

## **Different Missions, Common Goals – Museum-Library Collaboration at the Hong Kong Maritime Museum in the Service of Local and Family History and the Conservation of Documentary Heritage in the South China Sea**

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### **Abstract:**

*Established in 2005, the Hong Kong Maritime Museum (HKMM) is a relatively new private museum that aims to collect all forms of materials related to the development of boats, ships, maritime exploration, maritime trade, and naval warfare on the South China coast, as well as in its adjacent seas. The Museum not only serves as a unique platform for the teaching and learning of the local heritage of Hong Kong, it also contributes greatly to the promotion of community engagement and social connections. The HKMM is also equipped with its own museum library, called the China State Shipbuilding Corporation (CSSC) Maritime Heritage Resource Centre. In addition to supporting various research activities carried out by the Museum, this Resource Centre also serves as a central, and yet comprehensive repository for publications and archival documents on maritime heritage and history related to Southeastern China.*

*This paper first discusses the distinctive operational practices and user needs of museums and libraries. It also examines the benefits and challenges of museum-library collaborations in the new knowledge-driven society. This section is in part based on an interview with Kitty But (Librarian, CSSC Maritime Heritage Resource Centre, The Hong Kong Maritime Museum) and Robert Trio (Project Officer for Technology, The Hong Kong Maritime Museum), in which they discuss their professional experiences in the fields of audience education, the implementation of different new technologies associated with the museum and library services, various collaborative initiatives*

carried out between the Museum and the Resource Centre, and their upcoming challenges and opportunities.

The paper then focuses on the plans of the Hong Kong Maritime Museum and its CSCC library to build a central archive preserving the local maritime documentary heritage of the region of the South China Sea. Technical issues and practical difficulties of museum-library collaboration in this local history archival project are explored, as is the possible use of the new archival collection as a research resource for Hong Kong maritime family history.

**Keywords:** Hong Kong Maritime Museum, Documentary Heritage.

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*Museums, archives and libraries belong at the very heart of people's lives, contributing to their enjoyment and inspiration, cultural values, learning potential, economic prosperity and social equity.<sup>1</sup>*

## 1 MUSEUMS VERSUS LIBRARIES – SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Both museums and libraries play an important role in cultural preservation and transmission. According to Storey (2003), “differences among libraries and museums can be profound.”<sup>2</sup> Their assets, personnel, professional training and terminology can differ dramatically, in part due to the different materials collected and handled by each.<sup>3</sup> While a ‘knowledge artifact’ can speak for itself, a ‘cultural artifact’ requires deeper interpretation. As a result, compared with libraries, museums tend to play a stronger role in providing the context via ‘interpretation’.<sup>4</sup> Finally, museums have generally a stronger tradition of liaising with the educational community.<sup>5</sup> This has led both the museums and libraries to develop distinct techniques and practices for describing, organizing, managing, and maintaining their collections.<sup>6</sup>

The differences between these two institutions can best be outlined by comparing their distinctive operational practices and user needs, e.g.:

- Libraries tend to provide open access. In other words, they advocate free and open access to information in all formats for the general public. Libraries also encourage access to their entire collections via a centralized one-stop searching platform, i.e., the One Public Access Catalogue (OPAC).<sup>7</sup> As a result, the library end-users are able to access, as well as interpret the information with minimum assistance from the librarian.
- Museums tend to keep most of their collections in secured storage, not open for public access. Museums collect mostly unique, monetarily, culturally and historically

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<sup>1</sup> *Impact Evaluation of Museums, Archives and Libraries: Available Evidence Project*. Available at: <http://www4.rgu.ac.uk/files/imreport.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Storey, T. (2003) “Libraries: Their Role and Relationship to Other Cultural Institutions.” *OCLC Newsletter* 260 (April), pp. 12–14.

<sup>3</sup> Lester, R. (2001) “The Convergence of Museums and Libraries?” *Alexandria*, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 183–191.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

<sup>5</sup> Allen, N. and L. Bishoff. (2002) “Collaborative Digitization: Libraries and Museums Working Together.” *Advances in Librarianship*, Vol. 26, p. 66.

<sup>6</sup> Ray, J. and S. Choudhury. (2002) “Web-Wise 2002 – Conference on Libraries and Museums in the Digital World: a Report by the Co-organizers. *Library Hi Tech News* [online], Vol. 19, No. 6. Available: <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/journals.htm?issn=0741-9058&volume=19&issue=6&articleid=1489819&show=html&PHPSESSID=r12ph6hrga4sm7rs9u76bk713>.

<sup>7</sup> Allen, N. and L. Bishoff. (2002) “Collaborative Digitization: Libraries and Museums Working Together.” *Advances in Librarianship*, Vol. 26, pp. 66.

valuable objects that often require significant attention and efforts for security and ongoing preservation. In many museums, the information searching systems are designed for the staff and not for the general public.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, a majority of small museums are often not computerized and rarely adhere to a set of standards – thereby causing difficulties in information sharing amongst institutions.

- Furthermore, museum curators collect, study, and interpret mostly three-dimensional objects with little textual content, while librarians work with information-dense books, films, and other printed materials which are two-dimensional, as well as archival paper document files and electronic records.

According to Buckland (1991<sup>9</sup> & 1997<sup>10</sup>), objects held in a museum can be considered documents, because they are also meant to provide information: about the type of object, its context and its relationships to other objects. From an information-science point of view, museums therefore are very similar to other types of repositories, such as libraries (books and other materials for reading and study) and archives (historical records and documents). As explained by Navarrete and Owen (2011),

books, journals and archival records, even in their digital form, are readily accepted as carriers of information, i.e., as documents. The institutions that provide functions for the collection, storage and access of these documents are generally regarded as information systems in the wider sense, i.e., as the set of human and technical resources, procedures, methods and know-how that together perform one or more specific information functions.<sup>11</sup>

However, for a long time, information science has to a large extent neglected museums, due to a restricted notion of the nature of information documents to be collected. In fact, the museum too is a special type of information system.

## 2 MOTIVES AND BENEFITS OF ONGOING MUSEUM-LIBRARY COLLABORATIONS

Both museums and libraries are considered heritage institutions, and are designed to assemble a single body of knowledge, but their distinctive operational practices and standards tend to isolate them from one another. Yet both have a strong educational and recreational role to play in the local community. Recently, there has been greater emphasis on the heritage and leisure function of both museums and libraries,<sup>12</sup> with recognition of a shared common purpose as “cultural heritage institutions working for the public good”.<sup>13</sup>

Library-museum collaboration was described by Diamant-Cohen and Sherman in 2003 as the “wave of the future”.<sup>14</sup> An archivist working in a museum setting remarked in 2007 that

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<sup>8</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> Buckland, Michael K. (1991) “Information as Thing,” *Journal American Society of Information Science*, Vol. 42, No. 5, pp. 351-360.

<sup>10</sup> Buckland, Michael K. (1997) “What is a Document?” *Journal American Society of Information Science*, Vol. 48, No. 7, pp. 804-809.

<sup>11</sup> Navarrete, Trilce and John Mackenzie Owen. (2011) “Museum Libraries: How Digitization Can Enhance the Value of the Museum.” *Palabra Clave (La Plata)*, Vol. 1, No. 1. Available at: <http://www.palabraclave.fahce.unlp.edu.ar/numeros/vol1no1/v1n1a3>.

<sup>12</sup> Marsden, C. (2001) “Sectors and Domains: Some Reflections on Co-Operation and Integration.” *Journal of the Society of Archivists* [online], Vol. 22, No. 1, p. 20. Available at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00379810120037469>.

<sup>13</sup> Allen, N. and L. Bishoff. (2002), p. 43.

