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A Report on the East Asian Library at University of Pittsburgh: Before and After Reorganization

Haihui Zhang

The East Asian Library (EAL) of the University Library System (ULS) at University of Pittsburgh (PITT) was established beginning with its Chinese collection in 1960. Five years later, the Japanese collection was added. EAL began developing its Korean collection in 2003. According to the Council on East Asian Libraries (CEAL) statistical report in 2016, EAL at PITT ranks 15th in size among East Asian collections in North America.¹

EAL has a separate collection which has operated independently since EAL's establishment in 1960. The collection is located on the second floor of Hillman Library, which is the main library of the university. EAL librarians report to the head of EAL, while staff report to librarians according to the nature and content of their work. The head of EAL reports to the Assistant University Librarian, who is in charge of library collection development.

Before Reorganization

From the 1960s to 2013, EAL had a dedicated public service area, including a reference collection and an information desk. It operated without a library material circulation and lending service point, since EAL is located in the same building as the main library and such services are handled at the main circulation desk. All EAL collections, including the general collection, journals and reference materials, are shelved separately according to Chinese, Japanese, or Korean language. EAL has an annual budget allocated for its Chinese, Japanese, and Korean collections. All acquisition and cataloging work is processed and handled by EAL technical staff in house. With ULS's assistance, the librarian who is in charge of EAL public services is responsible for generating the statistics for the CEAL annual statistical report and figures.

For decades, EAL has strongly supported East Asian studies at PITT. In addition to building a strong collection and providing excellent service to meet teaching and research needs at PITT and outside PITT, EAL has supported East Asian studies at PITT in many other ways. For instance, as a member of the Advisory Board of the Asian Studies Center at PITT, the head of EAL has been closely involved in the design and implementation of the East Asian Studies program. To help raise the visibility of the East Asian Studies program, EAL has

¹ For more comprehensive information on the growth and development of EAL at PITT, see Hong Xu, "Global Resource Sharing and Information services: the East Asian Library at the University of Pittsburgh" in *Collecting Asia: East Asian Libraries in North America, 1868-2008*, edited by Peter X. Zhou. Association for Asian Studies, Inc. 2010, 256-65.

engaged in building unique collections and services, and has maintained its ranking among East Asian libraries in North America. All Asian Studies-related grant proposals by departments, centers, and institutes at PITT raise their application's profile by including the EAL as a resource they can use to support teaching and research. EAL also receives support from the Asian Studies Center in many ways. As a cultural institution, on behalf of ULS, EAL also supports local international festivals and holds lectures open to the public.

After Reorganization

In 2013, the EAL technical services staff was centralized and moved to a separate remote location to report to either the head of the ULS Cataloging Management Unit, or the head of the Technical Services & Acquisitions Management Unit. EAL's annual budget remains allocated separately from the ULS mainstream budget, with some reductions. EAL acquisition work is still processed by previous EAL technical staff from a ULS remote facility building. Chinese materials continue to be cataloged in house, while original cataloging of Japanese and Korean books is outsourced. For the CEAL annual statistics report, data generation work continues to be handled by an EAL librarian.

The structural change to EAL was sudden, and all moving and restructuring work was completed within two months. For months, no one knew how this change would affect EAL's daily work and service to its target patrons. With the 1.6 miles of distance between EAL and the remote location, could librarians who remained on campus and previous EAL technical services staff who moved to the ULS remote facility work efficiently and smoothly? With half of its personnel cut, and EAL technical staff reporting to the ULS acquisitions and cataloging units, would PITT's EAL be able to initiate and carry out projects? Without the technical staff onsite, could we communicate and solve problems encountered by both on-campus staff and patrons quickly and effectively? Besides facing all of these questions, EAL staff also had to undergo a psychological adjustment process.

1. Run in new technical support procedure

The restructuring did not affect EAL's instruction, reference, and public services including the Gateway Service that is handled by librarians and staff on campus. However, the primary issue was how to modify the processing of CJK materials from acquisition to completion of cataloging work. Because the previous EAL technical services staff moved to a separate location and began reporting to the head of the ULS Technical Services unit, all communication between staff on campus and at the ULS remote location began taking place through emails and phone calls. It is true that face-to-face communication is much easier than email or phone when there are questions about journals or books. However, after a time, staff became accustomed to this new method of processing. In addition to email and phone, in some cases, images are delivered by campus mail or Skype Office to aid in solving problems. Though the process is not as convenient as before, it is workable and adjustable.

