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Two Different Institutional Models in Canada: The University of Toronto Libraries and the University of British Columbia Library

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This article is based on my panel presentation at the Council on East Asian Libraries (CEAL) Annual Conference's "Vice Presidential Roundtable: Organizational Models of Future East Asian Libraries" in 2017. Although each panel speaker only shared their own institution's case in their talks, I discussed my current and former institution as the panel chair requested. Therefore, in this article, I will discuss the two institutions' cases.

In this paper, I aim to examine the pros and cons of centralized technical services vs. the holistic services of an East-Asian library in North America that has its own technical services, based on my work experience at the University of Toronto (U of T) and the University of British Columbia (UBC) in Canada.

Overview of the two libraries

The U of T Cheng Yu Tung East Asian Library (EAL) is Canada's largest repository of materials on East Asia. It is a separate collection that operates independently of the central library's collection. The library's primary goal is to promote learning, support teaching, and enhance scholarly, research, and creative activities by building collections and providing expert services and innovative access to information. More specifically, the library develops collections in East-Asian languages and provides the following services: acquisition, loan, reference and research services, faculty liaison and student outreach services (orientations, tours, and instructions), and public events (lectures and exhibitions). The library is located in the central Robarts Library (the main humanities and social sciences library of the University of Toronto Libraries). The technical services staff of the U of T East Asian library are located in the Materials Processing Department, which is in the same building as the EAL.

The UBC Asian Library provides key resources to support the teaching and research of Asian studies (mainly Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Indic, and Persian languages). It also provides key support for UBC's community and international engagement strategies via its resources, programming, staff expertise, external partnerships, and an increasingly strong digital presence. UBC's Asian library is a separate, standalone building with no technical services staff on its premises. The technical services staff for Asian languages report to the Central Technical Services, which is in a separate location, 15 minutes' walk from the Asian library.

Administrative and Management Issues

First, I will investigate the administrative/management issues in the two different institutions' cases, focusing especially on optimizing human resources and skills, accountability, efficiency, and effectiveness.

At UBC's Asian library, there is less burden and accountability in terms of human resources management and performance management. The cataloging staff is well trained in cataloging policies and rules by the professional cataloging trainers at the Central Technical Services and has current knowledge of the new policies and cataloging trends. The Asian library's management can focus on its own operation without worrying about cataloging performance or productivity.

On the other hand, it may be challenging for the Asian library to manage its priorities for processing library materials. Although there is room for negotiation, the Central Technical Services department has full control over the work allocation of their staff, based on their departmental priorities, which could delay processing the materials acquired by the Asian library. This would impact the Asian library's user satisfaction. In this model, the Asian library is only one of the internal clients of the Central Technical Services.

U of T's EAL has relatively better control over setting its priorities for its cataloguers. It can flexibly change its priorities as required. However, the EAL is responsible for managing cataloging staff performance and cataloging quality.

Ideally, having an EAL cataloging coordinator in-house would help ensure that work procedures and cataloging practices are standardized across cataloging staff for Chinese, Japanese, and Korean materials and ensure that each language cataloging staff meets the departmental objectives. At U of T, there is currently no such position. Therefore, this is an additional challenge for the EAL. Each subject librarian at the EAL trains their language cataloguer(s) and monitors the cataloging quality, and the EAL director interacts with the subject librarians to ensure efficient and productive cataloging. To facilitate communication among EAL technical processing staff, the EAL has recently implemented regular meetings of the EAL technical processing staff to discuss any technical or cataloging issues they may face or to share updates and information about cataloging rules and practices. Although this has been only practiced for the past several months, it has proven to be an effective way of improving communication and quality control of cataloging across Chinese, Japanese, and Korean materials.

Service Issues

Next, I will look at service issues, specifically on the aspect of the management of grants and special projects. I think both institutions' models have pros and cons.

The UBC model may require more internal coordination and collaboration. For example, UBC undertook an international collaborative cataloging project of rare Chinese books with a Cataloging Hidden Special Collections and Archives grant from the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR). The Asian library had to extensively coordinate with the Rare Book Collection department, which holds Chinese rare books on their premises, and the Central Technical Services, which has Chinese cataloging staff for this project. The Asian library had to consistently provide updates and coordination to these two departments throughout the project. Although much energy and time were spent on the coordination, the project's outcome was highly satisfactory. Another example of this model is that before accepting a significant gift-in-kind (GIK) acquisition (for example, those that are physically voluminous or have potentially significant financial value), the Asian library has to consult with the Central Technical Services for its consideration of processing the material. In this process, staffing costs for processing (acquisitions processing, preservation review and cataloging) the material are estimated. Depending on feedback from the Central Technical Services, the acceptance of the GIKs and/or the processing plan is determined. This may be a good example of the additional workflow the Asian library faces.

Compared to the UBC model less coordination is required for U of T, and managing grants and special projects is relatively less time-consuming. For example, at U of T, there was a digitization project of Chinese rare books with the National Central Library in Taiwan. As the project lead department, the EAL only needed to work with a digitization unit. When the EAL needed to provide metadata or cataloging records for this project, it efficiently pulled out its own cataloging staff into this project. However, it was noticed that the quality control of the cataloging work required more attention.

Comparing these two cases, a principle consideration was the process of ensuring the quality of the project. At UBC, having a principal cataloguer from the Central Technical Services in place consistently provided the Asian library with feedback. At U of T, although the project management was easier, quality control was not automatic. Special arrangement had to be made before the project. Such an arrangement is not always guaranteed because of its Materials Processing department's priorities and its workload. It would be more efficiently and effectively managed if U of T's EAL has an internal cataloging coordinator in-house who ensures the cataloging quality and compliance with standards in technical services for all EAL language materials.

Conclusion

To conclude, each model has pros and cons. The U of T model gives more flexibility to EAL to apply its departmental priorities to the operation as required. Having centralized technical services adds less pressure to East-Asian libraries in terms of cataloging productivity and quality control.