

“Books on the Move”: Rare Chinese Collections at the University of British Columbia

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Abstract:

This paper provides an overview of the Chinese Puban (蒲坂) and Pang Jingtang (龐鏡塘) collections, exploring their formation in China, their survival and eventual acquisition by the University of British Columbia, and their continued movement and transformation in their new home. Both collections were originally owned by Chinese elite families and contain very rare and unique materials. The Puban Collection, consisting of 45,000 volumes, best represents Canton and southern Chinese civilization, while the Pang Jingtang collection derives from Shandong Province and has connections with famed northern Chinese scholars. We identify several patterns of movement that have affected these collections: the coming together of the materials that make up the collections; their travels from a once troubled homeland to Canada; their recent resettlement from the Asian Library to the Rare Books and Special Collections Library at UBC; and, finally, their planned return in digitized form to their country of origin. Along the way, we examine highlights of the collections, their intellectual value for research and their emotional value as objects of cultural heritage. We also emphasize issues affecting the preservation and use of the collections. In addition, connections regarding both preservation and digitization between UBC and institutions in China are also described.

Keywords:

Chinese rare books, Nanzhou Library (南州書樓), Puban (蒲坂), Pang Jingtang (龐鏡塘), University of British Columbia Asian Library

Recent bibliographical studies have investigated the history, travels and fates of a number of Western books and collections¹. We propose to give similar attention to two collections of Chinese rare books which are now in Canada. This paper provides an overview of the Chinese Puban (蒲坂) and Pang Jingtang (龐鏡塘) collections, exploring their formation in China, their survival and eventual acquisition by the University of British Columbia (UBC), and their continued movement and transformation in their new home. Both collections were originally owned by Chinese elite families and contain rare and unique materials. The Puban Collection, consisting of 45,000 volumes, best represents Canton and southern Chinese civilization, while the Pang Jingtang collection derives from Shandong Province and has connections with famed northern Chinese scholars. The Puban collection – containing a substantial part of a much larger collection that had been broken up – had already been moved to Macau when UBC purchased it in 1959; the smaller but choice Pang Jingtang Collection was in Vancouver when it was received as a gift from Mr. Paul Fang in 2000.

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Overview

Among the 60,000 volumes of hand-stitched bound books housed at UBC Library, about 45,000 volumes belong to the two special collections. They were moved out of Mainland China, first to Macau and Taiwan, respectively, during the wars and then transported to Canada 50 years ago. The Puban Collection (蒲坂書樓), acquired from the prominent Yao (姚) family in Macau in 1959, helped make the UBC Asian Library a top-tier research library for Chinese Studies in North America. Until that time, the most important Chinese collections could only be found at Library of Congress, Harvard, Princeton, Berkeley and the Royal Ontario Museum. The Puban Collection contains over 3,000 Chinese classical titles in approximately 45,000 physical volumes and spans literature, history and thought from the 12th to early 20th century. The collection includes manuscripts, local history, literary works, rubbings, songs and maps focusing on the area of Lingnan (嶺南) and the Pearl River Delta (珠江三角洲). Many items are originally from one of the most famous private libraries in China – Nanzhou Library (南州書樓). Such a large-scale purchase of an entire Chinese private library is quite unusual among libraries outside of China.

The Puban collection contains nearly 2,000 literary works written by scholars during the Manchu Dynasty (1644-1911). The collection has about 1,000 rare titles, and among them, 100 are unique. It is also a rich resource because only a very limited number of the collected works of Qing authors have ever been edited in China, and many are not available in modern punctuated versions. Consequently, literary items from the Puban collection are often requested by scholars beyond UBC, and researchers have made many interesting discoveries.

The Pang Jingtang Collection (龐鏡塘藏書) was originally owned by the Pang family in Shandong (山東) Province. The collection, on deposit since 2000, was officially donated to the UBC Library in the spring of 2010. A private collection from the north of China, it contains 94 titles in 823 volumes, and includes rare literature and calligraphy especially by writers of the Shandong region. Pang's collection includes many choice and unique items and has about 30 rare titles. The Pang family collected many rare and unique items originally from Haiyuan Ge (海源閣), a well-known Chinese

¹ See, for example, *Books on the Move: Tracking Copies through Collections and the Book Trade*, edited by Robin Myers, Michael Harris and Giles Mandelbrote, New Castle, DE and London: Oak Knoll and The British Library, 2007.

private library founded in 1840 by the Yang family and located in Liaocheng Xian (聊城縣), in Shandong Province.