<sup>14</sup> Diamant-Cohen, B. and D. Sherman. (2003) “Hand in Hand: Museums and Libraries Working Together.” *Public Libraries*, Vol. 42, No. 2, pp. 102–105.

libraries and archives could learn more from museums about education, while museums could take a page from libraries in providing better access to collections.<sup>15</sup> But for libraries and museums to work effectively together:

It is necessary for collaborators to understand the differences among themselves. A library's "patron" may be the same individual as a museum's "visitor", but the reason that person has for going to the library may be quite different than the reason for visiting the museum. The library's funding structure is likely to be very different than the museum's, and its administrative and decision-making structure may not be at all the same as the museum's. While the museum has a "catalog" it uses that catalog for inventory purposes, and it may be difficult for a partnering library to understand why that catalog is not available for public use. A library does usually have a preservation program of some kind, but the library may not recognize the tremendous value placed by museums on preservation and conservation handling of collections. Therefore, the library's primary purpose for starting a digitization project may be to improve access, while the museum will want to include a far greater emphasis on preservation, as might the archival partner. The museum's traditional roles for curators might be compared to the role of university faculty or librarians, but they also are quite different as well. All of us already know these things, but we did not expect them to surface so often in partnership projects between libraries and museums, archives, and historical societies. A new sensitivity to the different systems, cultures, and decision-making requirements is needed.<sup>16</sup>

For many years, libraries, museums and archives have collected data in a variety of forms in an attempt to establish the efficiency of service, client use and satisfaction. According to Diamant-Cohen and Sherman (2007)<sup>17</sup>; Lester (2001)<sup>18</sup>, Brown and Pollack (2000)<sup>19</sup> and Yakel (2005)<sup>20</sup>, in the light of these data the practical reasons for library-museum collaboration could be summarized as follows:

- to attract new audience groups and expand the reach of the library and museum;
- to improve public perceptions of museums and libraries as traditional staid institutions;
- to identify new ways to encourage cultural heritage and preservation;
- to foster of best practice from the museum and the library;
- to share physical resources such as space and materials;
- to share policies for preservation and conservation of collections;
- to share expertise;
- to share staff training costs;
- the experience of collaborative work itself.

Waibel and Erway nicely sum up the benefits and organizational impact:

By working together, applying collective attention and collaborative action to common challenges and solutions, not only can [libraries, archives and museums] leverage

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<sup>15</sup> Wythe, Deborah (2007) "New Technologies and the Convergence of Libraries, Archives, and Museums." In *RBM: a Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts and Cultural Heritage*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Spring 2007).

<sup>16</sup> Allen, Nancy. (2000) "Collaboration Through the Colorado Digitization Project." *First Monday*, Vol. 5, No. 6. Available at: <http://firstmonday.org/article/view/755/664>.

<sup>17</sup> Diamant-Cohen, B. and D. Sherman. (2003), p. 102.

<sup>18</sup> Lester, R. (2001), p. 183.

<sup>19</sup> Brown, K. and M. Pollack. (2000) "Illinois Libraries and Museums: Connecting and Collaborating for the Future." *Illinois Libraries*, Vol. 82, No. 3, p. 212.

<sup>20</sup> Yakel, E. (2005) "Choices and Challenges: Cross-Cutting Themes in Archives and Museums" *OCLC Systems & Services: International Digital Library Perspectives*, Vol. 21, No.1, p. 13. Available: <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/journals.htm?articleid=1464573&show=html>.

network effects, they can also free up valuable time and resources to focus efforts on things only [they] can do: meet local user's needs, collect unique materials, and preserve those artifacts. [...] Collaboration changes behaviors, processes and organizational structures, and leads to a fundamental inter-connectedness and inter-dependence among the partners, making this transformative change the hallmark sign by which true collaboration can be known.<sup>21</sup>

### **3 HOW CAN ONGOING MUSEUM-LIBRARY COLLABORATIONS BE MADE TO WORK?**

Although the potential benefits of museum-library collaborations are self-evident, non-profit arts and culture groups are today challenged as never before, with museums and libraries being no exception. Both institutions are constantly competing for audience against a variety of low-cost commercial entertainment products. Their operating costs, like those of most non-profit cultural organizations, continue to rise. At the same time, we do not see much growth in ticket sales, fund donations and other possible earned income. Most important, the audiences for many non-profit cultural organizations are rather static, and in many cases, in fact, declining, due to competition from new media. In short, audiences are paying museums and libraries less attention, and budgets have become increasingly tight.

In these circumstances, how can museums and libraries work together and with their communities to address the community's lifelong learning needs, and become centers for community knowledge creation and productive inquiry? As pointed out by Pastore (2009), "Museums and libraries can continue to enrich the education and knowledge building of society by consciously adapting their services to the new ways in which people want to seek, gather, and interpret information and to create meaning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century."<sup>22</sup> If museum curators and librarians in general begin to collaborate more, they may also begin to re-define themselves, in terms of their new, shared educational and recreational roles both in the local context and in the global knowledge society. Gibson, Morris and Cleeve (2007) predict that museums and libraries will work together "to create a brand new model for learning in an information-rich environment by taking the best aspects of two informal learning environments and blending them to create a seamless integration of resources."<sup>23</sup>

The new emphasis on museum-library collaborations will be carried across curation, education, marketing and even fundraising, breaking down many traditional divisions of museum and library practices. Both museums and libraries can provide a rich public experience by making their contents exciting. The new collaborative efforts will aim at providing a broader, lifestyle experience as a trusted resource for the community's cultural and intellectual growth. In this connection, museums must learn integrate their services with library services in a digital context, for enhanced informational value-added.

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<sup>21</sup> Waibel, Günter & Ricky Erway. (2009) "Think Global, Act Local - Library, Archive and Museum Collaboration." *Museum Management and Curatorship*, Vol. 24, No. 3. Pre-print available online at: <http://www.oclc.org/resources/research/publications/library/2009/waibel-erway-mmcc.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> Pastore, E. (2009) *The Future of Museums and Libraries: A Discussion Guide*. Washington, D.C.: Institute of Museum and Library Services, p. 15. Available at: <http://www.imls.gov/assets/1/AssetManager/DiscussionGuide.pdf> (IMLS-2009-RES-02).

<sup>23</sup> Gibson, Hannah, Anne Morris and Marigold Cleeve. (2007) "Links between Libraries and Museums: Investigating Museum-Library Collaboration in England and the USA." *Libri*, Vol. 57, p. 59.

Perhaps the greatest concern for both museums and libraries today is what they need to do to remain meaningful institutions in the future: how to stay relevant to the communities they serve and how best to preserve materials and provide access to them for future generations.<sup>24</sup> Intimate digital partnership strategies will not only help engage the institutions in their physical and virtual communities, but will further promote the preservation of their unique identity and resources, as organic, active participants in resolving contemporary issues such as cultural heritage preservation. Since information contents and services over the Internet are increasingly syndicated for increased interoperability and connectivity, curators and librarians should identify ways to leverage their cultural collections into greater public awareness using such tools as Google, Amazon, Flickr and Facebook.

We would like to stress the social importance of having museums and libraries working closely together - to create engaging, pleasant and memorable experiences for their visitors, so that they could be fully inspired, enriched as well as entertained in their search for knowledge. This is how to build communities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Pastore notes that in *The Great Good Place* author Ray Oldenburg

defines the significance of the third place in a healthy society. Neither work nor home, the third place is a neutral community space, where people come together voluntarily and informally in ways that level social inequities and promote community engagement and social connection. As public gathering places organized around public service and the transfer of information and ideas across individuals, museums and libraries are a unique form of the third place because of their distinct resources as easily accessible, low-cost-barrier places rich in content and experience.<sup>25</sup>

Inevitably there will be convergence. In a Research Libraries Group Forum, Michael Fox of the Minnesota Historical Society said, “I continue to argue that good museums need to become more like research libraries and archives just as good libraries and archives ought to adapt certain characteristics of the museum experience.”<sup>26</sup> While “learning from each other” was presented as an opportunity, “lending to each other” was given as a real-life example of museum and library working hand-in-hand. As collaboration, collocation, and blending of services continue, it is likely that the boundary between museum and library will become less distinct. The unique mission and identity of individual institutions need not disappear; rather, the institutional goals can be expanded and enhanced through ongoing collaborations.<sup>27</sup>

#### **4 THE SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A MUSEUM AND ITS OWN LIBRARY**

The issues of effective museum-library collaboration are seen most clearly when the library is institutionally connected with, and at the service of, the museum as well as its public. Providing contextual knowledge, and especially general background knowledge, for the museum’s collections is the function of the museum library. Museum libraries’ books and archival collections are primarily meant to support research and exhibitions related to the museum’s field of interest. For example, in order to go beyond the mere admiration of museum objects and derive meaningful information from them, one needs both the necessary background knowledge (e.g., artistic periods or other technical and cultural information) and more specific contextual knowledge about the objects (e.g., by whom, when, for what

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<sup>24</sup> Pastore, E. (2009), *passim*.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>26</sup> Fox, Michael. *Three in One: Archives, Libraries and Museums under One Roof*, pp. 11. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/5ek6xy>.

