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Gateway to East Asian Studies: An Analytical Report of Subject Guides in North American East Asian Libraries

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Introduction

Most North American academic libraries have for decades used subject guides to help their users locate relevant information in a specific subject field. In the digital age, Web-based subject guides have gained more popularity, and it is rare to see a library that does not have any online subject guides. East Asian libraries are no exception, and East Asia librarians have been creating electronic subject guides to assist their users, especially in finding resources in foreign languages. Although East Asian guides are important in terms of providing aids for users to explore foreign resources, no literature exists regarding East Asian subject guides in US academic libraries. This article intends to investigate the topic of subject guides in East Asian studies in US academic libraries, and report on the platform and structure of the guides and relevant library resources and services provided.

Literature Review

The concept of library subject guides is not new, and academic libraries have long been using various formats of subject guides as pathfinders to information. As early as the 1930s, B. Lamar Johnson at Stephens College experimented in academic libraries in integrating library bibliographic services to facilitate instruction and learning. Later in the 1950s, similar studies were carried on at Monteith College by Patrica Knapp (Kent, Lancour, and Daily 1978, 223). Coined by Maria Canfield at MIT in 1972, a pathfinder was defined as “a checklist of references to those basic sources representing the variety of forms in which information on a specific topic can be found,” which “enables a user to follow an organized search path” (Canfield 1972, 287). According to the *Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science*, a pathfinder is “a subject bibliography designed to lead the user through the process of research a specific topic, or any topic in a given field of discipline, usually in a systematic, step-by-step way, making use of the best finding tools that library has to offer” (Reitz 2013). Pathfinders can be either print or electronic; however, in most of the literature pathfinders are associated with print format, while subject guides are associated with electronic format. In this paper, the term pathfinder is considered to encompass subject guides, research guides, and library guides in any format.

Library subject guides first appeared in print format, and abundant literature has discussed traditional print pathfinders and provided guidelines and suggestions for librarians to construct subject guides (Breivik 1982; Canfield 1972, 283-300; Jackson 1984, 468-471; Kapoun 1995, 93-105; Peterson and Coniglio 1987, 233-239; Stevens

1973, 40-46; Thompson and Stevens 1985, 224-225). Although these articles primarily focused on print guides, they were later cited in the literature regarding electronic subject guides and used to provide recommendations for later electronic guides.

The late 1990s witnessed the emergence of web-based pathfinders, and since then, a plethora of research has been reported on electronic library research guides (Vileno 2007, 434-451). Similar to previous literature regarding print pathfinders, most of the studies conducted between the late 1990s and the early 2000s emphasized providing guidelines and recommendations for librarians engaged in creating guides (Cox 1997, 39-43; Dahl 2001, 227-237; Dunsmore 2002, 137-156; Jackson and Pellack 2004, 319-327; Morris and Grimes 1999, 213-217; Morville and Wickhorst 1996, 27-32; Wang and Hubbard 2005, 618-625). More recent studies, especially those after the mid-2000s, concentrated more on user-centered issues, such as accessibility, usability, evaluation, and so on (Dean 1998, 80-88; Hintz et al. 2010, 39-52; Magi 2003, 671-686; O'Sullivan and Scott 2000; Reeb and Gibbons 2004, 123-130; Staley 2007, 119-140). Studies on specific subjects have also been conducted, such as business, health science, philology, communication. In all these studies, however, there is no research about East Asian studies subject guides. This article aims to bridge this gap by investigating the current state of subject guides in the field of East Asian studies and the design and use of subject guides in the field.

Method

From June 6, 2013 to June 19, 2013, the authors visited both the library homepages and East Asian library/collection websites of 48 East Asian libraries listed by the Council on East Asian Libraries (CEAL 2013) to look for subject guides for East Asian studies, Chinese studies, Japanese studies, and Korean studies (CJK studies). Topic guides and course guides were excluded from this study. Of the 48 East Asian libraries/collections, four libraries/collections do not have any online guides available on their websites and were excluded from the statistical analysis. Some libraries did not create guides for certain countries/regions. Altogether, 137 guides were studied. The authors observed eleven parameters for a holistic examination of East Asian guides, which included platform used, entry point, title of the guide, librarian's contact information, resource categories, instructional video, embedded instant messaging, web 2.0 features, clarity of ownership of online resources, resource annotation and last updated time.

