Over One Hundred Years of Collecting: A History of East Asian Collections in North America

Building an Academic Library in the Heart of Pacific Canada: the case of the Asian Library at the University of British Columbia

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Introduction

This paper describes the major milestones attained in the last 48 years by the Asian Library at the University of British Columbia (UBC) in the areas of collection development; space, facilities, technology and service improvements; community and international engagement; and contributions to the profession of librarianship. It is not intended to give a comprehensive review of each project but aims to outline the outcomes that are of benefit to UBC, our users, the Province of British Columbia, and the general sphere of scholarship.

The Asian Library, established in the Point Grey, Vancouver campus of UBC, the largest research university on the west coast of Canada, is congruent to the institutional efforts to build an ever-stronger Asian Studies presence in Canada. Asian-related programs here started with studies in Chinese and Japanese in the late 1950s and have since grown to include Korean, Sanskrit, Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, Indonesian, and more recently Tibetan in the new millennium. In 1990, the renewed commitments by UBC President Strangway to Pacific Rim countries set the stage for the development of enriched programs. In support of the academic plans, the library acquired materials in Asian scripts and offered services to facilitate learning, teaching, and research in these nine languages. The support bestowed on this initiative through the years has reflects Canada’s emerging and burgeoning interest in the Pacific Rim. On a national level, Canada’s interest in Asia was renewed after World War II. The subsequent changes in Canadian foreign policy speak volumes to the new focus: diplomatic relations with Japan were normalized in 1952;

**Opening the Doors to Immigration**

When Canada repealed its Chinese Exclusion Act in 1947, changed its immigration laws to a points system, and lifted all restrictions specifically directed against Asian immigration in 1967, it effectively opened its doors to thousands of immigrants from Asia. The ensuing waves of immigration, which were dominated by ethnic Asian newcomers, have since then been driving up student intake in the university. Taken together, the demographic changes in the Lower Mainland of Vancouver and on the UBC campus constituted a powerful impetus for the library’s multicultural and intercultural programs in the years following (1991, and 2006 Censuses). In retrospect, it is evident that the Asian Library has not only fulfilled its role in supporting learning and research at UBC and the broader academic community but also contributed to the development of Canada as a multicultural society. (1)

The centrality of the Asian Library on campus since its move to the current premises in the Asian Centre has been substantiated by the acquisition of seven special collections including Japanese government publications and the Swann collection with its holdings of rare reproductions of Japanese and Chinese paintings—these in album form and almost unobtainable elsewhere (Figure 1). The library has also grown by its ability to take on the challenges of the ever-evolving and complex roles of academic librarians and the library facilities in the advent of information technology, a tool that brought about fundamental changes in learning, teaching, and research in academic institutions. As part and parcel of an academic research library, it operates in the overarching context of the University’s strategic plans, currently enshrined in the document “Trek 2010” and its earlier

These documents shaped the vision and goals of the UBC Library. In the last decade, the Asian Library’s endeavors and accomplishments in community outreach and internationalization have attested to the underpinnings of the university’s aspirations. Over time, because of its success in connecting with the Asian communities in the province of British Columbia and collaborating with international organizations and individuals, the library is regarded as the primary centre for study and research on Asian studies available to the academic community and the hub of Asian cultural programs offered to the public at large.

The tremendous, continuous growth of the library in turn brought the privileges of membership in major consortiums such as the Korean Collection Consortium of North America (KCCNA) and the Research Library Group (RLG) Princeton Chinese Rare Book Project, in which the UBC Asian Library ranks fourth. While our unique and diverse collections, print and online, have attracted scholars across North America and Asia, we are reputed locally in the province by private collectors and pioneer families as the ideal home for their valuable collections and family archives. Because of our strong bonding with the 650,000 Asian British Columbians, the Asian communities often rally behind the Asian Library whenever it seeks financial support for various projects.

**The First Giant Steps**

The Asian Library was first established in 1959 with the acquisition of the valuable Puban collection 蒲坂藏書, one of the most distinguished in North America, supported by the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada and Dr. Walter Koerner, who at the time was the driving force behind the Friends of the Library. Thirty-four years later, the same donors again came to its support and financed the appraisal of Puban 蒲坂藏書.