<sup>27</sup> Pastore, E. (2009), p. 9.

purpose they were created). The latter descriptive data are usually provided by the museum curators as part of the exhibit, but it is the documents held inside the museum library that provide further information on individual objects and their connections with a particular collection, as well as general historical, technical, and biographical information pertaining to the collection as a whole.<sup>28</sup>

In fact, many museum libraries also collect materials related to the activities of the museum, such as conservation, restoration, and exhibition. Other materials collected may include books, prints, maps, drawings, musical scores, as well as visual images (video art, film, postcards, posters) and sound recordings. Occasionally, the museum library collects objects related to an artist, such as contracts, autograph musical scores, manuscripts and personal letters.<sup>29</sup> As a result, by managing both the museum collections and the museum library together, one is able to give access to the “whole” story of museum objects to the audience, including both the primary and secondary sources. This greatly enhances their interpretation, understanding and enjoyment for all users, from novices to specialists.

The specific relationship between the library and museum objects is the main characteristic that differentiates the museum library from many other types of libraries. But museum libraries can differ drastically among themselves, in terms of their historical origin, their collection contents, the way they are organized and funded, their librarians’ expertise, and -- most important -- the nature of their relations with their parent institution, the museum itself. Hence the nature and form of collaborations between museum curators and museum librarians needs be looked at case by case.

It should be noted, however, that museum libraries are not always considered part of the resources to be made available to the general public. For example, the Van Abbe Museum of contemporary art in Eindhoven, The Netherlands, founded in 1936, has an excellent library which was made open to the public, by appointment only, some twenty years after the Museum’s opening. The first librarian was hired ten years after that (or thirty years after the opening of the museum), so that the Van Abbe Museum Library could be made open to the general public during regular museum opening hours.<sup>30</sup>

The modern trend, however, is for a museum and its library to be integrated increasingly as a combined resource for public consultation, education and entertainment. In the case study which follows this is the paradigm that will be pursued.

## **5 THE HONG KONG MARITIME MUSEUM AND ITS MARITIME HERITAGE RESOURCE CENTRE**

Established in 2005, the Hong Kong Maritime Museum (HKMM)<sup>31</sup> is a relatively new museum that acquires, conserves, researches and exhibits all forms of materials related to the development of boats, ships, maritime exploration, seagoing trade and naval warfare on the South China coast and in the adjacent seas. This museum aims to provide a comprehensive account of Hong Kong’s growth and development as a major world port and maritime center. The HKMM includes many semi-permanent and special exhibitions, such as the *Canton*

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<sup>28</sup> Navarrete, Trilee and John Mackenzie Owen (2011), p. 14.

<sup>29</sup> *Loc.cit.*

<sup>30</sup> Franssen, Fiana. (2007) *Van boekenplank naar kennisproductie: De geschiedenis van de bibliotheek van het Van Abbemuseum 1936-2007*. En: Koot, R.; Nijhoff, M. y Scheltjens, S. *Kunstbibliotheken in Nederland*. Leiden: Primavera Pers, pp. 99-112.

<sup>31</sup> *Hong Kong Maritime Museum*. Information available at: <http://www.hkmartimemuseum.org>.

*Trade with Europe and the Americas*<sup>32</sup> and *Piracy in the China Seas*<sup>33</sup>. It also offers interactive displays, educational events, a café, and a museum shop.<sup>34</sup> The HKMM not only serves as a unique platform for teaching and learning of the local maritime heritage in Hong Kong, but also contributes greatly to the promotion of community engagement and social connections with the city's seafaring community.

The Hong Kong Maritime Museum is also equipped with its own museum library, officially called the China State Shipbuilding Corporation (CSSC) Maritime Heritage Resource Centre.<sup>35</sup> In addition to supporting various research activities carried out by the Museum, this Resource Centre also serves as a central, comprehensive repository for publications and archival documents on maritime heritage and history related to Hong Kong and Southeastern China. Some of these items date back more than 300 years, and represent work that cannot be found in the public domain anywhere else in Hong Kong.<sup>36</sup>

To gather information on the efforts to integrate museum and library services in this exciting new combined venue for Hong Kong local history, Patrick Lo interviewed Kitty But, librarian, and Robert Trio, technology officer, of the Hong Kong Maritime Museum and the CSSC Maritime Heritage Resource Centre.<sup>37</sup> According to them the HKMM and its Resource Centre are pursuing a policy of expansion, with new facilities, new buildings, new collections, new education programs, and improved collection access through digitization. Money is being invested in promoting the educational and heritage roles of the Museum and the Resource Centre. Collaboration has led to many new education initiatives and outreach programs, which would have been impossible without the museum-library partnership.

In spite of all the changes occasioned by close collaboration, however, the complementary core responsibilities of the library and the museum will remain the same: to acquire and to preserve the original materials as well as all other relevant information, and to make them as widely accessible as possible. The interview showed that the aims, objectives, services and operations of a museum and its library can and do fit well together, especially those concerned with lifelong learning, heritage preservation and social inclusion. But the interview also confirmed that there is no single concept of what a museum library should be, and there is no easy solution to all problems currently faced by museum curators and librarians in working together.

## **6 DOING LOCAL HISTORY IN HONG KONG: THE ROLE OF THE MUSEUM AND ITS LIBRARY**

Hong Kong's history can be dated all the way back to 6000 years ago. Once a tiny fishing village, Hong Kong has successfully transformed itself into one of the busiest seaports in the world; and at the same time, complemented this transformation with the status of "world's freest economy". The 156 years of British colonization and continuing separate administrative status from Communist China since 1997, combined with elements of the traditional Chinese culture, have resulted in a very unique 'multicultural heritage' that cannot

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<sup>32</sup> *Canton Trade with Europe and the Americas*. Information available at: <http://www.hkmaritimemuseum.org/eng/explore/galleries/the-canton-trade-with-europe-and-the-americas/12/6/>.

<sup>33</sup> *Piracy in the China Seas*. Information available at: <http://www.hkmaritimemuseum.org/eng/explore/galleries/piracy-in-the-china-seas/12/12/>.

<sup>34</sup> Information available at: <http://www.hkmaritimemuseum.org/eng/explore/galleries/introduction/12/4/>.

<sup>35</sup> The Resource Centre is named after China State Shipbuilding Corporation in recognition for their support of the Centre's staff and resources. More information available at: <http://www.hkmaritimemuseum.org/eng/resource-centre/introduction/about-us/30/59/>.

<sup>36</sup> *Loc.cit.*

<sup>37</sup> For the full text of the interview, see Appendix I.



be found elsewhere. Such a unique, historic legacy is indeed part of our cultural identity and collective memory in Hong Kong – something that is undeniable as well as irreplaceable, and is definitely worth preserving. Unfortunately, the topics of local Hong Kong history, local cultural heritage and Hong Kong family history did not attract serious scholarly attention until the 1980s. In addition, it was only in the early 1990s that the Hong Kong Government began to invest in different historic and cultural preservation initiatives, through grants, public education programs, building new theme-based museums and archives, as well as making local history as part of the secondary education curriculum in Hong Kong.

In response to such cultural heritage preservation initiatives, the Hong Kong Maritime Museum has also embarked on the mission of developing a central repository unit, with the goal of preserving the local documentary heritage related to maritime matters in the region of the South China Sea. Although this HKMM central repository project is in the planning stage, the benefits and the positive impacts of such central repository unit are already self-evident.

The planned archival repository of the CSSC Maritime Heritage Resource Centre within the Hong Kong Maritime Museum is designed especially to house publications of any kind on maritime history, heritage, culture and the sea-based industries in the region of the South China Sea. The Centre has set itself the goal of ensuring that maritime records belonging to the local history and cultural heritage, created today or in the past, are properly preserved for future generations. It aims to collect documentation of major maritime historical events in the region of the South China Sea, as well as shipping company records and the personal archives of the major ship owners and their families (personal correspondence, photographs, postcards, diaries, artifacts, films, sound recordings).

## **7 THE PRESSING NEED FOR AN ARCHIVAL HONG KONG MARITIME COLLECTION**

In the past, there have been a large number of international and local shipping companies in Hong Kong, because Hong Kong has one of the deepest natural harbours in the world. The natural shelter and deep waters of Victoria Harbour provide ideal conditions for the docking and handling of all types of vessels. In addition, Hong Kong has always served as an important economic gateway to inland China. The combination of these factors has worked to make Hong Kong into one of the busiest seaports in the world.

