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Development of Conservation Training Program in Taiwan

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Abstract

The economic boom from 1980 to 1990 in Taiwan did not only fulfill Taiwanese basic needs for life but also stimulate movement of collecting antiques. In 1990s, cultural organizations, such as museums, historical societies, and art centers, were established for the purpose of studying Taiwan culture. In result, issues of collection preservation were then addressed more than ever. In 1999, the first conservator program was officially founded at the Tainan National College of the Arts, renamed as Tainan National University of the Arts (TNNUA) later, under the mandate of the Education Ministry. At the same time, the other conservation related courses were also available at the National Yunlin University of Science and Technology (Yuntech). The TNNUA program divided into 5 disciplines areas, which are oil

paintings, Asian paintings, wooden artifacts, paper, and collection preservation. Comparing with TNNUA's courses, the Yuntech program is more focused on community management and conservation science. The aim of this paper is to introduce the history of conservation education and out-reach program development in Taiwan. In addition, the preservation challenge and current developments in book conservation are also addressed.

1. Introduction

In Taiwan, "books and documents" is not so clearly defined, especially in the field of conservation. Books and documents are sometimes considered as the same "origin" because these materials contain informational and historical values. In results, preservation of these types of artifacts is categorized in same group regardless of varieties of formats. For example, Rare books and Documents department at the National Palace Museum (NPM) is responsible to the conservation of these types of materials. In addition to the NPM, the National Central Library, the National Central Library Taiwan Branch, and Fu Ssu-nein Library at the Academia Sinica also have designated space for rebinding and conserving rare books and documents. The history of these libraries could be traced back to the period of Japanese colony or further much earlier in Mainland China. In consequence, the history of book conservation is also much influenced by Japan and China. For example, the "book binding" lab at the NPM is the one with greater influence from Mainland. On the other hand, in 1921, the National Central Library Taiwan Branch invited Japanese book conservator to train library staff¹. Therefore, Japanese method of book binding was integrated with western and Japanese style which could also be seen in Taiwan.

2. Current Situation of Library Book Labs and Outreach Program

It has been 75 years after the Japanese came and taught at the Taiwan Branch. In 2005, the date of retirement of the last technician at book binding lab was also the closing day of the lab at the National Central Library Taiwan Branch. Due to the economy strain, most libraries were contracted out to people who know how to do lining and binding. Very few libraries could afford employing full-time conservation staff except the Rare Books and Documents Department at the NPM with 2 full-time staff and the Fu Ssu-nien Library at the Academia Sinica with 4 full-time staff to conserve and preserve book collections.

Before the establishment of conservator program in 1999, book conservator was apprentice trained. The treatments vary based on format of the oriental and western books. The most common conservation practices are disbinding, lining, rebinding, resewing for Chinese style rare books, and rebacking is a common treatment for western volumes. From time to time, outreach programs to advocate book preservation are sponsored by non-profit organizations. As to the Library study, very few school provides preservation related courses,

¹ Interview with Mr. Yang, Staff member at the National Central Library Taiwan Branch on June 5, 06.

such as “Preservation Management for Library Materials” offered by the Department of Information and Library Science at the Tamkang University; a two credit points class is designed for one semester of each academic year. In addition, Graduate Institute of Library, Information and Archival Studies of National Chengchi University is now on progress of designing a preservation related course: Care of Library Collections. The goal of these preservation related courses and/or workshops/conferences is to advocate care of book collections in order to raise conservation concerns to students and the public.

In 1999, the first conservator program was officially founded at the Tainan National College of the Arts, renamed as Tainan National University of the Arts (TNNUA) in the year of 2004, under the mandate of the Education Ministry. At the same time, the other conservation related program were also available at the National Yunlin University of Science and Technology (Yuntech).