In the year of its inception, UBC Library was designated as the Canadian depository library for Japanese government publications, to be delivered by the National Diet Library, Tokyo. South of the border, the Library of Congress at Washington, D.C. was designated as the depository for Chinese government publications.

the only other library in North America offered the same privileges. In the following year, Ng Tung-King 伍冬瓊, formerly Librarian of Fung Ping Shan Library of the University of Hong Kong, accepted the position of Head of the library. In the next seventeen years, she provided outstanding leadership and mentorship and worked with Yim Tse 謝琰 and Tuneharu Gonnami 權並恒治, the first Chinese and Japanese reference librarians, respectively, to develop the East Asian collections into the largest in Canada.

In the University, Professor F.H. Soward of the Department of History was appointed director of a new program in International Studies in the 1946-47 academic year, and the first course on “Modern Chinese History Since 1644” was offered in 1948-49 by Ho Ping-ti 何炳棣(2), who was also the sole negotiator in the acquisition of the renowned Puban collection 蒲坂藏書 from Yao Jun Shi 姚鈞石 of Macao.

In Yitong Wang 王伊同’s articles entitled “The P’uban 蒲坂 Chinese Library at the University of British Columbia” and “A Descriptive Catalogue of Valuable Manuscripts and Rare Books from China, Issued During the Sung, Yuan, and Ming Dynasties (960–1644),” he went to great lengths to illustrate how its rare and valuable editions in the areas of classical philology, history, philosophy and literature came to be known amongst the most distinguished body of works in the realm of major private libraries at that time. In Miss Ng’s report of 1986, she describes the collection as follows:

The P’u-pan Collection 蒲坂藏書 forms the core of the Chinese Section of the Asian Studies Library, providing an excellent coverage of traditional Chinese works published before 1912. It numbers approximately 45,000 stitch-bound volumes (ts’ e 冊 in Chinese), of which about 115 are from the Sung and Yuan dynasties (960–1368) (Figure 2), 3326 from the Ming (1368–1644), 9,865 from the early Ch’ing (1644–1820), and the remainder from the modern period (1820--). Of its 300 manuscripts, the oldest is dated 1426, and some remain unpublished.
Other valuable items include the gazetteers (local histories), the classics, resources on history, ts’ung-shu 叢書, and individual works by scholars of the dynastic periods. The emphasis on works pertaining to Kwangtung is much in evidence throughout the P’u-pan Collection 蒲坂藏書. That was because both former owners were from that province. The core of the P’u-pan 蒲坂藏書 was originally a part of the Nan-chou shu-lou 南州書樓, a library owned by Hsu Shao-ch’i 徐紹棨 (1879–1948), a professor of Chinese literature and bibliography, at one time curator of the Kwangtung Provincial Library, and one of the three most renowned bibliophiles of South China. He concentrated his book-collecting on records, documents, gazetteers and literature of his native province. Some of these have never been published and are still among the section of the collection that was transferred to the Yao 姚 Family during World War II. Mr. Yao Chun-shih 姚鉉石 then augmented it with material of high quality, based on the same policy with emphasis on Kwangtung oriented publications-- to build up his new P’u-pan Collection 蒲坂藏書.

Rare items of the P’u-pan 蒲坂藏書 include a 986 edition of the Shuo-wen wu-yin yun-p’u 說文五音韵譜 (notes on phonetics of the Shuo-wen 說文), once owned by Pao T’ing-po 鮑廷搏 (1728--1814), a renowned bibliophile; a 1473 edition of the Chang Chu-chiang chi 張曲江集 (complete works of Chang Chiu-ling 張九齡, 673--740), which was the original borrowed for photographic reproduction in the compilation of the famous Ssu-pu ts’ung-kan 四部叢刊 and the Shuo-wen Sheng-t’ung 說文聲統 (phonetic system of the Shuo-wen 說文) by Ch’en Li 陳澧 (1810—1882), a well-known Kwangtung scholar. The last title was not published until Ch’en Chih-mai 陳之邁 (1908–1978), great-grandson of Ch’en Li 陳澧, identified the presumably lost manuscript from the P’u-pan 蒲坂藏書 catalogue and borrowed its photocopy for publication in 1971. (Figure 3)
With a double stroke of luck, the library was first able to enlist the assistance of Ming-sun Poon 潘銘燊 of City Polytechnic of Hong Kong and the much-revered Professor/Curator Emeritus of the University of Chicago Tsuen-hsuin Tsien 錢存訓 to appraise the collection in 1991 so that it could be insured against loss and damages. The two experts added 130 more titles for the Ming editions, almost doubling the earlier count. Seven years later, Chi Fong Lee 李直方, also a former Head of Fung Ping Shan Library, was hired as a consultant after his retirement in 2000 to catalog all the Puban 蒲坂藏書 titles for online access both in the UBC library catalog as well as the (then) RLIN database. To sum up, Ming-sun Poon 潘銘燊 speaks of the strength of the collection in 13 areas, summarized as follows (3):

