts.

The information helped us to better understand, interpret and appreciate our collections by enriching our knowledge about the artefacts beyond their physical appearance.



▲ *A betrothal letter dated 1959*



## *The Analysis and Conservation of a Chinese Silk Birthday Hanging of the Qing Dynasty*

To better understand the nature of an object and formulate its treatment strategy, the materials of a spectacular silk birthday hanging, dated 1789 (the 54th year of the Qianlong reign in Qing dynasty) and measuring 3m x 4.5m, were analysed. Using liquid chromatography equipped with time of flight mass spectrometer, carminic acid and laccenic acids (naturally occurring red dyes) extracted from particular insects were identified as the dye colourants. Numerous precious materials such as traditional metal threads in gold, animal hair, and peacock feather threads on the embroidered longevity motifs were identified. The findings helped unveil the history and techniques used to fabricate the object.



▲ *Conservators analysing the dye with liquid chromatography equipped with time of flight mass spectrometer*

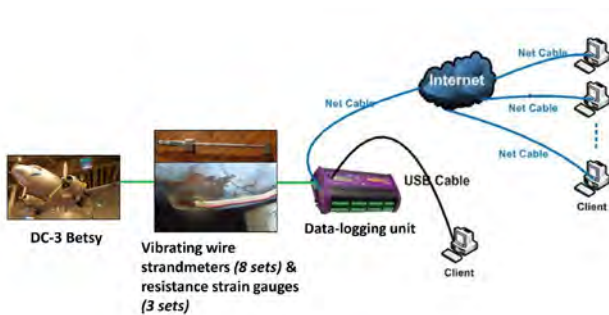
The valuable information found is essential to the treatment and studies of the severely damaged metal threads and painted silks. Detached gold metal threads were couched in place to revive the visual appeal of the embroidered motifs. However, stitching could not anchor the fragile painted silk. Studies into consolidating the inscribed gold painted silk revealed that acrylic adhesive Lascaux 360:498 (1:2) in deionised water was an appropriate adhesive. In light of the enormous size of the hanging, the accessibility and methodology of adhesive application on the painted silk would be studied further to draw up an appropriate treatment plan.



▲ *The seriously damaged metal threads of the dragon motifs (left) were secured by stitching (right)*

## *Applying Engineering Techniques to Heritage Preservation*

Although the structural health monitoring (SHM) technique has been widely developed in civil and structural engineering for continuous assessment of the structural integrity and health of mega-structures (e.g. Tsing Ma bridge) and buildings (e.g. Guangzhou TV tower), the application of such technique to heritage preservation has yet to become popular. With the use of a high-performance sensory system comprising vibrating wire strandmeters on all suspension wires and resistance strain gauges on all of the ceiling anchorage points, the performance data of the suspension gears of the DC-3 “Betsy” at the Science Museum was continuously collected via a well-defined sensor network. Any detected irregularities could be followed up with an inspection of the suspension gear and diagnosis and identification of the root cause.



▲ Schematic configuration of the SHM system for DC-3 “Betsy”



▲ DC-3 “Betsy” showing her in-flight pose at the Science Museum

Data collected by the SHM programme since its introduction in 2011 showed that the stress-strain behaviour of the suspension gears vary with changes in the ambient environment. A temperature variation pattern was observed in which the structural reading decreases when the temperature increases. After data normalisation to neutralise the effect due to environmental changes, the structural behaviour of the suspension system was in fact very stable. We are now confident to conclude that the suspension system of the DC-3 “Betsy” is extremely safe and does not show any early signs of structural failure. Such proactive approach not only enhances safety, but has also proven to be highly cost-effective compared with the old practice of replacing all of the suspension gears every six months.

The results of the SHM programme were presented in the paper “Safe or not? A proactive approach to looking after an aircraft display at the Hong Kong Science Museum” at the “Metal 2013, Interim Meeting of the International Council of Museums Committee for Conservation (ICOM-CC) Metal Working Group”, a conference held from 16 to 20 September 2013 in Edinburgh, Scotland, in the U.K. The conservator took the opportunity to share his experience with other delegates.

