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FIVE FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENTS TO JUMPSTART A NEW EAST ASIAN COLLECTION*

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Introduction

Starting a collection from scratch can be very tough, especially for a collection in the East Asian languages, where the whole acquisition business is quite different from mainstream collections. Chinese people often compare a new endeavor to a “blank sheet of paper.” If you lack the proper skills, you may be able only to make some scratches on the paper, but if you have the right combination of design, layout, color, and skills, you can make a beautiful picture out of it. The same is true with starting a new East Asian collection. The librarian shouldering such a responsibility must possess personal capabilities, professional competencies, as well as the ability to create a favorable working and cultural environment.

In this paper, I shall concentrate on five fundamental elements that a new librarian should pay attention to in order to get the collection started in the right direction, that will result, in time, in a “beautiful picture.” These five fundamental elements are **User relations, Vendor relations, Colleague relations, Inter-collegiate relations, and Gifts and Exchanges.**

User Relations

To develop a new East Asian collection, the librarian must know who are the primary users, what their information needs are, and how to maintain close ties with them. Undoubtedly, in an academic library, the major users of the East Asian collections would be faculty and students in the appropriate departments, institutes and research program. The librarian should serve as good liaison with them in order to know their information needs well, and to incorporate those needs into collection development.

There are many ways for the librarian to maintain close ties with the primary users, including but not limited to:

- Meeting with the departmental representatives to inform them of library resources, to know program needs, and to solve any information problems they may have
- Establishing profiles for each faculty member of the appropriate departments and program to know their teaching and research focus
- Contacting new faculty and graduate students (especially PhDs) to learn their research interests and expectations
- Effectively publicizing newly acquired library resources
- Keeping various program records, such as research activities, grants received, and curriculum offerings. Such information permits the librarian to anticipate and provide for the current and changing needs of the faculty and students in their research and studies.

Once the user groups, program research, and teaching focuses are identified, the librarian, in cooperation with other library staff, should work out a feasible collection development policy on criteria for titles to be selected, and on future directions the collection should take. For a new East Asian collection, the collection development policy must set up collection priorities for language sources, chronological periods, geographical areas, subject treatment, material formats, date of publication, and place of publication, all of which are based on program needs.

* This paper is based on a talk given at Binghamton University Libraries in 2003, and covers collection development for print resources only.

The librarian will also need to plan and allocate the collection budget carefully in order to make most efficient and effective use of limited funds. To do this, the librarian will need to know user groups and any particular emphasis of the program subject areas.

Therefore, user relations enable the librarian to know what materials to select and collect.

Vendor Relations

To obtain materials selected according to guidelines set up in the collection development policy, the librarian needs to develop good vendor relations to facilitate the purchase of those materials and their distribution to the library. Since the majority of the materials in an East Asian collection are published and purchased from abroad, the importance of oversea vendors in East Asian collection development is self-evident. For those who may find the term unfamiliar in this context, vendors are book-dealers or book-sellers. They gather books from publishers and sell them to libraries. They are valued for many of the services and benefits to the library. They save time and money by book discounts, fast delivery, and special services to meet the collection's specific needs.

East Asian vendors provide the selector of East Asian materials with a variety of selection tools, such as

- **Printed book list of new, current, or future publications.** Often these book lists are annotated. They provide the selector with more accurate information on whether the prospective title is relevant to the collection's needs.
- **Online lists of recent publications.**
- **Blanket order program and approval plan arrangements.** However, blanket order and approval plan have not proven to be very effective. Title-by-title selection from vendors' book lists is still the most commonly adopted method for selection of CJK materials. That is another reason why good and reliable vendors must be used.

There are many vendors of East Asian materials. A few of the most well-known are China International Book Trading Corporation, China National Publishing Industry Trading Corporation, Shanghai Book Traders, Japan Publication Trading Company, and Panmun Book Cooperation (for Korea materials). The librarian needs to investigate their respective strengths and availability in order to make effective use of them.