Books on the Move: the Puban Collection

These two special collections from southern and northern China gathered together historic, literary and art treasures from all over China, and also from Japan and Korea. Formed separately by private individuals, the collections have been absorbed into the public domain and now share a common home and destiny at the University of British Columbia. Their movement has been a result of economic and environmental factors and is especially associated with China's turbulent history in the early 20th century.

Some of the scale and complexity of these books' movement can be told by looking at marks of ownership, readers' annotations and sales records. Most items in the Puban Collection (蒲坂書樓) were rescued from the Nanzhou Library (南州書樓) which had been previously owned by Xu Xinfu (徐信符), also known as Xu Shaoqi (徐紹綦) (1879-1948). A well-respected traditional scholar and educator, Xu taught at over a dozen institutions that were the precursors to many modern colleges and universities; among these, he was at Lingnan (嶺南) and later Zhongshan University (中山大學). Many of his students became famous scholars or government officials. He worked for the Guangdong Provincial Library in the 1920s. His own Nanzhou Library was among the top five of the 51 private libraries listed in his book on the major private libraries in Guangdong province, *Guangdong cang shu ji shi shi*.² This is all the more remarkable since Xu was a scholar of relatively modest means, while other major collectors were from wealthy families in international trade, the salt industry, western medicine, etc.

Xu started collecting in 1900. Following the Revolution of 1911 and during decades of war, many traditional private libraries in Guangdong Province came to an end. Books were cheap, and were affordable for someone like Xu, spending his teaching salary to expand his own library. He purchased large amounts of books locally and also tried to collect throughout the entire country. Since Xu never made a complete list or bibliography of his collection, nobody knows the exact size of his collection. His students and friends recorded different numbers of total Nanzhou items. A reasonable estimate is that his collection had reached about 600,000 juan (about 200,000 physical items) in 1932, housed in two two-story buildings and 6 rooms, including a reading room³.

It has been said by Du Dingyou (杜定有)⁴ that the private libraries in Guangdong Province typically lasted for no more than three generations. That was the case for Xu's Nanzhou Library, which was formed in late imperial China, and lasted through the Chinese republic, the Sino-Japan wars, and into the period of Communist China; but within three generations, it was dispersed. Nature, too, plays a part in the destruction and dispersal of libraries: one of the Nanzhou Library buildings collapsed during a long season of rain, and he lost over 400 boxes of books in this flood.

² Xu Shaoqin, *Guangdong cang shu ji shi shi*(廣東藏書紀事詩), Hong Kong: Shang wu yin shu guan, 1963.

³ Gao, Bingli. "Nanzhou shu lou ju san shi shu lue", *Tu shu guan lun tan*, 2003, 12, 23, p. 6.

⁴ Xu, Xinfu. "Guangdong cang shu ji lue", in *Guangdong wen hua lun cong*, edited by Du, Dingyou, Guangzhou: Guangdong Provincial Library, 1949.



Figure 1: Xu Xinfu (徐信符), also known as Xu Shaoqi (徐紹欒) (1879-1948).
Image provided by the Deputy Director of Guangdong Provincial Library, Mr. Ni Junming (倪俊明)

On August 31, 1937, the Japanese bombed Guangzhou, forcing Xu to move the family along with some of his books to Hong Kong, where he began selling books to support the family. Before the Japanese invaded Hong Kong in 1941, we know that Xu picked out some rare books, intending to have them shipped to Macau, but what became of those books is not known. His next move was to Guangzhou, where he became very ill, and continued to sell more books. Xu was determined to avoid living under Japanese rule, and when his health allowed him to travel, he moved the family again to Macau. Many of the books left behind in Guangzhou were robbed and lost around the same time. The family survived by selling more books, including rare books from home and those saved in Hong Kong. Xu finally sold the core of his Nanzhou Library collection in Macau to Mr. Yao Junshi (姚鈞石), whom we will discuss below.