## *Consolidating an Unfired Clay Statue, “Wen Pang Guan”*

“Wen Pang Guan” is an assistant to the deity named Hung Shing. An unfired clay statue of “Wen Pang Guan” estimated to be some 300 years old was originally installed in the I Shing Temple in Yuen Long, Hong Kong. It was almost disintegrated as a result of pest infestation and serious structural damage. The unfired clay of the statue was loosely bonded and “dehydrated” upon arrival at the conservation laboratory. After thorough inspection, excessive loss of water molecules in the unfired clay was identified. The problem was a result of its standing in the unfavourable environment of the temple over the years. To rescue the statue from its alarming condition, a consolidation methodology designed to replenish the clay structure with the necessary water content was developed.

The use of Silicic Acid Esters (SAE) in conserving clay materials has proven to be successful in many applications. However, it was not applicable to this occasion because the clay structure was too “dehydrated”. Hence, prior to conducting the usual SAE-based consolidation treatment, the clay was moisturised with Poly(2-ethyl-2-oxazoline), a common material used in oil painting conservation. The material was selected as the “water-carrying” agent and to act as a pre-consolidant for the clay statue.

A series of consolidation experiments were carried out on the clay samples with 2% poly(2-ethyl-2-oxazoline) in different water-organic solvent mixtures to identify the optimum solvent mixture ratio, which was then found to be 3:1 (acetone : water). This two-step consolidation approach was adopted for the lower inner part of the clay statue. The loosely bonded unfired clay was consolidated successfully. After treatment, the statue was subsequently reinstalled in the temple.



▲ *A conservator conducting consolidation experiments on clay samples*

A conservation paper describing the said two-step approach to consolidating the clay statue was accepted for presentation at the IIC 2014 Hong Kong Congress.

## Chapter 4

### *Education & Awareness Promotion*

*In promoting the awareness of conservation, we organised a number of thematic conservation workshops and laboratory tours in different scales and format for the public. These education and extension programmes offered participants opportunities to experience the work of a conservator, thus increasing their understanding of conservation.*

*To continually contribute to the professional preparation of students, we took on five conservation interns for periods ranging from four weeks to five months. They gained invaluable experience by working with our specialist conservators in various work arenas, ranging from conservation of paintings, paper and textiles to exhibit mounting and research work.*

### *School Culture Day Scheme*

As part of the School Culture Day Scheme, thematic workshops on the conservation of oil paintings, wooden artefacts and textiles, together with laboratory tours, were organised for secondary school students. Through these activities, students were able to experience the fun and challenges of conservation work and to become more aware of the importance of cultural heritage conservation. In the past year, more than 200 students and teachers from nine secondary schools attended the programme.



▲ *Students learning about batik and textile dyeing in a conservation workshop*



## *International Museum Day 2013 Thematic Workshops*

To increase the public awareness of conservation, we organised four thematic workshops as part of the International Museum Day 2013. Entitled “Artefacts + Science = Conservation”, the events offered 144 participants the opportunity to experience the enjoyment and challenges of conservation work in a relaxed learning environment. During the activities, we shared with participants how to apply scientific knowledge to restore and preserve our artefacts. Under our guidance, participants made plaster models and gilded them with gold leaf. Participants also took the opportunity to talk to us to gain a better understanding of our day-to-day work.



▲ *Participants learning the art of gilding during the International Museum Day 2013*

## *Conservation Interns*

Ms Irene Dominguez Jimenez, a graduate from the University of Northumbria, U.K. with a Master of Arts in Conservation of Fine Art, was engaged in conservation and research projects relating to oil paintings during her five-month internship with us from May to September 2013.



▲ *Irene Dominguez Jimenez consolidating lifting paints on an oil painting*

Miss Anna van der Zalm joined us in August 2013 for a 4-week internship. Anna was an undergraduate student studying Chemistry at the University of Oxford, U.K. She has a keen interest in easel painting and mural conservation. She spent the summer at the Conservation Office exploring the role of an art conservator, a profession which blends science with art and history.