Unfortunately, since the opening of Communist China to a free market economy under Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s, many of Hong Kong's local shipping businesses have been in decline, due to increased competition from neighbouring cities around the Pearl River Delta, such as Shenzhen, Shekou, and Zhuhai. Some Hong Kong shipping companies are going out of business and their company documents and records (regarded as important part of our local documentary heritage in Hong Kong) are simply being lost or destroyed. This is a tragedy, because local shipping companies also played a major role in the overall development of Hong Kong logistics businesses, as well as in Hong Kong's economic development as a whole. The shipping companies were key facilitators of the City's transformation into one of the freest economies and busiest harbours in the world, with a uniquely dynamic culture embracing internationalism and diversity.

In this situation the CSSC Maritime Heritage Resource Centre recognizes the need for its repository to be proactive, to seek out and archive privately held materials related to maritime

history around the South China Sea, instead of waiting passively for individuals or shipping companies to donate or deposit their materials. Starting in 2013, the Centre Librarian is approaching different small- to medium-size companies along the South China Sea to ask for donations of their archives. Not content with serving as an information centre for research on materials held by the Hong Kong Maritime Museum, the CSSC Maritime Heritage Resource Centre has undertaken its own, separate mission of collecting, maintaining, interpreting and making accessible the documentary records of local and family maritime history.

## **8 CHALLENGES OF ESTABLISHING THE LOCAL MARITIME HISTORY ARCHIVAL COLLECTION**

One of the major challenges faced by the CSSC Maritime Heritage Resource Centre is fitting into the different cultural climate of business-driven Hong Kong, by creating an awareness of the need for preservation of local history and documentary heritage amongst the general public as well as commercial companies, and convincing them to donate their historic documents of high value to the Centre's repository. The Centre's librarian and the Museum staff recognize that archives are different from a collection of museum objects. In contrast to museum objects, archival documents need to come in blocks, in sequence, and need to be maintained as individual units, or record groups, that illustrate the whole story of a series of events or incidents. Furthermore, archival documents should be made easily accessible to all users, regardless of their format; they should be viewed, touched and handled by as wide range of audience as possible. But all this is opposed to the business instincts of most commercial companies in Asia, which are reluctant to donate their historic company records *en bloc* to any external party for preservation, as such documents even after generations are regarded as highly confidential commercial information or even seen as trade secrets.<sup>38</sup>

Consider, for example, the case of the valuable records of a local Chinese company called Cheoy Lee Shipyards, Ltd.<sup>39</sup> founded in Hong Kong around 1870. This is the one of the few surviving shipbuilding companies in Hong Kong. Cheoy Lee Shipyards sat side-by-side with the Hongkong and Whampoa Dockyard and the other shipyards of Hong Kong for many decades. After Whampoa Dockyard was merged with Taikoo Dockyard<sup>40</sup> and changed its name to Hong Kong United Dockyard, Cheoy Lee survived by converting its business model from cargo ship building to the building of luxury yachts and ferries. Cheoy Lee's company records are definitely an important part of the documentary heritage of Hong Kong, as they would provide historical evidence of the whole development and transformation of Whampoa Dockyard. However, when the Hong Kong Maritime Museum approached Cheoy Lee Company and requested donation of archival materials to its Maritime Heritage Resource Centre, Cheoy Lee would only allow the HKMM staff to photocopy and scan their company's past product catalogues and pamphlets, photographs and some other 'less-important' documents such as quotation sheets, while refusing to donate any of their original documents to the Centre's repository.<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately the former HKMM staff involved had

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<sup>38</sup> In fact, the CSSC Maritime Heritage Resource Centre is not the only non-profit organization in Hong Kong that faces difficulties in convincing corporations to donate their archival materials for preservation purposes. According to an interview given in March 2013 by Richie Lam, head of the Hong Kong Film Archive: "In Hong Kong, we don't have any legal deposit legislation [for films] - NO legislation at all whatsoever [...] because films are really special products, especially [...] commercial films. [Many people think that] the property rights and the copyrights [...] of the film materials [...] are very personal or even private, because these rights are closely related to the commercial values of the actual film products. As a result, the film companies were reluctant to give out their film productions to the Film Archive." Cf. Hong Kong Film Archive – Homepage at <http://www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/CulturalService/HKFA/en/index.php>.

<sup>39</sup> Cheoy Lee Shipbuilding Company. Further information available from the Cheoy Lee Shipyards Homepage at <http://cheoyleena.com> and from <http://www.cheoyleassociation.com/WebMisc/Doug/history.htm>.

<sup>40</sup> Taikoo Dockyard. Further information available at: <http://gwulo.com/taikoo-dockyard>.

<sup>41</sup> For examples of the historical documentation obtained from the Cheoy Lee Shipbuilding Company, see Appendices II, III and IV.

not received the professional training required to identify and properly handle archival materials, and mistakenly treated the photocopied or scanned materials as of archival value, losing a valuable opportunity to explain the need for proper archival preservation of the originals for future generations. Nor were a professionally trained librarian and a proper archival acquisitions policy in place at the HKMM at that time.

Another missed acquisition was the records of Jardine Matheson Holdings Ltd., one of the original Hong Kong trading houses dating all the way back to Imperial China during the Qing Dynasty and the Opium Wars of 1840. The company's roots can be traced back to the founding of the Hong Kong settlement to import opium directly into China in exchange for tea and cotton exported to the British Empire. Half of the Jardine Matheson Holdings documents directly related to Hong Kong's economic development and shipping businesses. Ironically, the whole Company archive is now housed in Cambridge, England. The Hong Kong Maritime Museum does not wish to face another 'Jardine incident' in the future.

## 9 ARCHIVAL MODELS, TRAINING, AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT

The Hong Kong Maritime Museum has now been relocated to Central Pier 8, with the proper facilities to operate as an information resource centre, and the librarian of the Maritime Heritage Resource Centre is developing the archival collection on local maritime history in accord with a collections policy and a strategic plan. The Centre's archival practices are modeled on those of two notable maritime museums abroad: the British National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, England,<sup>42</sup> and the Australian National Maritime Museum<sup>43</sup> in Sydney. As Hong Kong is a former British colony and Australia shares with her the British maritime heritage in the Far East, the archival structures and practices of those two maritime museums are deemed the most relevant to the HKMM's resource centre, which hopes itself to become a model for developing other maritime archives in the region.

There are few professionally trained archivists in Hong Kong and non-profit institutions would find hiring one very costly. For this reason museums, like other organizations and even for-profit businesses in Hong Kong, would normally send their existing staff to attend local or overseas archival management training courses while already working in the field. As part of its staff development program, the Hong Kong Maritime Museum is currently considering sending its resource centre staff to the archival training courses offered by the University of Hong Kong's School of Professional and Continuing Education (HKU-SPACE).<sup>44</sup>

The resource centre's archival collection policy outlines the type of records we are looking to acquire, including subject areas, geographic scope, media and chronological range. It will encourage influential individuals, families, small enterprises or non-profit organizations and large, to donate their records to the Hong Kong Maritime Museum as a central depository and a research venue for local and family history. The policy refers to such standards as:

- U.K. National Archives, *Archive Collection Policy Statements: Checklist of Suggested Contents* (2004),<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> National Maritime Museum – homepage at: <http://www1.rmg.co.uk> .

<sup>43</sup> Australian National Maritime Museum – homepage at: <http://www.anmm.gov.au/site/page.cfm> .

<sup>44</sup> University of Kong Kong, School of Professional and Continuing Education – homepage at: <http://hkuspace.hku.hk> . Available archival courses include an Archival Studies Workshop on Appraisal and Acquisition, an Archival Studies Workshop on Arrangement and Description, an Archival Studies Workshop on Electronic Records Management, and lead to the Postgraduate Certificate in Archival Studies and to the Executive Certificate in Archives Management.

<sup>45</sup> Available at: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/information-management/archive-collection-policy.pdf> .

- U.K. National Council on Archives, Public Services Quality Group, *Standard for Access to Archives* (2008);<sup>46</sup>
- *General International Standard Archival Description*;<sup>47</sup>
- *ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description*;<sup>48</sup>
- *International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families* (2004);<sup>49</sup>
- U.K. National Archives, *Cataloguing Guidelines* (2007).

