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Tel: 02 6262 1336

Email: development@nla.gov.au

Web: nla.gov.au/celestial-souvenirs

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2015 NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA FUND CELESTIAL SOUVENIRS APPEAL

Detail from *Zhongguo gu dai jiang ling ren wu miao hui hua ce*
late 19th century
nla.gov.au/nla.cat-vn6574402

PRESERVE CELESTIAL SOUVENIRS

National Library of Australia 2015



nla.gov.au

Help Us Preserve Chinese Pith Paper Paintings in the National Library's Collection

We all collect souvenirs of our travels—and so did the first Western visitors to China. These memories of past journeys now need your help.

From the nineteenth century, Chinese artisans in and around Canton produced vivid watercolours on pith paper for sale to Western visitors. Small, inexpensive and easy to transport, they made convenient souvenirs or gifts for loved ones. Developed to appeal to Westerners, pith paper paintings did not represent traditional Chinese aesthetics and many of the images played to Western preconceptions of China. Yet the paintings are exquisitely detailed, informative and beautiful, and reflect the excitement Westerners would have experienced in the trading ports of nineteenth-century China.

The Library's collection of Chinese pith paper paintings comes from a variety of sources and is in a number of formats, including albums and individual paintings rendered in mediums of gouache and ink. There are nearly 400 items in the collection, with subjects including:

- the emperor and senior officials of the Chinese court, and their ladies;
- traditional legal punishment used in imperial China;
- Chinese women engaged in silk spinning, weaving and embroidery; and
- Chinese junks and other boats.

A small selection of these albums and paintings will be on display in the exhibition, *Celestial Empire: Life in China, 1644–1911*, from 2 January to 22 May 2016.



How You Can Help

Chinese pith paper paintings are delicate and fragile, often featuring ribbon borders. Many of these rare items require preservation treatment to ensure their survival into the future. More detailed description of the paintings will improve understanding of their significance. Complete digitisation will also provide the opportunity for digital repatriation of these items to China and support international research collaborations.

With your support, the National Library's unique collection of Chinese pith paintings will be preserved to the highest standards for all Australians to discover.



Detail from *Qing dai min jian sheng huo tu: yu le tu*
late 19th century
nla.gov.au/nla.cat-vn5783555

What Is Pith Paper?

Pith paper (also incorrectly referred to as rice paper) is formed from the pith of the small tree, *Tetrapanax Papyrifer*, native to south-west China. For use in painting, it is cut by hand with a knife into thin sheets from short lengths of the spongy tissue. Pith was both inexpensive and readily available to Chinese artisans of the time.

Detail from *Qing dai xing fa ji lu*, 19th century
nla.gov.au/nla.cat-vn6005086

Donation Form

To contribute to the preservation and digitisation of Chinese pith paper paintings from the National Library's collection, you can donate online at nla.gov.au/celestial-souvenirs, or return the donation form below. Donations over \$2 are tax-deductible.

This appeal closes on 18 March 2016. Any donations received after this date will be directed towards The National Library of Australia Fund, which supports conservation and digitisation of the Library's collection.

Thank you for supporting the National Library of Australia.

I wish to make a donation of \$ to the

Celestial Souvenirs Appeal

Treasures Gallery Support Fund

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Donations to The National Library of Australia Fund at all levels are welcome. By donating \$1,000 or more you can become a Patron of the National Library. All Bronze (\$10,000 and above), Silver (\$25,000 and above), Gold (\$100,000 and above), Platinum (\$250,000 and above) or Principal (\$1 million and above) Patrons will be recognised on an Honour Board in the National Library.

(Continued overleaf)