Xu returned home after the Japanese defeat in 1945. He planned to work on a bibliography of his remaining collection, and to ship his books in Hong Kong and Macau back home, but suffered a heart attack, and passed away on October 30, 1948.

After his death, Xu's children continued to sell the family collection, mainly to the Guangdong Provincial Library and to the Sun Yat-sen University Library, where Mr. Xu had worked. These two institutions, along with UBC, hold the largest blocks of the original Nanzhou collection. On May 21, 1982, Xu's granddaughter sold the last of the Nanzhou books to the Guangdong Provincial Library.

Yao Junshi was a successful physician, business man and philanthropist from Guangzhou. By buying thousands of Xu's books, Yao was seeking to rebuild his own private collection, which he called the Puban Library, after the famous ancient capital of the legendary Emperor Shun (舜), whose ancestral name was Yao. Like Xu, Yao also moved his books from Guangzhou to Hong Kong and finally to Macau, desperate to escape the onslaught of advancing armies. Unfortunately, we have found relatively little documentation about Yao Junshi.⁵

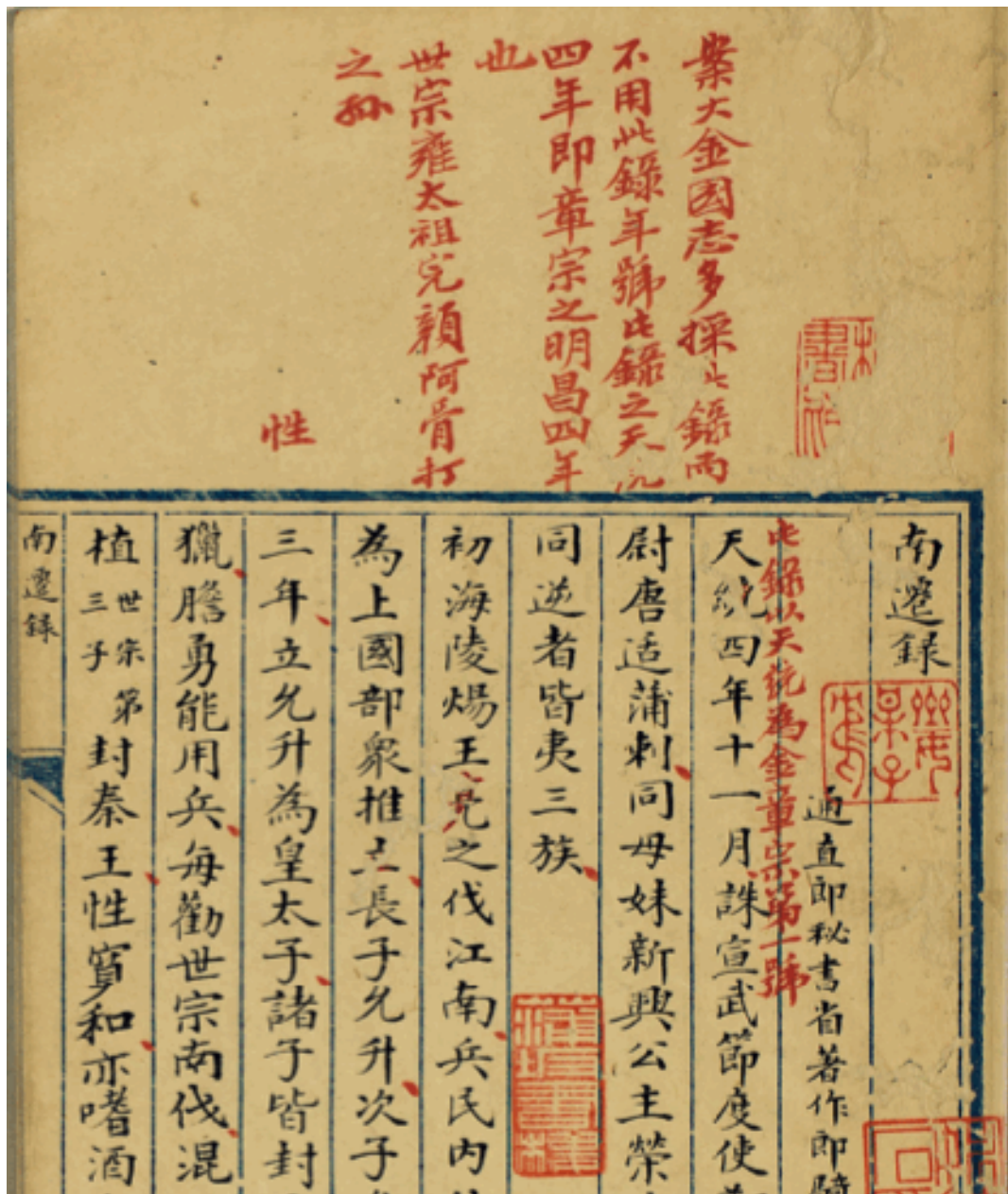


Figure 2: One of the Puban Books: *Nan qian lu*, by Zhang Shiyan (南遷錄, 作者張師顏) with various collectors' seals and comments.

⁵ Information about Yao Junshi comes from his nephew, Mr. Tienmin Yao, an architect in New York City, who was excited to discover the complete Puban Collection at UBC and flew to Vancouver expressly to view this hidden treasure that once belonged to his family.

Mr. Ho Ping-Ti (何炳棣), a history scholar, left China in 1945 and started teaching the very first course on China at UBC in 1948. In 1958, Mr. Ho represented UBC in purchasing and shipping the Puban collection to Vancouver. Puban was the first Chinese collection at the University and became the core of the UBC Asian Library, which was established in 1960. The UBC Asian Studies Department was established a year later.

Books on the Move: the Pang Jingtang Collection

The Pang Jingtang Collection (龐鏡塘藏書) which primarily contains items from northern China, originated in Shandong before moving to Taiwan and then Vancouver. It was owned and developed by the Chief of the Chinese Nationalist Party of Shandong province, Pang Jingtang (1900-1977), who was a scholar before taking up political office. Pang's wife and two daughters went to Taiwan during the regime change, but he was captured