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New Directions for the *Journal of East Asian Libraries*

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NEW DIRECTIONS FOR THE *JOURNAL OF EAST ASIAN LIBRARIES*

Peer-reviewed or not? For nearly twenty years that has been the recurring topic of discussion related to our CEAL organizational publication, beginning when it was still the *CEAL Bulletin* and continuing regularly since it became the *Journal*. During the tenure of Abraham Yu as President of CEAL, the question of whether the *Journal of East Asian Libraries* should become a peer-reviewed journal was considered over a two-year period, from 2003-2005. The decision reached by the CEAL voting membership at that time, by a close vote of 73-90, was that *JEAL* should not become a peer-reviewed journal.

The Executive Board reconsidered this issue in their meetings at the annual CEAL meetings in March, 2010. After carefully weighing potential benefits and risks, the Executive Board unanimously agreed that it is time to make the change. The Board believes that the field of East Asian librarianship has matured to the point that our organization's publication should be a high-quality journal that provides a forum for scholarly discussion and a suitable place to publish discussions of the issues that engage the field. It should include substantive research articles that have gone through a rigorous peer review process that make theoretical or scholarly contributions to the field. A journal of this type would make a greater contribution to the world of ideas and the life of the mind; it would also give more credit and prestige to our profession and to those who publish in our journal.

In addition, the Executive Board recommends that once the change is made, the journal would be made up of two sections: peer-reviewed articles, and a non-peer reviewed section for statistics, reports, book reviews, news items, personnel notices, obituaries, and so on. The Board further recommends that the frequency of *JEAL* be changed to two issues per year.

The opinions of *JEAL* readers and subscribers on these recommended changes were collected May 6-20 by means of a short survey distributed via the Eastlib listserv and designed by Gail King, Asian Studies Librarian at Brigham Young University and Editor of *JEAL*.

A summary of the results of the survey follows.

Total number of surveys returned 100

Question No. 1 Nature of respondents:

88 were members of CEAL and *JEAL* subscribers; 4 were *JEAL* subscribers only;
7 were interested in *JEAL* but not a subscriber.

Question No. 2: Have you ever contributed an article to *JEAL*?

Yes 48

No 52

Question No. 3: Have you ever had an English-language article related to East Asian librarianship published elsewhere?

Yes 51

No 48

No response 1

Question No. 4: The CEAL Executive Board recommends that the *Journal of East Asian Libraries* become a peer-reviewed journal. Do you support the recommendation?

Yes 74

No 23

No response 3

Question No. 5: The CEAL Executive Board recommends that the number of issues published per year of JEAL be reduced from 3 to 2. Do you support this recommendation?

Yes 80

No 17

No response 3

Analysis of survey results:

By a majority of 3 to 1, respondents supported the change to peer-review status for the *Journal of East Asian Libraries*.

Of the 23 responses that did not support the EB recommendation to make JEAL a peer-reviewed journal:

4 had published in both JEAL and other East Asian library journals

3 had published in JEAL but not in other East Asian librarian journals

11 had not published in JEAL but had in other East Asian library journals

5 had not published in either JEAL or other East Asian library journals

Of the 74 responses that supported the EB recommendation to make JEAL a peer-reviewed journal:

14 had not published in JEAL but had published in other East Asian library journals

25 had not published in either JEAL or in other East Asian library journals

20 had published in both JEAL and in other East Asian library journals

15 had published in JEAL but not in other East Asian library journals

The main concerns expressed in the comments were (1) would enough articles be received, and (2) who would be the reviewers. In its discussions of this issue the Executive Board also considered the question of adequate number of articles. In fact, the number of articles submitted to JEAL has been declining for several years, and

the reason given by many people for not sending their work to JEAL is that they receive less credit because JEAL is not peer-reviewed. It is a merry-go-round question. The truth is, we will not know if we receive enough articles until we try it. One possibility to help with this situation would be to make one of the issues per year a peer-reviewed conference volume with articles from CEAL meeting sessions submitted for review and selection for publication. The second issue, also peer-reviewed, would be made up of articles otherwise submitted for publication.

The Executive Board also discussed who would be the reviewers. After considering a number of options, it was decided to make managing the peer review process a responsibility of the Members at Large on the EB. This does not necessarily mean that At-large EB members will review all the articles themselves. Some articles may require special knowledge to review, outside the expertise of the At-large EB members. But it would be the responsibility of the At-large members to get the articles reviewed by responsible, knowledgeable reviewers. In other words, the responsibilities of At-Large members of the Executive Board would be enlarged to include serving as an Editorial Board for JEAL.

One of the services JEAL has performed is to provide a place for beginning librarians to publish; or, alternatively, as a place for established librarians to publish less formal writings. I think this is an important function that should be continued, and I think that ways can be devised to make that happen—primarily, by an editorial policy that emphasizes success in the review process—essentially, the way I operate now, but with a more rigorous review policy so that our journal can legitimately be classified as a peer-review journal with all the added credit for publication that implies. These things, like many others, will become more clear as the move to being a peer reviewed journal is implemented. There are, of course, details to be worked out, such as which months the *Journal* will be published, and when the changes will take effect. These details need not affect the basic decision for change.

When any change is undertaken there are always concerns and fears about how it will all work out or how certain things will be handled or what if there are problems. But these concerns and fears should not hamper our resolve to implement change or keep us from trying what has been determined by the Executive Board and the great majority of CEAL members and JEAL subscribers to be the path forward for our *Journal*. We have talked about this idea repeatedly. It is time to give it a try. If it succeeds, we are all the better for it. If it does not, then at least we have tried. But let us be positive and work toward its success with vigor and good will.

Gail King
Editor, *Journal of East Asian Libraries*