3. Conservation Training Program at the Tainan National University of Arts

Among TNNUA and Yuntech, Graduate Institute of Conservation of Cultural Relics (GICCR) at the TNNUA aims to train student how to conserve cultural properties through treatment practices as well as to understand conservation theory and philosophy; while the Yuntech program is more focused on community management and conservation science. The TNNUA program is designed as 3-years graduate study with 4-months internship included. During 3 years study, students must have completed courses in the different discipline areas, such as conservation science, museology, art history, traditional craft making and conservation treatments, etc.. The ultimate objective is to cultivate leaders in the field of cultural relic conservation; to reach international standards; to help prevent the loss of information relating to cultural artifacts; to extend the life of cultural assets; and thereby to preserve existing examples of human culture and aesthetics.

The program is divided into 2 major study fields, which are management section, and conservation study section with 3 groups: oil painting and wooden artifacts, Asian painting, and paper conservation group. Among these groups, paper conservation program offers book conservation training course as a selective course for students who are interested in book conservation. In order to enroll book conservation class, student must have completed one semester’s book binding training, a craft making course required by paper conservation groups. The subjective of book conservation course is to teach book conservation techniques with emphasis of treatment judgment based on condition and format of books. At the beginning of the class, students accompanied by teacher go to school library to pick up damaged volumes in circulating collections, which were already set aside on special attention shelves. Basically, students will choose two types of books, one in western binding style and one in oriental format. The selected books to be treated then will be transferred back to

conservation studio followed by standard conservation procedures: before-treatment photography, condition documentation, treatment proposal, treatment practice, after-treatment photography, and treatment report as last. The treated book then will be housed in a four-flap box or a rare book box and send back to the library.

4. Book Conservation Course

Because book conservation course is designed as a selective course and for only one semester, the treatments are basically limited to simple paper treatment and structure stabilization, such as rebacking for western style volumes and resewing for oriental books. It is very rare to disbind and rebound books for full conservation treatment due to limited time frame for academic study. Therefore, disbinding and rebinding techniques are only discussed during class. At this moment, problematic label with pressure sensitive adhesive usually attaches on each library book. In result, tape removal almost becomes the first “must have” treatment for both western and oriental ones. It is difficult to address this special condition and ask librarian not to put label on spine due to the nature of circulating collections. In addition to tape problem, rusty metal fastener could easily found on paper back books in the period of Japanese Colony. It is a very common traditional practice to staple textblock's gatherings and then to apply glue on book spine before covering in Taiwan. For pamphlet, staple could be taken out and then replace with paper nail or linen thread, and this technique could also be used to secure textblock after removing rusty fastener.

A case study of rebacking treatment of half leather bound book in class is described as follows:

- a. Surface cleaning.
- b. Removing old spine lining using Methyl Cellulose poultice techniques. (Fig.1-3)
- c. Leather consolidation depending on the condition of leather. (Fig. 4)
- d. Deciding board attachment methods. Students would try different board attachment techniques based on conservation literature survey. A selected mock up would be treated as proposed one. At this case, Japanese tissue attachment were chosen. (Fig 5-7)
- e. After evaluating mock up treatment, the board attachment with Japanese tissue insert was performed on real object. Hollow tube was then pasted on spine for easy opening. (Fig 8-13)
- f. Final reinforcement to secure corner, spine, and head and tail areas. (Fig. 14-16)

5. Book Conservation in Future

Although book binding in Taiwan has its long tradition and could be related as much as earlier period, systematic book conservation training program has not yet been established officially. It might be due to the limitation of quota of faculty members at the graduate school, 5

full-time teachers or staff maximum for each institute. In addition, lack of administrative supports and very few conservation professionals might also have significant influence on the slowly development of conservation program. At this moment, collaboration to share resources might be one of alternatives in order to solve current situation. Sharing resources with knowledge diffusion is not only a key to introduce new techniques to small conservation group, but also to recognize the importance of setting up book conservation program. The training program would be implemented through exchange program with other conservation schools nationally and internationally with allocated funding available. Collaboration between libraries and school is also another way to train staff how to care bound collections and to train future book conservator on routine base. It has been long 7 years since the conservation program established in Taiwan. The challenge of conservation for all is not limited resources but is how to advocate concepts of conservation to the public. Therefore, to provide book conservation outreach program might be other alternative to promote the field of conservation. Implementation of conservation is not only conservator's duties but also the public responsibility.

