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Ryuta Komaki
Rikkyo University

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Cover Page Footnote
The author would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their thorough and constructive comments.
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Ryuta Komaki
Rikkyo University

Introduction

COVID-19, an infectious disease caused by the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, was first reported in late 2019, then as an outbreak of unusual pneumonia cases. It subsequently spread to different parts of the world to rapidly become a global pandemic, disrupting the social life of billions throughout the world. Schools and libraries were no exception to this. According to the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), libraries in more than 100 countries and regions have been affected by the disease, ranging from partial service disruptions to full, nation-wide closures, and school systems in at least 52 countries saw a full shut down, along with school and university libraries (International Federation of Library Associations 2020).

In North America, U.S. President Donald Trump declared a national emergency on March 13, 2020 (Taylor 2020). Around this time, the first wave of colleges and universities announced transitions to online-only instruction and exams (e.g., Harvard University announced that their classes would be moved online on March 10, Higgins-Dun, 2020). Many states and local municipalities in the U.S. and Canada have since issued various forms of local and state-wide shelter-in-place and social distancing orders, further affecting academic libraries’ ability to operate in full capacity. While these restrictions on social life are being adjusted from time to time, few higher education institutions have fully returned to face-to-face instructions, nor university libraries to in-person services.

While as-it-happens surveys and analyses of such closures and reopening efforts have been conducted by professional associations and research organizations such as the American Library Association (ALA) (American Library Association 2020) and Ithaka S+R (Ithaka S+R 2020), the CEAL community may benefit from an archiving project that focuses on the challenges unique to the field of East Asian librarianship rather than from information aggregated at the institutional level. To that end, this paper presents an ongoing project to document, in real-time, how academic libraries where CEAL members are situated have responded to COVID-19 and discuss the information the author has gathered thus far. Beyond these findings, the author also intends to develop further the project to make it an interactive digital platform to gather community contributions and oral histories of those in the field.

Background

This project builds on recent efforts and experiences of archivists and librarians to develop as-it-happens and community-sourced archives of social movements and natural disasters, such as the Occupy Archive (https://occupyarchive.org/), Documenting the Now
(https://www.docnow.io/) and Japan Disasters Archive (https://jdarchive.org/). Many research libraries and university archives across North America are also building real-time archives documenting the effects of COVID-19 on their local and academic communities (Groves 2020).

It also builds upon the surveys of library responses to COVID-19 carried out by Hinchliff and Wolf-Eisenberg (Hinchliff and Wolf-Eisenberg, n.d.), ALA (American Library Association 2020), and the Council on East Asian Libraries (CEAL) Task Force for the Creation of the CEAL’s Statement on Collection Development and Acquisition Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic (Rocha 2020) earlier in the pandemic, and intends to capture longer-term, more area-specific insights based on personal memories and experiences. Hinchliff and Wolf-Eisenberg (2020a, 2020b, 2020c) opened a survey on academic libraries’ reactions to COVID-19 on March 10, receiving responses from 213 libraries in the first 24 hours (Hinchliff and Wolf-Eisenberg 2020a). According to the authors, while 58% of the institutions that responded to the survey have shifted to online or remote instruction, about 60% of academic libraries were still opening regular hours, and about 85% allowed patrons to access print materials with no changes to policies during that period. Reference services remained unaffected (i.e., offered both in-person and by phone/online) at 65% of the institutions, although many implemented more stringent cleaning protocols (most commonly placing hand-sanitizers for patron use, provided at 80% of the libraries responded).

Hinchliff and Wolf-Eisenberg also analyzed the responses they received in the next 48 hours (2020b) and after ten days (2020c). They report that the period between March 13 and March 14 (i.e., the next 48 hours) saw a sharp increase in institutions transitioning to online instruction, from 58% to 82% (the latter survey received 194 responses). The proportion of libraries offering normal building hours decreased from about 60% to 36%, while reference services shifted more towards virtual deliveries. About 40% of the libraries that responded still provided access to print materials as usual, although this period also saw 7% of them suspending circulation of physical materials entirely.

Their discussion of the 10-day trends (2020c) is based on the answers provided by 253 institutions that returned to the survey to report updates. The authors found a continuing shift to fully online and remote instruction and that 49 (about 19%) of the libraries that initially reported their building was open as usual in their first responses changed their status to closed. According to the authors, it took an average of 5.4 days for those libraries to move from fully open to fully closed. 128 libraries moved their reference services to remote environments, whereas 97 institutions reported closing access to print materials. A visualization of academic library closures from this period (up to April 6, 2020, building closures only) can also be viewed on “Covid-19 Academic Library Closures in US and Canada” (Murgu 2020).

