

“Chinese Canadian Stories”: a University – Community Collaboration Project

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“Chinese Canadian Stories: Uncommon Histories from a Common Past” is community engagement and digitization initiative that contributes to the reconstruction of the identities of Chinese Canadians. Focusing on UBC Library’s role as nexus for university-community engagement, this presentation outlines interactions with the local Chinese communities and their roles in shaping the identities of Chinese Canadians across the Pacific. As a case study of one Canadian academic library’s drive in the recovery, creation, organization, promotion and research of Chinese Canadian historical materials in both English and Chinese, this project showcases the complex links and dynamics between institutional efforts to preserve archival materials for learning and research and the preservation of family history in the community for posterity that can be studied on a number of levels.

Whereas academic libraries have traditionally concentrated on building collections, providing research support to students and faculty, and offering information literacy instruction, they have always been integrated into the broader aspirations of the university. As the academic library can be natural focal point for this interaction and exchange between academia and community, Chinese Canadian Stories (www.chinesecanadian.ubc.ca) helps position UBC Library as a gathering place for community outreach and community-based research.

Through this project, it can be said that UBC Library is making a difference in innovatively creating a different approach to the preservation of the Chinese Canadian history and correcting the past’s erasures in Canada’s national memory, by working with academics, libraries and archives as well as the diverse communities of Canada. In all, UBC collaborated with twenty-eight communities across Canada – from Victoria, BC to St. John’s, Newfoundland – to document the history of Chinese families in the twentieth century.

This paper presents the project of “Chinese Canadian Stories” as a model for how an academic library can successfully collaborate with an ethnic community to preserve their culture and history and brought a new awareness of their social identity. The benefits and challenges of such collaboration are discussed in the context of a real-world application. And recommendations for future applications are presented.