## 10 COLLECTING AND CATALOGUING CONFLICTS

The common traits of libraries and museums outweigh their differences. But when a library and a museum share the same space, as in the Hong Kong Maritime Museum, it is the small differences that often lead to operational conflicts. Although the library acts as an independent office of the museum and follows library standards and best practices, it is heavily influenced by the mission and vision of the museum and its core practices.

One can see from the current collection of the library at the Hong Kong Maritime Museum that it was predisposed in the early years not to collect in a typical library fashion. The library's primary collection focus initially was on first editions and rare copies. There was never any intention to lend items or to have a juvenile section. The collection grew primarily out of the wishes of one person who approached the library from a researcher's point of view. Yet despite this focus, there were few reference materials collected. Collecting rare and first editions exclusively is consistent with how museum professionals think about collecting artifacts for the museum collection.

At the Hong Kong Maritime Museum this practice has led to some interesting dynamics when it comes to cataloguing collections. Libraries tend to focus on cataloguing records based on the idea that the item is identical to similar items of the same edition or printing. Museums tend to catalog items as if each is one of a kind, with the item's individual story tied to a person or family who owned it or for whom it was created.

Because personal histories are an important part of museums' missions, it is this concept that often drives the thinking behind how cataloguing is done. Museum cataloguing places the connection of the person to the object above all other things. It is the personal connection that provides the context of why the object is in the collection at all. For example, a printed copy of a Judaic prayer book from 1930 takes on a much greater meaning if that book belonged to a Holocaust survivor.

So when a dual institution acquires a collection, differences of opinion often arise on how the item should be catalogued and what type of metadata should be collected on it. An interesting case of such a cataloguing conflict arose recently at the Hong Kong Maritime Museum, when a small group of nautical charts came into the collection. In many ways, this set of charts helps to illustrate the struggle between different approaches that exists in a museum setting that also a library focus. The charts also illustrate the struggle which institutions that tell personal stories have, when the materials are not yet old enough to be considered antiques but

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<sup>46</sup> *PSQG Standard for Access to Archives*. Available at: [http://www.archives.org.uk/images/documents/access\\_standard\\_2008.pdf](http://www.archives.org.uk/images/documents/access_standard_2008.pdf)

<sup>47</sup> *General International Standard Archival Description*. Available at: <http://www.ica.org/?lid=10207>.

<sup>48</sup> *ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description*. Available at: [http://www.icacds.org.uk/eng/ISAD\(G\).pdf](http://www.icacds.org.uk/eng/ISAD(G).pdf).

<sup>49</sup> Available at: [http://www.icacds.org.uk/eng/isaar2ndedn-e\\_3\\_1.pdf](http://www.icacds.org.uk/eng/isaar2ndedn-e_3_1.pdf).

may be unique enough that in the future one may want to research them as a group, because they belonged to a specific person.

The British Hydrographic Office produced this set of charts in the 1970's. Sailors of small vessels commonly used them for short hops from one island to another. The charts show landmasses and the depth of the water in stunning detail. In all, there were about forty charts in the set, covering most of the major waterways of Hong Kong. This practice of using such printed charts to navigate has now been replaced by modern Global Positioning System (GPS) receivers, radio-linked to earth satellites, that are on board most small vessels.

The rub was where to place this collection: in the library, the museum or the maritime history archive. The librarian made a case that the charts were clearly a secondary source and fit under well-established library cataloging practices. Some argued that the charts, all belonging to a single sea captain and annotated by him, belonged in the archives. In the future one might wish to research this particular person as an actor in local seafaring history, and the charts represented his life work. Lastly, because the charts contained unique notations and markings from this sea captain, they could be considered a museum collection item. The sea captain had also donated a set of nautical instruments to the museum. By making the charts a part of the museum collection, all of these items could be stored and displayed together.

The challenge for the museum and its library and archival repository was to preserve the set together. In the end, what prevailed was the concept that the personal story was the most important. The museum may never know if researchers wish to explore this captain's life work, but mixed institutions like the Hong Kong Maritime Museum must ensure by their cataloging and display practices that it is possible for them to do so.

## **11 THE RELEVANCE OF THE COLLECTIONS TO LOCAL AND FAMILY HISTORY AND GENEALOGY**

Via collaborations and partnerships, we can soon expect to see the Hong Kong Maritime Museum and its Maritime Heritage Resource Centre become a leading agent for the promotion of local documentary heritage in the region. This has implications not only for the study of local maritime history but of family history and genealogy. The shipping companies were in many cases family concerns, and acquiring a complete set of family business records, including listings of employees, contractors, seamen and their voyages, as well tools of the trade like the captain's annotated charts, has family history research potential in Hong Kong similar to that of immigrant or transportee ships' passenger records in the New World or in Australia.

In conclusion, as the CSSC Maritime Heritage Resource Centre begins to undertake the challenges of collecting, preserving and sharing the local business and family histories of the people of Hong Kong, we recognize that the key component is building relationships with our community, past and present, and carrying them forward into the future. Our work is about building a trust amongst the people we serve and the people we wish to recognize. The Hong Kong Maritime Museum and its Resource Centre are in a unique position to take up this role because the sea has touched the lives of all Hong Kong's people in one way or another. Building a repository of the collective memory of the community will perhaps be the institution's greatest contribution to its community.

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## Appendix I

### Interview with Kitty But and Robert Trio

In an interview conducted in August 2012 with Robert Trio, Hong Kong Maritime Museum Project Officer for Technology, and Kitty But, librarian at the CSSC Maritime Heritage Resource Centre, Patrick Lo discussed the new roles of the Hong Kong Maritime Museum as well as the new problems and challenges faced by reform of this Museum. The interview discussed the following issues:

- (1) What makes the HKMM different from other museum places in Hong Kong, and what role can HKMM and its Resource Centre play in becoming part of a strong community network?
- (2) The intricate relationship between the Resource Centre and its parent institution (i.e., the HKMM), and their shifting social functions in relation to cultural preservation efforts?
- (3) What are the current models for collaborations amongst museums and libraries, in order to promote social inclusion, community development, generate greater access to information?
- (4) How can museum curators and librarians increase collaborations, while retaining and respecting the historical and unique differences within a single organization? When is the public best served and by what channels and methods?
- (5) What are the ways that museums and libraries contribute to the public good, and how can they do more for the community?
- (6) Who are the future audiences for library and museum services? What factors determine this new audience?

The following face-to-face interview with Kitty But and Robert Trio was carried out at the CSSC Maritime Heritage Centre in Hong Kong in August, 2012

**Patrick Lo (PL):** *So, maybe we could begin by taking turns to introduce yourselves.*

**Kitty But (KB):** Okay, my name is Kitty But and I am the Librarian for, as we call it the CSSC Maritime Heritage Resource Centre, and I believe this is quite a special library. It started from an in-house library and is now open to the general public. Am I right, Robert? You know more than I do, maybe.

**Robert Trio (RT):** My understanding is that the core of the collection came from the first fellow that was appointed by the Museum, Dr. Stephen Davies.

**KB:** The collection in itself, first of all, the reason why I joined this Museum as a librarian is that I could fully utilize my experiences and expertise as both an archivist and a librarian, as I have professional experiences in both fields. Since our Library Resources Centre is still at an infancy stage, I am hoping that I will have many opportunities to use my experiences and expertise here. Because right now, we do already have a fair amount of museum-plus-archive materials to look after. In addition, we need to start collecting archives based on the Hong Kong maritime subjects, e.g., the shipping industries, historical records,

personal historical records, etc.

But what I found the main challenge here is how to bring the library ideas into the museum setting. That is why I am glad to have my museum colleague Robert working with me in this situation, because it is very hard – as you know, the museum mind-set and the library mind-set are totally different. I would not say I am a very traditional librarian, but I do believe there are certain rules and theories and practices behind what we do as practicing librarians and practicing museum curators. But since the very beginning, it has been so difficult to persuade my other museum colleagues – explaining to them why we have to do this or that the sake of the library's operations. Are there any good examples you can think of Robert?

**RT:** I think that the main difference whether you are looking at a library or a museum is that they both contain collections. But the purpose behind the museum tends to focus on presentation, i.e., presenting information to the public with a specific point of view. While libraries tend to say, "*Here is the collection, you explore on your own! You choose what section to look at*".