Results and Discussion

Platform

Platform refers to the web application that is used to host and create subject guides. Among 137 guides, 59% (81) of guides were hosted by LibGuide, which is a mainstream subject guide software developed by Springshare; 27% (37) of guides by other Content Management Systems (CMS), whose brands the authors were unable to identify; and 4% (19) of guides were found to be coded by HTML, whose URLs ended with .html.

Most East Asian libraries/collections employed the same platform to host East Asian guides, Chinese studies, Japanese studies, and Korean studies guides. However, some libraries/collections **utilized** different platform for guides with different subjects. The most common inconsistency **was** that the East Asian guides, usually the guides for the English language collection, used the mainstream platform adopted by the university libraries, but Chinese, Japanese, and Korea (CJK) guides used a different platform. In other cases, even within CJK guides, different platforms were used. For example, one library had a Chinese subject guide hosted by LibGuide, while the Japanese and Korean subject guides were written in HTML.

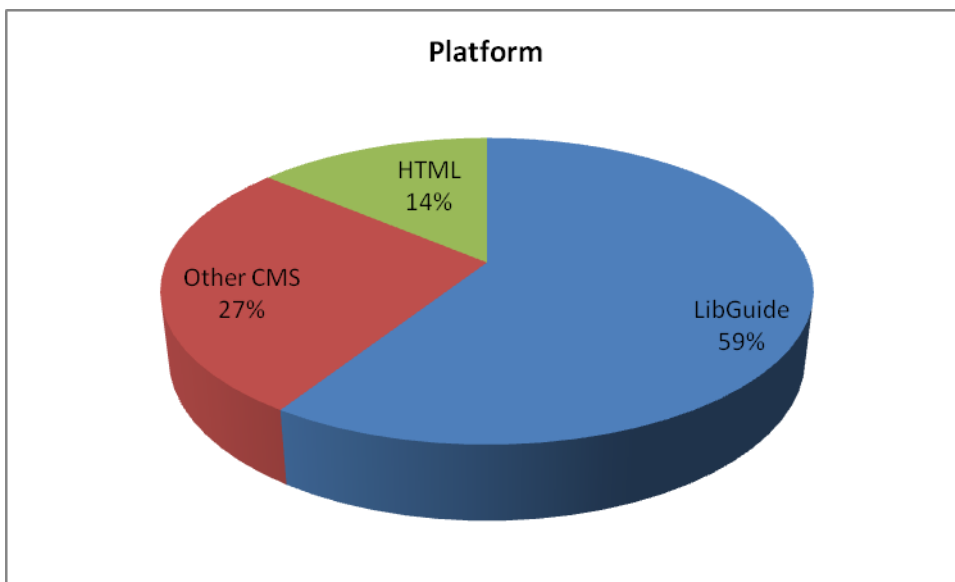


Table 1: Platform used to host guides

Entry Point

Among 44 libraries, 52% (23) of libraries provided entry points both on the main library homepages and East Asian library/collection homepages, 23% (10) of offered only entry links on their homepages, and 20% (9) only listed guides' links on their EA library/collection's sites. Two libraries did not provide any access points to their guides, and these guides can only be retrieved through searching the main library search box. In one case, the subject guide listed on the East Asia library/collection's page appeared to be different from the one linked from main library's homepage.

