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New Concept of Collection Management: A Survey of Library Space-Related Issues

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NEW CONCEPT OF COLLECTION MANAGEMENT: A SURVEY OF LIBRARY SPACE-RELATED ISSUES

Ping Situ

The University of Arizona

Abstract

Even though information available in digital format is convenient and valuable, print collections continue to play a very significant role in academic institutions, especially those that have programs requiring non-Romanized script materials. However, due to limited physical space and budgetary resources, the shelving space scarcity has become one of the main collection management problems that many academic libraries have to confront. This article reports on a survey of library space related issues in academic institutions that collect and manage Chinese language materials. The findings and comments from the survey shed light on future collection management options and decisions regarding how to maximize the use of available resources. The results and observations of this study will be of interest to other East Asian Studies (EAS) librarians as well as collection managers who specialize in other area studies. In addition, it is hoped that this paper will stimulate discussion by EAS library communities and library administrators on “ownership” versus “access” of East Asian materials.

Introduction

Physical space shortage, shrinking budgetary resources, and changing customer needs and expectations have pushed many academic libraries to consider using high-density off-site storage facilities for their low-use materials. However, the University of Arizona (UA) Library, which also has a space shortage dilemma, does not plan to use a remote storage option as a solution to their overcrowded stacks. The UA Library is taking other flexible collection management approaches, such as identifying duplicate copies and removing them from the shelves, installing compact shelving, regularly reviewing all approval plan profiles and revising them to reflect a close alignment with the teaching and research needs of faculty and students, and replacing print journals with back-files/archives of full-text electronic journal databases. Although these collection management practices seem reasonable and work for the library as a whole, the author is concerned about possible negative impact to the EAS collections (Chinese in particular) because of their unique nature. East Asian collections in vernacular scripts differentiate themselves significantly from their mainstream Western counterparts in numerous aspects, such as publishing industry, scholarly communication, book-trade, technical processes, as well as licensing and copyright constrains associated with the electronic databases. Between May and June 2007, the author conducted a brief survey about library space related issues of 45 academic libraries that have relevant Chinese language collections with the following objectives: a) determining if academic libraries that have Chinese language collections are running out of shelf space; and b) learning what collection management approaches are being taken to accommodate the growing print collections and alleviate or prevent shelf space constraints.

Literature Review

Since few studies have been done on collection growth and management with a focus on East Asian collections, this literature review covers publications on collection management issues and options in general with relation to library physical space challenges in academic institutions. Since the 1970s, due to library physical space shortage and decreasing financial resources, more and more academic libraries have chosen high-density off-site storage options to accommodate their growing print collections (Lougee, 1992). Because of increasingly shrinking funds, Reilly (2002) predicts in his study that it will be impractical for individual libraries to preserve heavily redundant and enormous amounts of print collections. Given the magnitude of the information in print format, long-term preservation of even the most critical research materials ought to be a cooperative endeavor. Bridegam (2004) recognizes that a collaborative approach to print preservation at the local level was not an option. This was a needed strategy so each collaborating institution could find long-term solutions to their lack of physical space, consistently growing print acquisitions and continuing budget crisis. Agee (2007) suggests that in order to alleviate physical
space crisis, to avoid unnecessary redundancy in collections and to better meet patrons’ information needs, independent state or regional storage facilities ought to align themselves into national or international network programs. This would allow institutions to maximize the usage of the existing resources of technology and infrastructure.  

According to the 1992 ARL library survey, many libraries indicated that their institutions were developing policies or services that focused on access rather than ownership (Rutstein, 1993). The traditional role of librarians as “information collectors” is being challenged by their new positions as “providers of access to information” (Kane, 1997). Baldwin (1996) proposes that in this rapidly-advancing digital technology era, what we need to do is not to own every single physical item that our patrons might use, but to provide them with reliable and timely access even though the requested materials are not “owned” or housed in the individual library. Roberts (1992) suggests that it is time to reevaluate the value of Interlibrary Loan (ILL)/Document Delivery (DD) services because libraries could generate big savings by cancelling print journals with little usage and guide customers toward friendly and effective ILL/DD services. Simpson (1994) suggests that resource sharing with the combination of access and ownership is a possible solution to libraries’ growing demands and shrinking budget because new technology will strengthen and improve access while coordinated acquisition will reinforce ownership.

Purpose of the Survey

This survey was developed and conducted to:
- Determine if shelf space density is a shared problem among academic libraries with Chinese language collections.
- Learn successful approaches that libraries are taking to deal with space related issues or to prevent shelf space crowding.
- Use the collected data as a useful tool to enhance skills in future collection management activities.