▲ *Anna van der Zalm retouching a painting frame*

Eugenie Renaudeau completed a 3-month internship at the Office. She was in her final year studying paper conservation at the Ecole de Condé in Paris. Having been trained as a paper conservator, Eugenie did not only undertake the mounting of exhibits for the thematic exhibitions “Sounds in the Grass: Selected Works of Insects by Chao Shao-an” and “The Legend of Silk and Wood: A Hong Kong Qin Story”, but also carried out conservation treatment work and conducted simple scientific analysis of paper artefacts. She enjoyed the internship and commented that it was the first time that she had dealt with oriental artefacts, an experience which represented a valuable opportunity for her training.



▲ *Eugenie Renaudeau washing a paper artefact*



▲ *Eugenie Renaudeau examining a woodblock print under the microscope*

Kimberly Kwan from the University of Arts in London completed a 3-week internship at the Office. Interested in book conservation, Kimberly took delight in participating in the conservation of opera librettos as well as mounting photo albums for the “Images through time: Photos of old Hong Kong” exhibition.

Joey Chan, a student of a Museum Studies course at the University of Sydney, Australia joined us as an intern to fulfil her course requirements. She was impressed with the experience of conserving a painted textile item and reconstructing ceramic pots. She was also delighted to have deepened her preservation knowledge as a practicing curator in a museum.



▲ *Joey Chan reconstructing an archaeological pot*



## Chapter 5

### Community Engagement & Partnership

*The Office continued to engage the public through the Conservation Volunteer Scheme to bring our values to life. Apart from the community engagement, we partnered with the Airport Authority Hong Kong to promote our cultural heritage to a wider audience. A Curators Forum was also held to strengthen the professional exchanges among the Greater Pearl River Delta region.*

#### Conservation Volunteer Scheme

The Conservation Office has leveraged on Conservation Volunteer Scheme to engage communities and promote social awareness of the preservation of our valuable cultural heritage. During the year 2013-14, 104 individuals enrolled for our Volunteer Scheme. They generously contributed a record-breaking 5,270 hours of their precious time to assist in our conservation works and activities and the team was awarded the Gold Certificate for Volunteer Service (Organisation / Corporation) in the Volunteer Movement of Social Welfare Department.



▲ *Volunteers retouching an eaves board from the Tat Tak Communal Hall*



▲ *Volunteers practising traditional Chinese book binding*

We were extremely grateful for the services of these dedicated volunteers and expressed our appreciation at the “2014 Conservation Volunteer Briefing Session cum Volunteer Award Presentation Ceremony”. This highly anticipated event took place at Hong Kong City Hall on 11 January 2014. Twenty-nine volunteers were awarded Certificates of Appreciation and souvenir medals in recognition of their outstanding volunteer services.





▲ 2013 awardees and the former Head of the Conservation Office (first on the left)

Immediately following the award presentation by the former Head of the Conservation Office, we proceeded with our recruitment of new force of volunteers by introducing our activities in 2014. The event concluded with a familiarisation visit to City Hall, the venue of the IIC 2014 Hong Kong Congress.

### *Airport Display*

Following the resounding success of previous thematic exhibitions, the Conservation Office once again collaborated with the Airport Authority Hong Kong to present “Childhood Memories” as a part of the “Glimpses of Hong Kong” series at Gate 31, Departure Level, Terminal 1 of the Airport from November 2013 onwards.



▲ Visitors enjoying the “Childhood Memories” exhibition

The theme was chosen as toys evoke sweet childhood memories. Toys in different eras reflect changes in social culture and lifestyles, and are a reflection of people’s preferences, imagination and creativity. Whether a nostalgic tinplate car, a simple plastic doll or a sophisticated electronic toy, such items from times gone by are designed to bring happiness to people and bear a very special charm of their own.

Selected from the local museum collections, over twenty nostalgic Hong Kong toy sets, including land transport vehicles, aircraft, robots and dolls, were put on display. The exhibition attracted over 300,000 visitors each year. The exhibition did not only enable visitors and passengers to recall the fond memories of their childhood, but also reminded them of the golden days of Hong Kong’s toy manufacturing industry during the past century.

## *Curators Forum*

To strengthen professional exchanges between museums in Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau, the inaugural Curators Forum around the theme of “Museums and Community” was held at the Hong Kong Museum of History on 15 November 2013. 15 curators and museum professionals from 15 museums in the three regions were invited to deliver 20-minute oral presentations on curatorial strategy, diverse educational activities or brand and image building of museums. Over 130 delegates attended the forum, and all found it not only inspiring but also beneficial in enhancing professionalism and lifting the bar of museum service.