1. I ching comprises 68 items and is the strongest among Confucian classics.
2. The collector was quite proud of his Classical Philosophy holdings of 250 items. He divided it into 11 sub-classes, the most numerous of which were works on Shuo wen chieh tzu 說文解字, with 82 items.
3. Gazetteers (245 items) comprise the major part of Geographical Works (275 items). (Figure 4)
4. Most of the local gazetteers are devoted to Kuang-tung 廣東. Some rare items were identified.
5. There is a very interesting collection of Gazetteers of Mountains, comprising 63 items.
6. It is strange that Yao Chun-shih 姚鉅石, a physician by training, could have assembled so meager a collection of Medical Books.
7. The 65 items of Seal Impressions are rare. (Figure 5)
8. The rich collection of 26 lei shu 類書 (encyclopedias) is impressive. Many of them are large sets, with some unusual editions.
9. Literary Anthologies are strong. More than a handful of them are multi-colored editions, ranging from two to six colors.
10. Collected works of individual authors are impressive, with the following authors being emphasized: T’ao Ch’ien 陶潛 (11 items), Tu Fu 杜甫 (47 items), Su Shih 蘇軾 (24 items).

11. A total of 97 items of Collected Works of Ming authors constitutes a sizeable inventory in this area.

12. Collected works of Ch’ing authors, totaling 639 items, are made up to a large extent of works of Kuang-tung 廣東 authors. Many are family editions. A few of them are believed to be unpublished or unique copies.

13. Ts’ung shu 叢書 (collectanea), 124 items in all, are well preserved and are complete sets.

In 1965, with a large donation from H.R. MacMillan, the library acquired the Jing Yi-Zhai 景頤齋 and Song Xue-peng 宋學鵬 collections. The former comprises about 4,000 volumes of Chinese traditional works including many early Qing and a number of Ming editions; the latter includes 500 volumes, some of them gazetteers of Guangdong. To this date, a substantial number of titles of these two collections are still not catalogued. Inadequate funding for processing and cataloguing after the special collections were acquired continues to compromise their access and consequently the very usage of the materials. In an attempt to address the problems that discourage users, to say the least, selected items from these collections were showcased in one of the library display cases. Before funds are raised for the cataloguing project, lists of their titles and locations have recently been posted on the library’s website so that there is now reasonable access to the valuable and previously inaccessible resources.

As Ho Ping-ti 何炳棣 did for the Puban collections 蒲坂藏書, another Asian Studies professor, Ronald Dore, helped acquire in 1960 the private collections of George Sansom and Herbert Norman, two well-known Japan specialists. In 1964, the library purchased a collection of rare Japanese maps of the Tokugawa period 徳川時代 (1603–1867) from the original collector, George H. Beans of the Philadelphia Seed Company. Small collections from George Bonn and other collectors were added to the acquisition. The
Beans Map collection of Japanese Old Maps contains some items produced from wood blocks created in the Edo era and is most rich in privately published travel maps and guides of Japan and the rest of the world. Works of prominent artists include those by Hishikawa Moronobu 菱川師宣, Miyagawa Chôshun 宮川長春, Shiba Kokan 司馬江漢 and Kuwagata Keisai 鍬形蕙斎 (4, 5). As of now, the maps have become part of the UBC Library’s Special Collections.

