

Provenance in Books in a Post British Colony-

Examples from the University Archives and Special Collection at the University of Hong Kong.

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This essay aims to introduce the research in provenance of some of the western books in both the Morrison Library and Hankow Club Collection held by the Special Collection (SC) and Edmund Blunden's rare books collected by the University Archives (UA) at the University of Hong Kong Libraries (HKUL). The provenance includes their history of use and acquisition, physicality, marks of ownership, colonial legislation that affects acquisition, and the loss of ownership during the Japanese Occupation. It will also discuss the different bookplates found in some of the books and the use of the University Coat of Arms which

indicates colonial ties.

Book provenance is defined as information concerning the transmission or ownership of a book. A special binding, bookplate, or inscription may indicate previous owners, collections, or institutions through which a particular book has passed. The intent of capturing such information is to provide proof of a continuous chain of custody and therefore the authenticity of the work. Another, more common reason for securing this information is to highlight the prestige of the copy in-hand by enumerating illustrious past owners. Hence, the provenance of a rare book assists in determining an acquisition and, in some cases, be used for retrieval at collecting institutions.¹

Researching provenance in books is based on physical evidence present within the books. The physical evidence of ownership takes many forms including bookplates, signatures, inscriptions, stamps, annotations, marginalia and stamped bindings. Records of book ownership and physical format should be maintained for research value to literary, historical, and bibliographical scholarship, as well as sentimental reasons. Traditional recognition of the importance of provenance evidence has been confirmed and expanded by the development of the recent study of the history of the book and its explorations into the social history of book production, reading, book ownership, book collecting, and histories of personal, public as well as institutional libraries.² Another significant aspect of recording ownership in book

collecting and the records of cultural heritage is that provenance concerns not only the initial origins of books but also the ongoing connections to collectors and collections. This defines the owner(s) or the collecting institution(s).³ For special collections librarians, archivists and patrons, provenance is an important aspect, highlighting the evidence of previous ownership of materials. In addition to research interests in the content of rare books, scholars working in archives and special collections may also focus on the materials as objects and the evidence of provenance they reveal.⁴

For researchers of provenance of books, provenance information may cover the whole life cycle of the archival materials, books, or records, from their creation and evolution to acquisition, processing, preservation, access and trades. All socio-political context, technical and physical details fall within the scope of provenance.⁵ Therefore, understanding the history of acquisition is a way to explore the provenance of some rare books in addition to studying the physicality of the books at HKUL. Investigating the acquisition history of a particular book or collection helps with reconstructing the content of an historical library, which is one of the aspects of provenance research in books.⁶ Acquisition, changes in stewardship or ownership, and transfer of ownership forms provenance.

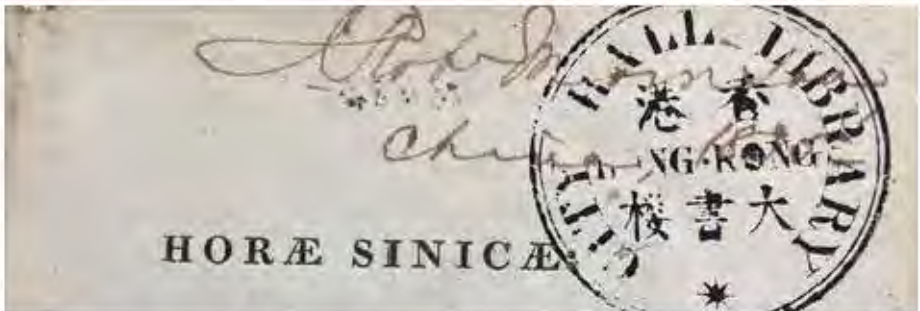
Most of the rare books held at HKUL were collected through acquisitions and donations. HKUL was established when HKU first opened in 1912 and was housed in two rooms of the Main Building until after the Second World War when the University entered a period of unprecedented expansion, including its collections of books. In 1912, Colonial Secretary and Sinologist Sir Cecil Clementi donated the first rare books collection in Chinese comprising a 1,628-volume edition of a Chinese Encyclopaedia, known as *Gujin Tushu Jicheng* (in Mandarin) or *T'o Shu Tsap Shing* (in Cantonese) meaning mixed collection of pictorial books. These encyclopaedia were completed in 1725 during the reigns of the emperors Kangxi (1662-1722) and Yongzheng (1723-35). 1912 was also the year in which the Library was gifted its first major rare book collection – the Morrison Library. It originally formed the basis of the Morrison Education Society Library set up in 1806 by members of the English 'factory' in Canton and was named after the protestant missionary Dr. Robert Morrison (1782-1834). The collection of 3,500 volumes was moved to Macau in 1841. In 1869 the collection became part of the newly opened City Hall Library in Central, Hong Kong.

