

Honorary Fellow A Citation



Mr Mok Wah Chiu, Christopher, MA

There is an ancient saying that a river does not flow so far that it forgets its source. This means, among other things, that a community is ever enriched by keeping in touch with its cultural memory, embodied in its stories, poetry, music and fine arts. Mr Christopher Mok, distinguished collector of the arts of past dynasties, is especially mindful of the part played by beautiful artifacts in keeping alive some of the most precious aspects of Chinese cultural memory and identity.

Coming from a family of highly successful compradors stretching back five generations to the beginnings of Hong Kong in the mid-nineteenth century, Mr Mok follows in the tradition of his distinguished great great grandfather Mok Sze Yeung, grandfather Mok Kon Sang and father Mok Hing Yiu in caring for the community, especially in the support of research and education including links to this University right back to its founding. He follows them too in collecting exquisite Chinese art and antiquities. The family collection is one of the most important in Hong Kong. The University community was fortunate enough to see aspects of it in 2008 in an exhibition held in the University Art Museum entitled "Timeless Legacy: The Mok Family Collections". The array of ancient bronze, fine Ming and Qing ceramics, scholarly objects, furniture, intricate carved jades, exquisite textiles, classical landscape painting and fine calligraphy made an unforgettable impression on visitors. At the same time these artifacts traced the river of an ancient culture back to some of its most significant sources.

Mr Mok himself was educated at the University of Cambridge and has practiced as an accountant. He has also served the community with his work in healthcare and governance of various Hong Kong hospitals. But the passion of his life has been the fine art that he began to savour in the collections of his family and their friends such as the family of Pan Zhengwei and the Master of Bei Shan Tang. Inspired by Dr Joseph Needham and Professor Cheng Te-kun whom he met at Cambridge, and under the guidance of the late Dr J.S. Lee, Mr Mok was moved to begin his own personal collection in the name of "Hall of Receiving Instruction" or Cheng Xun Tang. The name itself embodies the spirit in which Mr Mok has approached his collecting, as if he is on a long journey of learning and discovery.

Not only does Mr Mok acquire strongly focused collections of various genres of art, such as his incomparable collection of Chinese painted folding fans, he also enhanced his acquisitions by using much of his spare time painstakingly cleaning and repairing them. In the case of his famous collection of gold artifacts, he has restored inlays to their former glory, seeking old gems to substitute for the missing ones. This is the most traditional approach to the care of antique art objects, and the restored objects are known as "shoukeng" (literally cooked patina).

Mr Mok is a generous benefactor and patron to the Art Museum of The Chinese University of Hong Kong. He has served as a member of the Art Museum Management Committee since 1982 and has offered unfailing support and guidance to the Art Museum through its expansion



by two new wings and evolution into one of the finest university museums in Asia. Soon after the Master of Philosophy Programme in Chinese Art History was launched by the Department of Fine Arts, Mr Mok kindly placed his valuable collection with the Art Museum for teaching and research purposes, clearly demonstrating his concern for academic research and the training of young scholars.

In 1996 Mr Mok generously lent his valuable collection of Chinese folding fans for the exhibition "The Cheng Xun Tang Collection of Painting and Calligraphy on Fans" organized by the Art Museum of the University. He also sponsored the publication of the fully illustrated catalogue of one hundred and eighty fans from his collection. In a Foreword to this catalogue, he explained how he acquired this collection: "In 1981, a large collection of fan paintings became available. It comprised many famous pieces dispersed from earlier Guangdong collections, as well as a number of very good works by artists as yet documented in the history of Chinese painting With limited resources, I had to make a choice. Following sound advice that it was an important collection built up over considerable time and that it would be a great pity to allow its dispersal again, I eventually acquired the fans." Hong Kong is fortunate that he did so and built upon this collection, which now numbers over one thousand so that it has become one of the most prized and informative private collections of Chinese fan painting anywhere in the world.

More than one highly important exhibition of gold ornaments of ancient China has been held at the University Art Museum. In 2000 the first one was staged with exhibits from the collections of Muwen Tang, Mengdiexuan and Cheng Xun Tang. Between them these three good friends agreed to specialize in collecting different periods of gold ornaments, while sharing their various research discoveries, meeting regularly to review and discuss each other's finds. They also jointly mounted the very popular and longest standing exhibition at the Hong Kong Museum of Art on Chinese gold artifacts since 2004. Cheng Xun Tang has focused on the artifacts of the period from the Song to the Qing dynasty. His broad knowledge of gold craft in China is clear from his Foreword to the academic catalogue *Celestial Creations: Art of the Chinese Goldsmith. The Cheng Xun Tang Collection* published after the exhibition "Celestial Jewellery: Later Chinese Gold Ornaments". This exhibition, which took place from November 2006 to March 2007, derived from Mr Mok's personal collection and was organized by the Friends of the Art Museum to mark the 35th anniversary of the Art Museum and the 25th anniversary of the Friends. The opening of the exhibition was accompanied by an international conference on the art of the Chinese goldsmith, and the conference proceedings of fourteen papers were later published. Mr Mok generously supported the publication of the catalogue which featured over a thousand items of Chinese gold from his collection and was one the outputs of an earmarked grant research project on Chinese gold conducted at the Art Museum.

Mr Chairman, it is my privilege to present to you Mr Mok Wah Chiu, Christopher, distinguished collector and connoisseur of Chinese art, for the award of an Honorary Fellowship of the University.