ALA conducted a survey of libraries’ responses to COVID-19 from May 12 to May 18, 2020, receiving responses from 3850 public, K-12, academic, and other libraries from all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia (American Library Association 2020). Most notably, about 62% of the libraries responded was fully closed to patrons during this period, with 26% open for curbside pick-up, 11% open with other restrictions in place, and only 1%
remaining fully open (American Library Association 2020, [4]). 47% of the respondent institutions reported they did not know of the date of reopening to the public, while 37% expected to reopen in June or July.

CEAL’s Task Force for the Creation of the CEAL’s Statement on Collection Development and Acquisition Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic conducted a one-week survey among East Asia area specialists in July 2020 as it prepared for the “Council on East Asian Libraries’ (CEAL) Statement on Collection Development and Acquisition Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic: in Collaboration with the North American Coordinating Council on Japanese Library Resources (NCC) and the Society of Chinese Studies Librarians (SCSL)” (Rocha 2020). Rocha reports that 45 respondents from at least 27 institutions from the U.S., Canada, and the United Kingdom participated in the survey. Of the 42 respondents who responded to the question on whether their libraries are implementing or reformulating a collection development policy shift towards electronic resources, 28 (66.7%) said yes, 12 (28.6%) said maybe, and only 2 (4.8%) answered no, indicating a strong budgetary shift towards non-physical resources. As East Asian studies (and other area studies) resources are not as readily available in electronic format as English-language resources in North America, the Task Force and the CEAL Executive Board subsequently issued a statement calling for more balanced policy and budgetary approaches to avoid a knowledge gap in those specialized collections.¹

Research organizations such as Ithaka S+R continue to monitor university and academic libraries’ reopening plans (Ithaka S+R 2020). While their reports offer valuable insights, these tend to document and analyze aggregated data or sample more generalizable cases, necessitating community-based efforts to gather and preserve as-it-happened information that is more relevant to the field of East Asian librarianship in North America. Moreover, as the author discusses further below, a retrospective collection of “as-it-happened” data will become increasingly difficult as time passes. In the context of COVID-19 responses, many institutions are using continuously updated web pages to post their announcements, deleting information as they become obsolete. To mitigate such a loss, the author attempted to gather as much time-coded data as possible for this project during the period of mid-August to mid-September 2020. The author aims to use the collected data to show trends in the CEAL libraries’ COVID-19 responses and create a foundation to build a collaborative digital venue to gather community contributions and personal stories with the hope that time-coded data will aid people’s recollection of the events.

Data and method

For this stage of the project, the author defines “CEAL libraries” as those that reported data either as a “U.S. University” or “Canadian University” to the “Council on East Asian Libraries Statistics 2018-2019 For North American Institutions” (Doll and Liu 2020). This definition generated a list of 43 academic libraries. This list excludes institutions that report their annual statistics as non-university entities, such as the Cleveland Museum of Art, Library of Congress, and Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Also excluded are those academic libraries with dedicated East Asian librarian positions that did not report their statistics. The author intends to include those and other institutions when the project is opened to the community.
The author then went to each institution’s main library website and manually scraped news items, updates, and announcements related to the library’s COVID-19 responses. When announcements did not appear on library websites or were posted on a continuously updated page that overwrote outdated information, the author scraped through the library’s social network site (SNS) postings for time-stamped updates announcements or items posted on their system-wide webpages for confirmation.

Because academic libraries use various communication strategies and channels, and because language and tags used for these announcements varied considerably, the author did not utilize automated collection methods. The data collection was done from mid-August to mid-September 2020. The current dataset is up to date with most libraries’ announcements up to the second or third week of September when the fall semester or quarter had begun at most of those institutions.

The collected web, blog, and SNS posts were recorded on spreadsheets along with geolocation codes (approximated from the library’s physical address), timestamp (year, month, and date), and, where possible, a permanent link to the original post. When the timestamp of the post and the date of service change were different (e.g., a post about future plans), the actual implementation date was used as the time code as much as possible. The post’s timestamp was used as a proxy date when the actual implementation date could not be determined from the content of the post itself. The author then coded each post for the following three categories: reference, material access, and space. Reference refers to any reference services, including help desk activities and research consultations. Material access is for what types of library resources were available to patrons and if they had any restrictions associated with access. Space refers to the availability of the library’s physical locations as study and computing spaces.

For reference services, each post was coded “virtual” or “hybrid.” The author coded the post as “virtual” when the post announced that help desk activities and research consultations were given exclusively through an “Ask a Librarian” system, chat, email, video conference, and other remote methods. The “hybrid” code was given to those posts that announced the availability of physical service locations or in-person consultation in any form. Because most CEAL libraries had been offering at least some form of virtual reference and consultations pre-pandemic, the author decided not to use “in-person” as a code to indicate a return to the normal level of service. While the author is aware that the pre-pandemic “hybrid” services and current “hybrid” services may look different (such as an implementation of digital-first approaches or in-person services being restricted to those with reservations), for the purpose of this project any shifts towards the face-to-face service are coded as “hybrid.”