The Collections and Facilities
As of 2007, the entire collection of Asian language materials in the Asian Library stood at about 550,000 volumes. In addition to its recognized strength in the four well-documented Chinese and Japanese special collections acquired before 1965, the library acquired the Swann collection, the Chinese Times 大漢公報 (1914–1992), which is the longest-run Chinese language newspaper in Canada and the only available print copy, and developed the online archive of Historical Chinese Language Materials in British Columbia 加華文獻聚珍 (http://www.hclmbc.org), bringing the total of major special collections to seven. The library is also very strong in East Asian Buddhism, Chinese gazetteers, Asian-Canadian history, Ming and Qing classics, and Asian law. Our holdings include Si ku quan shu 四庫全書 (both online and print versions), Si ku xu xiu 四庫續修 (the addendums of Si ku quan shu 四庫全書). Before the end of 2007, we finally completed amassing all 4,300 volumes of other Si ku collectanea with a special funding of Cdn$150,000. * To our rich list of online databases in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Tibetan, we have added “Quan Si Ku 全四庫.”

The South Asian collection began in 1968, following the establishment of the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute. As a founding member, UBC participated in its book purchasing program from 1969. In 1975, a large collection of books in South Asian languages was received from the University of Washington, and in 1984 the Vancouver Consulate-General of India donated a substantial collection on Indian art and architecture. Since

* Completion of the acquisition of the Si ku series.
then, we have continued to build a collection in Sanskrit, Hindi, Punjabi, and Urdu, augmented by a small body of works in Bengali, Marathi, Tamil, and Gujarati.

In developing the 20,000-volume Korean collection since 1982, the library has again enjoyed tremendous financial support from different quarters: mainly from the Centre for Korean Research, but also from the Department of Asian Studies and the Faculty of Law at UBC. In 2007, the Korean Foundation pledged to provide US$120,000 over four years for collection development in designated disciplines, as part of the responsibilities and privileges of the KCCNA consortium membership.

In 1970-71, there was an increase of 30% in undergraduate enrolment, with the largest gains in Japanese and Indic language courses. Through the efforts of Professor Shôtarô Iida 飯田昭太郎 of the Department of Religious Studies, the University was given the roof and structural framework from the Sanyo Pavilion built for the 1970 World Exposition in Osaka, to serve as the base for the new Asian Centre. Construction began in January 1974, and it took seven more years of fund-raising before its completion in 1981. Since then, the Asian Library has been operating at its 21,500 square ft., three-storey premises, now wireless-networked. Our three display windows, one of which is about 100 square feet, provide an excellent, intellectually stimulating platform for showcasing our resources and activities. A humidity-and-temperature-controlled vault of about 1,000 square feet, lined with compact shelving provides a secure and ecologically supportive home for our rare and delicate materials. Currently, a display on Cantonese opera music in British Columbia and Master Wong Toa 黃滔, a local Cantonese musician and mentor, is staged in the main showcase in the lobby, replacing the equally popular exhibits of Asian alternative medicines.

Language training facilities are among the most sought-after learning tools for students. Since summer 2007, we have increased the total number of public workstations at the Asian Library to 20 stations, 15 of which are partitioned study carrels loaded with language training software for Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Hindi, and Punjabi. Two seminar rooms, one seating 10 persons and another 14, are available for reservation.
Equipped with a television, DVD player, a computer connected to the projector and screen, video-conferencing facility, and modular furniture, they have proved to be very popular for group study, presentations, and small classes.

We would still be struggling with the nagging problem of shelving and storage shortage if UBC Library had not provided us with the much-needed storage space for 40,000 volumes with the Automated Storage Retrieval System (ASRS) at the Irvin K. Barber Learning Centre, which is five minutes walk from the Asian Library. About another 80,000 volumes with low or zero circulation records are housed in another site on campus. In total, about 100,000 items reside outside our premises. At the same time, the “The Transition to Online Journals” project which started more than four years ago also helped free up substantial valuable shelving space for print materials. In 2007 alone, we were able to cancel 65 Chinese print journal titles that are now covered by the more than 2,000 paid online full-text serials. Tomoko Kakehi and Lucia Park, retired Japanese and Korean librarians have been instrumental in migrating the print serial titles in their language areas to their online versions during their term of service.

Fortunately, users have been very receptive to the changes and generally find Serial Solutions a great tool for identifying online journal titles as it works seamlessly with bibliographic tools such as EndNote and RefWorks. Lastly, with the transfer of eight technical library staff to work physically at the Library Processing Centre in 2005, we now have the option of installing 100 compact shelves in what used to be the technical services offices. Taken together, these policies and procedures have translated into viable and effective solutions for the universal space problem that plagues most libraries with a long history. Based on the rate of acquisition in the past decade, it is projected that we will have ample room for new acquisitions up to 2013.