▲ *Over 130 museum professionals from Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau attended in the first Curators Forum*



▲ *The speakers shared their views on museum development*

## *Chapter 6*

### *International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (IIC) 2014 Hong Kong Congress*

Amidst regular conservation duties, the year 2013-14 had placed exceptional demands upon our team of professionals for the organisation of IIC 2014 Hong Kong Congress, our unprecedented collaboration with IIC<sup>1</sup> to host its 25th biennial conference in Hong Kong during the week of 22-26 September 2014.

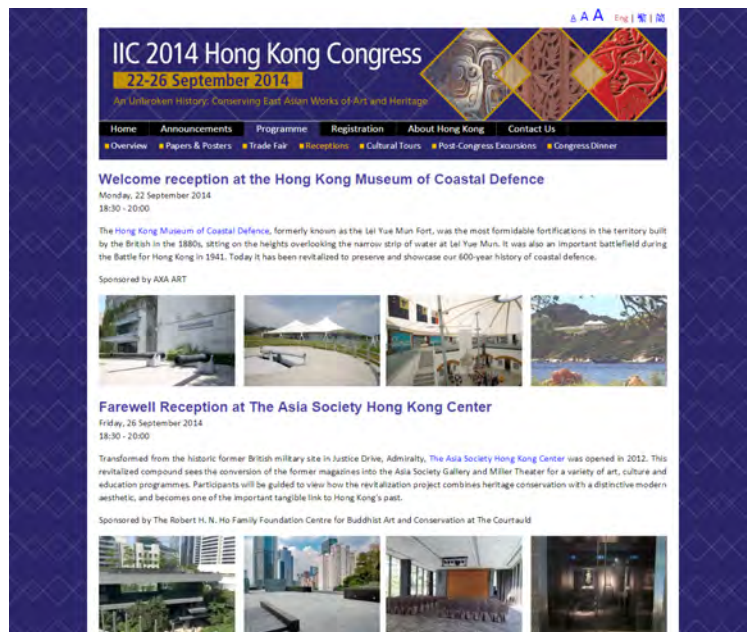
Building on the advanced planning laid in previous months, this year, the Organising Committee steered by the former Head of the Conservation Office moved into top gear implementing the increasingly complicated and intensive preparatory tasks, from the very minute details of negotiating with venue managers, stakeholders, potential participants and exhibitors, to the drawing up of budgetary and contingency measures as well as the Memorandum of Understanding. Amongst the tasks, the year-long compilation of the Congress Preprint was notably one of the most challenging. Comprising 97 vigorously selected papers and posters which formed the backbone of the technical programme entitled “An Unbroken History: Conserving East Asian Works of Art and Heritage”, the Preprint was not only our first bilingual publication on conservation, but also an imprint of Hong Kong as the host city of this mega event. Though the meticulous process of editing and translation had very much escalated our workloads and production constraints, we believe the work would prove invaluable to the conservation profession, especially in reaching out to the massive number of practitioners in China.

Being the first of its kind in Southeast Asia, the IIC Congress was unknown to most practitioners in emerging countries such as China. Our experience as an event organiser also reflected the fact that publicity was instrumental in arousing local response and recruiting overseas participants, many of whom had to travel from afar to attend the Hong Kong Congress. We had therefore refurbished our thematic website to provide audience with exhaustive information about the event and Hong Kong, and more importantly, freshened it up with a new branding design in deep purple which was then applied across all our publicity materials, souvenirs and publication covers. These efforts were accompanied by the launch of the online registration system in early 2014. This highly anticipated milestone in our organisation work was met with a very encouraging response and the event had gained further momentum as a result.

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<sup>1</sup> Founded in 1950 and based in London, the International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (IIC) has been mounting a major conference every two years on a topic of current interest since 1960s. IIC is an internationally acclaimed conservation organisation supported by individual and institutional members worldwide, and serves to provide a communication platform with the mission of advancing professional standards for cultural heritage preservation through conferences, publications, awards and collaboration with museums and other organisations.





