

**Archiving Hong Kong in Canada:
Digital Preservation, Community Collaboration, and the Future of Diasporic Collections**

Jack Hang-tat Leong

York University

Peer-reviewed and accepted by

The Reading Room: A Journal of Special Collections on 11 September 2026

Version: Accepted Manuscript

Abstract

This paper examines the evolution and significance of Hong Kong-related and Chinese Canadian collections in Canada, addressing the persistent challenge of fragmented resources and the urgent need for sustainable curation. By surveying major archives and initiatives, the study identifies trends in digital preservation and collaborative approaches among curators, researchers, and communities. These efforts not only safeguard cultural heritage but also advance library and information science scholarship by informing archival theory, policy development, and community engagement frameworks. The research highlights the role of digital platforms and partnerships in preserving born-digital and digitized materials for interdisciplinary inquiry and inclusive knowledge production.

Keywords

Hong Kong collections, Chinese Canadian archives, Born-digital materials, Community collaboration, Diaspora studies

1. Introduction

“In the 1970s, when I was studying history at UBC, there weren’t a lot of Chinese Canadian books around, neither fiction nor non-fiction. To do Chinese Canadian history meant going through primary records to find a history to tell. What made things worse was that there weren’t a lot of sources to go to. Since then, of course, more materials have become available in archives, so today’s historians are having a field day.”

(Lee & Yee, 2024, p. 44)

This reflection by Paul Yee, an award-winning Chinese Canadian writer, underscores the scarcity of resources on Chinese Canadians and Hong Kong well into the 1970s. By the 1990s, scholars like Vivienne Poy began to benefit from emerging collections, such as those at the University of Toronto–York University Joint Centre for Asia Pacific Studies, which supported her dissertation and later publications. Then as a Senator, University Chancellor, and PhD candidate at the University of Toronto, Poy completed her dissertation *Calling Canada Home: Canadian Law and Immigrant Chinese Women from South China and Hong Kong, 1860–1990* in 2003. With support from the Joint Centre’s collections and networks, she continued her research and published *Passage to Promise Land: Voices of Chinese Immigrant Women to Canada* (2013). Poy was impressed by the unique resources made available to her through the Centre and recognized the vital role of documenting and archiving the immigrant experience of Hong Kong and Chinese Canadians. She became a strong advocate for creating programs, collections, and

archives supporting the preservation of Hong Kong and Chinese Canadian history, leading to the establishment of various academic programs, libraries, and archives on these studies.

Toronto has become a central hub for Hong Kong and Chinese Canadian archival resources. Home to the largest Chinese Canadian population in the country and continuing to attract significant numbers of Chinese immigrants (Lindsay, 2007), the city reflects Canada's strong interest in Sinophone cultures. With over 1.7 million Chinese Canadians nationwide (Government of Canada, 2022), cultural institutions—particularly in Toronto—have been actively collecting and preserving materials related to Hong Kong, China, and Chinese Canadians since the 1930s, beginning with a major Chinese collection at the Royal Ontario Museum. Today, notable programs and initiatives sustained by these collections include the Hong Kong Studies Group and Bernard Luk Hong Kong Lecture Series at York University, the Hong Kong Studies Initiative at the University of British Columbia, and the Chinese Canadian Studies Program at the University of Toronto. Hong Kong, as a primary source and transit point for Chinese immigrants and cultural artifacts, remains central to understanding Chinese and Chinese Canadian experiences and the transfer of these materials.

Despite significant progress, archival resources remain fragmented across institutions and formats, while the proliferation of born-digital materials introduces complex challenges for long-term preservation and access. This study addresses these issues by surveying major collections and initiatives in Canada and beyond, documenting their historical development and identifying emerging trends in digital curation and collaborative models. It argues that the sustainable preservation of Hong Kong and Chinese Canadian diasporic heritage in Canada hinges on two

interrelated strategies: the integration of advanced digital curation technologies and the establishment of collaborative frameworks among institutions, scholars, and communities.

By mitigating fragmentation and addressing the unique demands of born-digital content, these strategies not only safeguard cultural memory but also reconceptualize archival theory and practice within a transnational, interdisciplinary context. In pursuing these objectives, the research contributes to the scholarship of Library and Information Science (LIS) by proposing actionable approaches for the sustainable management of culturally significant digital archives, informing policy and infrastructure development for long-term preservation, and strengthening models for community engagement and interdisciplinary collaboration. This study demonstrates how coordinated efforts can preserve diasporic heritage and advance inclusive knowledge production by situating Hong Kong and Chinese Canadian collections within global archival practices.

2. Literature Review: Digital Collections and Community Collaboration

Research on Hong Kong-related and Chinese Canadian cultural collections consistently emphasizes that sustainable stewardship of diasporic heritage depends on aligning policy and standards with community collaboration and practice-based workflows. At the technical layer, comparative standards analyses in LIS highlight the interlocking roles of metadata schemas (e.g., MARC, Dublin Core), communication protocols (e.g., OAI-PMH), content standards (e.g., RDA), and digital preservation frameworks (e.g., OAIS, PREMIS) in enabling federated discovery and durable access across dispersed holdings—an imperative for Hong Kong and

Chinese Canadian materials distributed among academic libraries, public archives, and community repositories (Meghanandha & Naik, 2025).

Operationally, best practices for born-digital preservation converge on layered workflows: bit-level fixity verification, migration to sustainable formats, targeted emulation when required, and redundant storage documented through clear policies and roles. Practice-oriented literature translates these standards into repeatable processes and toolchains (e.g., Archivematica, LOCKSS) that sustain integrity and usability over time—approaches directly applicable to Hong Kong—focused diasporic collections that include oral histories, websites, social media captures, and community documentation (Verma & Sharma, 2023; Maurya, 2025).