**Re-engineering the Space**

* For a full list of paid and free databases, please visit the web pages constructed by the reference librarians on our home page [www.library.ubc.ca/asian](http://www.library.ubc.ca/asian).
With the problem of shortage of storage and shelving space behind us for the next five years, we have been focusing our energy on re-engineering the library space so that it will be even more user-oriented and welcoming (6). In our capital improvement plans, we will seek funding to better equip and furnish the library in order to meet the future needs of students, faculty, and the communities beyond the confines of the university (7).

Like other academic libraries in North America, we are serving students with a wide variety of learning styles and needs; working with and becoming part of the new trends of scholarly communication and delivery models, and learning to use new forms of digital information and networked technologies. Because of the size and complexity of the user landscape, we are expected to help users with very diverse academic and cultural background to attain a level of information literacy that will become a core part of their learning and research experiences. Teaching faculty and graduate students using Multisearch, RSS feeds, and Cite’n Write for learning, teaching, and research has become part of the instructional responsibilities of the four reference librarians and the Indonesian bibliographer. They are only able to conduct these Web services after their office workstations have Dreamweaver and they have completed the HTML courses.

The ideal future digital realm in our capital improvement plans also makes provision for Asian-related research, community outreach, and internationalization initiatives at UBC. For example, the current version of the Voyager system with Unicode support only facilitates the retrieval and display of bibliographic records in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean at UBC, but the need to enter parallel script bibliographic records in Hindi, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Urdu is a pressing one. In addition, a digital information infrastructure that will facilitate institutional depository, preservation, and dissemination of data in Asian languages is part of our future plan. We also recognize the need for stand-up, quick-use computers, more power outlets, better lighting in some reading areas and more worktables closer to the large windows (8). As we have a spacious lounge area in the foyer of the Asian Centre, we can provide some comfortable common area, which also includes provision for students’ craving for food and drinks.
The Student-Centered Library

In delivering technology, space, and services to approximately 5,140 students taking Asian-related courses, we are mindful of the students’ learning habits and real needs, approaches to using (or not) library materials for their assignments, and their wide spectrum of expectations (or otherwise) of the library’s physical and virtual spaces. We have been focusing on developing information literacy programs for students working on programs in different languages, setting attainable goals for graduate and undergraduate students (8). We reached three important milestones in 2007 which answered the pressing needs of students and other users. First, 15 computers with language learning software and access to all the library’s online resources were installed in the individual study carrels on the upper floor of the library. Shortly before that, 12 openable windows that significantly improved the air quality of the library were also mounted. Lastly, with generous funding from a donor, we could extend our opening hours in term time from 9:00 am to 8:00 pm. Increases in the gate count as well as regular physical headcounts demonstrated that the improvements in the space, technology and access had answered real student needs. The four language librarians, Jing Liu 劉靜, Helen Kim 헬렌 김, Sarbjit Randhawa, Shirin Eshghi and bibliographer Anthony Hardy have been revamping and updating their web pages, some developing study guides in collaboration with the faculty and offering instructions on specific topics and information literacy, sometimes in classes as part of the curriculum. Jing’s China Access: International Collaborative Reference and Interlibrary Loan Service was also a good attempt to provide an alternative service model beyond the regular library-wide interlibrary system. In our 2007 summer orientation program, we bravely met our students for the first time in Facebook, one of the most popular social-networking tools for students but found that it was too exhausting for us to maintain the channel.

Thanks to the timely and strategic planning and implementation on the part of the UBC IT Services and the Library Information System Technology which provided us a state-of-the-art environment, we have been able to help train users to be successful in their studies and as 21st century workers. The robust IT infrastructure empowers them to use the electronic resources we invested in and benefit from the online services and
bibliographic tools we developed. The current campus-wide Master Space Feasibility Study provided the incentive as well as the framework for remodeling our physical and virtual space.

