

## **A Library Where Research Meets Community: The Asian Library at the University of British Columbia**

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Surrounded by natural beauty, the Asian Library at the University of British Columbia (UBC) is located on the spectacular Vancouver campus, nestled in the forest and overlooking the mountains and the Pacific Ocean. The Asian Library is housed in the Asian Centre, whose iconic four-sided pyramid roof and structure were constructed for the Sanyo Corporation pavilion at the 1970 World Exposition in Osaka, then later gifted to UBC by the Japanese government.

The Asian Centre building itself was opened in 1981 to hold the Asian Library and the Department of Asian Studies, which continue to work together to support Asia-related studies at UBC. The Asian Centre was the first building on campus to be devoted to Asia-related studies. Since then, however, an Asian area of campus has developed around the Centre: The Nitobe Memorial Garden, a traditional Japanese tea and stroll garden, lies to the west; the C. K. Choi Building for The Institute of Asian Research is to the east; the Liu Institute for Global Issues and the International House are to the north; and St. John's College, which was

built in memory of the original St. John's University, which was once one of China's most prestigious and influential universities, Simon Lee Hong Kong University-UBC House, and other student residences lie to the south. The Asian Library began as a division (the Asian Studies Division) of the UBC Library. It was not until 1960 that it was formally established as its own branch, after the acquisition of a major Chinese collection, the Puban Collection (some 3,200 Chinese titles in about 45,000 volumes in thread-stitched binding), formerly owned by Yao Jushi of Macao. The majority of this collection came from the well-known Nanzhou Studio of Guangdong Province in China.



**Picture 1.** UBC Asian Library 2<sup>nd</sup> floor (Photo Credit: Tae Eom)

The Asian Library is a hub for scholarship, learning, and community connections. The Asian Library's holdings provide key resources in support of Asian Studies teaching and research and currently total some 650,000 volumes across 11 languages: Korean, Chinese, and Japanese; the Indic languages of Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, and Sanskrit; Tibetan, Indonesian, Persian; and, most recently, Vietnamese. The Asian Library's collection is unique in that many Asian libraries in the world focus more exclusively on East Asia (Korea, China, and Japan).

## **A Collection Built by a Chinese Canadian Pioneer, Seto More**

While many of the Asian Library's earliest collections were acquired through purchase, over the years, many private collections have been donated by the community, often by family members who have come to inherit them. Such was the case with the Seto Collection.

Seto More was born in the late nineteenth century in Victoria, British Columbia, and never visited China, the land of his ancestry. Nonetheless, he managed to obtain a classical education in the true Chinese fashion and became a recognized Chinese scholar of his day. His belief in education was the driving force for many Chinese immigrants in the early 20th century. This included his own daughter, Geraldine Seto, and her husband, Tong Louie, both of whom graduated from UBC, in 1940 and 1938, respectively. Seto More is now considered a distinguished Chinese pioneer in Canada.

During his lifetime, Seto More collected an impressive library including many pamphlets and books. After Seto More's death in 1967, his collection was donated to the Asian Library by Tong Louie and Geraldine Seto. This donation supplemented the Asian Library's Chinese holdings in Buddhist literature and philosophical and literary works from the years 1912-1965. The collection became a crucial research resource on early Chinese Canadian settlers in British Columbia.

Seto More was the maternal grandfather of Dr. Brandt Louie, one of Canada's most respected entrepreneurs and philanthropists. He is the CEO of London Drugs, a pharmacy chain of Canadian retail stores. According to a recent survey done by Ipsos, in partnership with BC Business, London Drugs is British Columbia's best loved brand. In 2015, Dr. Brandt Louie and members of his extended family visited the Asian Library, to view the Seto Collection and learn more about his maternal grandfather and the collection.