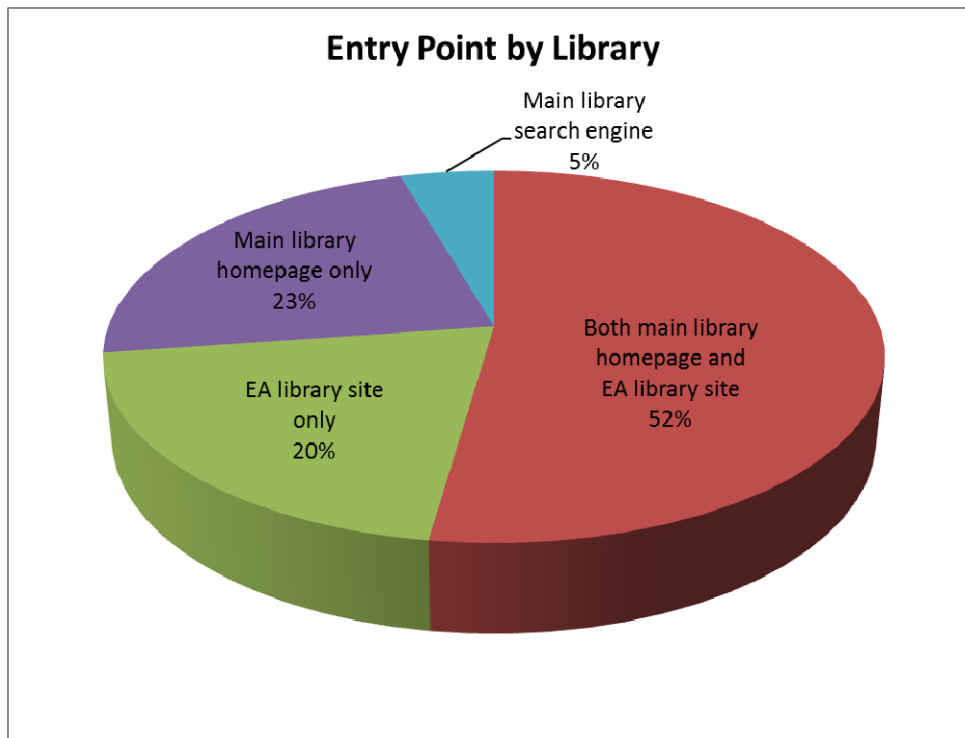


Table 2: Guides' Entry Point

Title of the Guide

"Research Guide" is the most popular name, and 39% (53) of the guides used this name. The second most popular name was "Subject Guide" which represented 28% (38) of the total share. Eight percent (10) of the guides were labeled "Study Guide." The rest 25% (34) of the guides chose other names other than these three common names, such as resource guide, resource gateway, and East Asian collection.

While recording various ways of naming their guides, the authors also noticed that some guides were used as their East Asian library/collection's homepage. Some guides were used as a collection's usage guide and listed locally owned materials. It appears that course guides or topic guides are gaining increasing popularity. These guides were linked from general subject guides to help users retrieve more specific information about a particular course. Some libraries only created course guides or topic guides.