**The Resource Centre for Asian-Canadian studies**

If there was ever any concern about a disconnect between an academic research library and the larger community, it was not an issue at the Asian Library. We received the entire run of *Chinese Times* 大漢公報, 1914–1992, the only print copy of the longest-run Chinese newspaper in Canada that still exists, from a publisher with a large sense of purpose. We consider the newspaper as the singularly most important archive for researchers, students, and community members interested in Chinese-Canadian history. It chronicles the major events here in Canada as well as in China and Hong Kong that impacted the lives of the Chinese immigrants. In many ways, it constitutes a missing piece of the history of Canada which was neither documented in government records, mainstream media, or other publications nor even understood by the population outside the Chinese community. Unfortunately, even with the English index that Professor Edgar Wickberg 魏安國 developed for some of the issues, access to the newspaper is only possible by physical visits to the library. Last year, we decided to collaborate with Simon Fraser University (SFU) in digitizing the newspaper as part of the Multicultural Canada Digitization project, making it available online and soon retrievable by Chinese keywords on an article-level (9). It was in the same spirit to preserve, provide access to, and actively promote the use of Chinese language historical materials that the project “Historical Chinese Language Materials in British Columbia” 加華文獻聚珍 was launched in 2000 in partnership with the Institute of Asian Research and SFU (10). The important collections include four shelves of 142 clan association publication titles, and family archives of major pioneers. To date, we are continuing to process precious family and personal archives with funding support from the owners and various UBC academic units. Currently, we are working on Ron Bick Lee 李日如’s archives, which are excellent primary materials for understanding the early Chinese settlers’ economic contributions to the province, the impact of the social institutions they established in BC, and the role they
played in PRC and Taiwan politics. My research on Chinese Canadian name forms is another core reference for people who are interested in their family roots (11).

The Japanese-Canadian newspapers are just as rich. In Tsuneharu Gonnami 権並恒治’s two articles for *Microform and Imaging Review*, he describes the pre-WWII publications in detail and the commendable efforts by British Columbians to preserve the rare titles on microform for future generations (12, 13). The book in English entitled *Historical Materials of Japanese Immigration to Canada* [Kanada Iminshi Shiryo カナダ移民史資料] edited by Gonnami 権並恒治 and Norman Amor, documents details of our collection on this topic.

To reach out to the community, we have been hosting the Asian Heritage Month Open House since 2000, plus numerous workshops and receptions. To be a relevant and active resource centre on the campus, we continue to engage the faculty and students in integrating the materials and the library activities into their curriculum and pedagogy. Collaboration with the departments, colleges and institutes, other branch libraries and other units at UBC intertwines with all of our outreach programs. We have filmed two popular and amusing videos entitled “Eating Global Vancouver” with a team of history students, hosted a workshop on Japanese art, and provided a venue for Korean and Japanese music students to perform for the public. Occasionally, the University also stages international social functions at the Asian Library, one of these memorable events being the reception for Princess Takamado高円宮妃久子殿下 of Japan in 2004, during which she presented the library with a set of books on Noh masks, the history of Japanese advertisements, and early 20th century women.

By engaging all library staff in the community outreach programs and three of them in Asian-Canadian research (12) (13), a deep commitment to community engagement and creation of knowledge has been nurtured in the Asian Library. Phoebe Chow 鄒崇樂, one of our support staff, has been particularly capable, enthusiastic, and creative in the coordination of events. A number of librarians who retired or changed career paths
continue to offer support; Yim Tse 謝琰, a highly respected scholar and calligraphist in his own right, is one such loyal colleague. Their unfailing support and strong networking in the community help reinforce our rapport in Canada. By bringing in students to work in almost every project as interns, paid staff, professional-experience students or volunteers, we fulfill our role as educators in providing an intellectually stimulating environment that is conducive to learning. Our endeavors exemplify how a major academic library can provide leadership in forging intercultural and multicultural synergies on campus as well as outside it. Continuous funding from the Offices of Vice President, Students and International Community Engagement, the UBC Library, as well as the Institute of Asian Research, and the Department of History -- just to name a few collaborators -- continues to drive our annual Open House/Asian Heritage Month celebration and more recently the reception “Honoring Master Wong Toa 黃滔” in January 2008. At UBC, we are now reckoned as an important stakeholder in the institutional strategies of making community connections. The Asian Library now stands on the forefront with other units and staff, working with St. John’s College on initiatives such as the UBC Centennial celebration and fundraising exercise.