2. New structure and more collaborative work

For more than a decade, the ULS at PITT has established long-range goals every three years. In the past, ULS's long-range goals have included expanding global outreach, creating digital collections, and improving scholarly communication. However, with half of the EAL personnel reorganized and incorporated into the ULS Technical Services Unit, where they would no longer be administered by the head of EAL, could EAL modify its daily work and conduct special projects to work toward ULS goals? Fortunately, over time and especially in recent years, to reach its consistent and explicit goals, ULS has actively supported work focused on East Asian digitization projects and has achieved remarkable results through more collaborative work with other departments and units within ULS, and with faculty members.

Since 2014, with ULS's support, EAL has completed five digitization projects: Chinese Land Records, Sze Papers, Political Prisoner Photo Collection, Chinese Marriage Certificate Collection, and Chinese Oversea Student Newsletters. Those projects were successful collaborations among EAL, the ULS Archive Service Center (ASC) and the ULS Cataloging Unit, including technical support (identifying materials, scanning, storing, generating metadata, etc.) and financial support (sharing student work hours).

The most typical example of successful collaboration between EAL and other departments and units at ULS is a project titled CR/10. CR/10 (Cultural Revolution: 10) is an experimental oral history project. It aims to neutrally collect ordinary people's authentic memories and impressions of China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, which lasted 10 years, from 1966 to 1976. CR/10 interviews began in December 2015 and interview collection continues to the present. Each video interview lasts approximately 10 minutes. The interviewees are asked to discuss the experiences that left the deepest impressions on them—what they most want to share with the audience, given a limited amount of time. By giving interviewees 10 minutes to speak freely, we created an archive of video interviews that will be useful for those studying this era from various angles, such as how people who have experienced a historical incident pass on their memories, and how those who were born after the Cultural Revolution ended understand and acknowledge this movement.

This project has gained great interest and support from faculty at PITT and elsewhere. However, it is impossible for EAL to complete it independently. The whole process includes interview recording, as well as transcription, translation, and subtitling of the interviews; storage of the video files; evaluation and selection of software for each part of the process; recording metadata; designing a webpage and choosing a platform to house the digital collection; plus grant proposal writing, legal consultation, promotion, etc. Several ULS departments and units have been involved in the working process, such as EAL, Archives &

Special Collections, Information Technology, Digital Scholarship, Web Services and Communications, Administrative Services, etc., along with, of course, the great, indispensable support of ULS senior administrative staff. In October 2017, the CR/10 website was officially released at <http://culturalrevolution.pitt.edu/> and we have received a lot of positive feedback not only from within PITT, but from around the world.

Over the past few decades, the consensus has been that the power of a college or university library comes not just from collecting materials, but also from organizing and preserving them, and making knowledge accessible. Collaboration has become the key element to achieve all of this. Obviously, it would be impossible to process and digitize an East Asian Humanities project completed at PITT solely through EAL's own manpower and technical skill. Such a project is highly dependent on colleagues who have specific knowledge and skills as well as specific library responsibilities and assignments. Collaboration is not only necessary for digital humanities projects, but also for other library services and activities such as working with departmental liaison librarians on instruction and training; sharing student work hours on special needs; co-writing grant proposals for presenting subject expertise; etc. Moreover, collaboration with faculty to discover unique sources and identify research and teaching needs has become more and more important to initiating unique projects within East Asian studies.

In short, PITT's EAL remains a standing unit within ULS after its technical service centralized, which has helped EAL continue to innovate and engage in exciting new initiatives in recent years. In the four years since the reorganization, we at PITT's East Asian library have had the opportunity to learn and think about development trends of libraries and environmental changes in academic research and teaching. Looking back on our initial concerns at the beginning of the library's reorganization, we have come up with some new perceptions as well as renewed confidence. EAL has continually engaged in building a unique collection, providing excellent service, innovating new projects, etc., and it continues to strongly support the East Asian Studies program at PITT.

However, facing a structural change in an Asian/East Asian collection/library is indeed challenging. It is necessary to understand current practical considerations while also having a long-term vision of the future. Internal influences and needs from the library system, as well as external influences and needs from the university's academic programs also need to be taken into account seriously. When considering such a dramatic restructuring, any library also needs to take into account the history and reputation of each individual library being affected. East Asian/Asian and other specialized subject libraries fill unique niches within any university's library system. Such libraries are amenities that raise a university's visibility and profile, and allow it to directly compete with other universities. When considering restructuring, differences in these specialized libraries' collections and patrons need to be

considered (the patrons the EAL/AL serves are not limited to faculty and students, but people from the local and regional areas). All of the above issues directly affect a library's service, reputation and visibility, which may impact the university as a whole.