For material access, the author coded the posts with the following three codes: “available,” “available-limited” and “digital.” “Available” refers to print materials being available to patrons with little to no restrictions, whereas “available-limited” was given to announcements that mentioned the presence of some form of stricter limitations (such as no browsing). The posts were coded “digital” when only electronic resources were available, or, even when print books were announced as accessible, they had to be delivered as digital
scans. (“No” is not used as a code because none of the CEAL libraries entirely halted the provision of library resources, print and digital).

Note that, as such, these codes gloss over variations between each library’s effort to provide physical materials while protecting the health of patrons and the library staff. “Available-limited” in particular covers several different means of providing access, such as a digital-first approach, self-service check out, in-person check out, curbside pickup, contactless pickup, mail delivery, and combinations of some of these. Such variations, however, are mostly due to different university and municipality policies and guidance, staffing levels, as well as the physical arrangement of the library’s open and closed stacks, and did not necessarily indicate differences in the spirit of the service. The author thus coded any announcements that referred to the availability of printed material with some forms of distancing as “available-limited.” Likewise, schools that are coded “available” for this category may still have quarantine policies for returned books, suggesting that their circulation service is not yet back to the pre-pandemic level.

The author used “available,” “available-limited” and “no” to code for the physical library space availability. “Available” means that the library was open to patrons for access with little to no restrictions, even with social distancing measures and face covering policies. “Available-limited” is used for cases with stricter access provisions, such as the existence of reservation systems, rigorous checking of university IDs, requirements to show negative COVID-19 test results, and limited building hours. “No” means that the post announced the closure of the library building, with the exception in some cases, of areas designated for picking up requested print materials.

The author then visualized the data using charts and maps for analysis. The map and the coded data are available on https://sites.google.com/view/covid-19-responses-by-ceal-lib. Members of the CEAL community are encouraged to submit additions and corrections, as well as their stories via https://forms.gle/NfAJShrTZ7JBQJFN7.

Analysis and discussion

For the analysis of the time-coded data collected so far, the author divided the time after March 2020 into four periods: the period of initial response up to March 25, spring semester/quarter (March 26 through May), summer semester/quarter (June and July), and fall semester/quarter (August and September). The earliest dated post collected for this project is from March 12, 2020, from SUNY Binghamton (since updated with the information for the rest of the spring semester, but still timestamped March 12). By March 25, all CEAL libraries in the study had made at least one COVID-19 response announcement. The author then created a snapshot chart and map for the end of each period. The visualizations presented below thus respectively show 1. the state of each service at each CEAL library after most universities and academic libraries have braced up for the COVID-19 emergency, 2. changes implemented by the end of the spring semester/quarter (or lack of them), 3. changes implemented by the end of the summer term/break, and 4) changes introduced for the beginning of the fall semester/quarter.
Period from initial response to March 25, 2020

A national emergency was declared in the U.S. on March 13 (Taylor 2020), and colleges and universities began moving their instruction online beginning as early as around March 10 (see, for example, Higgins-Dunn 2020). Similar to what Hinchliff and Wolf-Eisenberg (2002c) observed in their analysis of the “first 10-day” responses (their “first 10-days” was the period of March 11 to March 21), most CEAL libraries also shifted their reference services to remote-only and began restricting access to print materials and physical locations.

The snapshots below (Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3) show that by March 25, most CEAL libraries have moved their reference services and research consultations online (42, or 97.7%; 1 missing data; see Figure 1), suspended circulation of print materials (38, or 88.4%; see Figure 2) and closed or significantly reduced access to their physical locations (closure: 39, limited availability: 3; see Figure 3). Those that still provided print books to patrons did so through self-checkout, paging, or mail delivery. The libraries that did not fully close their physical locations limited entry to faculty, students and staff, significantly reduced opening hours or had both restrictions in place.

![Figure 1](image1.png)  
**Figure 1.** The state of reference services in CEAL libraries as of March 25, 2020. Map data©2020 Google, INEGI.

![Figure 2](image2.png)  
**Figure 2.** Availability of library resources at CEAL libraries as of March 25, 2020. Map data©2020 Google, INEGI.
After initial responses, most CEAL libraries did not change their reference services or building access significantly during the spring semester/quarter. While a few adjustments (such as extending chat reference hours) were made, all libraries continued to offer remote-only reference services (43, or 100%; see Figure 4).

