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THE EAST ASIAN LIBRARY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Izumi Koide

Celebrating the one-hundredth issue of the CEAL Bulletin is, I believe, a good opportunity to think about the future of the East Asian library. This essay is, however, not to forecast the future course of the East Asian library, but rather to present a vision, or to throw out some thoughts on desirable future developments in the East Asian library.

The East Asian library and area studies

Housed largely in academic institutions, East Asian libraries were initiated and have developed in order to meet the needs of their parent institutions. In most cases those needs are to support the study and teaching of area studies. Their primary users are not journalists writing articles on Japan for general readers, nor government officials to be seated at a table for negotiation. Area studies in academic institutions, however, provide a knowledge based on foreign countries, on which journalists, government officials, businessmen, etc., can rely when they need to deal with such countries in their respective trades.

As most East Asian collections have developed by accompanying mounting academic research on the regions being studied, the collections themselves reflect the contemporary interests and needs of academe from the outset of such studies in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Influenced by changes in research interests, the fields emphasized in acquisitions have also been changing: most East Asian libraries with a longer history started building collections based on language, history, and culture; many have later added social sciences as a collection priority.

Recently area studies, particularly Japanese studies, are experiencing a fundamental change. Patricia Steinhoff has described how American Japanese specialists have been pushed out of their distant but cozy corner of traditional Japanese studies toward the arena of the academic mainstream. She termed this phenomenon "the loss of irrelevance." In discussing its influence, she referred to changes in conditions regarding the outcome of research.

"There will be a growing role for American Japan specialists as the producers of primary research on Japan upon which other scholars depend. Such research has to meet certain conditions of relevance, however, which may be different from the standards by which it is judged within the American Japanese Studies community. First, it must deal with a subject that non-Japan specialists want to know about, and second it must relate to the current theoretical paradigms that non-Japan specialists are using, at least to the
extent of containing usable information. And third, its publication must be positioned so that the non-specialist researcher or researcher's student assistant can find it through normal library search strategies. That in turn may push researchers toward the methods and procedures of the American academic mainstream, in order to make their work more attractive to mainstream journals.¹

While Japanese studies are in this process of mainstreaming, how should the Japanese collections included within the East Asian library cope in order to support these scholars during this change?

Is the language a barrier?

In most cases, the East Asian library is divided by language from the main library and is organized to serve the needs of its parent organization. In other words, the language of the materials dealt with by the East Asian library is different from the language of collection management and information flow. This discrepancy causes difficulties for the East Asian library, including the need for staff with specialized language ability, and the concomitant need for the knowledge and technical capability to make vernacular language description fit into a bibliographic system that operates in the English language.

The difference in the languages used in the literature and used for the flow of information regarding the literature in turn makes the distance between the East Asian library and mainstream academic collections larger. Furthermore, the division by language causes another important dimension of separation that is seldom discussed.

The process of research moves in a developmental spiral sequence which begins with exploring the sources and secondary works, goes on to making an original survey and observation, makes an analysis, ends with recording the outcome, and starts again with this recorded outcome being used as a secondary work. Looking at the research process in area studies in terms of the language used in each stage, the vernacular language is the language of the source materials while English is that of the secondary works. Whether researchers depend on documentary records or contemporary interviews and observations, serious students in area studies must command vernacular languages to approach the research subject and to gather raw data. On the other hand, they usually make the results of their research public in the English language because they belong to the academic community of the United States and the West where scholarly communication between researchers is made in the English language. Consequently, a knowledge base of area studies is formed and

accumulates in the English language and, therefore, is located at a distance from the East Asian library where there is another knowledge base of the same field in a somewhat raw form for the general English reader.

Most East Asian libraries place their emphasis on collecting vernacular language materials. Those materials constitute, however, only the "source" part of research. While an archive houses documentary records and provides source materials for researchers, a research library should embrace both sources and the results of research. The merits of accumulated knowledge can only be fully enjoyed when sources are examined in comparison to research results built up on previous works.

The distinguishing of the East Asian collection from the main library by language at first served it well, for both convenience in managing materials with particular bibliographic characteristics and for fulfilling the needs of its specific user group. Once area studies have, however, come of age, as is said about Japanese studies, the language distinction works differently. With the subject studies' coming of age, a significant amount and quality of research is accumulated in the English language. The distinction by language might then work to interrupt the spiral sequence of research development, unless there is an integrated system of bibliographic information flow regardless of the language used in the literature.