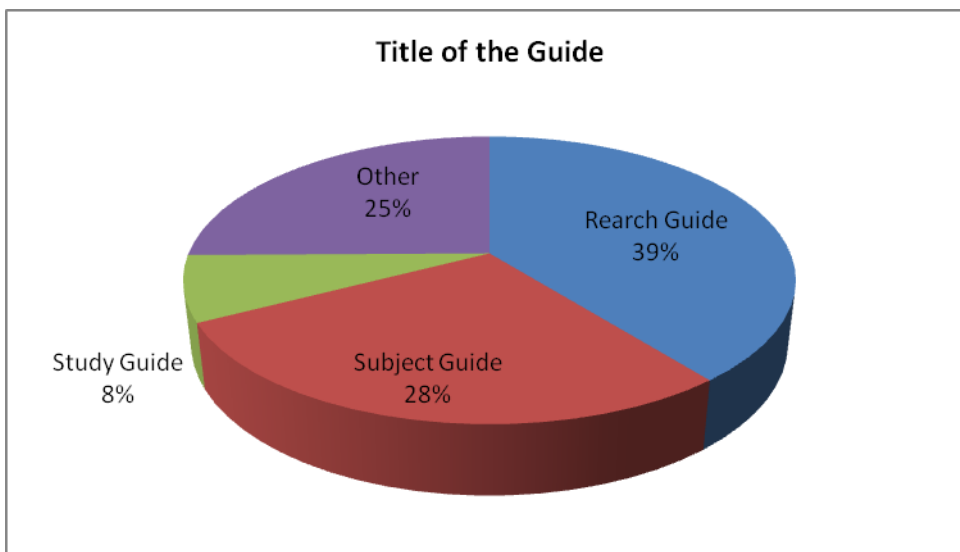


Table 3: Title of the Guide

Librarian's Contact Information

The great majority of guides provided librarian's contact information, including name, telephone, email, and office address. However, some librarian's contact information was missing or listed incompletely. Although the missing information could be found on the central staff page, this makes the librarian seem less approachable. Some guides listed contact information of multiple librarians with different job titles, which might be misleading for users. Of all the investigated guides, half (68) included the librarian's photograph. But some photographs were too small for users to identify, and a very few librarians used images instead of their photographs, such as scenery images.

List of Categories

Category here refers to the type of information listed on the guides. Twenty-six categories were selected to label different types of information, which included article indexes and databases, atlases and maps, biographical sources, blogs, bookstores, book reviews, chronologies, citation instruction, dissertations and theses, e-books, e-journals, English translated materials, government information, images, library catalog, museums and galleries, news, organizations and associations, primary sources, print journals, reference materials, special local collections, statistics, study abroad advice, films, and Internet resources.

The top 15 categories that were most frequently used are article indexes and databases (119), Internet resources (93), news (81), reference materials (76), library catalogs (74), statistics (50), e-journals (46), e-books (37), films (35), organizations & associations (34), print magazines (32), dissertation & thesis (31), images (29), special collection (28), and primary sources (26).

A major phenomenon the authors found was the lack of controlled vocabulary to categorize resources, which may cause confusion. For example, should e-journals belong to Database or be a separate category? In other guides, two different terms were used to label the same type of resources, such as Internet resources and Websites.



Table 4: List of Categories (the top fifteen categories)

Instructional Video

Instructional video refers to videos or tutorials that are designed to demonstrate how to use a library's resources. Only seven guides out of 137 embedded or linked to instructional videos. The most commonly covered topics were CJK searching and the use of a specific foreign language database.

Embedded Instant Messaging Service

Chat reference has become a standard reference service in most academic libraries, and can be found on many libraries' homepages. This study found that 21 out of 137 guides embedded an instant messaging service, or chat box, which reaches either a subject librarian or a general reference librarian.

Web 2.0 Features

Web 2.0 features in this study refer to the application of web tools to enable interaction between users and libraries or among users in a social media environment. A significant number of libraries adopted at least one type of web 2.0 feature. The detailed breakdown shows that 28% libraries (75) had social bookmarking functions available on their subject guides, 23% (61) provided RSS feeds, 17% (45) had comment or feedback capability, and 7% (20) linked to their Facebook accounts. Twitter (11) and Blog (10) take about 4% of the total share each. Some web 2.0 features were not present on the subject guides' homepages, instead, they were buried in sub-pages, which made them difficult for users to find.