Libraries that offered limited access to print materials continued to do so, and six more libraries started offering some form of request-and-pickup or mail delivery (Figure 5). HathiTrust began accepting requests for the Emergency Temporary Access Service (ETAS), which allowed digital, online access to the library’s print holdings, on March 31, expanding options for those CEAL libraries that are HathiTrust members (HathiTrust 2020). For the purpose of this analysis, the libraries that signed up for HathiTrust ETAS were still coded “digital,” unless they also started pickup or mail delivery of print books during the same period. More libraries moved to fully close their physical locations, except for two libraries that continued to allow limited building access (Figure 6).
**Summer, June 1 to July 31**

The beginning of the summer term or break did not see any significant changes to reference services. All 43 of the CEAL libraries continued to offer remote-only reference and consultations (Figure 7). Many libraries, however, restarted access to print holdings during this period, almost flipping the limited availability/digital-only ratio. By the end of July, partial access to print collections has expanded to 33 libraries, while nine institutions continued to provide digital and digitized resources only (Figure 8). As the author discussed above, libraries adopted various formats and branding for those services, including in-person pickup, curbside pickup, contactless pickup, grab-and-go, and “library takeout.” Still, no significant changes were observed regarding building closure. While two additional institutions reopened with appointment-only access to library spaces, one library transitioned to full closure (Figure 9).
Fall term, August 1 to mid-September

Many CEAL libraries partially reopened their physical locations as study and reading spaces in preparation for, at the beginning of, or during the fall semester/quarter, as more universities returned to in-person or hybrid instruction. In-person reference and research consultation, however, did not seem to return to as many institutions (Figure 10). While they reopened buildings, many libraries continued to offer virtual reference and consultations through email, chat, and video conference. Three libraries started to provide at least some reference services in in-person formats. However, even at those institutions, they are either limited to general reference (consultations with subject librarians still being handled remotely) or require reservations.

Corresponding to the reopening of library buildings, more libraries resumed circulation of print collections (40, or 93%; see also Figure 11). Some institutions also started to allow patrons to browse their collections (2, or 4.7%). However, those schools may still have specific safety measures in place, such as self-checkout procedures and quarantine policies for returned books. Only one library continued to offer digital resources only.

As for access to physical spaces for reading, study, and computing, for the second and the third week of September, a total of 31 institutions have reopened their buildings in some form (Figure 12), up significantly from three in the summer period. Most libraries that reopened still required appointments to enter the building and use the study space and limited access to library spaces to faculty and students. Some libraries set building quotas instead of using an appointment system.
Conclusion

As discussed above, CEAL libraries responded to the challenges of building closures and social distancing by offering digital services and resources and found creative ways to make print holdings available. They are also gradually reopening for in-person and on-site services, where their schools have also transitioned to in-person or hybrid instruction. This, however, is only part of the picture gleaned from updates and announcements from the main libraries of institutions participating in CEAL. East Asian libraries and librarians have faced unique challenges. They have devised different services and strategies from those announced by the main library and had a variety of professional experiences and concerns that these data do not capture.\cite{vii}
The data presented and analyzed here are also far from complete, in that they were not strictly collected “as-it-happened” but semi-retrospectively from August 2020. It was also processed and coded by a single investigator whose interpretation of the situation may not match that of an insider. However, as mentioned earlier, this stage of this project was intended to be a building block for a larger digital archiving project that would capture the professional experiences of individual East Asian librarians and the collective memory of the CEAL community. The data the author gathered and used for this analysis is open and available at https://sites.google.com/view/covid-19-responses-by-ceal-lib. The author also would like to encourage members of the community to contribute additional information and corrections, as well as individual stories via https://forms.gle/NfAJShrTZ7JBQJFN7.

References


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2 CEAL statistics name two of the 43 libraries, Columbia, Starr East Asian, and Harvard-Yenching Libry, as independent East Asian libraries. The author is also aware that there are other institutions (such as Washington, St. Louis, and possibly many more) where the East Asian librarians and collections are housed in an independent location. For this stage of the project, however, the author used their main library’s websites as a proxy, with an assumption that most COVID-19 related policies are enforced system-wide.

3 The data collected in mid-November 2020, shortly before the Thanksgiving break in the United States, can be found on the data-sharing site (see below).
This is also partly due to the fact that the “nuances” of the “hybrid” services are difficult to discern from the brief updates and announcements posted by the libraries. Some libraries may have prioritized virtual references even pre-pandemic and thus may be returning fairly close to their “normal” balance of online and in-person transactions, whereas those that relied more heavily on in-person services pre-pandemic are far from returning to the “normal.” Since the service updates themselves did not normally reveal this level of complexity, the author decided not to capture those differences for this part of the project but intends to address those variations in later surveys and/or interviews.

Note that while some schools’ spring quarter continues until mid-June, the data presented and analyzed here is cut off at the May 31 point for all institutions.

Note, however, this does not necessarily mean the reading and study spaces of the East Asian library/collections in those institutions have reopened. Many libraries opted to reopen designated study areas only.

Some of these challenges and efforts are documented by Rocha (2020) and Wang (2020) printed in the Fall 2020 issue (no. 171) of the *Journal of East Asian Libraries*.