**Picture 2.** The Seto Collection taken on the day when Dr. Brandt Louie and members of his extended family visited the Asian Library on May 21, 2015 (Photo Credit: Tarek Haji)

## **UBC's Most Treasured Rare Chinese Collection from Fang Family**

Another family-owned collection donated to the Asian Library is the Pang Jingtang Collection. In 2010, the Asian Library received a donation of rare Chinese books (94 titles, including 841 volumes, the majority of which were produced prior to 1796) from the Fang family. In 2014, the family of Paul Fang, who was the grandson of Pang Jingtang, donated additional items to the Pang Jingtang Collection, including works on the classics, literature, history, and philosophy.

Pang Jingtang (1900-1977) held several high-ranking government and military positions in the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), during the regime of Chiang Kai-shek in mainland China from 1917 to 1946, before he was imprisoned by the Communist Army in 1948. The donated materials were collected by Pang Jingtang throughout his life in China.

His grandchildren recognized the historical importance of these materials and donated them to UBC in memory of Pang Jingtang's daughter, Pang Yi, a graduate of the UBC Asian Studies program.

The Pang Jingtang Collection has drawn a lot of attention from academia around the world because of its high value and rarity.

## **Chung Collection**

Two great philanthropists, Dr. Wallace B. Chung and his wife, Dr. Madeline H. Chung, donated their private historical collection to the UBC Library for permanent exhibition in 1999. This extensive research collection of 25,000 rare and unique items tells the incredible story of Chinese immigrants and their contributions to the building of the Canadian nation. The collection includes documents, books, maps, posters, paintings, photographs, silver, glass, ceramic ware, and other artifacts. The Chung Collection is housed in the Rare Books and Special Collections section of UBC Library's Irving K. Barber Learning Centre.

Immigration from Asia to North America began in the middle of the nineteenth century, as the gold rush in California, and later in British Columbia, offered wealth to many Chinese who were struggling with poverty in their home country. These hard working Chinese immigrants played an instrumental role in building the transcontinental railway in Canada. The Chung Collection contains many documents relating to early Chinese immigration and their work experiences, such as contracts for Chinese and non-Chinese workers, petitions to the government about Chinese rights or restricting immigration, anti-Asian ephemera, head tax certificates, and government reports.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "The Chung Collection," University of British Columbia Library, accessed July 22, 2016.

The collection exhibition also includes artifacts from gambling houses and opium dens in early Chinatowns, as well as numerous photographs and pamphlets, correspondence, and other material.

The Chung Collection has been designated a national treasure by the Canadian Cultural Property Export Review Board. Many visiting scholars from around the world who wish to research the history of Chinese Canadian settlers visit UBC to view the Chung Collection, along with local Asian Canadian community members who wish to learn more about their ancestry.

### Korean Canadian Heritage Archives

A well-organized archive database is one of the most practical tools to facilitate successful research, but unfortunately there was no such database dedicated to the Korean heritage in Canada until 2010, when UBC and the University of Toronto undertook a collaborative project, the Korean Canadian Heritage Archives (KCHA) Project, to preserve the history of the Korean Canadian community's activities and its literary and artistic works.



**Picture 3.** Various materials from the Korean Canadian Heritage Archives (Photo Credit: Hana Kim)

The Korean-Canadian history begins with Korean seminary students in the late 1940s, a relatively short timeframe compared to communities from other East Asian countries, such as China and Japan, in Canada. The KCHA Project has strengthened to a certain extent the representation of Korean Canadians in Canada's archival heritage. The population of the first generation of Korean Canadians is rapidly aging, and consequently many historically significant manuscripts and/or experiences are at risk of permanent loss.

One of the main goals of the KCHA Project was to create a nationwide online searchable database for materials relating to Korean-Canadian culture and history, as well as to better document the Korean experience in Canada by collecting records into one location, making these readily accessible to the public. The database is designed not only to deal with existing catalogued material, but also to accumulate previously undocumented primary sources relating to Korean Canadians. Any materials related to or created by Korean Canadians are significant to the project.