Morrison Library

The Morrison Library was originally opened to the public in Canton in 1838 but, as a consequence of the threatening state of political affairs at the time, was removed to Macau. The Library was then transferred to Hong Kong in 1842 and the private library of the Honourable J R Morrison, son of Robert Morrison, was added to the Collection. After returning to Canton the interest previously taken in its fortunes by the foreign community subsided. The books, once shelved in a room at Honam, China, were left in non-environmentally controlled conditions where damp air from the local river resulted in degradation. Few people except students of the languages or manners of China ever consulted the decaying volumes. A partial effort at restoration was made, with around 1,500 volumes expertly rebound. These volumes constitute the usable portion of the library today. In 1845, when the last printed catalogue of the collection was issued, 4,140 volumes were listed and these were remarkably rich in topics such as languages, biblical literature, geography, voyages, travels and history, including 438 volumes on China. Many of the volumes had been added to the collection back then, but no record of them exists in the current HKUL catalogue.⁷

The recording of provenance is of particular importance in finding aids and catalogues of archives and special collections as knowledge of provenance lends authenticity and reliability to the materials held. Therefore, the documented circumstances by which individual materials were originally assembled, created and then received by the holding institution constitute perhaps the most valuable pieces of documentation relating to a collection as a whole and provide scholars with a record of authenticity and reliability essential to research. Provenance evidence in books consists of documentation of acquisition, their ownership, and those markings left by not only former owners in the legal sense but also by any who may have had temporary custody of the materials.⁸ The Morrison Library was loaned to the newly-established University Library in 1914 and permanently transferred in 1925, even though there were doubts about its usefulness to the general public. In March 1914, an *ex parte* petition for the transfer of the Morrison Library from the City to the Hong Kong University was launched in the Supreme Court. His Majesty's Attorney General for the Colony of Hong Kong, the Honourable John Alexander Strachey Bucknill, commented on the provenance of the collection:

Mr Morrison was one of the first Protestant missionaries in China...he deposited these books in the library at the City Hall under somewhat curious terms. The books consisted of a number of Bibles and sermons,



dictionaries and books of reference...there were some books of early travel in China, which would be connected with the public...there were several thousand of these books and there was a minute in the City Hall indicating that the Library of the Morrison Education Society be handed over to the City Hall Committee, as a free gift for the use of the public... the books be kept distinct from all other collections in the City Hall and designated the Morrison Library, in commemoration of the great missionary's memory...the petition did not seek that property in the books should be pass, but the books should be housed in the University building...where people could have access to the books, and the building is more suitable.⁹

The petition made no suggestion that the University was to own the books and it simply said that the collection was to be housed at the University. If the books were housed in the University building, they were likely to be of greater public use than at City Hall. The terms defined the custodianship of the Morrison collections by stating that if the City Hall Committee required the return of them they should be handed back, with the University bearing the cost of storage while retained.¹⁰

Provenance in the Morrison Collection

The best example of showing provenance of ownership in the Morrison Collection is *Horae Sinicae: Translation for the Popular Literature of the Chinese*, printed in 1812 in London.

There are three markings of ownership found on the front page including Robert Morrison's signature, place (China) and the year of purchase (1816), a stamp of City Hall Library, and an embossed stamp of the University Library. The stamps of City Hall Library appear consistently throughout the book, but there are neither annotations nor marginalia found inside the book and the binding is not original. It is worth nothing that the embossed stamp appeared again on page 51, which seems to be a convention in other surveyed books as well.

