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The East Asian Technical Services Model at the University of California, Berkeley

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1. Historical Background

The Agassiz Chair in East Asian Languages and Literature was the first chair endowed at the University of California, Berkeley. The University began collecting materials in East Asian languages in 1896, when the first holder of the chair, John Fryer, arrived on campus. The collection was seeded with Fryer's own volumes, and grew chiefly through purchases made by faculty while abroad on sabbatical, and through the acquisition of the libraries of retiring faculty and friends. From its inception, the collection was closely associated with the Department of East Asian Languages, which comprised its core constituency. But in the first fifty years of the collection's history, there was never one full-time librarian overseeing the development or accessibility of the collection, which was then divided between a dedicated reading room and the University Library's general stacks.

The East Asian Library (EAL) was established as a language-specialty library in 1947. Five years later, it moved into a building shared with the Department of East Asian Languages. EAL personnel included language bibliographers as well as public services staff. EAL also had its technical services staff to catalog and process materials in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean, and to a much lesser degree, Mongolian, Tibetan, and Manchu. Its chief constituency continued to be faculty and students in the humanities, including languages and literature, history and art history, and, later, Buddhist studies.

As the Cold War developed, and the needs of social sciences faculty interested in contemporary China grew, special funding was procured from the University President to establish the Center for Chinese Studies Library (CCSL). Although CCSL was originally under the aegis of the Center for Chinese Studies, by the early 1980s it had been folded into the organizational structure of the University Library. At that point, the University Library began to provide funding for ongoing collection development and for the position of Head, while the Center continued to fund staff positions and other operations. And while the Head reported to the Director of EAL, CCSL continued to maintain its own selector and technical services and public services staff.

In 2008, CCSL merged with EAL when both moved into the C. V. Starr East Asian Library and Chang-Lin Tien Center for East Asian Studies, the first free-standing building constructed in North America specifically to house an East Asian collection.

2. Current Organizational Model

As a stand-alone library, the Starr maintains its own service points and full-fledged public and technical services. A portion of the collection is housed in off-site storage. The combined collection is one of twenty-three libraries in the UC Berkeley Library system. EAL librarians may participate in system-wide councils or committees, such as the Arts and Humanities Council and Social Sciences Council as representatives of EAL. Their offices are located in EAL, they work in EAL, and they report only to the director of EAL.

Administration

The Director of EAL holds the concurrent title of Assistant University Librarian, and as such reports to the University Librarian. At EAL the Director has six professional staff reporting to him:

- three language bibliographers,
- one electronic resources librarian/Head of Public Services,
- the Head of Technical Services, and
- the rare book curator/manager of Administrative Services.

Each language bibliographer supervises one bibliographical assistant. The Head of Public Services supervises three library assistants. The Head of Technical Services supervises 6.5 professional and nonprofessional staff, in addition to a varying number of limited-term staff. The manager of Administrative Services supervises one limited-term administrative assistant.

Statistics

EAL units collect statistics throughout the fiscal year. At the end of the year, the figures are sent to the University Library. The same figures are used to report CEAL statistics at the end of the calendar year.

Some statistics are reported automatically to the University Library: circulation statistics (with the exception of manual circulations) are reported through Millennium, Berkeley's integrated library system; statistics tracking directional and reference questions and instructional sessions are reported through LibAnalytics.

The statistics reported to the University Library are included in the annual Association of Research Library statistics. They are also used by the University to track what resources are housed where, for inventory and insurance purposes. The CEAL statistics help EAL gauge where it stands, among peer institutions, with respect to collection size, personnel, and fiscal support.

Changes in organization, constituency, and services in the last ten years

The 2008 merger with CCSL broadened EAL's collecting profile, giving greater prominence to social sciences and contemporary studies. This dovetailed with a growing emphasis on campus in research and teaching in fields of a non-classical nature, such as film and media studies, diaspora studies, and gender studies. It also coincided with the expansion of Asian studies programming on campus to include fields not originally served by EAL, such as public health, environmental studies, and psychology. Serving the needs of this new constituency has been facilitated by new methods of delivering information, such as e-books and subscription data bases.

Because EAL bibliographers work closely with faculty and students, they are quite familiar with research interests on campus. Because they are in close communication with the Institute of East Asian Studies' Centers for Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Buddhist Studies, they are familiar with research trends off campus. This allows EAL's language bibliographers to select materials of both immediate and timely interest, while keeping an eye on the collection's historical strengths.