The KCHA Project is an ongoing project of indefinite length, ensuring that it will continue to be filled with the resources of Korean Canadians from the past, present, and future. Its extensive collection of relevant materials were accumulated by means of donation, professionally preserved by the KCHA Project team from UBC and the University of Toronto, and meticulously digitized with the permission of the copyright holders. The KCHA information hub is now readily accessible to students, scholars, researchers, and the general public from all over the world.

## **Lunar New Year Celebration**

The Asian Library plays a crucial role in educating University students and members of the local community about Lunar New Year traditions

by celebrating it annually through various activities and programs. Most recently, in February 2016, the Asian Library (together with other campus units such as the Equity and Inclusion Office and the Asian Studies Department) sponsored engaging and educational activities in the University's Centennial Lunar New Year Festival. As the goal of the event was to feature an intercultural celebration of Lunar New Year traditions, the library prepared book displays on the Lunar New Year in Korea, China, and Vietnam, as well as interactive games for learning how different Asian countries celebrate the Lunar New Year.



**Picture 4.** UBC Asian Library's booth in the University-wide Lunar New Year celebration event on February 5, 2016 (Photo credit: Tae Eom)

The festival also featured colorful lion dances to bring good luck to the new student building (Nest), interactive dragon performances, musical performances, craft demonstrations, and traditional food stands.

This University's beautiful annual tradition of celebrating the Lunar New Year brought together the University community, as well as the local community, to celebrate the most significant holiday of the year for students, staff, and faculty of Korean, Chinese, and Vietnamese heritage.

## **Active Community Partner: Capturing Migrant Family Histories and Sharing Cross-Cultural Stories**

Another important commitment that the Asian Library has made is to community engagement and outreach. The Asian Library continues to be a resource for all those exploring trans-Pacific migration or researching the Asian community or family histories.

One of the key community partners for the Asian Library is the Pacific Canada Heritage Centre–Museum of Migration (PCHC–MoM) Society. PCHC-MoM is a non-profit society whose mission is to build a Museum of Migration in metropolitan Vancouver for the purposes of fostering a wider and improved understanding of Canada’s history and growth through intercultural explorations of historic and current trans-Pacific immigration.

The Asian Library has frequently partnered with the PCHC–MoM Society to offer workshops on learning how stories are gathered, and how the histories of Asia migrants to British Columbia and Canada can serve as an heirloom for generations to come.

In April, May, and June 2016, the PCHC–MoM Society, in partnership with the Asian Library, offered a “Family History with a Smartphone” workshop series. In this series, community participants gathered at the UBC Asian Centre to study methods for preserving the stories of their elders, family members, and loved ones. The workshop included instruction on framing, lighting, and audio techniques for recording family stories, along with a discussion of the ethics of filmmaking, and participants began to draft plans for creating their own family films. In the second workshop, participants learned about the post-production stage of creating and preserving family stories in a session facilitated by Alejandro Yoshizawa, a filmmaker from Vancouver and the lead filmmaker and director for the “Chinese Canadian Stories” web series.

In 2015, an event titled “A Banquet of Stories: Sharing Migration

Tales through Food” was hosted by the PCHC–MoM Society and sponsored by the UBC Library. Diverse Asian-heritage community members contributed a family recipe, dish, photograph, or heirloom and shared a story inspired by the item. In sponsoring such an event, the Asian Library highlighted the role of an active community partnership in supporting research on trans-Pacific migration and community and family histories.

For the past 57 years, the University of British Columbia and its Asian Library have served as a vital hub and catalyst for learning, research, and inspiration regarding Asian culture and heritage. As a public institution, through collaboration between the campus and its community partners, the Asian Library also practices a true commitment to community outreach. The Asian Library supports students and faculty in both community-based and international activities by providing rich resources and expertise and connecting them with the Asian communities in British Columbia. The Asian Library is a gem of British Columbia and Canada, a place where research meets community.

### **Key Reference:**

University of British Columbia Library. “The Chung Collection.” Accessed July 22, 2016. <http://chung.library.ubc.ca/node>.