Originality/Value

- Special aspects of East Asian language collections have made these collections significantly different from the mainstream academic collections in Romanized scripts.
- A lot has been written about collection management issues and options in general on limited physical space, shrinking funds and advancing digital technology and availability. However, little previous research has investigated how libraries that have East Asian or Chinese language collections are dealing with their pressing shelving space shortage and their unique customers’ needs.

Design/Methodology

The survey questions were developed in April 2007. It was designed to be short, quick and easy to answer. The focus of this study was to determine if shelving space density is an issue in academic libraries that have Chinese language collections in North America (mainly in the United States) and if it is, what strategies are being used to cope with those problems? The author balanced between a web survey and a print survey via email attachment. Using electronic survey tools, such as Survey Monkey, it would be easier to analyze and manipulate data. However, at the end the author chose to conduct the survey via email because it would be difficult to include some of the questions in Survey Monkey.

In May 2007, the questionnaire was sent to three libraries that have strong Chinese language collections as a pilot test to evaluate the clarity of the questions, the validity of the survey and to solicit feedback as well. All three libraries responded in a timely manner and provided very insightful suggestions and helpful comments. The survey was reviewed and revised. A commentary section was added to each questionnaire and some questions were broken up into several smaller parts to avoid potential confusion or misleading results. In order to choose the institutions to receive the survey, the author compiled a list of libraries that have Chinese language collections from the statistical report in the Journal of East Asian Libraries (JEAL). As of June 30, 2006, 47 academic libraries in North America reported their Chinese language
collection holdings in JEAL. Forty five libraries were chosen from the list. Two libraries were excluded: one having a very small Chinese collection and the other being the library where the author works. The author ensured that the survey was only sent to one librarian who is in charge of the collection per institution. Participants were informed about the purpose of the survey and that their responses would be kept confidential.

The survey was originally scheduled for May 14 to June 4. Many of the librarians were not available during this three-week period, so two extra weeks were added to the original timeline. The return rate was 80% from libraries across North America (three in Canada and 33 in the United States). Results from the data were compiled in an Excel spreadsheet.

Results

Geographic Distribution and Shelving Density

A total of 36 libraries (80%) responded to the survey representing academic libraries from private and state-funded institutions in the United States and Canada. Of the 36 respondents, 8% (3) are in Canada and 92% (33) are in the United States. Among the 33 US institutions, 14 are located on the east coast, 10 are on the west coast, and nine libraries are scattered throughout the Midwest, Southern and Rocky Mountain regions. (See Table 1 and Figure 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographic Area</th>
<th>Number (#) of Libraries</th>
<th>Percentage (%) of Libraries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Coast</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Coast</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest, Southern and Mountain Regions</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1

US (East, West and Central) vs. Canadian Institutions
The survey results discovered that over 72% (26) of the participating libraries have reached 70% or higher occupied shelf capacity, over 55% (20) of which have reached 80% or higher shelf density. It is also noted that over 50% of the academic institutions, private or state-funded, are facing an acute space shortage. (See Table 2 and Figure 2)

### Table 2
Comparison Chart of Shelf Density between Private and State-funded Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shelf Density</th>
<th># and % of Private Institutions (12)</th>
<th># and % of State-funded Institutions (24)</th>
<th>Total Institutions (36)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 49% (less than 49%)</td>
<td>1 8%</td>
<td>1 4%</td>
<td>2 5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-69%</td>
<td>2 18%</td>
<td>6 26%</td>
<td>8 22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-79%</td>
<td>2 18%</td>
<td>4 18%</td>
<td>6 17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 80% (greater than 80%)</td>
<td>7 64%</td>
<td>13 52%</td>
<td>20 55.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Figure 2
Shelf Density in Private and State-funded Institutions

