

Collaboration within the University Community and Beyond: The Story of the Oracle Bones in the Chinese University of Hong Kong Library

Leo F.H. Ma

Abstract

The Shang dynasty (c. 1600-1046 BC) inscribed oracle bones were found at Yinxu, Henan province in China. Shang oracle-bone script is the earliest known form of systematic Chinese writing which is a crucial source for understanding the development of Chinese characters as well as the history of the Shang dynasty. In 1969, Mr. Deng Zuxuan, a Science student of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), donated his late father Mr. Deng Erya's collection of 56 pieces of rare oracle bones to the United College of CUHK, which are now kept in the CUHK Library. In 2015, Mr. Gabriel Ng, CUHK Anthropology Year 3 student, did a research on this collection in collaboration with the CUHK Library and the Conversation Office of Leisure and Cultural Service Department of Hong Kong Government. In the same year, Prof. Zongkun Li from Academia Sinica of Taipei carried out important preservation work on United College's oracle bones. During the course of his preservation work he discovered that what was previously thought to be two separate fragments is one oracle bone. Prof Li also gave a public workshop in the Library illustrated with examples from United College's collection. In 2016, CUHK Library worked with the Art Museum of CUHK to capture the latest recto and verso images of the oracle bones. These high resolution images were uploaded to the CUHK Digital Repository. In 2017, CUHK Library and Art Museum of CUHK jointly organized an exhibition "A Legacy of Elegance" to exhibit the largest repository of oracle bones in Hong Kong, including forty-four oracle bones of the United College's collection and twenty-seven of the Art Museum's collection. In this presentation, the author reviews the story of unleashing the potential of CUHK Library's collection in supporting learning and research within the university community and beyond.

Author Profile

Leo F.H. Ma

Head of Upper Campus Libraries

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Leo F.H. Ma is Head of Upper Campus Libraries at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. Apart from managing branch libraries, he has spearheaded several digital humanities initiatives. Currently, he is a Standing Committee Member of IFLA Academic & Research Libraries Section, Fellow of the Hong Kong Library Association, Advisory Member of LIS programmes of The University of Hong Kong. He has published, as editor and author, more than 20 monographs, presented over 60 conference papers, and received more than 30 LIS and literary awards.