**KB:** And this is why we always come into conflicts – i.e., conflicts on whether this item belongs to the library collection or it should be treated as a museum object instead. Because in the past, people are only used one way to describe everything as in the collection, but they do NOT see the library collection and museum object as separate. For me as a librarian, any library book item should be made easily accessible for all users. For example, we do have a special library collection section, and we have the first edition of Homer Fairchild in our special library collection, but I don't want to have it locked up in a safe, and not to allow anyone to have access to it. It is because that is simply against the purpose of collecting and managing the library materials. Because there might be information that should be free for access for everyone, i.e., including you and me. As a result, we come into arguments sometimes, when you say, "*This is mine!*" or "*No, this is mine!*"

For this Museum Library, the original idea was just to cater for a small group of people, meaning scholars. It is a special library, but the subject of maritime is very big. Under the theme of maritime, you can include history, geography, art, politics, economies, law and it can range from being very general to very specific. And as a librarian, obviously, I don't want people to come and say, "*Kitty, the Resource Centre is the least valuable place in the entire Museum organization*", especially we are not making any revenue – which makes it even harder for us to justify the resources and manpower investigated into keeping the Library running. My other challenge is that, based on this set of readily-available collections, how am I going to attract more people to come to use the library? How to make the library special collection more special and appealing to the general users? How to generate more profits? Would digitalizing the existing materials be one of the more effective solutions? But how do we get the money for the doing the digitalization projects? And the skills involved in digitization... there is a lot of questions and issues involved. Many of these problems and issues which I really did not expect, when I first picked up this job. Before joining this Museum Library, I was only working as a school library. But on the other hand, this special Museum Library offers a lot of freedom, because we are not part of the Hong Kong Government. We have a lot freedom in choosing what books to be acquired. We are also going to build a youth collection to cater for the local primary- to secondary-school students. I believe it will be the first museum/library in Hong Kong, which will have this

kind of special educational-related focus. And what else? What I would say is this, sometimes I get confused – because the Resource Centre should be under the museum? Or we should be treated as a separate entity instead?

The other thing we have to build up is our collection. It needs to be more diverse to match with our collection, I mean the museum objects. For example as a visitor, Patrick, might be interested in certain paintings and I hope that one day, when you are finished viewing the paintings, you can come down to the Resource Centre and find more information on particular painters and the paintings. Currently, we don't have that kind of support to do that. And the next role for the Resource Centre is to play a supportive role to entertain certain research inquiries. We do have a lot of inquiries from different scholars, but we want more, and I would like to do more research inquiries if I have the time. It will be quite fun, and then by doing that we hope we can generate some knowledge which we can share on our website, producing publications, and presenting papers, etc. -- to make people understand that special libraries are not just for a small group of people, but special libraries can also be for the general public as well.

***PL: What about you Robert, could you tell us a bit more about you and your background and how your expertise could contribute to the whole setup of this museum? What are your specialties?***

**RT:** My name is Robert Trio, and I'm from the United States. I am currently serving as the Project Officer for Technology for the HKMM. I think that the biggest advantage I have is that I am not from Hong Kong. I think often, what I do, is say this is special about Hong Kong and that many Hong Kong people don't realise it is special, because it is so commonplace to them. And I think working with someone like Kitty, I had the opportunity to continually pull back and say, "Wow! *That is really special!*" and to be able to make those observations.

***PL: Did you go to library school or what did you study?***

**RT:** Oh, my background is working in museums, and ever since I was young I have worked in the museum field in one way or another. My most recent position was with the US Government in the Office of the Institute of Museum and Library Services, which is the federal agency, which oversees museums and libraries in the United States. Prior to coming here, I had the opportunity to kind of walk this line of thinking about libraries and museums, and how they in the United States these two institutions, that work very closely together, and partnering between these institutions is a standard procedure nowadays.

***PL: Did you study museum science or studies?***

**RT:** Museum. I earned my master in museum studies from John Hopkins University, and I have a bachelor's degree in history

***PL: Could you tell us more about this Museum Library. You are now trying to set up this library from scratch or was it already a small library? On a very small scale and it was located in Stanley, Hong Kong<sup>50</sup>; and you are currently relocating?***

**KB:** As I started in the beginning we were first joined in September 2012. We were

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<sup>50</sup> Stanley, Hong Kong. Information available at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanley,\\_Hong\\_Kong](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanley,_Hong_Kong).

situated in a very small office, maybe just slightly bigger than this in Stanley. In the office there was a couple of bookshelves, there were about 1,000 books, majority in English. How they were acquired, it was through the former director, Stephen Davies, now he works as the Maritime Heritage Research Centre researchers. He is also the leading person to come up with the storylines for our new museum galleries. He is a historian, he is a philosopher and he is a politician, in many degrees. He taught politics, so during his academic year he purchased books mainly on maritime related subjects. He loves this subject and all the books are supporting materials to his research. There are a lot of gaps that need to be filled - our biggest collection is on the history and shipping sections and naval architecture as well. Then, thanks to Robert he told the museum director, they needed a proper (professionally trained) librarian, not just the head of the Resource Centre, but someone with library knowledge to look after all the materials and resources kept inside the Resource Centre, so they started the recruiting the Museum Librarian, and I was lucky enough to be appointed.

The first challenge was - when I first looked at the library cataloguing records done by the Museum staff - I realized that they used some kind of in-house software developed by the Museum as a cataloguing tool. Then, I immediately realized that it should be the time to separate the library collection from the museum collection (it also happened to be the same time when Robert advocated to build a new website for the museum). One of the major reasons people requested for the new website was because they needed a centralized platform, which could guide the users to the library online catalogue (OPAC) for searching. However, the Museum in-house software did not support Unicode, also did not support many diacritical marks, etc. As a result, how to create an effective and efficient library catalogue was a rather major task from the beginning. We needed to set up a library catalogue that could support the cataloguing of Chinese books. Nowadays, we can't work without Chinese materials.

**RT:** And I guess where I would interject is that thinking about the challenge Kitty found, is that museums people think very differently than library people, and when you look at the early cataloguing of books, they were all categorized from a museum's point of view. What I mean by this is that museum people tend to think of everything as unique object. There is only one of these in the world. But library people tend to think about how this is one of many objects that contains this idea.

**KB:** And how to share this information and classify and catalogue the materials.

**RT:** Yes, and the whole idea of creating subject headings, how to write summaries of books. It is a very different point of view from the museum perspective.

**KB:** I mean I would have to re-work all these books that you see on the shelves. Because they either do not have or they have not used the standardized subject headings. So for the people, like a student, it would be very hard for them to find these books. Of course, what the museum people or the researcher would say, "*I don't need that, I know where it is, I know what it looks like on the cover*". That is the challenge, to make the museum colleagues understand, the re-working process - it was really time-consuming. And if we clean up and standardize our cataloguing practice, I hope that one day, we could contribute our library cataloguing records to the OCLC WorldCat, and to the other maritime museum libraries as well. If we don't have a set of standards to follow, we cannot really share our information

across other museums or libraries.

**RT:** I think what you are saying about standards is very important because, if you never intend to show your records to anyone outside your organisation, standards are not as important. But as the Resource Centre grows, and you think about consortiums and thinking about being able to share your information across, library loans or whatever... you have to have standards.

**KB:** So even though, yes... I think this task, how many years, I had estimated at least two years, and it shocked the museum director. He said you don't need two years to revise all the records.

**PL:** *How many records were you talking about?*

**KB:** Well, on the library catalogue it says we have 1,700 items, but in fact I found another 500 during the moving which I found... and we have about 2,500 items of books in total. It is not a lot but I am a 'one-man-band', yeah. Plus I don't work only on the library alone. I think I do need an assistant, a part-time one or a student helper. Optimally, I want to provide the best library records for everyone to browse online. I think the second task, Robert and I are working on some digitalization projects. But as I said we need to find money, and partners.

**PL:** *So am I to understand that this library is not funded under the Hong Kong Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD)?*<sup>51</sup>

**KB:** We are not. The whole museum is not a LCSD museum, we are a private museum.

**PL:** *Is HKMM the only private museum in Hong Kong?*

**KB:** No, the Hong Kong Medical Museum<sup>52</sup> is also private.

**PL:** *So who was the founder of this Museum?*

**KB:** A number of donors.

**PL:** *It was established... It was founded when?*

**RT:** In 2002, and primarily, the first donors came from the Hong Kong Shipowners Association.<sup>53</sup> They came together and recognized the need for Hong Kong to have... **KB:** A maritime museum.

**PL:** *Why is there a need for a Maritime Museum?*

**KB:** So let us ask you, why don't we need? How was Hong Kong built? What significant industry brought Hong Kong to what it is today? It is the maritime - from a small fishing village, to shipping, to now logistics. It is the biggest and most important reason why

<sup>51</sup> Leisure and Cultural Services Dept., The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. Information available at: <http://www.lcsd.gov.hk/en/home.php>.