Twenty one libraries indicate that their Chinese language materials are shelved with other collections while 15 libraries shelve their Chinese language materials separately. Among those 21 libraries, the majority of them interfile their Chinese language collections with Korean or Japanese language materials,
or with Chinese Studies materials in western languages. Only two libraries state that their entire Chinese language collections are shelved with all other general collections in the library following the Library of Congress classification system. Survey results reveal that over 50% of the libraries have overcrowded shelving stacks regardless of their shelving choices (interfiling or not). (See Table 3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupied Shelf Space</th>
<th># and % of Libraries That Interfile</th>
<th># and % of Libraries That Do Not Interfile</th>
<th>Total # and % of Libraries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 49%</td>
<td>1 5%</td>
<td>1 7%</td>
<td>2 5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-69%</td>
<td>7 32%</td>
<td>1 7%</td>
<td>8 22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-79%</td>
<td>2 9%</td>
<td>4 29%</td>
<td>6 17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 80%</td>
<td>12 54%</td>
<td>8 57%</td>
<td>20 56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 shows that more libraries are located on the east coast than the west coast or central regions. The libraries on the west enjoy relatively more physical space than the other two groups. The institutions that are from the Midwest, Southern and Mountain states have the most severe space problems.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shelf Density</th>
<th># and % of Libraries on the East Coast (15)</th>
<th># and % of Libraries between East &amp; West (10)</th>
<th># and % of Libraries on the West Coast (11)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 49%</td>
<td>1 7%</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>1 9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-69%</td>
<td>2 13%</td>
<td>1 10%</td>
<td>5 46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-79%</td>
<td>3 20%</td>
<td>2 20%</td>
<td>1 9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 80%</td>
<td>9 60%</td>
<td>7 70%</td>
<td>4 36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first collection development activity for Chinese language materials in an US academic library can be dated back to 1878, when Yale University received a set of Gu jin tu shu ji cheng from one of its students. This master collection is also called Complete Classics Collection of Ancient China, a ten-thousand volume compendium compiled during the Qing Dynasty. Since then, other academic libraries in the United States have also started collecting Chinese materials to meet the information needs of their scholars. It is obvious that the academic libraries that established their Chinese collections before 1950 have the strongest and largest collections in the US. People would assume that those institutions would suffer more serious space shortage problems than the younger ones. In order to find out whether or not this assumption is true, the author grouped the 33 US libraries into three clusters: the libraries that were established before 1950 (11), between 1950 and 1969 (15) and after 1970 (7). The survey data illustrates that this assumption is incorrect. In fact, based on the survey statistics, this group of organizations has fewer space issues compared to the other two groups. (See Table 5 and Figure 3)

The group of libraries that were established during the 1950s and 1960s are mostly state-funded institutions. This cluster is the largest in size among the three. They have had a longer time to
accumulate their collections as opposed to those that were established after the 1970s. Therefore, they have more space shortage problems than their younger counterparts. (See Table 5) However, they also have more crowded stacks than the older institutions due to state budget decline.

Table 5
Shelf Density According to the Collection Start Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shelf Density</th>
<th># and % of Libraries Started Chinese Collections before 1950 (11)</th>
<th># and % of Libraries Started Chinese Collections between 1950 and 1969 (15)</th>
<th># and % of Libraries Started Chinese Collections after 1970 (7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 49%</td>
<td>1 9%</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>1 14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-69%</td>
<td>5 46%</td>
<td>1 7%</td>
<td>2 29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-79%</td>
<td>1 9%</td>
<td>3 20%</td>
<td>1 14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 80%</td>
<td>4 36%</td>
<td>11 73%</td>
<td>3 43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3
Shelf Density According to the Start Year of the Collections

Options to Alleviate Space Pressure

Survey data shows clear evidence that offsite storage is the most popular collection management option to alleviate or prevent shelf space shortage in academic institutions. Eighty-one percent of libraries in the survey (29) report that they have remote storage facilities and 19% (9) indicate that they do not have any type of storage service. It is interesting to note that 22 out of 29 libraries that use a storage service indicate that they use the storage option to lessen their space crisis. (See Table 6 and Figure 4)
A few libraries comment that their institutions have a storage service, but up until the time of the survey, no Chinese language materials have been stored there. However, due to the growing lack of shelf space, low-used Chinese items will be removed from the stacks and sent to storage very soon. Two libraries state that they do not have a high-density storage facility off-campus at this moment but plan to build one in the near future. Other approaches to obtain more space for new print materials include adding new space in the library building, using compact moveable stacks, weeding duplicate copies and purchasing electronic books (e-books). (See Figure 4)

![Figure 4](chart.png)

**Figure 4**

Approaches that Help Alleviate the Overcrowding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Libraries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Off-site Storage</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-books</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compact Shelving</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Add New Space</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deselect/Weed</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results of the survey show that very few libraries offer reading rooms or browsing services in their remote storage facilities. Seventy-six percent of libraries (22) indicate that their turn-around time for retrieving requested items from storage is between 24 and 48 hours. Seventeen percent of libraries (5) say they are able to complete their deliveries in less than 24 hours while one library does not know their turn-around time and another delivers their requested items in three days or longer. (See Figure 5)
It is clearly observed from the survey that weeding/deselection is not a broadly applied collection management strategy; neither is it a high priority for most of the academic libraries that are running out of shelving space. Sixty-one percent of libraries (22) report that they do not have any written policy concerning weeding of library materials while 33% of them (12) report that they only have a library-wide collection management policy which pertains to deselection-related activities. Six percent of libraries (2) indicate that they have developed some specific criteria with regard to EAS collections. (See Figure 6)
Table 6 and Figure 7 illustrate that 28% of libraries (10) have never done any weeding of their Chinese collections, 19% (7) have weeded at least once in a one to four year period, 22% (8) have weeded their collections at least once in a five to nine year period, 8% (3) perform weeding at least once in over 10 years and 22% of libraries (8) weed their collection on an irregular or as-needed basis, which is not frequent at all.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6</th>
<th>How Often Do You Weed?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never Weed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Libraries</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Libraries</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7
How Often Do You Weed?