Colleague Relations

A new East Asian collection is usually a one-librarian situation, and organizationally the collection is nestled in the mainstream collections. It does not have the division of labor that is found in a regular East Asian library. To accomplish the work needing to be done, the East Asian studies librarian needs cooperation and support from colleagues in almost all other library departments or units. For instance,

- Administrative support for collection budget
- System support for the installation, maintenance and trouble-shooting of CJK cataloging software
- Technical services support for processing CJK materials, from ordering to receiving, invoicing, and payment
- The negotiation of licenses for electronic databases
- The coordination of special reference and instructional services
- Administrative support for professional development, networking, book buying trips, etc.

Teamwork and good colleague relations are essential here. It is very important to remember that the East Asian studies librarian can never work in isolation. His or her work is both directly and indirectly related to every other library department and unit. Without cooperation from colleagues in those departments and units, little can be done.

Intercollegiate Relations

Once a collection is under development, it needs to make itself known to other collections. It also needs

support from other collections in the United States and abroad. Good intercollegiate relations can help achieve both.

One very effective way to establish good intercollegiate relations is through active involvement in professional associations. In the case of East Asian collections, the most relevant organization is the Council on East Asian Libraries (CEAL), an affiliate organization of the Association for Asian Studies. CEAL is the North American East Asian studies librarians' forum for the discussion of East Asian library issues and problems of common concern. It publishes the *Journal of East Asian Libraries* three times a year. There are committees dealing with Chinese, Japanese, and Korean materials, technical processing, technology, and public services. It also maintains a listserv, Eastlib. Journal articles and committee workshop reports discuss library-vendor relations, current East Asian publishing trends, cataloging rule interpretations as applied to special East Asian materials, current projects (such as the Pinyin conversion project), and so on. By attending the annual conference, contributing to the *Journal*, participating in the listserv discussions, and serving on the committees, the librarian is actually acting as an ambassador of goodwill for the collection and institution he or she represents. Such activities not only help the librarian keep abreast of current and future trends in East Asian librarianship, but also greatly contribute to good intercollegiate relations, and promote the image and publicity of the collection and institution he or she represents.

V. Gifts and Exchange Programs

Good intercollegiate relations provide professional support that is very important to the development of a new East Asian collection. This support is materialized through gifts and exchange programs. Considering the relatively long interval between the ordering and receiving of East Asian materials (usually 4-6 months), and considering the increasing publication costs, high shipping fee and postage for materials purchased overseas (approximately 20-40% of the total cost), gifts and exchanges appear to be very pragmatic and economical ways of developing a good size collection in a short time. Some gifts may not immediately fit in the collection scope or may be duplicates of what is already in the collection, but they can be used as gifts to other institutions. So gifts and exchange can be another way to publicize and promote your collection and institute.

Gift materials may come from faculty members (their own publications as well as private collections), library friends (both are good sources for filling gaps in serials and periodicals), libraries (national, academic, public, etc.), research institutes, foundations, government or non-governmental organizations, etc.

Major gifts and exchange partners for Chinese language materials:

- Chiang Ching-Kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange: <http://www.cckf.org/>
- National Central Library of Taiwan :
<http://www.ncl.edu.tw/english/english.htm>
- National Library of China (Beijing): <http://www.nlc.gov.cn>

For Japanese Materials:

- The Japan Foundation: <http://www.jpff.go.jp/e/index.html>
- North American Coordinating Council on Japanese Library Resources:
<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~ncc/>

For Korean materials: The Korean Foundations: <http://www.kofo.org.kr>

Conclusion

As I mentioned at the very beginning of the paper, starting a new collection from scratch can be very tough. Apart from the librarian's personal capabilities, other aspects are also very important. I believe good relations and networking with collection users, colleagues on and off campus, and vendors home and abroad can create a very favorable working and cultural environment to get the collection well started. As the English proverb goes, "Well begun is half done."

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