▲ Thematic website to disseminate event information

Doing new things can be difficult at times. In the course of event organisation, we spared no effort to overcome the difficulties that may not find precedent in our history – from identifying simultaneous interpreters to translate the highly technical Congress proceedings, soliciting sponsorship to support the attendance of delegates as well as to finance different events and deliverables, lining up international scholars for a panel session on the much debatable issue of “environmental guidelines for preventive conservation”, and resolving various venue constraints on wi-fi installation and catering, to name just a few. Our pledge to make the Hong Kong Congress a resounding success was what drove us to react proactively to every challenge, but none of these endeavours would have been possible were it not for the continual support from our volunteers, overseas counterparts, LCSD colleagues and supporting organisations. Making use of this great opportunity, the Organising Committee would strive not only to promote professional exchange through a successful Hong Kong Congress, but also to make our cultural vibrancy and accomplishments in heritage conservation known to a wider world.



▲ Introducing the organisation work of the Hong Kong Congress at a briefing for conservation volunteers' information



▲ Signing of MoU between IIC and LCSD in 2013



## Chapter 7

### Other Conservation Services in LCSD

#### Hong Kong Central Library

The book conservation team at the Hong Kong Central Library offers treatment for the Library's Special Collection, including the depository items from the Hok Hoi Association of Hong Kong. A set of ten rare classical Chinese thread-sewn books entitled "Wenxian Tongkao" 《文献通考》, pertaining to the Hok Hoi Collection were badly damaged. They were conserved to restore their physical conditions and most importantly, to revive their vital functions as readily accessible information to the readers.

Probably previously stored in an unfavourable environment, the books mainly suffered from serious insect infestation, discolouration, water damage, fungal attack, embrittlement, etc.

Most of the book leaves were not only scattered with lots of insect holes and loosely held paper fragments, but also were clung together due to insect attack, which made them difficult to be separated or handled.

Book leaves with serious discolouration were washed with water on mounting table before further treatment. Thin sheets of lens tissue were temporarily applied on the surface of book leaves to hold the loose fragments in the right positions. Afterwards, thin sheets of custom-dyed xuan paper

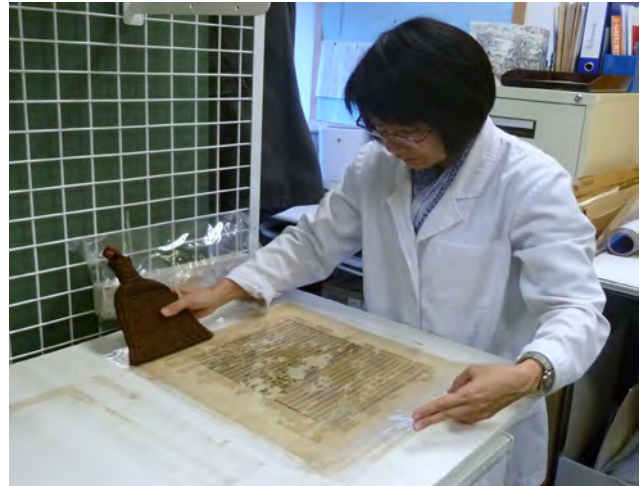
were adhered to the verso of book leaves to support and strengthen the pages. The borders of the lined book leaves were then attached to a drying board for flattening. Finally, the conserved book leaves were re sewn into books, which were then stored in archival boxes.



▲ Book leaves were seriously damaged by insect attack



▲ *The book leaf was temporarily protected with a thin facing paper before further treatment*



▲ *A piece of lining paper was applied onto the verso of the book leaf*

## *Hong Kong Film Archive*

The conservation unit preserves films and film related materials such as posters and stills pertaining to the Hong Kong Film Archive.

