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# LATE BLOOM IN THE DESERT: THE EAST ASIAN LIBRARY COLLECTION AND SERVICES AT ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY\*

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## Introduction

Arizona State University (ASU) at Tempe formally offered Chinese-language classes in the fall of 1966. While a more structured Chinese-language program leading to a bachelor's degree was founded a year later, the Japanese-language program was not begun until 1968.

Not long after the inception of the language program, a Center for Asian Studies was born with support from the university administration. The faculty members of the Center were originally composed of serious scholars in disciplines like foreign languages, political science, and history. Over two decades of growth, the Center has now expanded to some fifty-five faculty members across twenty departments and eight colleges, offering seventy-three Asian related courses from undergraduate lectures to advanced graduate seminars with a total enrollment of more than 2,600 students in any given semester. The Center's leadership role in Asian studies has been well recognized in the Phoenix metropolitan area and the state of Arizona through the many events it has coordinated or sponsored.

Unlike the majority of East Asian library collections which were established with the full support and well thought-out plans from the library administration, the East Asian collection at ASU started in 1968 with a somewhat make-do arrangement. There was no librarian hired or designated to take charge of the basic library functions of East Asian language materials; the cataloging responsibility for these materials was added to the duties of a catalog librarian who happened to have a Chinese language background and was given an assistant who knew the Japanese and Korean languages.

## Development of the Collection

Initially to support the language program and the research interests of the faculty and taking into account the lack of staff support in acquisitions, a blanket order for books in Chinese in specified subject areas was established in 1968 with the Chinese Materials and Research Aids Service Center (later renamed the Chinese Materials Center) in Taipei and with two publishers in Hong Kong. Thus, Professor Thomas Nielson of the Chinese Language

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Program singlehandedly in agreement with the University Libraries officials laid the foundation for the present Chinese-language collection which complements the existing collection in western languages for East Asian studies at ASU. As for the Japanese-language collection, individual faculty member order requests constituted the major basis for the Libraries' collection building activities.

Chinese books ordered and shipped to the University Libraries through this blanket order arrangement were presumably well chosen, were cataloged along with the Japanese-language receipts, and shelved with other language books in the general collection which used the Library of Congress classification schedules. No effort was made to gather them at a single location apart from the general collection, except that, for each Chinese, Japanese, or Korean book cataloged, the University Libraries at first provided one extra card with the heading "Foreign Language Books--Chinese [Japanese, or Korean]." This practice was later reworded in 1970 to "Chinese [Japanese, or Korean], Books in..." in the subject card catalog to bring these "esoteric" materials together.

Between 1968 and the late 1970s, ASU exchanged catalog cards in Chinese and Japanese vernacular materials with the Oriental Studies Collection of the University of Arizona. It was also agreed that ASU would develop more extensively in the area of modern Chinese fiction while the University of Arizona continued to devote its efforts in its already strong and well sustained area of modern Chinese poetry.

With a changing of the library administration at ASU, the attitude in the University Libraries toward providing East Asian library services also changed; the Chinese blanket order program was canceled in early 1972. For a period of more than one year, there was no acquisition activity for East Asian language materials except for a few faculty orders. Even these faculty orders were subject to the policy of nonduplication of purchases with the University of Arizona imposed solely upon East Asian language materials by the University Libraries during 1972-1978. This policy meant that ASU would not normally acquire a copy of an item held at the University of Arizona even when the item was basic for the program and was not expensive. The interlibrary cooperation agreement with the University of Arizona was pared down to the exchange of catalog cards only. Consequently, ASU had a collection that depended heavily on the resources at the University of Arizona. This inadequacy is still apparent nowadays in several ways.

A strong concern was expressed in late 1972 by Dr. Yung-Hwan Jo, the director of the Center for Asian Studies at ASU, that the University Librarian, Dr. William Axford, should appoint a librarian to serve part-time as the Library Contact person for the Center. (However, the Center lost this contact point a year later when this American librarian left the library.) Meanwhile, through the unflinching effort exerted by the small East Asian staff in the cataloging department, Dr. Axford, finally convinced of the necessity of placing the East Asian language printed material together at one location, gave his approval for the implementation of this plan in the spring of 1973.