Hankow Club's Library

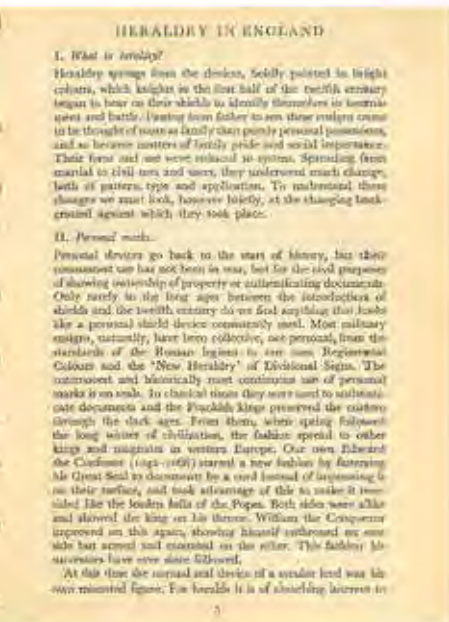
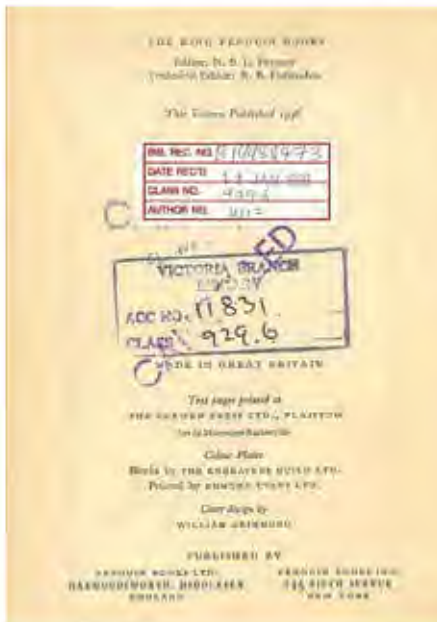
Hankow Club was a private recreation club in Hankow, the treaty port in Wuhan City, China. The Club occupied a unique position consisting of several thousand acres of land devoted to golf, horse-riding, polo, football, cricket, hockey, tennis, baseball and kindred sports. There was also a large dance hall where daily tea dances were held, along with a swimming bath for the summer months.¹¹ Former University Vice Chancellor Sir William

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Hornell was astute and forward-looking, especially in acquiring books. In 1932 he acquired Hankow Club's Library of books on China for HK\$25,000 in a sale and the acquisition was believed to assist the Colony in "fulfilling its natural role as a meeting place of Eastern and Western culture and understanding".¹² Sir William commented on the acquisition of 2,690 volumes of the Chinese section of the Hankow Club's library:

Ever since 1927 when first the suggestion had been made, a controversy has cropped up annually round the question of whether or not the Hankow Club should dispose of its famous Chinese section of its library.

The Club at first considered disposing of their collection relating to China when a trade depression hit in 1927. The asset was tied up in the Library, which was thought better in part because few of the members showed interest in them, except from a sentimental point of view. They did not wish to have the collection broken up and hoped to keep it intact to form the nucleus of the Library of an interested institution, such as a university within China. However, the decision to sell the Chinese section was never rescinded and for six years many attempts were made to find a suitable buyer, including Shanghai Municipal Council, which turned down the opportunity due to insufficient funds. The Club decided to ship the library to London to be auctioned piecemeal. Although the volumes were packed in readiness, HKU heard of the matter and decided to acquire the books. The collection had been built up largely through the efforts of Dr Skinner of Hankow, greatly assisted by Max Bisker, formerly of Lever Brothers. Both gentlemen were retired and well known within Shanghai. Dr Skinner had taken a tremendous personal interest in assembling the collection and had gathered statistical publications by various associations and learned societies that had appeared from time to time relating to matters in China and the Far East. The selection of Foreign Office and medical reports, in conjunction with the copious newspaper clippings, had been considered by certain authorities in China to be not only extremely valuable records, but also one-of-a-kind, much of which was unobtainable elsewhere.¹³

The provenance of the Hankow Collection in terms of its integrity and completeness is summarised in the 1935-39 Memoranda held at the UA and it reads:

*Hankow Collection was purchased at a very low price in 1932 from the Hankow Club. It is said to be the complete collection of books on China, in English, and other European languages. A condition of purchase was that the collection should be maintained unbroken. The University has never been in a position to add to the collection either early works, or works of recent publication.*¹⁴

Provenance in Hankow Club Library

An excellent example of the provenance of a book is *A General View of Chinese Civilisation and of the Relations of the West with China*, by M. Pierre Laffitte, printed in London in 1887.

Its cover shows two distinct past and present ownerships, including a Hankow Club stamp on top of its golden embossed logo at the bottom and a rectangular golden embossed logo of the University Library at the top right corner. Two bookplates are on the flyleaves, including a

modern University Library bookplate with the University shield and the original Club one with regulations and the shelf number of the book. The embossed stamp of the University Library again appears on page 51 and two library stamps from Hankow Club and the University Library appear together on the last page of the book.

In 1970, the University of Hong Kong received a generous donation of HK\$100,000, known as the Hung On-to Memorial Fund, which the University Council determined should be used for building up a space for a special collection within the Library building where all the Eastern and Western rare books, including the Morrison and Hankow collections, are currently held.¹⁵

University Archives

The University Archives were established in 2006 with a mandate to be the central repository for records of enduring value to the University. Its charge is to identify, collect, preserve, describe and make available records of historical value to the University and its alumni in all their various formats by maintaining their physical integrity.¹⁶ Part of its scope of collecting is to acquire rare materials relating to the alumni of the University, including our former staff member, British author Edmund Blunden.¹⁷

In 2018 the University Archives acquired , *Sixty-five*, a collection of tributes to Blunden Originally published in November 1961 in Hong Kong, the book was previously held by Manchester Public Libraries. There are multiple signs of ownership inside the book, including a golden embossed stamp on the cover, a bookplate, library stamps inside, one on the bottom edge, as well as on the original loan slip with the original shelf-mark on the flyleaf.