Because diasporic records often originate in community settings, the LIS literature surveyed for this paper positions academic libraries as bridges that convene multi-institutional partnerships to collect, digitize, preserve, and teach with local materials. Case studies show how library–community collaboration yields inclusive curricula and reciprocal engagement that provide insight on embedding community voices in appraisal, description, and access decisions (Nunes & Rizvi, 2021). Nunes & Rizvi’s findings facilitate the understanding of collaborative approach that shapes how Hong Kong and Chinese Canadian narratives are represented. At the same time, scholarship analyzing research-library partnerships with community archives identifies recurring barriers—paternalistic attitudes, rigid membership and policy regimes, and workflow incompatibilities—and proposes actionable strategies to dismantle them through shared governance, workflow alignment, and capacity building (Martinez & Tallman, 2024). These

insights map closely onto the needs of Hong Kong diasporic collections, where consent, cultural context, and community trust are as central to stewardship as technical reliability.

Access to diasporic digital heritage is equally shaped by legal and ethical constraints. A detailed examination of copyright in born-digital preservation documents how core actions (copying, normalization, migration) intersect with layered rights, unclear publication status, and DRM, and recommends mitigations such as pre-acquisition rights clearance, fair-use analyses, and routine risk documentation embedded in workflows—practices essential for ethically stewarding politically sensitive Hong Kong materials (Fisher, 2021). Complementary work on access barriers argues that large portions of digital cultural data remain effectively “dark” due to privacy sensitivities and technical impediments; it calls for cross-disciplinary collaborations and the ethical use of AI—with transparency, consent, and governance—to responsibly unlock access while protecting stakeholders (Jaillant, 2022).

Recent LIS scholarship demonstrates how computational methods can amplify collaborative preservation without collapsing provenance or meaning. In *Our Heritage, Our Stories* (OHOS), researchers co-design AI tools with heritage partners to link dispersed community-generated cultural heritage at scale, improving discoverability while embedding community values and oversight—an approach germane to Hong Kong and Chinese Canadian materials scattered across local platforms and institutions (Hannaford et al., 2024). This strand of work aligns with calls for ethical use of AI in archives: using automation to connect and enrich records while sustaining human-centered consent and culturally responsive description (Jaillant, 2022; Hannaford et al., 2024).

Taken together, these literatures sketch a field-tested repertoire for cultural and diasporic collections on Hong Kong and Chinese Canadians. Policy and standards establish the technical grammar for interoperable stewardship (Meghanandha & Naik, 2025). Preservation workflows and tools operationalize integrity and long-term access for diverse born-digital objects (Verma & Sharma, 2023; Maurya, 2025). Community partnership and academic-library engagement supply governance models that elevate local agency and embed inclusive pedagogy (Nunes & Rizvi, 2021; Martinez & Tallman, 2024). Legal/ethical frameworks and AI-supported access address risk while expanding responsible discovery (Fisher, 2021; Jaillant, 2022; Hannaford et al., 2024). Collaborative conservation models further argue for moving from participation to co-creation, positioning communities as co-stewards whose knowledge informs appraisal, description, and access—strengthening trust and cultural sustainability in diasporic archives (Spiridon & Sandu, 2023).

Importantly, the benefits to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) are not incidental. Library–community partnerships and ethically governed technologies help un-silence voices historically marginalized in mainstream collections, diversify the historical record, and foster belonging through pedagogy and public engagement—outcomes directly relevant to Hong Kong diasporic heritage in Canada (Nunes & Rizvi, 2021; Hannaford et al., 2024). As the paper proceeds, this cohesive lens—standards, workflows, collaboration, ethics, and EDI—guides analysis of how Canadian institutions and communities build, preserve, and provide access to Hong Kong and Chinese Canadian cultural heritage in ways that are technically sound and socially just.

3. History of Hong Kong and Chinese in Canada

The literature reviewed above outlines the technical, collaborative, and ethical frameworks shaping contemporary diasporic archival practice. To situate these approaches, this section turns to the historical development of Hong Kong and Chinese migration to Canada, providing the context in which these archival records and research infrastructures emerged.

Hong Kong has served as a critical gateway connecting South China to the world since the 1840s when the British established colonial rule under the Qing Dynasty lease. Its strategic location made it a major emigration port, facilitating the movement of laborers and goods to North America and other continents from the 1840s to the 1920s. Almost all legal emigrants or contract laborers transited through Hong Kong before departing for destinations such as Canada, creating the first significant Canada–Hong Kong link. Tens of thousands of emigrants traveled to Canada between 1850 and 1922 as gold miners, railroad workers, and factory laborers, contributing to the building of early Canada. Networks and supplies from Hong Kong supported these workers’ journeys, remittances, and communication with families, forming a transnational system of exchange that scholars have described as the “Cantonese Pacific” (Sinn, 2013; Yu & Chan, 2017).

The first major group of Chinese arrived in Canada in 1858 during the Fraser River Gold Rush, initially migrating from the U.S. west coast to British Columbia. By the 1880s, Chinese workers began arriving directly from China via Hong Kong to build the Canadian Pacific Railway (Li, 1998; Lai, 2011; Leong 2019). After the railway’s completion in 1885, Chinese communities

expanded eastward, with Toronto's Chinese population growing from 159 in 1901 to much larger numbers in the early 20th century (Chan, 2012; Lai & Leong 2012).