We have been reconstructing “Way Down West” 《西廂記》 (1927) in this year. The archival object is a masterpiece of the director Hou Yao (侯曜). The silent film title has been considered lost for many decades in the Greater China Region and the copy held by the Hong Kong Film Archive is believed to be the sole copy in the region. However the copy is a “French” version, its intertitles (printed narrations or portions of dialogue flashed on the screen between the scenes of a silent film) are in French. In order to make a



▲ *A conservator inspecting the master film material*

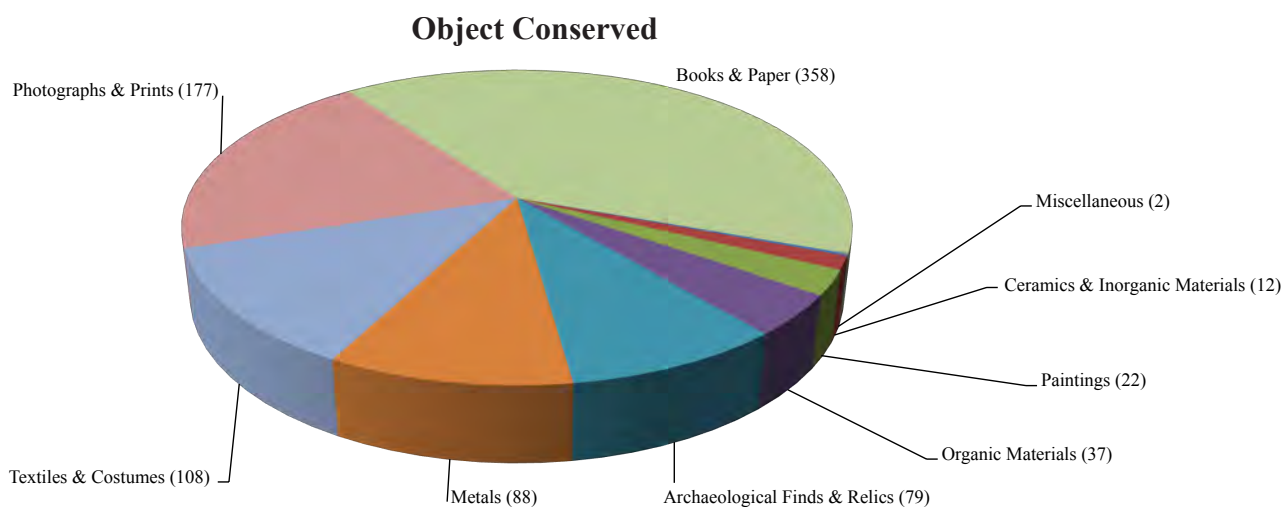
version that resembles the original “Chinese” version, we made new Chinese intertitles to replace the French ones. Over the course of work, we made reference to the design and font style of the intertitles of Hou’s other works. Besides, we documented the details of the copy and recorded the work done on it in the forms of conservation documentations and an introduction, which are going to be screened at the beginning of the film. The reconstructed title was shown to the public in February 2014.

# Chapter 8

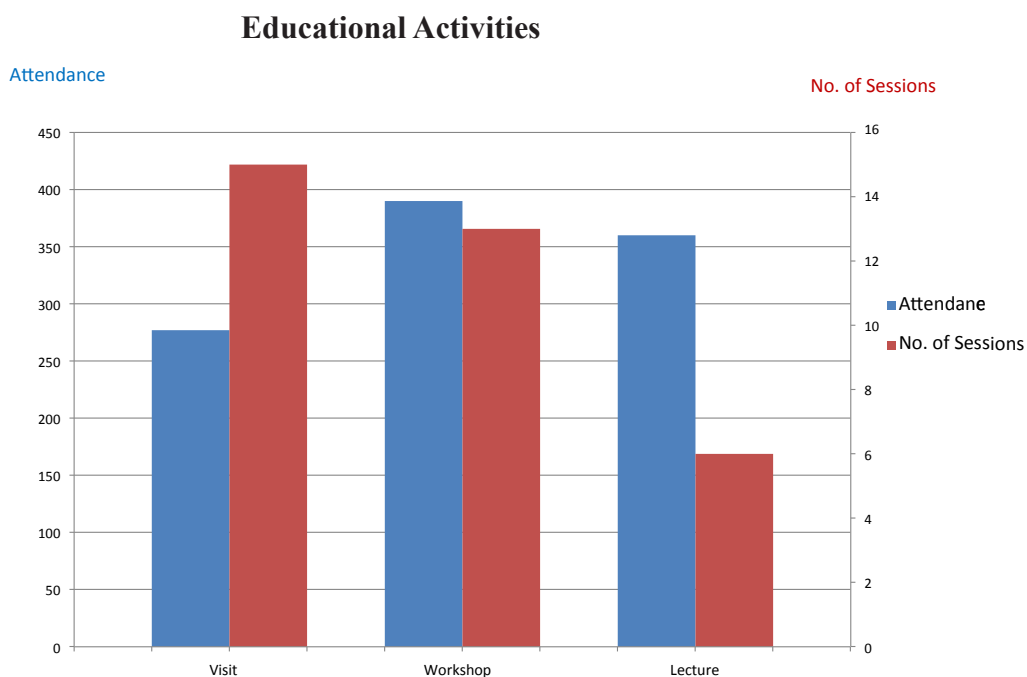
## Performance Summary and Organisation Chart

