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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Recently there have been major national efforts to examine the future of research libraries and their role in advancing international scholarship, area studies collections, and the globalization of universities of which they are a part. These include a forum in Duke University in December 2012 and a workshop in Indiana University in October 2013. These gatherings brought together faculty, administrators, librarians, and representatives from scholarly societies, associations and funding agencies. I was fortunate to be invited to both events. I would like to use this President's message to share with CEAL members my recent thinking on those developments and issues.

International scholarship and international studies have always found a place at the best research universities in the United States; and international studies depend on collections in the same way that the sciences depend on laboratories. In recent years, however, shrinking budgets and the burgeoning open access movement have driven more and more libraries increasingly to rely on third parties to develop in-depth research collections for the international and area studies programs on their campuses. The problem then becomes how to leverage on-campus collections against other institutions' resources in order to fully support campus programming and research needs.

Today, riding the wave of digital technology and content development, research libraries are weeding, if not eliminating, their duplicate print collections. While electronic books and journals are fast bridging the divide between the largest research libraries and their smaller peers, what still distinguishes the former are their foreign language and special collections. This means that areas studies librarianship and international collections remain as vital as ever.

Good international collections attract faculty, students, and visiting scholars from all over the world. They also contribute to faculty retention since they can have a direct impact on scholars' ability to conduct research at their home institutions. Despite the sea change high tech and the internet have brought about, the need to train undergraduate and graduate students in the use of primary source materials remains constant. In-house area studies collections are the most effective tool for such training.

In this fast-changing world, conventional measurements of research libraries are still important benchmarks for gauging the strength of a library and its impact on its constituency. But increasingly important are electronic measurements, particularly an institution's digital capacity for meeting patron needs through, for instance, remote access and in-time, location-free services and information delivery. Usage statistics, when taken out of context, are often inaccurate and can be skewed. More importantly, they do not take into account the mission of the research library, whose collection priorities cannot be simply determined by the number of volumes charged out in a given period of time.

Research libraries collect for posterity as well as for their present constituency. Nonetheless, it can be argued that as English-language academic publications become increasingly available online, the need to maintain them in print decreases proportionately. This is not true, however, when it comes to foreign publications (as there is not yet such a cyber-collection)—nor will it become true in the foreseeable future, for a variety of technical, economic, cultural, and geopolitical reasons. Therefore for many East Asian/area studies collections, collecting for posterity is still the norm and will remain the norm.

Needless to say, in today's environment, interlibrary cooperation in collecting materials in all languages is becoming increasingly important. What we must resolve is what our long-term obligations to our collecting partners will be, and how we can ensure that our key research programs and collecting areas will be supported as fully as possible. The challenge will be to develop fair, cost-effective, efficient models for collection development among all partners.

May I also point out that it is important to develop assessment tools for interlibrary cooperation, and to share information on how peer institutions have restructured their collections budgets to accommodate new collection and service programs. Other measurements may include the library's ability to integrate student learning and faculty research into library services, and to incorporate librarians' expertise into the teaching and research paradigm, possibly through teaching, research consultation, data creation, navigation, data and content curating, or courseware development.

Beyond collections, we also need to enhance the discovery experience and information aggregation across national boundaries, such as web archiving of online resources. We need to look at emerging areas of research. One approach would be to analyze new faculty research interests in light of current collecting practices, then redirect East Asian/area studies collections in that direction, making them more central to faculty needs. We need to take a proactive approach to the changing landscape of academic publishing, especially with respect to border-crossing, trans-disciplinary, and interdisciplinary research and teaching, media studies, social networking, and digital humanities and social sciences. The age of big data is here, and we need to consider how our collections and services will adapt to it.

We must consider the future of Title VI of the National Defense Education Act. This will have a pronounced impact on area studies collections. We need to assess our current reliance on Title VI and develop a strategy for maintaining and developing our collections in the event that Title VI is phased out.

At this critical moment, we, the East Asian library professionals, must communicate our values and contributions to our clientele, library and campus administration, as well as to the general public. The current focus on globalization in North American universities promotes an education based on a broad understanding of societies around the world through the study of foreign languages and the acquisition of area-based knowledge. International and East Asian/area studies collections dovetail into the current trend of internationalization. The direct relevance of area studies collections to internationalization cannot be overemphasized. Let us form strong partnerships with faculty and students. Integrate library services—such as interactive, up-to-the-minute information delivery—into their academic endeavors—global discovery, student training, course development—to demonstrate that East Asian collections are a vital component of building a globalized campus.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Zhou". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Peter X. Zhou
President, Council on East Asian Libraries