Institutional collecting began in 1933 when William Charles White acquired approximately 40,000 volumes of Chinese classical texts for the University of Toronto, later housed in the Cheng Yu Tung East Asian Library (University of Toronto Libraries, n.d.). Immigration patterns in Canada shifted dramatically after the 1960s, with skilled migrants from urban regions—especially Hong Kong—forming a significant wave (Li, 2019; Lai, 2011). This demographic change spurred academic and community interest in documenting Hong Kong and Chinese Canadian experiences, leading to the establishment of the Canada–Hong Kong Resource Centre (1994) and the Richard Charles Lee Canada–Hong Kong Library (2008) (Yeung, 2003; Levine, 2019).

Understanding Chinese Canadians originated from Hong Kong and its surrounding Cantonese areas appears to be a critical step in studying Chinese Canadian history and their lived experience (Chan, 2012; Lai, 2011; Sinn, 2013). Scholars have emphasized Hong Kong's pivotal role as a migration hub and logistical center for Chinese emigrants during the 19th century, shaping transnational flows of people, capital, and information. These insights, combined with the growing academic and community interest, accentuate why dedicated collections and archives on Hong Kong and Chinese Canadian studies have become essential resources for preserving and interpreting this history.

4. Collections and Archives of Hong Kong and Chinese Canadian Studies at the University of Toronto Libraries

Building on the historical trajectories of Hong Kong and Chinese migration to Canada, this section examines how these developments shaped the establishment of major institutional collections and archival infrastructures dedicated to preserving this diasporic heritage.

It begins by outlining the formation, scope, and significance of these collections, with particular attention to the University of Toronto Libraries' role in consolidating, curating, and sustaining materials essential to Hong Kong and Chinese Canadian studies.

4.1 The Richard Charles Lee Canada-Hong Kong Library

Located at the University of Toronto, the Richard Charles Lee Canada–Hong Kong Library (RCL-CHKL) is the result of decades of institutional collecting and community engagement dedicated to preserving Hong Kong and Chinese Canadian heritage. It builds on the Canada–Hong Kong Resource Centre and the Canada–Hong Kong Project, which consolidated thousands of items documenting Hong Kong's development, Canada–Hong Kong relations, and immigrant communities, supported by philanthropic contributions and collaborative networks.

Under my leadership as its founding director (2007–2020), the Library expanded its mandate and infrastructure to become the largest research collection on Hong Kong and Chinese Canadian studies in North America. Today, its holdings include more than 72,000 processed volumes, historical newspapers, manuscripts, oral histories, and community archives, complemented by active seminar and outreach programs that position the Library as a hub for scholarly exchange and cultural memory.

The Library inherited approximately 43,000 volumes and hundreds of archival boxes from the Canada–Hong Kong Resource Centre, along with community-based documents and manuscripts essential for studying Chinese Canadians, particularly Hong Kong immigrants. These resources originated from the Canada–Hong Kong Project (University of Toronto–York University Joint Centre for Asia Pacific Studies), launched in 1990 with support from the Donner Canadian Foundation. The Project produced about 5,000 items covering three major areas: Hong Kong’s development leading up to 1997, Canada–Hong Kong relations, and Hong Kong immigrant communities in Canada. These materials formed the core of the Resource Centre, established in 1994 with funding from HSBC and other donors (Yeung, 2003). The Centre later broadened its scope to include Chinese Canadian studies.

In 2005, a \$3 million donation enabled the creation of a permanent facility for these collections, officially opened in 2008 as the Richard Charles Lee Canada–Hong Kong Library. Within a decade, RCL-CHKL became the largest research collection of its kind in North America. It welcomed about 50,000 visitors annually and hosted more than 120 conferences, seminars, and exhibits. The following subsections highlight notable collections and events that illustrate the breadth and research value of this documentary record for scholars and community users.

RCL-CHKL’s representative collections advance the paper’s central claim: sustainable stewardship of Hong Kong and Chinese Canadian diasporic heritage depends on integrating standards-driven digital curation with community-centred collaboration, thereby reducing fragmentation and preserving born-digital/digitized materials for inclusive scholarship (Meghanandha & Naik, 2025). Collaboration with donors, communities, and partner institutions

supports equitable governance and EDI outcomes essential to diasporic archives (Nunes & Rizvi, 2021).

4.1.1 The Battle of Hong Kong

The Battle of Hong Kong collection documents the 1941 defense of Hong Kong, where approximately 2,000 Canadian soldiers joined British and local forces to resist Japanese invasion. This episode represents a pivotal moment in Hong Kong's wartime history and highlights a unique people-to-people connection between Hong Kong and Canada. The collection includes memorials, reprints of British Army Aid Group records, and rare personal diaries and autobiographical notes donated by veterans and event speakers, such as George S. MacDonell and members of the Hong Kong Veteran Association.

By preserving primary sources and personal narratives, the collection provides scholars and the public with critical evidence to explore Hong Kong's role in World War II and Canada's military engagement in Asia. These materials illuminate the geopolitical significance of Hong Kong during the Pacific War and offer insights into the lived experiences of Canadian soldiers and Hong Kong residents during occupation. This historical lens enriches studies of transnational wartime alliances and the broader trajectory of Canada–Hong Kong relations, complementing diplomatic and migration histories.

Symposiums and commemorative events hosted by RCL-CHKL around this collection serve as interpretive platforms that connect archival evidence with community memory. These gatherings enable veterans, historians, and community members to share perspectives, fostering dialogue

that situates the Battle of Hong Kong within both Canadian military history and Hong Kong's colonial narrative. Such programming transforms the archive from a static repository into a dynamic space for public history, reinforcing the Library's role as a hub for scholarly exchange and cultural remembrance.