in 1948 by the Communist army and was sentenced to reform through labour. During his incarceration, Pang was entrusted with the establishment and management of a prison library. Pang was released in 1960 after being granted a special amnesty and died in Shenyang (沈陽) in 1977. The majority of Pang's books that survived the wars went to libraries in Mainland China. Volumes from his collections can be found in the National Library of China, Inner Mongolia Library and Shandong Provincial Library. The *Heze Gazetteer* 《荷澤市志》 recorded that Mr. Pang donated over 10,000 books to those libraries on top of returning his own income to his villagers. Preserving local cultural heritage and giving back to society has long been a Pang family tradition. Pang Jingtang's daughter, Ms. Pang Yi (龐禕), a graduate of the UBC Asian Studies program, carefully preserved a choice portion of her father's collection until she passed away in 2000. It was then her son, Mr. Paul Fang, another UBC graduate and now a lawyer in Vancouver, who contacted UBC Libraries to donate this family treasure.

Although the Pang Jingtang collection is much smaller in quantity than the Puban, its research value cannot be neglected. A majority of the 94 works were published in the early Qing period, but Ming editions and rare and unique manuscripts are also present. The collection also includes more than twenty stele rubbings and items handwritten by prominent historical figures. Notably among them is *The Orchid Pavilion Preface* 《蘭亭泥全寫本》 in gold ink copied by Dong Qichang (董其昌 1555-1636).

Among the treasures of the Pang Jingtang collection is an album containing two letters from Xiong Tingbi (熊廷弼) (1569-1625), the Ming military intendant in Liaodong (遼東) and Yang Lian (楊漣) (1571-1625), the Donglin (東林) leader. They offended the eunuch Wei Zhongxian (1568-1627) (魏忠賢), and were sent to prison where they were executed. Many prominent connoisseurs had owned this album, among them He Shaoji (何紹基) (1799-1873), the most influential calligrapher in the late Qing period. Much is still to be learned about the context and influence of these letters.⁶

Several other titles in Pang's collection are also unique, including *Qing hua tang shi gao* 《情話堂詩稿》 by Min Ding (閔鼎), who lived in the end of Ming Dynasty and used his poems to describe the lives of Han scholars under the Manchu. This title was recorded in some reference books but treated as missing. Pang's copy is so far the only one known to exist.

