

A Future for the Past and Present –leveraging on conservation educational programmes

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Amongst the core functions of museums (Acquire, Conserve, Research, Communicate and Exhibit) as defined by ICOM, 'Exhibit' and 'Conserve' look distinctive under their own ambit, with the former in search of flexibility and the latter conforming to standards. Furthermore, being an apparent front-of-stage activity, 'Exhibit' attracts much public attention, whereas 'Conserve', which serves the needs of artefacts at the back-of-stage, is generally reckoned as secondary and auxiliary. Stepping into the second decade of the 21st Century when museums as public institutions, are opening up further to earn wider public support, the need for museums to make connections with visitors with an emphasis on communication has become more apparent, and the adoption of a customer-oriented and market responsive approach in the delivery of programmes and services has become more dominant. It is during the process of exploring new ways in enhancing new museum experiences for the visitors that 'Conserve' has been drawn into the limelight to assume a similar role as 'Exhibit' in front of the public. Taking the form of public educational programmes, 'Conserve' moves to the 'front-of-stage' to face the market and develop relationships with the public through a new channel. To this end, conservators have expanded their traditional role in museums to fulfil a broader social mission to promote conservation awareness in sustainable ways for the benefit of protecting and preserving the local cultural heritage for the future generations. Using the examples of the well-received conservation education activities currently run by the Conservation Office at the museums in Hong Kong, this paper will examine how conservators integrate 'Conserve' and 'Exhibit' together in the form of educational programmes to act as a powerful tool to 'Communicate' with the public and remake the traditional museum.