Community contributions exemplify co-stewardship and inclusive description, aligning with LIS literature on participatory governance (Nunes & Rizvi, 2021). Given the sensitive nature of wartime diaries and personal accounts, workflows incorporate rights clearance, privacy safeguards, and risk documentation to ensure ethical access and long-term preservation (Fisher, 2021). These measures uphold the paper's thesis that sustainable stewardship requires both technical rigor and culturally responsive collaboration.

4.1.2 Carl T. Smith Collection

The Carl T. Smith Collection consists of 56 reels of microfilm and approximately 140,000 double-sided data cards, meticulously compiled over 25 years from original records, newspapers, and publications held by the Public Records Office in Hong Kong. These materials document individuals, organizations, land transactions, infrastructure, and significant events across Hong Kong, Macau, and China's coastal cities from the mid-19th century onward.

While microfilm has historically served as a preservation medium, its long-term sustainability is increasingly challenged by format obsolescence and physical degradation. Digitization is therefore an essential next step to ensure future accessibility and usability. Converting these reels and data cards into high-resolution digital surrogates will not only safeguard the content against

physical deterioration but also enable integration with modern discovery platforms and federated search systems.

4.1.3 Hong Kong Art and Culture Collection

This collection includes hundreds of exhibition catalogues and art pieces donated by Laurence Tam, former chief curator of the Hong Kong Museum of Art, notably a series of six black-and-white aerial photographs of Hong Kong from the 1860s. The donation originated from an exhibition of Tam's materials and his students' artworks, which showcased the blending of Western and Chinese painting techniques. The collection was later enriched by approximately 200 artworks from Henry Ho, a Hong Kong artist residing in Toronto, whose cartoons depict major events and figures leading up to 1997.

Both Tam and Ho were not passive donors; they actively participated in curating exhibitions and organizing cultural events that contextualized their works within Hong Kong's artistic and historical narrative. Their involvement ensured that the collection reflects authentic cultural perspectives and interpretive frameworks, aligning with participatory models emphasized in LIS literature (Nunes & Rizvi, 2021; Spiridon & Sandu, 2023). These collaborative exhibitions served as platforms for dialogue between artists, scholars, and the public, transforming the archive into a dynamic cultural hub rather than a static repository.

Through these events and exhibitions, RCL-CHKL widened its network of Hong Kong and diaspora artists, fostering new donations and partnerships. This network-building function strengthens the Library's role as a connector between communities and institutions, enabling

future acquisitions and collaborative projects that amplify underrepresented voices in art history and diaspora studies.

4.2 Richard Charles Lee Chinese Canadian Archives

In 2019, a major endowment donation enabled the establishment of the Richard Charles Lee Chinese Canadian Archive to “collect, preserve and digitize cultural and personal records and stories from the Chinese diaspora in Canada, including oral histories, video and photographs” (Levine 2019). Serving as the Archive’s initial core, the following fonds provide a strong foundation for documenting and interpreting the diverse experiences of Chinese Canadians.

4.2.1 David Chuen-Yan Lai’s Chinese Canadian Research Archive

This collection contains over 120 archival boxes of research materials, accumulated over 35 years of Lai’s academic research of Chinese Canadian studies. It covers the subjects of Geography of Canadian and American Chinatowns, Strategies for Chinatown Redevelopment Projects, Asian themed Malls in North America, Chinese Arches in Canada, Chinese Canadian associations and leadership, and the Chinese Canadian history. Although based primarily in Victoria, British Columbia, Lai decided to donate this collection to University of Toronto for his commitment to mandate of RCL-CHKL, his family connection with Toronto, and his pioneer work in resolving tension created by the influx of Hong Kong immigrants to Toronto in the 1980s and 1990s. A couple of large scale events were organized spinning from the donation of this collection.

Lai's active involvement in donating and contextualizing his research exemplifies participatory description, a principle emphasized in community-archive scholarship (Nunes & Rizvi, 2021; Spiridon & Sandu, 2023). Rather than imposing institutional metadata schemas in isolation, curators collaborated with Lai to capture provenance, interpretive notes, and thematic groupings that reflect his scholarly intent and cultural perspective. This co-created descriptive layer enhances discoverability while embedding community voice in appraisal and access decisions—advancing equity, diversity, and inclusion goals central to diasporic archives.

4.2.2 Vivienne Poy's Archive

Vivienne Poy's fonds—comprising speeches, archival records, research papers, and books from her 14-year tenure in the Senate of Canada (1998–2012)—offers critical resources for understanding Asian Canadian leadership, gender and multiculturalism, entrepreneurship, and philanthropy. As the first Canadian senator of Asian descent, Poy's collection is not only historically significant but also symbolically powerful in diversifying Canada's political and cultural narrative.

The acquisition of Poy's archive reflects a relationship-driven approach to collection development, where trust and mutual respect between the donor and the institution underpin successful stewardship. Poy's decision to deposit her records at RCL-CHKL was informed by her long-standing advocacy for documenting Hong Kong and Chinese Canadian experiences and her recognition of the Library's mandate. This partnership exemplifies best practices in donor engagement: transparent communication about preservation goals, acknowledgment of donor intent, and public recognition through exhibitions, seminars, and outreach programs. Such

recognition not only honors the donor's contributions but also strengthens community confidence in archival institutions—an outcome emphasized in participatory governance models discussed in LIS literature (Nunes & Rizvi, 2021; Spiridon & Sandu, 2023; Martinez & Tallman, 2024).

