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Some Thoughts on the CEAL Roundtable Discussion on the Organizational Models of Future East Asian Libraries

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There was a time, in the 1940s, the question facing the East Asian collections in American libraries was a very simple one: how to get the books cataloged for use. Sixty years later in the digital age things have become a lot more complicated. From choosing a classification scheme to catalog the books, we are now debating which organizational model is the most effective for East Asian libraries to adopt. East Asian libraries have come a long way. The once rather insignificant collections of East Asian books have over the decades evolved into a major component of the America academic library holdings. This development did not come by accident. Many years of diligent and hard work by many dedicated librarians have contributed to this success story.

East Asian studies in the United State is today the most developed in the Western world, and that accomplishment is due, in no small measure, to the strong and steady support it has received from the nation's East Asian libraries. The pursuit of scholarship cannot be sustained without research resources. Libraries are created to acquire, organize and make available those resources for scholarly use. The two go hand in hand and cannot be separated. The late Prof. John K. Fairbank (1907-1991) used to say: "Great universities always have great libraries. No university can be great without a great library." He hit the nail right on its head. Libraries are the foundation on which scholarship is built. The stronger the foundation, the more solid the structure.

Prior to World War II, East Asian studies in this country followed mainly the European Sinological tradition, focusing on the study of language, literature, history, philosophy and religion, and the East Asian libraries followed suit by collecting research materials related to those fields. But that orientation went through a qualitative change after WWII. That change was a direct consequence of the transformation of Japan from a monarchy to a democracy, the founding of the People's Republic of China under communism, and the subsequent Korean War, all of which combined to raise Americans' awareness of the importance of East Asia and the need to learn more about its histories and civilizations. With strong financial support from private foundations and the federal government, new teaching and research programs on East Asian were introduced not only at those universities that were already offering some courses on East Asia before WWII, but also at institutions that entered into the East Asian field for the first time after the War, and a concomitant development was the creation of a number of new East Asian libraries. The changed teaching and research orientation called for a different approach to the study of East Asia than traditional Sinology.

The concept of "Area Studies" was adopted, that is to say, the study of an area, a society or a country from all applicable social science perspectives rather than from the standpoint of just one single discipline.

In order to keep up with this newly chartered course, libraries redirected their main attention to the collecting of modern and contemporary publications, especially in the social sciences. Non-book and ephemeral materials were also collected for the first time. All East Asian libraries, old and new, embraced this change of direction. After several decades of steady and rapid development, the accumulated research resources of East Asian libraries in this country are now without any doubt the best in the Western world. A few statistics will suffice to illustrate the progress. In 1940 there were twenty East Asian libraries with a total holding of 869,000 volumes. Ten years later in 1950, the total holding of the same twenty libraries had jumped to 1,774.000 volumes, an increase of almost one million volumes. Another survey conducted in 1964 shows that at the end of that year, there were 46 libraries (including five museum libraries) with a total holding of 3,526.000 volumes, doublint the 1950 count. This unprecedented growth continued uninterrupted. The latest survey shows that at the end of 2016 there were 49 East Asian libraries with a total holding of 26,712,567 physical volumes (including 5,422,032 eBooks), and 678,752 serials (including 563,736 electronic subscriptions). With this strong library foundation, it is not surprising that East Asian studies in the United States is the leader in the Western world.

In this special issue, the authors of the essays trace how the libraries they represent get to the point where they can now provide strong support for East Asian studies at their home institutions. The issues they discuss are complicated ones, for each university has its own mission and priorities in teaching and research, and the libraries must adapt their work in ways that will help fulfill those goals. These essays should serve as a useful reference to library administrators in this digital age.

Today technology has made work in East Asian libraries easier and much more efficient than ever before. However, we must remember that technology is only the means and not the end. While training librarians in the application of more wonderful technology, we must not lose sight of the fact that the main purpose of libraries is to build collections useful for scholarship. Technology can help us enormously in the technical process of acquisition, cataloging and public service, but it cannot help us decide what to acquire to build up good collections. The latter requires a different kind of training that libraries may ignore at their own risk. So regardless of which organizational model is adopted, it is incumbent upon the East Asian libraries to pay equal attention to ensuring our colleagues, particularly those just entering the field, have the opportunity to deepen their knowledge of the subject matters concerned in order to provide the best possible service.

Parts of this article are taken from an address I delivered at the 80th Anniversary Celebration of the East Asia Library of University of Washington on Nov. 3, 2017. Statistical figures are based on G. Raymond Nunn and Tsuen-Hsuin Tsien, "Far Eastern Resources in American Libraries" in *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy,* vol. 29, No. 1 (Jan., 1959), p.31, and *Journal of East Asian Libraries* (JEAL), Issue no, 164 (Feb., 2017), pp. 4-21.