⁶ Min Gu & Jing Liu, "A Primary Study of the Letters by Xiong Tingbi and Yang Lian at University of British Columbia", *Chinese Studies Abroad*, 1, p. 327 -341.

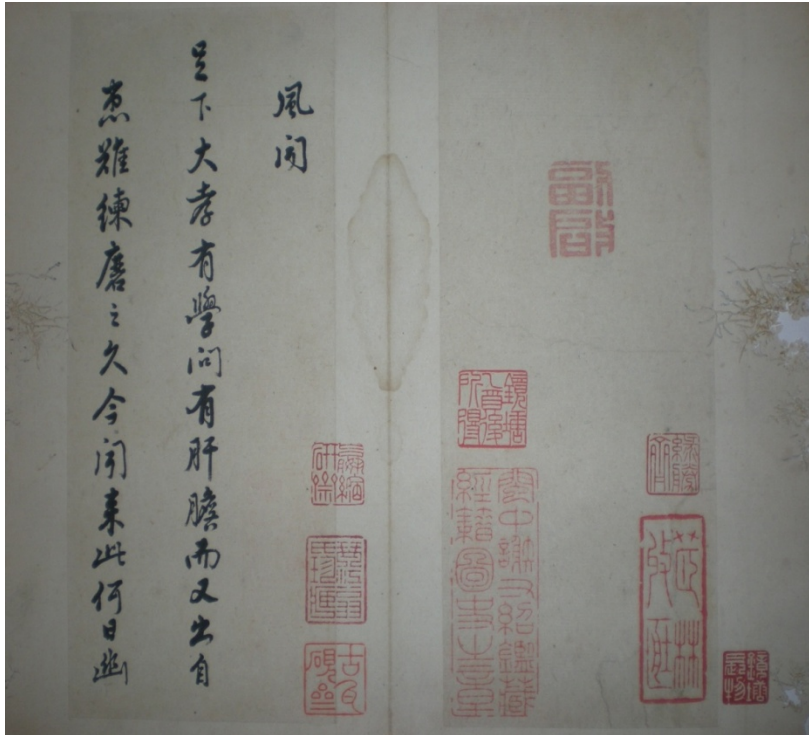


Figure 3: Letter by Xiong Tingbi (熊廷弼, 1569-1625) in the Pang Jingtang collection.

These significant examples were identified during preliminary investigations into the Pang Jingtang collection, which remains uncatalogued. We need assistance in researching and processing the collection, for example on such titles as *Lu zhu tang shu mu* 《菴竹堂書目》 - a famous private library catalogue hand-copied by a descendant of the compiler. Its prefix and seals show the book's collecting history, and it seems to be unique and authentic, but scholars in China have discovered that forgeries exist of this book. We do not know yet whether our copy in the Pang collection is genuine or a forgery. Either way, the copy is interesting, and makes one wonder about the role and extent of forgeries in Chinese collections.

Another question that arises from these collections concerns books that were printed in traditional Chinese characters but published in Korea and Japan. *Gu tong yin pu ju yu* 《古銅印譜舉隅》 - a book of ancient seal catalogue by Ota Kotaro - was published in Tokyo; *Kuizhang quan yun* 《奎章全韻：朝鮮正祖御定》 published in Korea in 1794 is an important book on the changes of Chinese characters in Korea. More can be learned about the overlap of the book trades in these countries⁷.

On the Move again

Until this year, the Puban and Pang Jingtang collections, along with other Japanese, Chinese and Korean rare books, were housed in a vault in the basement of the Asian Library building, which was constructed under the remarkable roof of the Sanyo pavilion, transported to UBC after the Osaka Exhibition of 1970. Even the most beautiful of structures ages and while being retiled in 2011, a leak in the roof led to water finding its way into the vault of the Asian Library. Undetected for some time, the leak was the source of a mold outbreak that affected the entire contents of the vault. More than 400 volumes had to be removed to freezers to await further conservation, and over a four-month period more than 60,000 volumes were vacuumed, hand-cleaned and removed to other quarters.

⁷ See for example Satoru Takeuchi, "Early book paths as preface to library cooperation", in *IFLA Pre-conference, Scholarly Information on East Asia In the 21st Century*, 18 August 18 2006.