Another rare book related to Blunden was *Paley's Philosophy – The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*, by William Paley.

It is a pocket size book printed in London in 1822. Blunden signed the flyleaf in 1964 and his lover, Aki Hayashi, signed it in London in 1930, 34 years earlier. This book is believed to have been given to Blunden as a gift, with their signatures being the only provenance of former ownership and proof of their relationship.¹⁸

University Bookplates

Bookplates are the use of engraved or printed paper labels carrying an owner's identity in order to mark the procession or gift of a book.¹⁹

All bookplates used in the HKUL are printed with the Shield from the University Coat of Arms.

Illustration five shows an early bookplate, which acknowledges Sir Robert Morton Dyer, one of HKUL's early senior professors at the Faculty of Engineering Dyer donated the book titled *International Law*, by Thomas Baty, external examiner for Law Faculty at HKU²⁰, printed in London in 1919, from his late father's book collection. This was accessioned in 1969, acknowledging the donor and signifying the reason for acquisition.

Illustration six shows a bookplate confirming the transfer of book ownership via gifting from the University of Oxford to the universities of China with the book titled *Introduction of Study of Law of the Constitution* by A. V. Dicey, accessioned in 1969 for the stated purpose of "the fellowship of learning".

Illustration seven shows a bookplate in the book titled *The Invention of Printing in China and its Spread Westward* by Thomas Francis Carter, accessioned in 1999, acknowledging and appreciating the donation by Lady Ride, wife of Sir Lindsay Ride who was the Vice-Chancellor of the University. Since then the design of the bookplates has been standardised, with only the shield and the Latin motto present.

In illustration eight, the bookplate in the book titled *Heraldry in England*, by Anthony Wagner, printed in London in 1946, identifies and shows appreciation to the previous depository 42 Command Library of the Osborn Barrack in Kowloon Tong, Hong Kong before the handover in 1997. The original marking of ownership on the right hand page was torn, but some information relating to Army Form and RAF Form is still present on the left hand side of the page, suggesting the book was formerly owned by a military library. Another library stamp showing its former ownership before arriving in Osborn Barracks was that of Victoria Barracks Library in Hong Kong.

Illustration nine shows the bookplate inside the book titled *Heraldry Customs, Rules and Styles* by Carl-Alexander von Borth, accessioned in 1983. This reads, 'the book was received in accordance with Books Registration Ordinance Section 4', showing not only the ownership of the book but also the legal obligation of acquisition. *The Colonial Books Registration Ordinance* was first introduced in Hong Kong in 1888 to, "provide for the registration of, and the preservation of, copies of books printed in the Colony".

The Ordinance requires 'three copies printed in the Colony...one copy shall be transmitted to the Secretary of State; another copy shall be disposed of as the Governor may, by general or special order, direct; and the remaining copy shall, after a memorandum containing the particulars respecting

the book has been registered as hereinafter provided, be deposited in such public library or be otherwise disposed of as the Governor may determine'.²¹ This shows that national and colonial legislature shapes the convention, practice and behaviour of book acquisition, which forms part of the provenance of books in some institutions. Another example is also found in *The Oxford Guide to Heraldry* by Thomas Woodcock, accessioned in 1988 but with a more modern looking bookplate.

Illustration eleven shows the most recent and standardised bookplate used inside the book titled, *The Coming of the Book – the Impact on Printing 1450 – 1800*, by Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, accessioned in 1977, with only the University shield and Latin motto.

University Coat of Arms and Shield on the Bookplates

Many universities in Europe use symbolic designs on their seals with heraldic elements. Other colleges have heraldic shields with opened or closed books as charges. In Great Britain, it is normal for universities and colleges to use armorial bearings. Most of these consist of shields and motto only.²² The original design of the coat of arms of HKU represents the aspirations of the future university, chief among them being the balance of Chinese and Western elements. This is most evident in the design of the shield and its supporters. The lion against a red background refers to the coat of arms of England, while the open book at its centre is a symbol of learning used by many European universities. The juxtaposition of the colours blue and green is not ordinarily allowed in heraldry but permitted in this case to refer to the islands of Hong Kong and the surrounding sea. Above the shield is usually a knight's helmet topped with a crest. In this case, the crest is in the form of a lion with an open book, echoing the design of the shield.²³ In short, the heraldic shield used in the Coat of Arms of HKU was clearly modelled structurally on British tradition, representing one of the European powers present in Southeast Asia since the 17th Century.²⁴