From 1972 to 1978 library collection building for East Asian research at ASU was practically at a standstill. It was a period reflective of the library administrative interest in cost studies and conservative spending. Developing a research collection to make the ASU library responsive to the special research programs on campus was not the primary concern of the administration. Increasing any meaningful support for East Asian library services, therefore, was like climbing a very steep hill. However steep the hill, the East Asian studies faculty did not give up climbing. It was this spirit of perseverance and persistence that kept the communication open between the East Asian studies faculty and the University Libraries and ultimately altered the Libraries' course in 1978 when the departing University Librarian, Dr. Donald Koepp, renounced the policy of nonduplication purchasing and approved the reinstatement of the blanket order program with the Chinese Materials Center. Earlier in 1974 Dr. Koepp also designated the catalog librarian who did East Asian language cataloging as part of her assignment as a Subject Specialist to work on library matters with the East Asian studies faculty in the Department of Foreign Languages.

It took an entire year to get the new blanket order off the ground because the profile was much expanded and procedures had to be approved at every level involved. A sample shipment arrived in the fall of 1979, and the first shipment started coming in in early 1980. Unfortunately, the Chinese Materials Center underwent some financial hardship one and a half years later and could not continue to supply what the University Libraries required. By then, a new library administration with Dr. Donald Riggs as the University Librarian had begun and a new head of Collections and Acquisitions, Dora Biblarz, was hired in 1980. Ms. Biblarz and her staff, with a very much different perspective and attitude toward collection development for area studies, have played a critical role in library services for East Asian research at ASU.

In the fall of 1981, the initiation of a new blanket order with the Joint Publishing Company in Hong Kong for books in Chinese from the China mainland and from Hong Kong went smoothly and expeditiously. While the Joint Publishing Company has been providing ASU with current Chinese imprints, the Chinese studies faculty and the librarian have been engaging in acquisitions of older and more expensive Chinese vernacular publications and in obtaining materials from Taiwan. They also continued developing the western language materials collection in Chinese studies.

Continued persuasion and demonstration of need by Professor Hoyt Tillman of Chinese history, who has been the Chair of the Center's Library Committee since the mid-1980s, and his colleagues throughout the 1980s prompted the University Librarian, Dr. Riggs, to approve the hiring of a Japanese-language librarian in 1988. After having been in the planning stage for three years, a Japanese blanket order was finally implemented upon the arrival of the Japanese-language librarian who would then monitor the performance of the blanket order vendor and evaluate the workability of the plan. The Japanese collection building responsibility, which had primarily been shouldered by the Japanese studies faculty up to that point, was duly transferred to the Japanese-language librarian.

In 1989 ASU joined the East Asian program component of the Research Libraries Group (RLG) and began to use the Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN) for cataloging its East Asian language materials. Its RLG membership has offered ASU not only a high-quality and cost-effective bibliographic database for cataloging purposes, but also free of charge access to a number of major East Asian collections in North America both on-site and through interlibrary loan.

### Present Status of the Collection

With 54,147 volumes, the East Asian collection at ASU ranks among the top thirty-seven of the East Asian research collections in North America.<sup>1</sup> Its subject strengths remain in art history, Buddhism, history, language and literature, and philosophy. The magnitude of its growth was chiefly experienced in the 1980s.

Due to budget constraints in recent years, the efforts in collection building at ASU have shifted to collection shaping and access as have those at many other institutions. The University Libraries has undertaken three serial cancellation projects in the past four years and has cut a number of staff positions including one full-time paraprofessional position in East Asian studies. Meanwhile, the arrearage for both Chinese- and Japanese-language materials has increased to over 7,000 volumes.