### Performance Summary

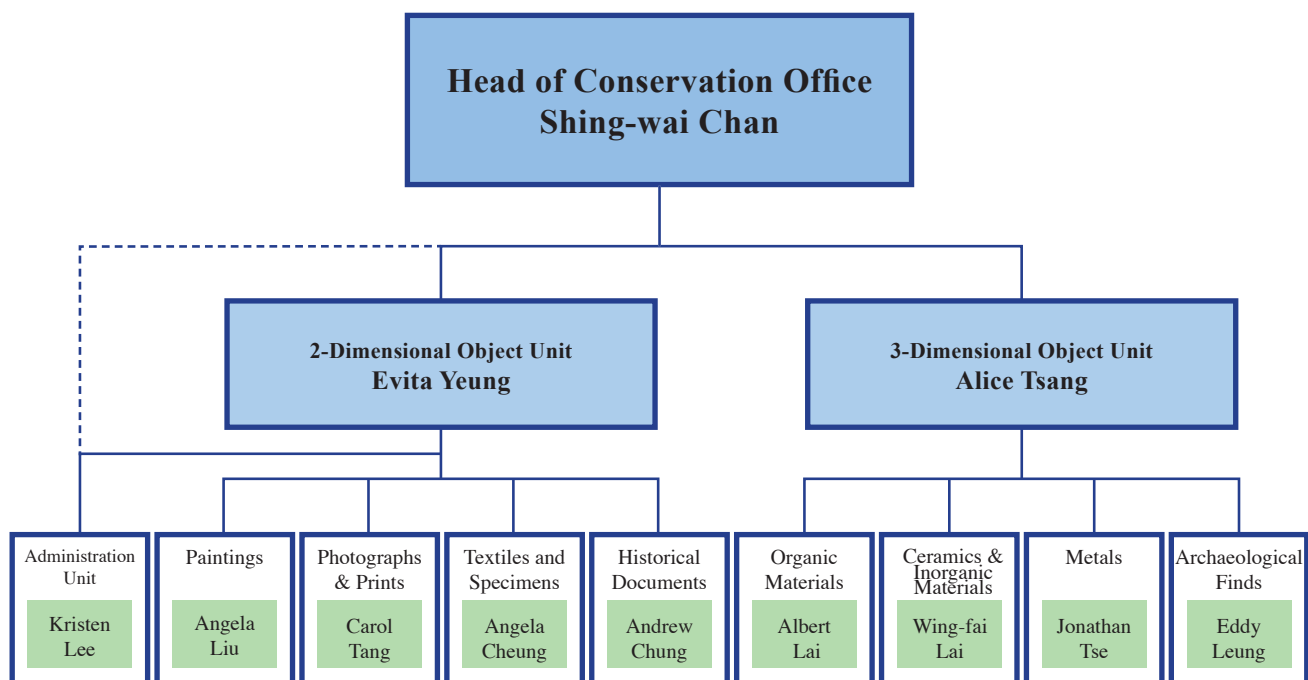
A total of 883 museum objects were conserved by the Conservation Office during the fiscal year 2013-14. They are classified into eight categories based on the nature of materials, ranging from 2D artefacts (such as photographs and prints) to 3D artefacts (including ceramics and inorganic materials).



To promote awareness of conservation, a total of 34 sessions of educational activities, including laboratory visits, workshops and lectures were held for 1,027 participants.



## Organisation Chart







## **Conservation Office**

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