ASSESSMENT OF AN ARCHIVE: PHOTOGRAPHS FROM TAIPEI

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FINDING OUR VOICE IN THE LIBRARY PROFESSION

- Collaborative project with Department of the History of Art, University of Michigan
- Preservation Assessment Survey
- Forming our own views, under the guidance of experienced professionals
NATIONAL PALACE MUSEUM COLLECTION

- Collection details:
  - Photographs of artwork held at the National Palace Museum, Taipei
  - Taken during the 1960s and 1970s
  - 9,000 photographic negatives
  - Approximately 9,000 Master and Stock prints (black and white)

- Under the jurisdiction of Visual Resources Center (VRC) and its Director

- Only repository of such materials in the United States
PRESERVATION ASSESSMENT

- **Interview** staff members about preservation activities and priorities
- **Observe** the activities and note the physical conditions at the site
- **Examine** applicable documentation on the site
  - Disaster and Preservation Planning, Research Room rules, Collection Policies

Main categories of evaluation:
1. Collection Management and Policies
2. Building and Building Environment
3. Collection Storage and Use
COLLECTION MANAGEMENT AND POLICIES

- Status of NPM Collection:
  - Very little collection documentation is available
  - Previous use and handling of collection is unknown
  - Current organizational/cataloging system is confusing and misunderstood

- Recommendations:
  - Capture of staff memory regarding the NPM Collection
  - Establish short-term and long-term goals for the NPM Collection use
  - Inventory and re-establish an appropriate cataloging system
BUILDING AND BUILDING ENVIRONMENT

- Status of NPM Collection
  - Collection is housed in a University-owned and University–maintained building
  - Overall, appropriate precautions are taken to ensure the Collection’s physical endurance

- Recommendations:
  - Maintain more strict controls on environmental factors (Temperature, Relative Humidity, etc.)
  - Move collection into special storage for photographic materials
  - Enforce proper housekeeping procedures
COLLECTION STORAGE AND USE

Storage Status of the NPM Collection:

- Negatives and prints are stored in Steelcase File Cabinets
- Negatives are housed in non-buffered paper slides

Negatives stored within File Cabinet drawer

Limited physical access; proximity of file cabinets
COLLECTION STORAGE AND USE

- Use Status of the NPM Collection:
  - Only Director of the VRC has access – unless special approvals are granted
  - Current cataloging system is vague; often, corresponding negatives and prints are cataloged differently

- Inventory labels on file cabinets
- Organization of Master Prints within file cabinets
- Card catalog for the Asian Art Archive
IDEAL SITUATIONS FOR STORAGE AND BUILDING ENVIRONMENT

- Environmentally controlled to temperatures below 65° F and 30-50% RH
- Prints can be stored in File Cabinets, with proper space allowances
- Negatives should, ideally, be stored in flat image boxes
- Storage furniture (cabinets and shelving) should be arranged to allow for human access
PRESERVATION PLAN

Main recommendations:

- Conduct a Physical Inventory of the NPM Collection
- Implement a standardized cataloging system, and re-label items accordingly
- Document objects in use in log
- Create permanent placeholders
NEW OUTLOOKS, NEW APPLICATIONS

- At a particular level:
  - Spatial constraints: Housing archival materials in rooms that are also staff workspaces
  - Environmental constraints: Different factors to analyze when evaluating building controls

- Universally:
  - Preservation is a precarious issue – especially in art libraries
  - Reconciling previous and emerging technologies
  - Balancing preservation and access
THANK YOU!

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Questions?