4.2.3 Cantonese opera in Toronto

There are significant efforts from the Chinese community to preserve and transmit Cantonese opera as a performing art that promotes transcultural identity and cultural heritage. The creation of Cantonese Opera in Canada collection provides a hub for documenting and presenting Cantonese opera activities. This collection includes playbills, newspapers, photos, and anthologies of lyrics, recordings and other archival materials from a number of Chinese opera centres in Toronto, such as Starlight Chinese Opera Performing Arts Centre, Soong Kam Wing Music and Arts Centre and the Lau Wing Chuen School of Chinese Opera. One of the highlights of this collection comes from the Beatrice and Raymond Jai Fonds. Beatrice Jai, who along with her husband, Raymond, played an important role in developing Cantonese Opera in Toronto. This fonds includes numerous photographs, documents, and audio recordings pertaining to Cantonese Opera. The materialization of this initiative involves collaboration among Julie Jai, who donated her family records on this very important topic, researchers Lisa Mar and Xing Fan, and current Chinese opera practitioners Alice Chan and Marianne Lui.

The creation and enrichment of this collection exemplify multi-layered collaboration among diverse stakeholders. Donors like Julie Jai contributed family records, ensuring the preservation of personal and community narratives. Researchers such as Lisa Mar and Xing Fan provided

scholarly framing and contextual interpretation, while information professionals designed metadata schemas and preservation workflows to ensure discoverability and long-term access. Opera practitioners—including Alice Chan and Marianne Lui—offered insider knowledge on performance traditions, repertoire, and cultural significance, shaping descriptive practices and interpretive notes. Students engaged through internships and research projects, contributing oral histories and digitization work that bridged academic inquiry with community heritage. This synergy reflects the co-creation model advocated in LIS literature, moving beyond token participation toward shared governance and reciprocal knowledge exchange (Nunes & Rizvi, 2021; Spiridon & Sandu, 2023; Martinez & Tallman, 2024).

By embedding community voices and professional expertise into appraisal, description, and outreach, the collection advances equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) goals and strengthens cultural sustainability. It also operationalizes the paper’s thesis: sustainable stewardship of diasporic heritage depends on integrating technical curation standards with collaborative frameworks that honor provenance and cultural context. This approach transforms the archive into a living resource for research, pedagogy, and public engagement, ensuring that Cantonese opera remains accessible and meaningful for future generations.

4.3 The Curation of Born-digital Materials and Digitized Materials

Adding to the collaborative approaches highlighted in Section 4.2, which demonstrated how community partnerships enrich physical archives, the next critical dimension of sustainable stewardship is the curation of digital materials. This trend, recognized for decades in library and archival science, has evolved from a technical necessity into a strategic priority for cultural

heritage institutions worldwide (Verma & Sharma, 2023; Maurya, 2025). Its importance lies not only in safeguarding fragile or born-digital resources but also in transforming how Hong Kong and Chinese Canadian studies are taught and researched. Digital collections—whether digitized surrogates of print materials or born-digital documents—enable interdisciplinary and collaborative inquiry, supporting innovative methodologies such as text mining, data visualization, and spatial analysis (Meghanandha & Naik, 2025). These capabilities connect dispersed materials, foster comparative studies, and amplify community voices, advancing the inclusive and transnational perspectives emphasized throughout this paper.

To illustrate these impacts, the following examples showcase how RCL-CHKL has curated significant digital collections—ranging from editorial clippings of Chinese newspapers to comprehensive archives on Hong Kong’s sovereignty transfer and political movements. Each case demonstrates how digitization and rights-aware workflows not only preserve content but also unlock new research possibilities and public engagement.

4.3.1 Editorial clippings of Chinese newspapers (1947-57)

Digitized from approximately 40 folders of brittle clippings donated in 2016, this collection documents civil war dynamics in China, Cold War geopolitics, and their impact on Chinese communities in Canada. Immediate digitization mitigated deterioration and enabled computational analysis. Workflows applied fixity checks, normalization, and redundant storage, combined with metadata standards (MARC, Dublin Core) and OAIS/PREMIS frameworks for interoperability (Meghanandha & Naik, 2025; Verma & Sharma, 2023). These measures align with best practices for managing digitized content and support advanced research methods.

Ethical considerations—such as rights clearance and persistent URLs—address risks highlighted LIS literature (Fisher, 2021).

4.3.2 Hong Kong 1997 Collection

This collection of digitized and open-access materials documents the transfer of Hong Kong’s sovereignty from the United Kingdom to the People’s Republic of China in 1997—a turning point that drew global attention following the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984.

Coordinated by Simon Fraser University and funded by Multicultural Canada, the Library digitized and cleared copyright for approximately 15,000 pages of books, academic papers, original artworks, manuscripts, newspaper clippings, ephemeral materials, photographs, and government documents. This project operationalized layered preservation workflows and rights governance to ensure long-term access to materials of diverse subjects, including “one country, two systems,” the Basic Law, the Sino-British Joint Declaration, the Opium War, and immigration to Canada.

This collection deepens understanding of Hong Kong’s political transition and its impact on migration patterns, identity formation, and transnational networks—issues central to diaspora studies. It provides primary sources for examining how Hong Kong Canadians interpreted sovereignty transfer and negotiated cultural belonging during a period of uncertainty, reinforcing the Literature Review’s emphasis on archives as tools for inclusive pedagogy and community engagement (Nunes & Rizvi, 2021).

4.3.3 Hong Kong Political Movements

In 2007, the National People's Congress Standing Committee set 2017 and 2020 as the target years for implementing direct elections for Hong Kong's Chief Executive and the Legislative Council. However, as these dates approached, public support for the pro-democracy camp consistently remained above 50 percent, reflecting a widening gap between public expectations and official timelines for democratic reform (Hung, 2022). Growing frustration over stalled progress led to escalating political tensions and ultimately the 2014 Umbrella Movement, during which protesters used umbrellas to shield themselves from tear gas.

