



10-31-2021

## Celebrating the 30th Anniversary of UC Irvine Libraries' East Asian Collection

Ying Zhang  
*University of California*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jeal>

---

### BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Zhang, Ying (2021) "Celebrating the 30th Anniversary of UC Irvine Libraries' East Asian Collection," *Journal of East Asian Libraries*: Vol. 2021 : No. 173 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jeal/vol2021/iss173/3>

This Report is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of East Asian Libraries by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact [ellen\\_amatangelo@byu.edu](mailto:ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu).

## Celebrating the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of UC Irvine Libraries' East Asian Collection

Ying Zhang  
*UC Irvine*

### Introduction

The year 2020 marked the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UC Irvine Libraries' East Asian Collection (EAC). In East Asian culture, someone, or something of 30 years old is significant. There is a popular Chinese idiom “三十而立” (establish oneself at the age of 30), which derives from the *Analects of Confucius* (論語). Founded in 1990, EAC serves the needs of the East Asian research and teaching community on campus, which comprises of faculty and students from various departments in the Schools of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, as well as affiliates of several academic centers, including the Center for Asian Studies, the Long US-China Institute, and the Center for Critical Korean Studies. It is also open to public patrons. The EAC has grown over 30 years from the original 8,000 Chinese books to over 120,000 volumes in Chinese, Japanese and Korean languages, making it one of the fastest-growing collections of this kind in the nation and the largest East Asian Collection in Orange County, Southern California.

To celebrate the milestone of EAC's maturity and development, we decided to put up an exhibit in Spring 2020 to highlight treasures from the past and present, along with a series of cultural and educational events. We spent almost nine months on preparation, including selecting exhibit items, choosing exhibit themes and scope, connecting with stakeholders and speakers, and planning a series of events. Much of the work was quite routine, just like what needed to be done for other library exhibits and events. However, our work this time turned out to be unusual and unforgettable due to the unexpected and unprecedented public health emergency. It is worthwhile to record and report our experience in how to transform the exhibit and related programs from physical to virtual in a short time and with a great deal of experimenting.

### The Transformation

In March 2020, the UCI Libraries was just a few short weeks from launching the exhibit. All were set for the grand opening event. Exhibit materials chosen were lined up and the exhibit catalog was to be printed. Meanwhile, the invitations had been sent to library friends, catering had been ordered, and equipment reserved. Over 150 honored faculty, students, library staff, and community members, already registered and were about to gather for the opening ceremony featuring keynote remarks, a tour of the newest exhibit, socializing, and live entertainment with East Asian-style food, music, décor and much more. However, suddenly, COVID-19 hit. With the threat of the pandemic looming over, the UCI community took shelter and quickly transitioned to remote work and temporarily closed all library facilities.

In the beginning, we still held out hope to open the exhibit on site later the same year but four months later it was officially announced that the campus would remain closed in the fall quarter. It was then that the idea for a virtual celebration came up and so the Libraries charged forward with the transformation of the physical exhibit into a virtual one.

The transformation of the exhibit was completed in a short period of three months. As the Libraries' very first online exhibit, [From I-Ching to Manga: UCI's East Asian Collection Celebrating 30 Years](#), showcases the evolution, vitality, and expansion of the collection through statistics, evidenced usage, rare and precious materials, significant gifts and donations, trans-Pacific partnerships, as well as memories and testimonials from various stakeholders, including founding and current faculty members, University Librarians and Asian Studies librarians. The special exhibit displays 72 items in eight themes, including [Birth & Growth](#), [Rare & Precious Resources](#), [Books are for Use](#), [Resources for the Local Community](#), [Grants & Gifts](#), [Global Partnership](#), [With the Help of Faculty and Friends](#), and [Autographed Books & Tributes](#).

The exhibit was officially launched on November 18, 2020, with an opening ceremony where over 100 library friends and guests celebrated the occasion together on Zoom. Following the interview-style keynote from UCI Associate Dean of School of Humanities Professor Yong Chen, who made comparisons between libraries and restaurants, attendees visited the online exhibit following a link shared in the chat box. There were a total of 101 visits during the one-hour event.

Following the online exhibit and opening ceremony there were five more themed events delivered on Zoom from December 2020 to April 2021:

1. December 2, 2020. *Conversation Kitchen with Yong Chen*. Professor Yong Chen and Chef Jessica Van Roo paired up to share Chinese food recipes from Professor Chen's book *Chop Suey, USA: The Story of Chinese Food in America* and the history behind them. The event attracted 211 attendees.
2. January 14, 2021. *Astro Boy, Anime, and Manga – Oh Wow!* Featured two UCI Libraries Research Librarians—John Sisson (a big fan of Japanese anime since his childhood) and Ying Zhang (the exhibit curator)—who explored the significance of anime/manga in the UCI Libraries EAC virtual exhibit. The event attracted 126 attendees.
3. February 8, 2021. *I-Ching: Working with Magical Symbols in Ancient Chinese Divination*. Professor Hyong Rhew from Reed College discussed the importance of *I-Ching* (the Book of Changes) and his new project to transform the ancient Chinese texts into a digital form. The event attracted 237 attendees.
4. March 9, 2021. *South Korea's Webtooniverse and the Digital Comic Revolution*. Professor Brian Yecies from the University of Wollongong, Australia, led a discussion on South Korea's contemporary webtoon industry, its ecosystem, and the fertile landscape for transmedia adaptation. The event attracted 89 attendees.
5. April 14, 2021. *Virtual Manga Drawing Event*. 244 attendees joined illustrator and UCI Student Mando Eijansantos and her talented co-host, Tristyn Caneso, for a fun, creative and social experience inspired by manga stories from the [Shūkan Shōnen Magajin](#) collection (1959–95) at EAC.