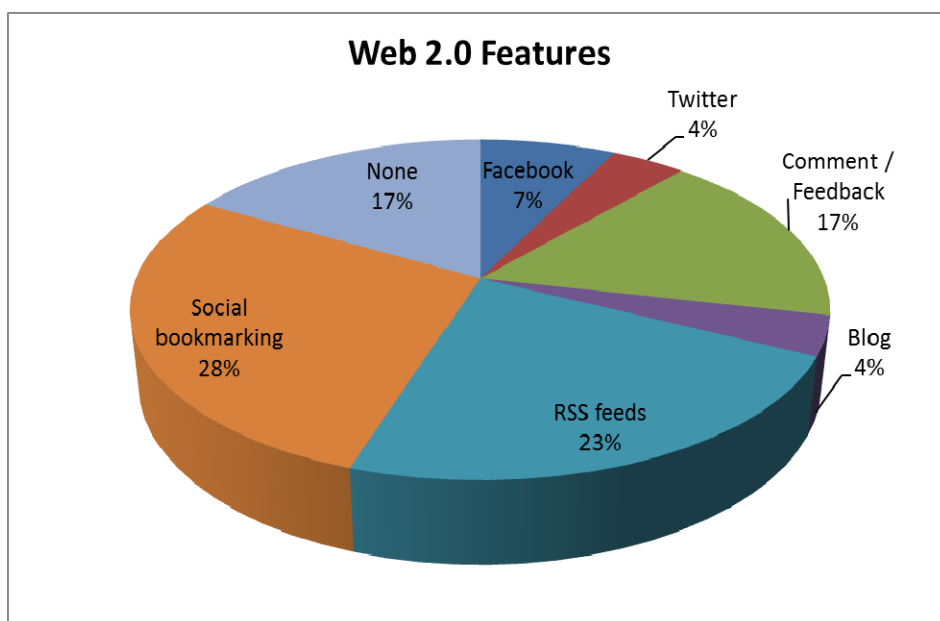


Table 5: Web 2.0 Features

Clarity of Ownership of Online Resources

We observed that many guides included both subscribed and freely available resources. We considered the following options are clear about the ownership of online resources: using the terms “owned” or “free” resources, using special icons (e.g. a lock icon) and language (e.g. restricted to a certain university), or listing owned and free resources separately. It appears that 60% (82) of the guides did not clearly distinguish between owned and free online resources: in other words, only 40% (55) of the guides clearly distinguish between owned and free resources.

Resource Annotations

As for annotations of listed resources, guides varied in the level of explanation. Some had very detailed information, such as the scope and coverage, and others only had a

few words. In this study, we only examined the existence of annotations and did not investigate whether enough information is given to help the user get a general idea of the listed sources. Seventy-one percent (97) of the guides had annotations following the resource links; 29% (40) listed only names and links of resources, but failed to provide any descriptive information.

Last Updated Time

This parameter measured the currency of the existing guides. We grouped the “last updated time” into several chunks of time based on the freshness of the guides, using June 6, 2013 as the cut-off date. Among 137 guides we visited, 30% (41) of the guides did not show “last updated time.” Forty-six per cent(63) of the guides were updated within the recent three months, 8% (11) of the guides within the recent three to six months, 6% (8) between six and twelve months, 6% (8) between one and two years ago, 2% (3) between two and four years ago, and 2% (3) were updated more than 4 years ago.