The Hong Kong Political Movements web archive began by capturing open-access online materials related to the Umbrella Movement through Archive-It. It later expanded to include documentation of major political developments, including interpretations of the Basic Law, the extradition law controversy, and the implementation of the National Security Law. These additions help preserve evidence of rapidly evolving political conditions and public responses. Born-digital political content is highly vulnerable to deletion, censorship, and platform instability. The project therefore applies preservation strategies that address the risks and access challenges identified in studies of digital cultural heritage, including the need for rights-aware workflows, privacy safeguards, and transparent governance (Jaillant, 2022; Hannaford et al., 2024). In addition to the web archive, the Library's print collection has expanded through major donations from scholars Bernard Luk, Ming K. Chan, and Sonny Lo, whose research materials offer long-term historical depth.

Together, these online and print collections document Hong Kong's recent political transformations and support research on how these developments shape migration patterns, identity formation, and diasporic memory.

4.4 Fostering Deeper Collaboration among Curators, Researchers and the Community

Apart from scholarly publications, Hong Kong and Chinese Canadian initiatives also collect practical and expressive materials through their community outreach programs. The building of these records is contributed largely by individuals and community organizations. This leads to another important trend in collecting and curating Hong Kong and Chinese Canadian materials – the collaborative approach. Information professionals and researchers are logical partners with the necessary skill sets to sustain and preserve archives and repositories for special collections. As the literature review underscores, diasporic records often originate in community contexts where cultural knowledge, trust, and lived experience shape both the creation and interpretation of materials. Effective stewardship therefore requires shared governance, workflow alignment, and participatory engagement among curators, researchers, donors, and community members (Nunes & Rizvi, 2021; Martinez & Tallman, 2024). These collaborations not only enrich the archives with unique content but also advance inclusive pedagogy and strengthen relationships of accountability that are central to diasporic heritage preservation.

The following initiatives illustrate how RCL-CHKL's partnership-driven model operationalizes these principles by generating original documentation, enhancing research capacity, and deepening public understanding of Hong Kong's transnational experience.

4.4.1 The Chinese in Toronto Project (2010 – 2016)

Developed with the support of 14 student interns from Hong Kong over seven summers, this project gathered survey data and research on generations of Chinese Torontonians, using both library resources and the Library's community networks.

The project demonstrates how students, community members, and researchers can co-produce primary data on adaptation, language, identity, media consumption, and political participation—areas often understudied in traditional archives. By engaging emerging scholars directly with community knowledge holders, the project embodies the literature review's call for participatory appraisal and inclusive curricula that bridge academic inquiry with lived experience (Nunes & Rizvi, 2021).

4.4.2 The Hong Kong-Canada Crosscurrents Project (2014 – 2019)

This multi-institutional collaboration provided coordination and repository infrastructure to document migration flows, cultural connections, and the changing dynamics between Hong Kong and Canada from the 1960s to the 2010s.

The project exemplifies Martinez & Tallman's (2024) emphasis on aligning workflows across research libraries and community archives to overcome barriers such as inconsistent policies and resource limitations. It brought together researchers, librarians, and archivists to create shared tools, digital collections, and public education resources, directly aligning with the thesis that interoperable platforms and collaborative governance can reduce fragmentation and sustain diasporic heritage over time.

5. Global Initiatives on Hong Kong and Chinese Canadian studies

In developing collections, academic programs, and community outreach, I have collaborated with or visited a number of international and inter-institutional initiatives that collectively shape the global landscape of Hong Kong and Chinese Canadian studies. These partnerships illustrate how archives, museums, research networks, and universities across North America, Europe, and Hong Kong mobilize shared expertise, distributed stewardship, and coordinated knowledge infrastructures to document, preserve, and interpret Hong Kong-related materials. As the following examples demonstrate, such collaboration strengthens research capacity, supports cross-regional comparative work, and expands access to culturally significant resources—further reinforcing this paper’s emphasis on cooperative models of preservation and the need for multi-institutional strategies to sustain diasporic heritage over time.

5.1 Toronto Public Library – Chinese Canadian Archive

Launched in 2016, this community-built archive collects multilingual materials documenting the lives, activities, and contributions of Chinese Canadians in the Greater Toronto Area. It includes photographs, diaries, correspondence, calligraphy, and official records, with a growing portion digitized and made openly accessible.

5.2 The Chung Collection & Chinese Canadian Stories (University of British Columbia)

The Chung Collection, comprising more than 25,000 rare items collected by Wallace B. Chung, provides extensive documentation of early Chinese migration, settlement, and railway labour in British Columbia. Complementing this is UBC Library’s Chinese Canadian Stories, a set of

open-access digital collections featuring photographs, audiovisual materials, manuscripts, and organizational records contributed by institutional and community partners.

5.3 Chinese Canadian Museum (Vancouver)

Opened in 2023 in Vancouver’s historic Wing Sang Building, the Museum has quickly become a leading site for public history and education. Exhibits such as The Paper Trail to the 1923 Chinese Exclusion Act highlight key events in Chinese Canadian history, while the Museum’s Research Room and community programs foster ongoing engagement and learning.

5.4 Hoover Institution – Hong Kong Documentary Archives (Stanford University)

Established in 1999 by Ming K. Chan, this archive contains corporate reports, serials, newsletters, pamphlets, press summaries, election literature, audiovisual recordings, and memorabilia documenting Hong Kong’s political, social, and economic conditions from 1841 to 1997 (Hoover Institute, 2025). The collection is a major resource for studying colonial governance, business networks, and the transition to Chinese sovereignty.