Reference

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History of National Central Library Taiwan Branch

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search date: 06/02/06

Academia Sinica, Fu Ssu-nien Library

<http://www.ihp.sinica.edu.tw/english/introduction.html>

search date: 06/02/06

Biography

Fei Wen Tsai received a MS in Library Service and a Certificate in Conservation from the Columbia University (1992) as well as a Certificate in Advanced Rare Book Conservation from the Library of Congress (LC). She undertook advanced internships and additional training at the Library of Congress; National Archives and Records Administration; Smithsonian Institution Library; and National Museum of Natural History. She was awarded a Paper Conservation Fellowship at the Conservation Analytical Laboratory (CAL), renamed as Smithsonian Center for Materials Research and Education (SCMRE) later, in 1993. Afterward, she worked for the SCMRE for many years before she took teaching position at the Tainan National University of the Arts in 1999. Her professional interests focus on research and treatment development for oriental paper-based materials and preventive conservation for paper-based collections, as well as special media materials. She is presently Assistant Professor at the Graduate Institute of Conservation of Cultural Relics, Tainan National University of the Arts (1999 till now).



Fig.1 removal of spine lining using poultice method



Fig.2 working on spine lining removal

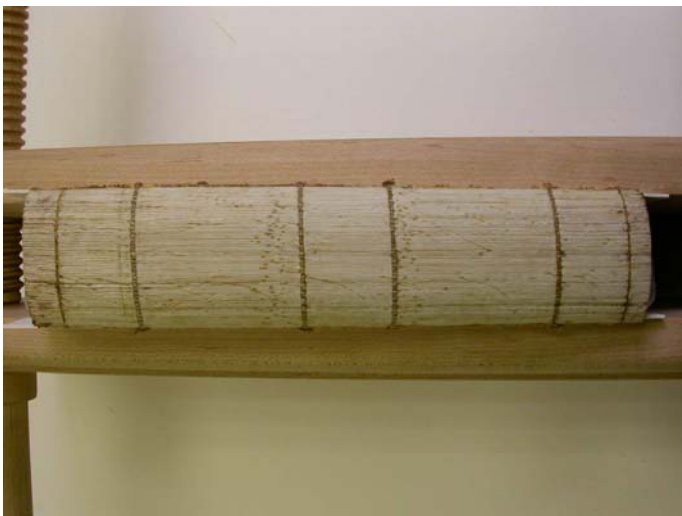


Fig.3 after spine removal



Fig.4 leather consolidation



Fig. 5 board attachment on mock-up object



Fig. 6 after board removal

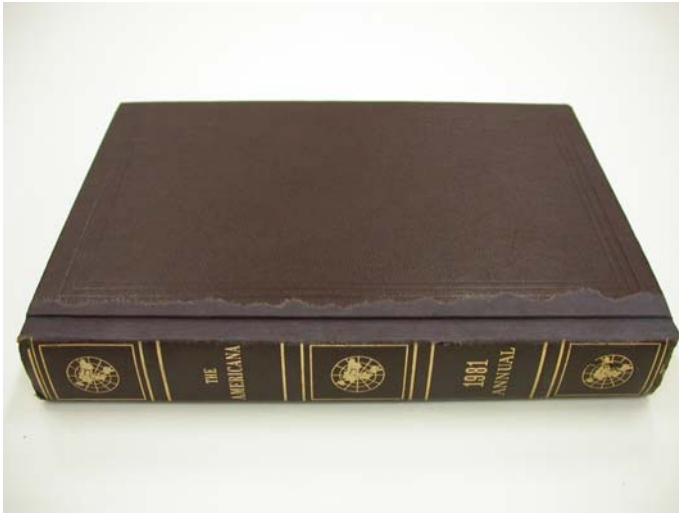


Fig. 7 after board attachment on mock up object



Fig. 8 board splitting for Japanese tissue insert



Fig. 9 Japanese tissue insert in detached board



Fig.10 during board attachment



Fig.11 stuck on endbands



Fig.12 after board attachment



Fig.13 after board attachment 2



Fig.14 securing loosen areas



Fig.15 before re-enforcement



Fig.16 after re-enforcement