With this coming of age, researchers' interest in use of the knowledge base increases. New groups of people hitherto indifferent to area studies and without specialized language skills become interested: scholars in various disciplines want to do comparative study and researchers outside of academe want to learn about Japan for doing business or for negotiating with Japan. The information accumulated in the East Asian library cannot be easily accessed by these people, although they often seek certain information regardless of the language it is written in, as they can usually manage to get a translation if they can pinpoint the desired material. However, with an integrated system of bibliographic information flow, the East Asian collection could be fully utilized along with the knowledge base in the English language even by people without specialized language skills.

A sophisticated information system

An integrated system of bibliographic information flow would ideally provide the researcher seeking information with an intelligent search on the issue. In this system the researcher would be able to look at whatever was needed, e.g., local catalogs, other libraries' catalogs, special files, periodical indexes, reference tools, etc., regardless of the format and the language of the material, by means of a natural language search with commands in English. The retrieved list of materials would be rank-ordered by relevance, and the system would also be linked to a document delivery system. This has long been my vision, but I had thought it only a dream.
Recently, however, I found an interesting report on new catalogs, which are very similar to my dream. The Bibliographic Services Study Committee of the Council of Library Resources has been considering a catalog based on a new concept, the E3 catalog. Less limited than OPAC and narrower than a campus-wide information system, the "window" comes closest to the essential concept. It should include such functions as a greatly improved retrieval system that allows natural language queries, best-match retrieval, ranked output, relevance feedback, and improved modes of subject searching, with more subject content information available in the catalog, and thesaurus and word-matching tools built into the retrieval process. To maximize user success, table of contents information and document delivery should be provided routinely.

So far it is unknown whether or not materials and information written in languages other than English are within the scope of the E3 catalog. If it can include East Asian bibliographic information, it would be of invaluable help for enhancing the use of East Asian collections. If such sophisticated measures for information flow inform English-language users of the contents of the literature in the East Asian library and, if this was available through a normal search in the main library system, then potential users of the East Asian library could reach the materials they wanted. Users and researchers would determine what they needed to have translated rather than their search being limited to available materials in the English language. Potential users of the East Asian library would be much extended through the existence of such a system. This sophisticated new catalog would open an avenue of normal search strategy to link general researchers' queries with information contained in the East Asian library for the first time since the East Asian library was initiated to contribute to and support American research by providing East Asian resource materials.

A new window for international scholarly communication

There is a mounting need for information on East Asia as the world becomes smaller and interdependence between countries becomes crucial. More particularly, there is a need for information on developments and experiences in East Asia, as it is a most active region for innovation in many areas, such as environmental issues and alternatives to the Western path of modernization. This latter sort of information is not easily found in the East Asian library because it collects books on East Asia, rather than research done in East Asia or

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2The E3 stands for: Enhanced, with post-Boolean retrieval techniques and vastly improved interface design; Expanded, to include indexing, tables of contents, etc.; and Extended, to serve as a gateway to other collections and resources. See Carol Mandel, "Library Catalogs in the 21st Century," ARL: A Bimonthly Newsletter of Research Library Issues and Actions 164 (Sept. 1992), pp. 1-4.
East Asian scholarship on other countries which may be of interest to other researchers rather than to East Asian specialists. This is a possible additional sphere of the East Asian collection of the future.

The East Asian library has traditionally housed research source materials on East Asia in the vernacular languages and served scholars in East Asian studies. It can potentially be a clearing-house for information on East Asia available in any language, with enhanced retrieval measures integrated into the main search system operated in the English language and easily used by the ordinary researcher, and then its users will be extended to those who are interested in East Asia regardless of language ability. Furthermore, it can be an indispensable repertory of useful information and knowledge originating in East Asia and only available in East Asian languages, if collections are strengthened in this manner, if sophisticated retrieval is made available, and if access is guaranteed through networks. The future East Asian library will then reach a much wider range of potential users outside of area studies.

Neither a repository of materials in exotic languages nor a ghetto of area specialists - the East Asian library has a great potential for being a gateway of scholarly information exchange in support of an international scholarly communication made across discipline, language, and culture. The East Asian library will then be one of the important constituents of the social infrastructure for human learning.