



When you enter the **Délia-Tétreault Museum**, you are surrounded by hundreds of objects and images which have crossed the ages and oceans. In the Fall issue of **MIC Mission News**, the museum presented one of its treasures, the Magic Lantern. Another object of interest is described below.

The Secret Life of Objects

INK-STONE-STICK



By Alexandre Payer

Exhibitions Commissioner
Délia-Tétreault Museum

Ink Preparation:

1. Place the inkstone on the work surface. Pour a small amount of water in the hollow section.
2. With the end of the ink stick held between your thumb, forefinger and middle finger, gently scrub the wet stone in small, circular motions until a black ink forms, adding water as needed.
3. To test the ink's thickness, place a drop of the ink on the rim of a saucer or a deep dish using the stick. If the drop forms a bead without rolling down the edge, the ink is ready!

Each item is as indispensable as the next, yet many visitors to the museum are often perplexed by these objects, and don't immediately understand the essential function that unites them. Indeed, who could have guessed that the fate of this "stick," shaped like a curved jewel, nestled in its emerald silk, would be slowly crushed? That this dark, dull stone, in its modest case of varnished wood, could be the crucible of age-old art?

Since ancient China, the ink stick and inkstone (along with paintbrush and paper) were part of the "Four Treasures of the Study," also known as calligraphy. While the ink stick is made by moulding a solution of hardened rubber, resulting from burning fat or tree branches, the inkstone is crafted from carved stone—usually

shale, which is how it gets its darker colour. The Duan inkstone exhibited at the museum was sculpted in Zhaoqing—a prefecture-level city in the Guangdong province in southern China—in a regional variety of polished volcanic tuff (which gives it its subtle purple hue). The bas-relief design on top represents a dragon, soaring through the clouds in pursuit of a pearl of wisdom.

Sister Maria Bourdeau's work on Manchurian customs and traditions around 1930 demonstrates the significant effort it took to adapt to a new reality: "For the missionaries, the study of [Chinese] characters is difficult. Our alphabet contains 26 letters; in China, there are 40,566 characters, only 4,000 of which are in common usage." Speaking to immigrants visiting the museum, it's evident these "challenges and adventures in faraway lands" that awaited the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception also awaited these immigrants, who had much to overcome to begin their new lives in Québec.

This leap into the unknown—at the heart of the missionary ideal—is echoed in the immigrant experience. Every object, every visit reminds us of this: Communication is not a one-way street. Becoming familiar with the other, learning their story and culture takes patience, compassion and curiosity—the very conditions of sharing.

Photo:
Inkstone

Sources:
MIC Archives

Délia-Tétreault Museum

100 Place Juge-Desnoyers, Pont-Viau, Laval, QC
Tel.: 450-663-6460, Ext. 5127 | www.museedeliatetreault.ca