The University Coat of Arms comprises the shield, the motto, the helmet and crest, and the supporters, which are the four essential elements of heraldry. The design of the Coat of Arms was assigned to the Governor of Hong Kong and Chancellor of the University, Sir Frederick Lugard, the first Vice-Chancellor Sir Charles Eliot, and S H Ixer of the Public Works Department of the Government, who drew the caricature of Francis Clark, the first Dean of the Faculty of Medicine of the University, in 1912.²⁵ A design was sent to the College of Arms in October 1912 with the suggestion

that if more distinctive emblems were needed, then the University would prefer a clump of bamboo. The Court Minutes at the UA reads

*"The Coat of Arms circulated among Members was approved and it was ordered that the design should be submitted to the College of Heralds for approval and ratification, in the event of their demanding any addition of distinguishing emblems, some bamboos to be introduced into the design."*²⁶

Arms, without bamboo, were granted by letter patent of 14 May 1913 with a blazon couched in the arcane phrases of heralds, quite inscrutable for the uninitiated "per pale vert and azure an open book proper bound and edged or inscribed with Chinese characters sable on a chief gules a lion passant guardant or; but only after some trouble with the Chinese text."²⁷ The Chinese ideograms on the two pages of the open book (an Oxford book, rather than a Cambridge book), which are closed, have caused comment, two of them being of unusual form. They are a combination of two phrases in the Confucius classic 'The Great Learning', which indicate broadly the Western concepts of moral and intellectual training. The characters are written in the old *lishu*, or clerical, script, in vogue during the Han Dynasty and still favoured for the writing of inscriptions. There are several variants in this style for the two characters *ming* and *de* (to manifest virtue); the forms used were taken from some of the most highly regarded Han inscriptions. Shortly before the University opened, the Court had already selected *auspicium melioris aevi* (augury of a better age) as the official motto. However, the motto below the shield brought confusion with it until about twenty years later when the earlier motto was officially discarded. In the official Council Minutes it says

*"The Council took note that the present motto of the University "Sapientia et Virtus" (Wisdom and Virtue) had never been formally sanctioned by the Court, the original motto having been "Auspicium Melioris Aevi". The Council recommended that the Court be asked to accept the change in the motto from Auspicium Melioris Aevi" to "Sapientia et Virtus"."*²⁸

HKU has the distinction of being the only university in Hong Kong to have a complete Coat of Arms assigned by the College of Arms in London. The shield and motto were granted in 1913 by the College of Arms, while the remaining components of a full coat of arms were applied for in 1981 and granted in 1984.²⁹ Unfortunately, the official blazon and all authentic colour copies of the Shield of Arms disappeared during the Sino-Japanese War. When the University was preparing in 1958 for the Golden Jubilee three years later, these were obtained anew from the College of Arms.³⁰

Heraldry is a phenomenon not only confined to European history, but also

pervading the other continents or former colonies like Hong Kong, where it was introduced by migrating and colonising Europeans.³¹

To conclude, the western books at the University Archives and Special Collections of HKU have a limited number of provenances comprising mostly bookplates, library book stamps, embossed stamps, and signatures of the collectors and donors. Annotations, marginalia and historic binding are absent.

However, the bookplates used in the HKUL have all adopted the shield from the University Coat of Arms, which is a significant element of heraldry in British culture. It shows not only that the establishment of HKU was modelled on British higher education, but also the influence of colonialism since 1841, when Hong Kong was ceded to Britain.

While investigation into physical markings is important for research on the provenance of books, it also leads to another important issue, namely the processing of acquisitions in libraries and archives. The former term applies to bookplates, stamps and stencils, and even embossing stamps on both covers and the inside of books to claim ownership. The latter term covers protecting the physicality of records in all formats in order to maintain their physical integrity and authenticity.

The research and practice of the history of the book developed in Europe on a regional basis and has been taken as a universal model. The provenance research of western books remains attractive and fascinating because of its maturity and the alluring history of the printing press as an agent of change, as print culture led the way to the Renaissance and then on to the Copernican Revolution, print capitalism, modernity, and to our cherished freedom of speech and the press.³² Nowadays, as electronic media has substantially replaced printed books, the physical provenance will become obsolete. Digital technology has much to offer for new publishing, but the existence of digitised versions of books cannot replace the evidential value of books and artefacts.³³ (4,172)

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