As the last step in the total library automation at ASU, an in-house retrospective conversion project for approximately 15,000 East Asian cataloging records began in 1991. The main thrust of the project commenced last fall and, hopefully, will reach completion this fall (in 1993). Using a combination of RLG's Batch Retrospective Conversion (BRCON) program and direct on-line input of original records to the RLIN database, ASU has been able to convert its retrospective East Asian cataloging records at a cost much lower than that offered by several vendors in the past. Once the project is finished and the records are downloaded to the local On-line Public Access Catalog (OPAC), ASU will have its East Asian holdings totally accessible on-line in romanized form. The vernacular display of these records will not be available until ASU's OPAC vendor, CARL Systems Inc., implements its CJK display capability which already has been promised for some time.

At ASU, collection development, reference, bibliographic instruction, and faculty liaison are the responsibilities of the librarians appointed as Area Specialists or Subject Specialists. While the Subject Specialists are responsible for these functions involving western-language materials in their individual subject disciplines, the Area Specialists are responsible for these involving *all* language materials in their area studies. In addition, because of the special language problems, the East Asian studies librarians who are the Area Specialists also have acquisitions and cataloging duties.

Structurally each of the Area Specialists and the Subject Specialists reports to a primary evaluator who usually is a department head. In the case of the East Asian studies and the Slavic studies librarians, their primary evaluator is the head of the Original Cataloging and

Special Languages Department. All personnel actions and official reporting need to go through the primary evaluator with supplementary reviews from Collection Development and Library Instruction as appropriate. Under each of the East Asian and Slavic studies librarians, there are a paraprofessional staff who assist in doing copy or less complex original cataloging. This holistic approach of personnel management is not unusual for an institution that has a smaller-sized East Asian collection or library unit.<sup>2</sup> It does provide an opportunity for the individual librarian to develop in many aspects of librarianship at the same time and does enhance his or her awareness of library policies and activities in different service areas. But it also demands a constant shift of priorities and a test of negotiation skills, while also requiring a steady upkeep of information and a knowledge of changes in those different areas of librarianship. It is challenging, yet frustrating at times, particularly when the support from one's leaders is lacking.

### Conclusion

It goes without saying that good library support and services are absolutely essential for any good instructional and research programs at any institution; and the core of good library services is a good library collection in terms of quality and quantity. A good library collection is not produced overnight; it depends on a joint effort and long-term commitment of both the faculty and the library. We at ASU are privileged to have witnessed this effort and commitment. The East Asian studies faculty at ASU did not give up in their efforts to persuade the University Libraries to see and meet their needs, even during the most discouraging of times. They sought every opportunity to cooperate with and assist the University Libraries in obtaining support from the university administration and from other sources. The library grants from both the Japan Foundation in 1979 and the U.S. Department of Education in 1992 which provided the University Libraries with some much needed scholarly works and enhanced its East Asian service ability are examples of what this joint effort and commitment could accomplish. At the same time, ASU is also fortunate enough to have had in the past decade a library administration that has been willing to listen and respond to the demonstrated needs of the faculty and students.

The dramatic growth of the East Asian collection, the membership in RLG, and the additional staffing support for the East Asian library services during the 1980s at ASU were evidence of the excellent working relationship between the faculty and the University Libraries. The creation of a separate reference collection within the East Asian collection which is included in the strategic plans of the University Libraries for the next few years is another proof of this relationship.

Although the current budget situation no longer allows ASU to continue the kind of expansion for its East Asian collection as it did before, in the days to come the collection will carry on its excellent performance through its membership in RLG and its commitment to provide access to information to its constituents in whatever form.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>"Current Status of East Asian Collections in American Libraries, 1991/1992," in *Committee on East Asian Libraries Bulletin*, no. 98 (Feb. 1993): 35.

<sup>2</sup>William Sheh Wong, "Impact of Information Technology on Library Administration: with Special Reference to East Asian Collections" (Paper delivered at the library panel, "East Asian Library Services for the 1990s," at the Joint Conference of the Western Conference and the Southwestern Conference of the Association for Asian Studies, Austin, Texas, 13 October 1990), 12-14.