<sup>52</sup> Hong Kong Museum of Medical Sciences. Information available at: <http://www.hkmms.org.hk>.

<sup>53</sup> Hong Kong Shipowners Association. Information available at: <http://www.hksoa.org>.

we have Hong Kong now. People like you and me? In the past, we were not a very maritime city. Even compared to Macau, the port of the Macau City was there much longer than Hong Kong. The reason was that Macau was conquered by the Portuguese and began to develop the City at least 400 years earlier than us.

**RT:** Macau was conquered?

**KB:** Okay, colonized. But after Britain took over Hong Kong, we have always been number one, because of the geographical location and its situations. How are we going to tell the young generation if you will forget and I will forget about this part of the history? And I think that is the reason why these donors come together and have been trying to persuade to the Hong Kong Government that we need a maritime museum in Hong Kong. If Macau can have a very established maritime museum, why don't we have one as well? But it is politics of course, and I believe we have the coastal defence, the centre of ... what is it called, the fire-fighting boat thingy.

**RT:** Well you know, this is where I would play my out of town card. When I was speaking to people and I would show them where I worked, they would say, in Chinese it doesn't say 'Maritime Museum', it says 'Museum of Sea Matters'. What really struck me is that it is a much more accurate way of thinking of this institution. We focus on the matters of the sea. Not just history...

**KB:** Museum of Sea Matters - anything that is tied to water.

**RT:** That was really the key for me to understand why this institution is in need by the community. It is a repository for people's collective memories, but also a place to recognize and to remind them who they are now.

**PL:** *To remind us where we came from.*

**KB:** Yeah. Well you know, from my point of view, Hong Kong never respected our own local heritage, and never understood how to preserve our heritage. We are very lucky to have these people, the donors, to contribute everything they have into the Museum. Some of them also contribute time and efforts, promotion, acquiring the new objects and making connections. So, being able to take part as a team member is an honour, because now, I think I am actually part of Hong Kong, and I never had that sense of belonging before. Well you know. My grandmother was a fisherman, and we might all have relatives relating to the sea. It's just all behind our minds.

**PL:** *So to my understanding, this Museum was originally located in Stanley, Hong Kong, why?*

**KB:** Yeah, it was located at Hong Kong Stanley Murray House.

**PL:** *Why are you relocating?*

**KB:** I can answer the second part, but I can't remember the first part...

**RT:** The opportunity arose when they started developing the idea of the museum. The Hong Kong Government owned the Murray House, and they were planning to use the Murray House as a multi-purpose space, with lots of restaurants and shops. I think it just happened

that the vacancy was available at Murray House at that time. Obviously, one of the main factors was that Stanley has a very strong connection to the sea. It is also where the Tin Hau Temple<sup>54</sup> is located.

**KB:** For the relocation, I think the Museum was open to the public in 2004, but since 2005 they started preparing for the relocation, because they could see the limitation of space in very short years. We had many objects, but we could not show them to the public, when we were at Stanley. Even for this location, yes, we cannot occupy the whole pier, but as far as I've heard from the curatorial team, we still don't have enough space for our objects. So, they started looking for places for relocation in 2005. They made a report to the Hong Kong Government based on different factors. Then, when did the Government granted the land to us? Maybe three years ago, I can't remember, when they were re-developing this area. The Government decided to rent us this land...

**RT:** A long-term lease?

**KB:** a long-term loan.

**PL:** *Meaning you don't need to pay anything?*

**RT:** I believe it is a nominal fee.

**KB:** Very limited fee, yeah.

**KB:** But we are still struggling, because one day we might have to move out, because it is a government property.

**KB:** The Resource Centre is moving quite fast. Its growth is quite fast. Not at this stage, we need to collect a lot of Chinese materials. In the past, they were not too concerned about the Chinese materials, and I am also hoping that we can find a way to collect more Chinese historical records and rare books as well. It is just so heart-breaking to see all the valuable and rare materials found in the Library of Congress, the British Library, but not in National Library of China. Some of them could be found in Taiwan, which is also a Chinese-speaking country, but not in Hong Kong.

**RT:** I would like to point out that the Museum Library has never been open to the public.

**KB:** It was always internal, and the library was just used for one person. But we are going to change that. Currently, one of the museum colleagues would record books, but she is not a qualified librarian. We don't have a qualified archivist as well. But this is something I would like to do, once the museum gets started, maybe next year, I will do a qualification in archiving, so maybe that will help build up the museum archive. We work really hard to build the connections with others, not just maritime museums, but you know, resource centres and libraries around the world, and sometimes even individuals for acquiring archive materials, especially photos. One of my major roles currently is copyright clearance for the images we need to use for the exhibitions. I contribute almost all my time for doing that. Now I found that this is one of the ways we can make money for the Resource Centre, so I need to acquire more photos in order to make money from the photos.

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<sup>54</sup> Tin Hau Temple in Hong Kong. Information available at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tin\\_Hau\\_temples\\_in\\_Hong\\_Kong](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tin_Hau_temples_in_Hong_Kong).

**PL:** *The funding for operating this museum and the library, where does it come from?*

**KB:** Donors.

**PL:** *So do you have a fundraising position, such as a marketing person, to look after and attract the money?*

**KB:** Currently we don't have anyone in this position, but it is a long-term plan.

**RT:** Essentially, the museum is funded through donations, earned revenues and endowment funds, and those three arms together, work together. The breakdowns are available on our website under the section called money matters. If you want to look at our operating budget, and where the money goes to, things like that.

**KB:** So to bring more people to the museum... We only charge 20 Hong Kong dollars.

**PL:** *For the admission?*

**KB:** Yeah, for the admission. But people already complain that we charge 20 dollars instead of 10 dollars. .... **RT:** Admissions make up approximately 6% of the operating costs.

**KB:** Yes, it is nothing.

**PL:** *So what can the visitors expect to see here at this Museum?*

**RT:** The galleries at the Pier are thematic. But the idea is that each gallery focuses on different topics. China's maritime history is one of them. The Canton Trade, but one of the things...we also have things such as, there is going to be a section on sports.

**KB:** Yeah, some fun parts as well.

**RT:** Underwater ecologies of Hong Kong. So I mean it is going to be very diverse.

**KB:** For people who would like to know more about the technology side, we do have navigation and communication. People can come in and play games. In the long run, we will start looking into educational programmes as well. We want to bring in more students and families. We will be creating different kind of programmes for children and adults. I may go to do storytelling sessions also, Robert may go to do our paper-folding also.

**RT:** My goal would be to be, I don't want people to say, "*Oh I've been to the museum, and checked that off their list*". I would like to think of the museum as a place you go on a regular basis, to hear storytelling or to bring your children into an arts-and-crafts programme. Something along those lines... Or to have a cup of coffee and enjoy the free Wi-Fi.

**KB:** Yes, yes. So I mean we can foresee a lot of opportunities for the museum, as well as the Resource Centre itself, but all these would depend on the time, manpower and other resources available. So, I really do encourage more volunteers to come to help out at our Resource Centre.



**PL:** *What kind of help are you looking for at the moment?*

**KB:** Well of course library help, more than just shelving, I would like them to do some basic cataloguing, and probably or writing summaries.

**RT:** But I think the Museum's Resource Centre is also looking for people who are interested in doing a fellowship, and producing a portfolio of work that will be significant for the research or other related cultural developments.

**KB:** To use the materials here to create a publication or document, we can, you know, share. That is the reason why we have a Resource Centre; we can't always rely on Google and Wikipedia.

**PL:** *Are you currently looking for doing any collaboration with museums, other archives or institutes in Hong Kong? Because the thing is, I understand there is also a Hong Kong archive something, set up by the Hong Kong Bank, is it true?*

**KB:** Oh yes, the Hong Kong HSBC Archive<sup>55</sup>, yes that is an in-house archive. It is also open to the public by appointments, provided you want to do research in their bank archive.

**RT:** And Kitty and I are very close to the archivist and historian in HSBC. We hope to really collaborate, because we see some fusion. HSBC was one of the primary banks responsible for the growth in shipping in the 1950's - so I mean it is a natural marriage.