Digitization and Preservation

Apart from the digitization of the *Chinese Times* 大漢公報 and the Tokugawa 徳川 maps, in 1994 we embarked on another ongoing preservation project with Fuji Publishing. Together, the team produced the facsimile edition of the sixteen-volume set of *Kanada Iminshi Shiryo* カナダ移民史資料 (Historical Materials of Japanese Immigration to Canada) with part of the content translated into English. This joint project exemplified how librarians / researchers and publishers may work hand-in-hand with technology towards a common goal of preservation. Then in 2006, we were funded by a private donor with matching funds from the UBC Library to provide online access to the community section of *Ming Pao* 明報 (1993–), one of the three major current Chinese newspapers in Canada. Also, amidst our action plans, we are interested in participating in the institutional depository initiatives which involve using IVT software in oral history
interviews. That in turn may have a wide application in number of our multicultural projects.

Of all the projects in which we are involved, the development of “learning objects” may best illustrate our ambitions and strength. In an article recently published in the *Technical Services Quarterly*, Shu Liu 刘舒, currently Metadata Librarian of the Morgan Library at Colorado State University, reported her experience as the primary investigator for developing a prototype of a learning object depository of archival materials mostly selected from the “Historical Chinese Language Materials in British Columbia”加華文獻聚珍 (10):

The project suggests that libraries should take a proactive role in their institution’s information and learning technology initiatives, and make use of the library resources more dynamic and timely. We learned that it is beneficial to communicate with teaching faculty to explore ways of creative use of library resources. In addition, information technology units on campus are quality resources to rely on to resolve technological issues and obtain relevant advice. (14)

At the time (2003-04), Shu Liu 刘舒 worked under my supervision as a graduate academic assistant at the Asian Library, UBC. Her article provides a perspective of the Asian Library’s efforts in supporting learning and research by rendering its archival materials in a digitized and technically aligned format.

**Networks and Consortiums**

As the Asian Studies program developed, the Asian Library joined a crop of consortiums which brought with them designated collection responsibilities as well as group subscription privileges. Other important privileges that impact our services are interlibrary agreements, staff development opportunities and, in the most favorable cases, gifts in kind (e.g., from the Japan Foundation) or cash (e.g., from the Korean Foundation). As a member of the Center for Research Libraries (CRL), our users have access to a
collection of unique and rarely-held research materials such as newspapers, foreign official gazettes, government records, documents, and microform sets in Asian languages. Most of these materials are for loan free of charge. We are also a member of the CRL’s South Asian Microforms Project (SAMP) and the Southeast Asian Microforms Project (SEAM). All materials filmed or acquired by these projects are available for loan, with no charge. Excluding KCCNA, all other afore-mentioned memberships were forged under the leadership of Linda Joe 周鄺美筠, my predecessor. As publishers, content providers, software companies, learned societies, and foundations adopt commercial strategies for initiatives directly connected to knowledge, consortial members may quickly become party to economically viable activities.

Contributions to the Profession

In the last decade, we have witnessed a steady increase of students with proficiency in Asian languages joining the School of Library Archival and Information Studies (SLAIS) at UBC. Many of them conducted their “professional experience” program, worked as “co-op librarians” or partook in specific projects as part-time staff in the Asian Library. Librarians are also invited to advise SLAIS students at various workshops. By and large, we pride ourselves on being a teaching library and a pool of mentors for young librarians who work with us in some capacity. Over the years, we have also received numerous visiting librarians from PRC, Taiwan, Japan, Hong Kong, Korea, and North America who were attracted by our special collections, community outreach programs, and the expertise of the librarians. On our visitors’ lists, we have also recorded artists, scholars, and interns who come to use our resources and consult the librarians. Sometimes we make referrals and recommendations of other libraries and librarians these guests should visit. Last year, we hosted two exchange students from Asia who were funded by their universities to learn about multicultural life in Vancouver and experience the multicultural work environment in the Asian Library for almost three months. In 2007, at the annual meeting of the Council on East Asian Libraries (CEAL), I formed the Special Interest Group on Genealogy and East Asian Diasporas and shared our experiences in working with Canadian-Asian materials at UBC. The group will meet again at Atlanta in 2008, when I will report on the survey conducted on the materials kept in the 14
responding libraries and the services they deliver. Jing Liu 刘静, Linda Joe 周郁美筠, and Tomoko Kakehi 篠朋子 served in different CEAL committees during different periods, while T. Gonnami 権並恒治 presented at the “Librarians’ Colloquium: The Current State of Japan-Related Collections in Canadian Libraries” sponsored by the Japan Foundation in 2000. From January to July 2008, the librarians at the Asian Library will work with our colleagues at UBC and representatives from the Simon Fraser University, the Vancouver Public Library, the British Columbia Library Association, and Library and Archives Canada, preparing to host the IFLA Satellite Conference on “Multicultural to Intercultural: Libraries Connecting Communities” in Vancouver, 5-8 August, 2008. The conference opening will be launched at the First Nations Longhouse at UBC.