5.5 University of Toronto – Richard Charles Lee Chair in Chinese Canadian Studies

Established in 2012, the Chair advances research and teaching on Chinese Canadian and transnational Asian studies. Holder-led activities—including seminars, symposia, and community collaborations—strengthen ties between academia and the public while enriching library collections with unique archival contributions.

Alongside these major collections, academic programs and scholarly initiatives also play a central role in advancing Hong Kong and Chinese Canadian studies. Together, they extend the impact of archival resources by providing research frameworks, pedagogical structures, and collaborative networks that support sustained scholarly and community engagement.

5.6 York University – Hong Kong Studies Group

Supported by the York Centre for Asian Research, the Hong Kong Studies Group promotes interdisciplinary dialogue on Hong Kong’s history, culture, identity, and politics. Through seminars, the Bernard H.K. Luk Memorial Lecture, and the Global Hong Kong Essay and Creative Project Award, the Group fosters scholarly exchange and encourages student research.

5.7 UBC Hong Kong Studies Initiative

Founded by Leo Shin, the Initiative promotes integrated teaching, research, and community engagement on Hong Kong as both a Chinese metropolis and a global hub. Courses, public events, and collaborative projects build bridges between scholars, students, and the broader community, particularly in the context of Hong Kong migration to Canada’s West Coast.

5.8 Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project (Stanford University)

This transnational initiative documents the experiences of Chinese labourers—many of whom migrated through Hong Kong—who built the North American railroads in the nineteenth century. The project offers digital archives, timelines, visualizations, publications, and public programming, reflecting extensive collaboration among scholars, librarians, and community leaders.

5.9 Society for Hong Kong Studies (Hong Kong)

Formed in 2017 and affiliated with the Association for Asian Studies, the Society serves as a global platform for interdisciplinary Hong Kong studies. Through conferences, awards, and publication support, it fosters an international scholarly community and the development of new approaches to understanding Hong Kong in regional and global contexts.

5.10 Hong Kong Studies Association (United Kingdom)

This Europe-based association supports scholars researching Hong Kong by organizing annual conferences and publishing Hong Kong Insight. Its mandate includes facilitating collaboration, promoting research, and fostering communication among specialists across disciplines and institutions.

These global initiatives collectively demonstrate the expanding scope and interdisciplinary nature of Hong Kong and Chinese Canadian studies. By connecting academic institutions, community organizations, and international networks, they contribute to a robust and collaborative research environment. Their diverse collections and programs enrich teaching, support public engagement, and provide essential resources for understanding Hong Kong's complex histories and its diasporic communities worldwide.

6. Conclusion

This paper has surveyed leading collections, archives, and initiatives related to Hong Kong and its diasporas across North America and Europe. Two interrelated trends are essential for sustaining these resources:

- (1) the strategic development of digital materials and preservation platforms, and
- (2) the deepening of collaboration among curators, researchers, and community members.

As Hong Kong has undergone major political, social, and legal shifts—including its increasing integration with Mainland China, the passage of the National Security Law in 2020, and the continued out-migration of dissenting communities—the focus of many collections has naturally shifted toward documenting the Hong Kong diaspora. This shift presents new opportunities to record the lived experiences of Hong Kong people, both their memories of past events and their migration journeys.

Sustainable stewardship in this context depends on attentive digital preservation practices, including rights management, privacy safeguards, and maintaining persistent URLs to ensure long-term accessibility. For example, as heritage collections migrate to large platforms such as CRKN's Canadiana, original URLs are often not retained or redirected at item level, undermining previous indexing and citation work undertaken by researchers and information professionals. Similar challenges arise when preserving politically sensitive born-digital materials, where copyright, identity protection, and personal safety must be carefully assessed.

Finally, the long-term impact of Hong Kong and Chinese Canadian collections will be strengthened through coordinated, multi-institutional collaboration. While efforts to document Chinese Canadian and American histories remain vital, the rapid disappearance of born-digital materials created by recent Hong Kong migrants requires urgent, collective action. By adopting shared platforms such as Archive-It, Archivematica, Figshare, DSpace, Islandora, and Scholar Portal services (PermaFrost and Scholaris), institutions can perhaps jointly address the challenges of acquisition, digitization, preservation, and access, ensuring that Hong Kong's diasporic memories remain discoverable and durable for future generations.

References

- Chan, A. (2012). *The Chinese in Toronto from 1878*. Toronto: Dundurn.
- Chinese Canadian Museum. (2025). "Our History: Connecting to the Chinese Canadian Story." <https://www.chinesecanadianmuseum.ca/about/our-story>
- Fisher, K. (2021). Copyright and preservation of born-digital materials: Persistent challenges and selected strategies. *The American Archivist*, 83(2), 238–267. <https://doi.org/10.17723/0360-9081-83.2.238>
- Government of Canada, Statistics Canada. (2022). "Profile table, Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population – Canada [Country]". <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca>
- Hannaford, E. D., Schlegel, V., Lewis, R., Ramsden, S., Bunn, J., Moore, J., Alexander, M., Barker, H., Batista-Navarro, R., Hughes, L., & Nenadic, G. (2024). Our Heritage, Our Stories: Developing AI tools to link and support community-generated digital cultural heritage. *Journal of Documentation*, 80(5), 1133–1147. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JD-03-2024-0057>

Hong Kong Studies Association. (n. d.). “About”

<https://www.hongkongstudiesassociation.co.uk/p/about.html>

Hoover Institute. (2025). “Hong Kong.” [https://www.hoover.org/library-](https://www.hoover.org/library-archives/collections/hong-kong)

[archives/collections/hong-kong](https://www.hoover.org/library-archives/collections/hong-kong)

Hung, H.F. (2022). *City on the Edge: Hong Kong under Chinese Rule*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jaillant, L. (2022). How can we make born-digital and digitised archives more accessible?