Figure 4: UBC Asian Library

In fact, the emergency helped us focus on the deterioration which affects all collections of old material. Before they came to us, books in our collections had been through floods, had been attacked by insects, and had been packed and transported in unstable times. The condition of many volumes has been of concern to curators and scholars for some time. The binding threads of many volumes are broken or loose, insect tracks have weakened many pages, some pages are torn or detached, and so on, as one would expect with older material of this kind. A few rare editions are too fragile to be handled. The collections certainly needed a good cleaning, which they have now received, to the great general benefit of both collections. Where mold could not be fully removed, we did our best to minimize damage and to preserve any indications of provenance.

Still, we plan to do more. A title-by-title conservation assessment has been made of the Pang Jingtang collection, and we are working on our overall capacity to stabilize and repair our rare Asian books. In 2011, Alvan Bregman spent three weeks at Peking University learning about traditional conservation methods for Chinese rare books, and based on this experience we are working to develop our conservation facilities and staff. We are currently hiring a conservator, and our goal will be to ensure long-term access to our Asian and other collections.

After cleaning, the Puban, Pang Jingtang and other rare collections were transferred to the UBC Rare Books and Special Collections (RBSC), a state-of-the-art facility. We hope this will be the final physical move for the Puban and Pang Jingtang collections, but of course, one never knows! While the RBSC provides physical security and local access to our collections, it also isolates them from distant users. In their new home, the collections will be closer to the UBC Library's Digital Initiatives facility, where plans to digitize the rarest contents of the collections are being completed. Being on a digital platform should liberate the contents and permits scholars around the world to work with these materials.

Part of this plan depends on the additional conservation of fragile volumes so that they can be handled and photographed without harm. For example, preservation is needed before we can scan our possibly unique and early printing (around 1488) of the great 15th-century compilation of statecraft writings, *Daxue yanyi bu* 《大學衍義補》.

Another benefit of digitization will be the recataloguing of the collections so that appropriate metadata can be attached to images. Many of the Puban items are discoverable thanks to our online catalogue, but most records are very brief and do not contain bibliographic and provenance information in sufficient detail to support scholarly research. Existing records need to be compared to the works they describe. For example, Professor Pan Jianguo (潘建國) of Peking University was able to examine our copy of *Qie yin zhu Zhuxi chan yin gao* 《鍤音註竹溪蟬吟稿》 by the late Ming

novelist, Deng Zhimo (鄧志謨). We now know that our copy is the first published work, dating from 1606 or 1607, and the most comprehensive collection of poetry of the author.

Another example of the need for re-examination and recataloguing of the collection concerns the Puban copy of *Zhu Ciqi xian sheng dian shi juan* 《朱次琦先生殿試卷》. Zhu Ciqi (朱次琦), a prominent Confucian scholar and educator in the mid-19th century, played an outstanding role in his hometown's education in Jiujiang, Nanhai County (南海縣九江). Through his involvement in the production of local texts – anthologies, genealogies and local gazetteers – Zhu further helped to construct a Jiujiang (九江) local identity, and even earned himself a new name – Zhu Jiujiang (朱九江). The national examination paper that earned Zhu his the Gongshi degree (貢士) for entrance into the Imperial civil service in 1847 has attained legendary status. According to our catalogue, it appeared that the Puban held the original manuscript, which had been removed secretly from the Forbidden City and from which a handful of copies was made in the 1930's by Zhu's student, Jian Chaoliang (簡朝亮). Recent research conducted because of the interest of scholars in China and from Princeton University has shown that although the copy in Puban is rare, it is not the original manuscript. In 2006, Mr. Zhu's museum received a 1930's copy from a private donor in Hong Kong, but still can't find the original one.

The Pang Jingtang collection has yet to be catalogued. Once catalogued and digitized, these collections will be returning home in a virtual form and will be accessible to scholars from China and around the world. The possibility also exists that scattered volumes from the original collections may be identified elsewhere and linked together virtually with larger surviving portions. Once all our work is complete, at least some of the efforts of the original collectors will be realized, although across time and over a great distance. In coming to UBC our collections have entered a new world, have gained a new life and will enjoy continuity with the heritage from which they derive.