**Challenges and Opportunities**

The history and development of the Asian Library at UBC embodies the aspirations, challenges, and dynamics that are shared by many academic libraries in North America. Nonetheless, we are faced with roadblocks that are unique in this complex, fast-growing and prestigious university. We are working among 47,711 students on two campuses, 7,851 of them being graduate students. On the ranking by citizenship of our 5,663 international students, China, South Korea, Japan, India, Hong Kong, Indonesia and Taiwan are consistently in the top ten (15). The spectrum of services and facilities we need to provide to this wide range of student population is very taxing, to say the least. At the curriculum level, programs on Inner Asia, which includes Inner Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang, are offered in the University without adequate funding for library resources and language support. On the near horizon, we might have to support studies on Vietnam. To a certain extent, materials on Asian law, music, and films are as under-funded as the librarians’ work time and expertise are over-stretched. To say that we are understaffed is an understatement. With four full-time librarians, one half-time librarian, one half-time bibliographer, two-and-a-half public services support staff and five cataloguers, we manage a 550,000-volume collection and over 21,000 square feet of space in an institution where over 60,000 staff and students work and learn.
Compounding the stressful environment, a small number of Asian materials in Asian scripts are not kept in the Asian Library. For example, Asian videos with English subtitles are kept at the Koerner Library; Asian law collections catalogued in the K classification are housed at the Law Library; and Asian language textbooks for schools in the province are shelved in the Education Library. But there is always a silver lining to every cloud, and the challenges sometimes present opportunities. With the evident need for a library to re-invent its physical and virtual spaces and service models, we receive the support of the UBC Library to re-model the library premises, a task that should enable and stimulate the cost-effective exploitation of information systems and physical space. Similarly, with the latest round of staff retirement, the library is now served by a team of four young librarians who have few years of academic librarianship experience behind them, yet are very technology-savvy and more akin to the learning habits and lifestyle of students.

**Back to the Future**

No library is as distinguished as it believes or as distinguished as it should be. We have weathered many difficult times and celebrated many milestones achieved. Looking forward, to meet the high expectations of the University, the local Asian community, and other parties who appreciate our unique resources and activities, we need to regularly review our work and the resources entrusted in our hands. It is only with professionalism and humility that we will be able to deliver a student-centered, research-focused library and a hub with rich Asian heritage resources to the community that supports us.
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Photo by Martin Dee.

Figure (2)

Oldest book in the Puban collection, 618-907 CE

As the oldest object in the Puban collection, this rare book was published under the auspices of the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE) as a history of the earlier Jin dynasty (265-420 CE), and is part of a 130-volume collection. Recorded on rice paper, the book was later rebound in Hong Kong, with a current estimated value of $4 million.

Photo by Martin Dee; description by John Penant

Figure (3)

Original manuscript of dictionary of phonetics, mid-late 19th century
This original manuscript, a dictionary of phonetics, resides in the Puban collection. Entitled *Shuo Wen Sheng Tung*, it was written by Chen Li in the mid to late 19th century. The author’s great-grandson, Chen Chih-mai, published the book posthumously in Taiwan in 1971.

Photo by Martin Dee; description by John Penant

**Figure (4)**

![Pan Yu County Map, 1871, detail](image)

This detail of a Pan Yu County map appears in a 54-volume gazetteer from the Puban collection. The maps were compiled by Li Fu Tai and published in 1871.

Photo by Martin Dee; description by John Penant

**Figure (5)**

![Collection of Ancient Royal Seals, 1575](image)

This collection of ancient royal seals, from the Puban collection, originated in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), with a preface dated 1575. Edited by Wang Chang, it appears in three volumes. Red ink was chosen for the seals, while the text is in black. The large middle seal is that of the Prince of Jing, a member of the Ming royal family.

Photo by Martin Dee; description by John Penant