Identifying obstacles and solutions. *Archival Science*, 22(3), 417–436.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-022-09390-7>

Lai, C. Y. (2011). “A Brief Chronology of Chinese Canadian History: From Segregation to Integration.” Chinese Canadian History Public Education Project, David See-Chai Lam Centre for International Communication. Vancouver: Simon Fraser University.

http://www.sfu.ca/chinese-canadian-history/chart_en.html

Lai, C. Y. and J. H. Leong. (2012). “Toronto Chinatowns 1878-2012.” Chinese Canadian History Public Education Project, Canada Chinatown Series, David See-Chai Lam Centre for International Communication. Vancouver: Simon Fraser University.

http://www.sfu.ca/chinese-canadian-history/toronto_chinatown.html

Lee, C. and P. Yee. (2024). “From the Past, for the Future: An Interview with Paul Yee.”

Canadian Literature (257): 44-68.

Leong, J. H. (2019). “The Hong Kong Connection for the Chinese Railroad Workers in North America.” Stanford University Chinese Railroad Workers of North America Project.

<https://web.stanford.edu/group/chineserailroad/cgi-bin/website/the-hong-kong-connection-for-the-chinese-railroad-workers-in-north-america/>

- Levine, R. (2019). "U of T receives \$4-million donation to create Chinese-Canadian archive." U of T News. <https://www.utoronto.ca/news/u-t-receives-4-million-donation-create-chinese-canadian-archives>
- Li, J. T. (2019). "Introduction: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Transcultural Negotiations of Chinese Canadian Identities." In Li, Jessica T. Ed. *The Transcultural Streams of Chinese Canadian Identities*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Li, P. S. (1998). *Chinese in Canada*. 2nd edition. Toronto: Oxford University Press.
- Lindsay, C. (2007). "Profiles of Ethnic Communities in Canada: The Chinese Community in Canada 2001". <https://publications.gc.ca/Collection/Statcan/89-621-X/89-621-XIE2006001.pdf>
- Martinez, R., & Tallman, N. (2024). Fostering collaboration between research libraries and community archives to preserve the "Network of Mutuality." In *Proceedings of iPRES 2024: International Conference on Digital Preservation*.
<https://doi.org/10.21428/5676bf2d.6ce0dcfd>
- Maurya, S. (2025). Preserving born-digital content. In J. Kumar & M. V. Sedam (Eds.), *Advancing library and information science: Innovations, practices, and future directions* (pp. 139–144). Vyom Hans Press. <https://doi.org/10.34256/vadlibs.25.11.139>
- Meghanandha, U., & Naik, U. (2025). A comparative review of metadata, communication, content, and digital preservation standards in modern libraries. *American Journal of Information Science and Technology*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ajist.20250901.13>

- Nunes, C., & Rizvi, S. A. T. (2021). Community-based digital archives to support diversifying campuses and enhance community involvement. *portal: Libraries and the Academy*, 21(1), 47–62.
- Poy, V. (2003). “Calling Canada Home: Canadian Law and Immigrant Chinese Women from South China and Hong Kong, 1860-1990.” PhD diss., University of Toronto.
- . (2013). *Passage to Promise Land*. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s UP.
- Sinn, E. (2013). *Pacific crossing: California gold, Chinese migration, and the making of Hong Kong*. Hong Kong University Press.
- Society for Hong Kong Studies. (2025). “About SHKS.” <https://hkstudies.org/about/>
- Spiridon, P., & Sandu, I. (2023). Conservation of cultural heritage: From participation to collaboration. *ENCATC Journal of Cultural Management and Policy*, 5(1), 43-53.
- Toronto Public Library. (n.d.), “Chinese Canadian Archive.”
<https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/chinese-canadian-archive/>
- University College, University of Toronto. (2025). “Richard Charles Lee Chair in Chinese Canadian Studies.” <https://www.uc.utoronto.ca/canadian-studies/rcl-chair>
- University of British Columbia Library. (n. d.). “Open Collections – Chinese Canadian Stories.”
<https://open.library.ubc.ca/collections/chinesecanadianstories>
- . (n.d.). “The Chung Collection.” <https://chung.library.ubc.ca/>
- University of British Columbia. (n. d.). “Hong Kong Studies Initiative.” <https://hksi.ubc.ca/>
- University of Toronto Libraries. (n.d.). *East Asian Library history*. Cheng Yu Tung East Asian Library. <https://east.library.utoronto.ca/about/history>

- Verma, R., & Sharma, A. K. (2023). Digital preservation and conservation of library collections in the digital age: Issues and challenges. *Library Progress (International)*, 43(2), 259–269. <https://doi.org/10.48165/bpas.2023.43.2.13>
- Yeung, Peter. (2003). “Canada-Hong Kong Resource Centre: The Collection.” Canada-Hong Kong Resource Centre Reports (internal documents), University of Toronto.
- York University. (n.d.). “Hong Kong Studies Group.” <https://www.yorku.ca/research/year/hong-kong-studies-group/>
- Yu, H. and S. Chan. (2017). “The Cantonese Pacific: Migration Networks and Mobility Across Space and Time” in Wong, L. L. Ed. *Trans-Pacific Mobilities: The Chinese and Canada*. Vancouver: UBC Press.