The new building's design includes group study rooms, a seminar room, a media classroom, and a large, environmentally controlled rare book room, all of which were absent in the library's old quarters. Now classes in East Asian studies meet in the library regularly, sometimes consulting collections, electronic resources, or EAL staff during class. The proximity of the rare book collection has led more instructors to include materials from the rare book room in their classes and curricula. Publicity surrounding the dedication of the building ten years ago has also drawn the off-campus community's attention to EAL's rare materials collection, leading to a much more active outreach program than it had in the past.

Integrated services

A new practice emerging at EAL is the integration of acquisitions and cataloging at overseas locations, such as Tokyo or Beijing. Books that have been selected for acquisition are cataloged, marked, and provided with end processing (e.g., application of bar codes for circulation and inventory purposes), all before coming to Berkeley. When they do arrive, they are ready to be shelved and circulated.

Currently more than half of EAL's Japanese and over a third of its Chinese acquisitions are processed this way. It has reduced the time it takes new acquisitions to become available enormously. It has also required EAL bibliographers and collection management librarians to work closely and regularly with Technical Services staff.

This type of synergy is appearing throughout EAL library operations. The ever-growing demand for digitization of library materials, for instance, has led to further cooperation between bibliographers, Technical Services, and EAL's rare materials curator: the curator and bibliographers contribute collection and curatorial oversight; Technical Services contributes metadata and discovery mechanisms to ensure the effectiveness of the endeavor.

Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined without being siloed. It is a model that is becoming increasingly common and, in the face of shrinking budget and staffing resources, increasingly necessary.

The Technical Services model

Technical Services, the center of the synergistic model, is one of six units at EAL. The Head of the unit sits on the Berkeley Library system's Catalog and Metadata Council, and consequently communicates regularly with the Head of the Library system's Catalog and Metadata Services. At EAL, the Technical Services Head reports to the Director. Within the unit, the Technical Services Head has eight direct reports:

- three cataloging librarians, one for each of the major languages in the collection, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean;
- four cataloging assistants—two for Chinese, one for Japanese, and one for Korean;
- and one serials coordinator.

EAL's Technical Services' workflow is based on language. Its cataloging librarians consequently handle materials in all subject areas and in all formats, including monographs, serials, manuscripts, audio-visual materials, e-resources, microfilm, and maps. EAL cataloging librarians and library assistants create original and copy cataloging bibliographic records in the ILS Millennium, as well as holdings records and item records.

EAL's Technical Services and organizational considerations

To ensure uniformity throughout the Berkeley catalog and because other collections on campus—Anthropology, for instance—regularly acquire a limited number of titles in East Asian languages, the idea of merging EAL's Technical Services unit with the library system's catalog and metadata services has been floated from time to time.

The advantage of this model is clear: better communication. But Berkeley's system-wide cataloging and metadata council already ensures regular and direct communication between EAL's technical services and the central catalog and metadata unit.

The disadvantages of the model are more significant. First, it would effectively constrict communication between East Asian catalogers and bibliographers and their assistants. This would impact receiving, claiming, and cataloging. Second, it would separate catalogers from the collections they are charged with making accessible in a coherent, consistent way. While mainstream acquisitions, like contemporary literature or historical studies, may be competently cataloged remotely, sets and loose collections of like material, such as gazetteers, are less easily handled from a distance. Finally, the model renders catalogers unavailable to respond to queries from researchers who might question the dating, for example, of an early edition or manuscript in the rare materials collection.

The merged Technical Services model might work under different conditions—a smaller constituency, a larger staff, a more generous budget, a slower-paced world—but having the advantage of none of these, the synergistic model has become critical to EAL operations.

3. Summary and Reflections

From the Cold War era to the digital age, Berkeley's East Asian Library has embodied the University's aspirations to provide its students and faculty with the finest resources for teaching and research, to compete with other institutions globally, and to extend beyond the state line and the nation's borders in its intellectual outlook. It could never have grown as quickly as it has, and it could never have developed such a rich collection as it has, had it not been, from its establishment, a fully functional, comprehensive library.

Essential to the comprehensiveness of its collections is having a staff that is competent in all functional areas, that can cross into other areas when necessary, and that can work synergistically. To have a staff that lacks a Technical Services unit, to have to work with catalogers unfamiliar with the collection in its entirety, or the nature of its constituency, would decrease the effectiveness of EAL operations without reducing overall costs within the Library system. To fracture an integral operation is like taking a hammer to a fine lump of jade: all the pieces might be retained, but the value of the original has been diminished and cannot be restored.