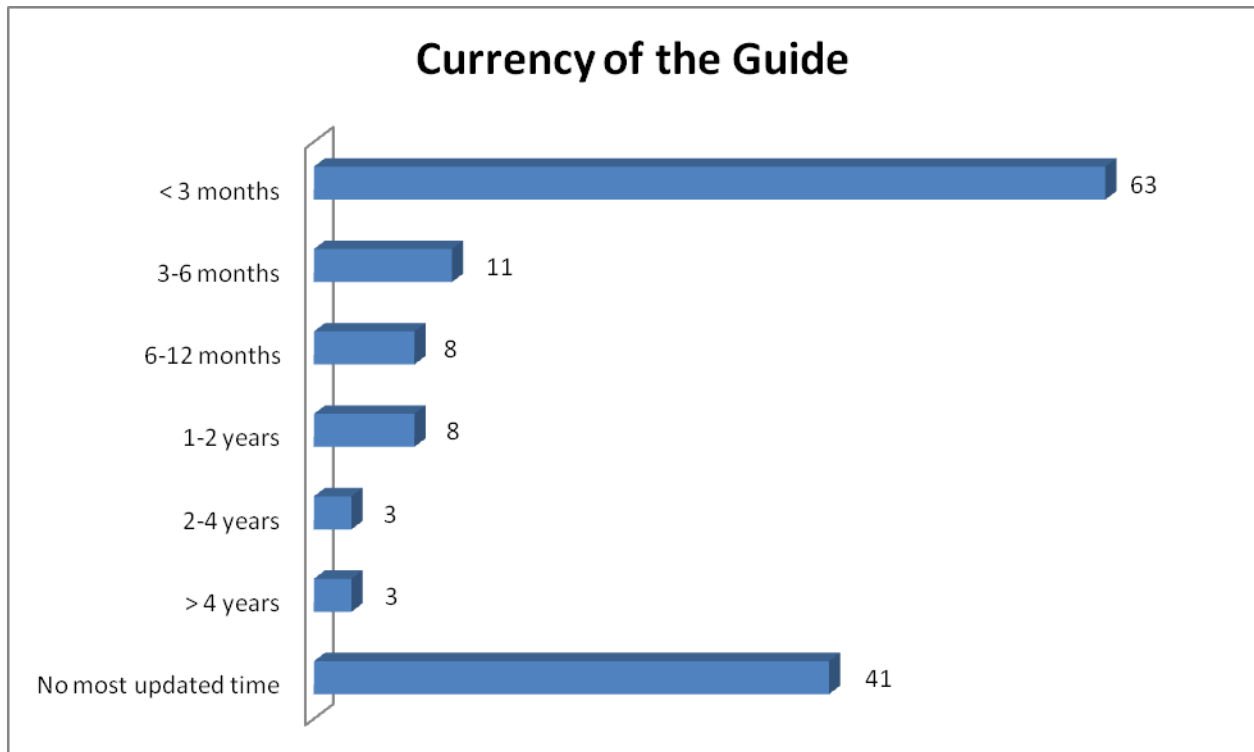


Table 6: Currency of the Guide

Conclusion

This report presented a holistic picture of how East Asian libraries/collections have been using subject guides to promote usage of East Asian materials in print and electronic formats. It serves as an opportunity to open up the discussion among East Asian librarians about how service can be improved in the future. As the first step of

this Subject Guide study, this report will be followed by surveys sent out to East Asian librarians to gather more information regarding the creation of guides. The authors hope to solicit feedback in the following areas: Choices of guides' platform, workflow, maintenance of guides, effectiveness of guides and user assessment. Fellow librarians' feedback is essential to this study, as it provides individual experience and reflection. Such feedback will be incorporated into the follow-up paper and shared among CEAL community.