**KB:** There are more and more companies looking to set up archives in-house archives like Swire Jardins back in London, but I mean we are a part of the Hong Kong Archive Society<sup>56</sup>, and we have regular meetings, not just to chit-chat, but we really will sit down and tackle issues if we have problems. So it is a good network, and then of course when I feel comfortable opening up this library and I will invite the Hong Kong Library Association if they would be interested in having a visit. But yeah I don't know yet.

**RT:** But what you were asking earlier is that there are many key objects on display come from the Hong Kong Museum of History. And my understanding is that they are just in storage at the History Museum, because their focus isn't maritime necessarily. I think one of the best examples is that they have a 19<sup>th</sup> century lighthouse glass, that has been in one of their warehouses for a long time. They are loaning it to the museum and it is going to be on display for the very first time.

**KB:** So we do have quite a number of collaborations with museums, not only local but also international.

**RT:** Yes the Peabody Essex Museum in Massachusetts has several items on display here.

**PL:** *How are they related to Hong Kong?*

<sup>55</sup> HSBC (Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation)'s Archive. Information available at: <http://www.hsbc.com/1/2/about/history/hsbc-s-archives>.

<sup>56</sup> Hong Kong Archives Society. Information available at: <http://www.archives.org.hk/about.html>.

**RT:** Well, the Great Canton Trade connected Hong Kong to the world.

**KB:** You really have to spend time to look into the galleries, and you know, some of the books at the Resource Centre. Then you will definitely realise how the world is rounded up and connected by ships.

**RT:** I, for example one of the first times I came to the museum, there was a plate on display at the museum, and it was made here in the Huang Cho Area in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, or maybe the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and I looked at it closely and I recognized the coat of arms, because the family who ordered the plate is from my hometown in the US. You know, to see that connection between my own life and something here in China.

**RT:** And as Italian/American, I of course think of Marco Polo and all of our interrelations.

**KB:** So it is a fascinating subject.

**PL:** *What kind of strategic plans do you have for this Museum Library for the next five to twenty years?*

**KB:** To say that we have to be more Asian in not just collection and items but also how we represent the subjects and we have to be more Oriental as well. But it is very hard, because I have been talking to another scholar. She was telling me that, Hong Kong people nowadays try to being criticized for being too colonial, because they want to forget that part of our history. Then at the same time, that is part of our history. The museum have to make a balance... the committee of the museum had a very hard job to measure that... we need to project a more neutral position, which I don't know, how it could work. But that is the feedback provided by various historians and from different professionals. So like the Resource Centre when a Chinese scholar came in, he complained why we did not have more Chinese books, and why we spent so much money on the special collections that nobody uses. And my challenge is to make that balance. We need certain things colonial, but we also need certain things more neutral and contemporary.

**PL:** *But you are saying you have a two-year plan for this, what items are included in your two year plan?*

**KB:** Well, for the youth collection and to bring in more students, we want the Resource Centre to be remembered when teachers are teaching subjects on maritime related, sometimes marine animals, exploration, or shipping industry, history of the Hong Kong trade, etc. I want the students to be a part of the audience, and how we can attract this group of audience is via our collections and via our library items. Maybe to create different programmes and have a very strong tie with the schools in Hong Kong also.

**RT:** Teachers for example, often have challenges in that they need to be able to have subjects and have difficulties often bringing those subjects into the classroom. If you take something like trigonometry... If you are a trigonometry teacher in secondary school, you probably don't think of the maritime museum as a resource. But there are direct trigonometry principles that helped sailors navigate, and you know that a teacher in secondary school doesn't necessary think of the maritime museum as a place where they could send students to learn about things like that. So we have a great deal of community building ahead of us in order to make sure that teachers now, that we have something that could make the lessons

more fun. Because maritime museum has a very negative context where you think it is just a bunch of ship models in glass cases. You disagree? When you say maritime museum it is pretty dull stuff at times.

**KB:** Even though I would say the Macau Maritime Museum<sup>57</sup> is good, but it is very academic as well.

**PL:** *What you are talking about now is related to the unique identity this Museum has established?*

**RT:** It is my idea of where the museum should think about growth, is to expand its conversation. The museum will never have a problem, attracting people who are die hard lovers of maritime history, who love the material and seek it out. It has a harder time trying to tell people there is place for your interest here even if you may not know it.

**PL:** *You mean it is like, relevant to your life? Relevant to your daily life? Even though you are not a scholar or a sailor.*

**KB:** Well I mean our major audiences, except overseas visitors are the locals. We do have a lot of locals going to the art museum and science museum quite frequently. I think that is our challenge is how to attract those crowds to come here as well.

**PL:** *What do you think are the new skills and new mind set expected of the new-generation museum curators and librarians?*

**RT:** Museum curators and librarians often think about curation in terms of tangible items, whether it is a painting, letter, or a book. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century there has been a rise in thinking more about the intangible heritage that these objects represent. So in a way, one of the biggest shifts is moving from curating items to curating ideas. And this concept takes an entirely different set of skills. Take for example, a physical item; it can only be in one place at one time. It is on a shelf, on display, out on loan. While a digital file can be in many place at the same time. It can be copied, shared, and changed.

**KB:** Honestly, I personally still struggle with the position of being a librarian in a museum setting. It is because librarians can also organize an exhibition, however, it doesn't seem to be the same way as the museum curators would think or do. However, I see more and more librarians are involving in curating exhibitions in oversea libraries, mostly in state libraries or academic libraries. Therefore, I think, in order to perform a rather supporting role or providing just the background research to an exhibition, when a librarian is organizing an exhibition, he or she needs to consider the importance of telling the whole story using the display items, rather than just using the objects to support a story. I don't know if it is clear to you, because I found it difficult to express how I actually feel.

**PL:** *What form of collaborations will take place between the museums and libraries in the next five to ten years?*

**RT:** Like new skill sets, I think the most important collaborations that will occur in the next five to ten years will be in the area of re-thinking how the world works. We are no

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<sup>57</sup> Macau Maritime Museum. Information available at: [http://www.museumaritime.gov.mo/index\\_e.html](http://www.museumaritime.gov.mo/index_e.html)

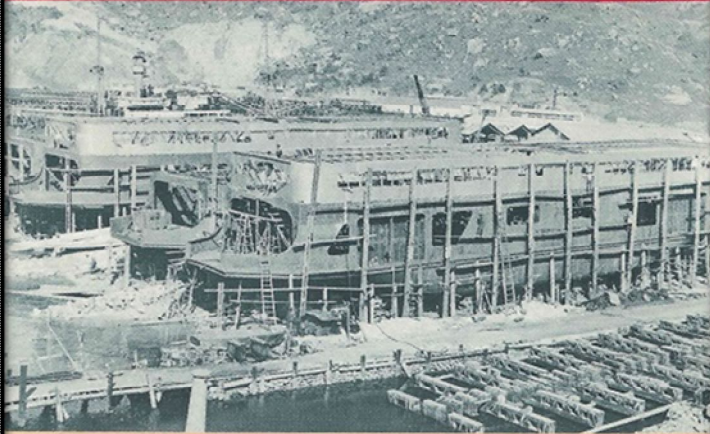
longer bound to the physical world. This whole idea that the world is round has led people to believe that the other side of the world is unattainable. A digital world is flat. There is a great potential for collaborations. Some may still argue that language is a barrier. Culture is a barrier. But like early maritime explorers of the past, museum and library professionals need to take chances and set a course into uncharted waters. There are still wonderful treasures to be discovered.

**KB:** Many major or large libraries would also have in-house museums. I see it as, probably it is a wrong understanding from the museum study's viewpoint, but these in-house museums are like exhibition halls in the libraries. Library is a centre for providing additional information to the exhibits, while a museum is a venue to display the exhibits. I can foresee the merge of these two professions already happening in the major institutions, and they have not tried to clear cut their functions and operations into separate departments. I myself don't see the reason for creating such distinction either. So, I believe the collaboration between the museums and libraries already exist, and they will continue to maintain a strong working relationship in the future.

**RT:** When I think about museums and libraries I recognize there are fundamental differences between the two. But in the end, there are more things that they share in common. I learned this first-hand from my experience working at the Institute of Museum and Library Service. The driving force behind this has been technology and the growth of online data sets. People who are online don't care if the data is from a museum or a library. All they care about is whether or not the information is good. Museums and Libraries, along with Archives need to learn to leverage resources in order to be seen as essential institutions in their communities. If the community does not see them as essential, then it is all for nothing.

## Appendix II

# CHEOY LEE SHIPYARD



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