A few libraries emphasize in their comments that besides pulling little used duplicate materials from the stacks, they do not plan to perform any content weeding, in other words, deselecting unique items from the collection. Most frequently they withdraw low-used or duplicate items from the shelves and send them to their remote storage facilities.

Regarding the question of how a library uses Chinese electronic books or e-books, respondents could select more than one answer. Twenty libraries indicate that they have not purchased electronic books at all. Fourteen libraries state that they use e-books to supplement their existing print materials while 12 libraries
say that they utilize them to fill the gap of their print collections. Only four libraries report they are using digital books to replace the print ones. (See Figure 8)

The survey comments uncover some of the reasons why the majority of libraries surveyed have not purchased Chinese e-books. The concerns that most shared are collection policy, cost and technology issues. Many e-book vendors offer packages that include titles for general readers, and academic titles only occupy a very small percentage of their inventory. The cost of each e-book is higher than the printed version and the increase of the yearly access fee can be very surprising. Chinese e-books may work smoothly in Chinese computing systems in Asia; however, with our English platform version and our various library computing systems, it may not work well in North America. In addition, not every library has knowledgeable library computing staff members who are experts on both systems.

Conclusion

In common with other types of academic libraries, the survey data demonstrates that organizations with East Asian collections are faced with an acute physical space shortage. Most libraries are running out of shelf space and use their institutional off-site storage as a main alternative to alleviate book storage pressure. Given the unique characteristics of East Asian collections, limited availability of resources in digital format and very different user needs, academic institutions that have EAS programs will continue acquiring, managing and preserving print materials in those languages. However, it becomes a question whether it is necessary and cost efficient to have each institution build and manage their own facilities to store little-used print texts. We know that all the materials sent to the remote facility are of very low usage, which is confirmed by the survey. Why not establish more collaborative activities among East Asian library communities? This would avoid unnecessary redundant efforts and expenses; and with the savings, institutional specialties can be further developed and strengthened.

Off-site storage facilities have satisfied libraries’ space needs for the moment, but the consistent increase in print acquisitions will fill up high-density storage shelves someday. With decreasing financial funds and
growing costs in all aspects, it will be a challenging job for each institution, especially those that are state-funded, to maintain individual facilities. In addition, constantly selecting low-used materials from the stacks and preparing them for the storage is also a very time and money consuming task. Therefore, collaborative efforts among institutions are becoming a necessity, not just a nice thing to do. The author strongly believes that it is and will always be the mission of each academic library to build, manage and preserve useful and usable collections in alignment with the research and teaching activities of its institution. However, with the limited physical space and financial resources, it is wise for libraries, especially those that are not very wealthy, to spend more of their resources on access and delivery rather than on items that could be needed “just in case.” Reliable and efficient interlibrary loan and document delivery services with cooperative agreements among libraries of common interest could be a possible alternative to relieving the critical shortage of space while providing access to research materials that the individual institution does not own. This interlibrary cooperation would free many libraries from the need to maintain every title their researchers may need.14

Acknowledgements

The author would like to express her sincere appreciation to everyone who took time to respond to the survey questions and shared their insightful comments and advice. She also wants to thank many of her colleagues at the University of Arizona Library who provided her with useful tips and helpful suggestions while developing survey questions, compiling the data and writing the article. Special thanks also goes to Mr. Otto Holgersen for his proof reading and valuable feedback.

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Cited Works


APPENDIX

The University of Arizona library is facing a severe shortage of shelving space. Various strategies have been applied to alleviate the problem. I am conducting a short survey to learn if other libraries (especially libraries with Chinese Studies collections) are experiencing similar space related issues and if so, how they are dealing with them. This survey is limited to academic libraries that have Chinese language materials. The estimated time to complete the survey is 10 to 15 minutes. Your responses will be anonymous, as I will compile only the aggregated results. Thank you very much for your time and cooperation!