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Appendix

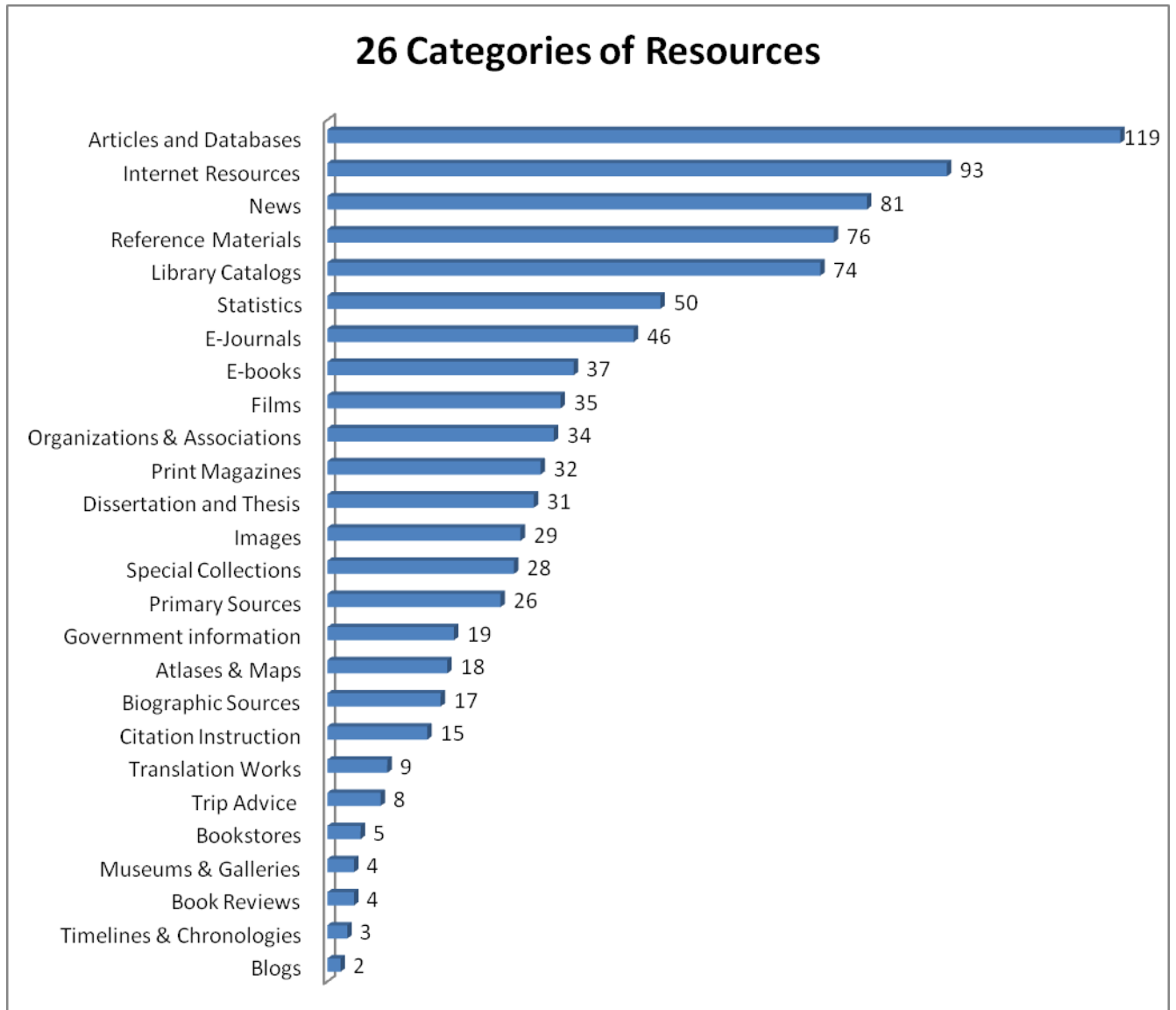


Table 7: 26 Categories of Resources

Supplementary Notes about Categories:

Articles and Databases: including owned and free resources in electronic formats. Index database is also included in this category.

Dissertation and Thesis: including owned and free resources in both print and electronic formats.

E-books: electronic books, including owned and free resources.

E-journals: electronic journals, including owned and free resources. Some libraries wrap it under "Databases"

Films: in all formats, including owned and free resources. Some libraries use Movies or Multimedia Resources as alternate terms.

Government Information: including owned and free resources in both print and electronic formats.

Images: including owned and free resources in both print and electronic formats.

Internet Resources: free Internet resources, include search engines. Some guides use Website as an alternate term.

Library Catalog: including local and outside catalogs. Some libraries use "Finding Books" as an alternate term.

News: including owned and free resources in both print and electronic formats.

Organizations & Associations: including affiliated and unaffiliated organizations and associations.

Print Magazines: including owned subscription journals in print format.

Primary Sources: including owned and free resources in both print and electronic formats.

Reference Materials: including owned and free resources in both print and electronic formats (e.g. dictionary, directory, thesauri and encyclopedia).

Special Collection: locally owned rare materials and special materials.

Statistics: including owned and free resources. Some libraries include Statistics as a subgroup of Government Information.

Atlas & Maps: including owned and free resources, in both print and electronic formats.

Book Reviews: links to book review websites.

Bookstores: links to popular bookstores for purchasing new or used Chinese, Japanese and Korean books in US and abroad.

Blogs: links to well-known blogs on East Asian topics.

Biographic Sources: including owned and free resources in both print and electronic formats.

Citation Instruction: guides that introduce users to citing information in a variety of citation styles, or links to citation guides.

Museums and Galleries: links to relevant museums and galleries.

Timelines & Chronologies: including owned and free resources on historical events listed in chronological order, in both print and electronic formats.

Translation Works: including owned and free resources in both print and electronic formats.

Trip Advice: links to general information for students and scholars to travel to China, Japan and Korea.

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