1. Who are your most frequent users of the Chinese Studies collections? (Please select as many as needed)
   a) Faculty (       )
   b) Undergraduates (       )
   c) Graduates at masters level (       )
   d) Graduates at doctoral level (       )
   e) Other ___________________
   Comments:

2. Has the study/learning space increased in the last five years in the library system where the Chinese collections are located?
   a) Yes (       )
   b) No (       )
   Comments:
   If the answer is Yes, what is your library’s approach (Please select as many as needed)?
   a) Decreasing stack spaces (       )
   b) Expanding the library building (       )
   c) Other ___________________
   Comments:

3. Are your Chinese Studies collections interfiled with other collections of the library?
   a) Yes (       )
   b) No (       )
   Comments:
   If the answer is Yes, what is your current shelving capacity (occupied space) in the areas where the Chinese collections are shelved?
   a) 49% or less (       )
   b) 50%-69% (       )
   c) 70%-79% (       )
   d) 80% or higher (       )
   Comments:
   If the answer is No, what is your current shelving capacity (occupied space) for the Chinese Studies collection?
   e) 49% or less (       )
   f) 50%-69% (       )
   g) 70%-79% (       )
   h) 80% or higher (       )
   Comments:
4. If the shelving capacity of the areas where the Chinese Studies collections are located is reaching 80% or higher, what approaches are being taken to alleviate this problem? (Please select as many as needed)
   a) Increasing stack space in the library (  )
   b) Sending items to offsite storage facility (  )
   c) Using compact shelving (  )
   d) Deselecting items from the Library's collection (  )
   e) Buying e-books in place of paper copies (  )
   f) None of the above (  )

 Comments:

5. Do you have up-to-date written collection development policy/criteria that have a specific section on weeding/deselection?
   a) Yes [library-wide policy] (  )
   b) Yes [a separate policy for Chinese Studies collections] (  )
   c) No (  )

 Comments:

6. How often do you weed your Chinese Studies collections?
   a) At least once in 1 - 4 years (  )
   b) At least once in 5 - 9 years (  )
   c) At least once in over 10 years (  )
   d) Never (  )

 Comments:

7. Do you use compact shelving for your Chinese Studies collections?
   a) Yes [entirely] (  )
   b) Yes [partially] (  )
   c) No (  )

 Comments:

8. Do you use offsite storage facilities as a way of alleviating overcrowded shelves for your Chinese Studies collections?
   Yes (  )
   No (  )

 Comments:

9. If your library uses offsite storage facilities, do you offer users browsing capabilities?
   Yes (  )
   No (  )

 Comments:

 If the answer is Yes, how many hours per week is the offsite storage open to the public so they can browse in the facility? ______________; and how far is the offsite storage to your current Chinese collections?
   a) Within 1 mile (  )
   b) Over 1 mile but less than 2 miles (  )
   c) 2-5 miles (  )
   d) Over 5 miles (  )

10. If you have offsite storage facilities, what is the average turn around time for users to receive their requested items from your offsite storage?
   a) Less than 24 hours (  )
   b) Between 24 and 48 hours (  )
   c) Over 48 hours (  )
11. If your library does not use any offsite storage facility at this time, does your institution plan to have one in the near future?
   Yes (   )
   No (   )
   Comments:

12. Does your library have a separate annual budget allocated for the purchase of electronic books in Chinese language?
   a) No (   )
   b) Yes.
      A. Under $2000 (   )
      B. Between $2000-5000 (   )
      C. Over $5000 (   )
   c) Other _________________
      Comments:

13. Does your library have a separate annual budget allocated for the purchase of electronic databases in Chinese language?
   a) No (   )
   b) Yes.
      A. Under $2000 (   )
      B. Between $200-5000 (   )
      C. Over $5000 (   )
   c) Other _________________
      Comments:

14. How does your library handle duplicates? (Please select as many as needed)
   a) Keep all print duplicates (   )
   b) Keep partial print duplicates (please give examples) _________________
   c) Deselect materials from the Library’s collection (   )
   d) Send print to offsite storage facility (   )
   e) Send print copies to other institutions as part of a consortial plan (   )
   f) Offer print duplicates for sale (   )
   g) Donate print to other institutions (   )
   h) Other _________________
      Comments:

15. How does your library use Chinese e-book resources? (Please select as many as needed)
   a) We have not purchased any e-books. (   )
   b) To replace print books in order to relieve overcrowded shelves. (   )
   c) To supplement existing print collections. (   )
   d) To fill the gap of the collections. (   )
   e) Other _________________
      Comments:

16. Any other general comments?