## Reflection

The Virtual Manga Drawing marked the end of celebrating the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UCI's East Asian Collection. Looking back, the celebration was eventful and exciting. However, the celebration during the unprecedented pandemic was also bewildering and challenging. When COVID-19 hit, much of the exhibition preparation was completed, and the exhibition items and accompanying descriptions were already selected and written. They were all planned according to the layout of the physical exhibition space, with four wall cases and four floor cases, which are in the lobby area of our main library. Suddenly, we had to explore a new way to put those together as our first online exhibit and

within a very tight time frame. It was a challenge to find the right online format, design, and theme that could best display the items and tell a compelling story. How to represent unique and beautiful physical artifacts in a two-dimensional online format was also not easy. Another source of frustration for the curator was gaining access to physical items while working in a remote environment, especially when being asked by colleagues in Design Services who do not read East Asian languages to verify an object or part of an object. We also had to work within the limits of Drupal, the online virtual exhibit platform, chosen because of the familiarity on the IT end in building Web content. There were a few interface issues yet to be resolved, including lack of straightforward transition from one themed section to next, no zoom in and out function for a digital image, loss of details of a 3D physical artifact in an online and two-dimensional format, and the awkward position of the forward and back arrow keys in the lower part of the screen rather than the middle.

Despite imperfections, we were excited to see the successful transformation of the exhibit and events from a physical to virtual format. To us, the celebration is all about connection, exhilaration, appreciation, promotion, recognition, and reflection. We were so happy to be able to connect and reconnect with former faculty, students, and library colleagues, including the founding East Asian Studies Librarian, founding academic department chair, along with many current library users, friends, and supporters. Our virtual celebration events brought together hundreds of faculty, students, librarians, and library friends both local and international.

It was a source of joy and excitement to connect to people as well as experience serendipitous discoveries of precious facts, publications, and archival materials in and related to the East Asian Collection. During the exhibit preparation, I, as the exhibit curator, was often thrilled to see evidence of collection support to and from the East Asian studies community, as can be seen in [Books are for Use](#) and the [Exhibit Quotes](#). I was also inspired by documented collection development with help from faculty, as well as local and international library friends and partners, as showcased in [Grants and Gifts](#), [Working with Global Partners](#), and [With the Help of Faculty and Friends](#).

The online exhibit highlights and recognizes many contributions and activities from various library stakeholders over the last 30 years. The celebration expresses our appreciation for their long-standing support. Meanwhile, we are grateful to many UC Irvine library employees from different units who contributed to the development and management of the collection, as well as the delivery of the online exhibit and events. The enthusiastic team of our Communication and Events Office made the celebration events well-organized and enjoyable. The EAC30 exhibit and event flyers, designed and produced by the talented Design Services team, are strikingly beautiful. Librarians and archivists at the Special Collection and Archives were very helpful in discovering valuable objects for the exhibit. Our Web Services staff played an invaluable role in providing technical support in creating the virtual exhibit. Last but not least, no words could express how grateful we are to the two former UC Irvine librarians, leading figures in the field of East Asian studies librarianship, and past CEAL (Council on East Asian Libraries) presidents—Abraham Yu whose technical service support is instrumental, and William S. Wong, who has laid a solid collection foundation and left well-kept documentation which is now part of the EAC Archives.

Although regrettably, we missed the chance to celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in person, the online exhibit and events allowed us to highlight our growth and development to a broader audience and to a lasting effect that would not have been possible if it were in person. As the virtual exhibit is open around the clock, it has received 3,251 unique visits since its opening, 296 visits per month on average. Out of the total visits, 585 (18%) are international, from more than 20 countries all over the world. The 2,666 domestic U.S. visits contain 24% (640) outside of California. Among the eight exhibit

themes, [Rare and Precious Resources](#), has received the second-highest number of visits, next to [Birth and Growth](#). This is encouraging to us who are aiming to promote our collection. Our two signature collections, [I-Ching Collection](#) and [Shūkan Shōnen Magajin](#), were successfully promoted through the online exhibit as well as the two virtual events. At the February event, the faculty speaker from Reed College expressed his desire to come to our library to use the I-Ching Collection. At the manga drawing event in April, our two student manga illustrators helped us to publicize the Japanese weekly youth manga magazine, for which we own the most comprehensive holding outside Japan, to over 200 attendees.

The EAC30 celebration also promoted the value of the East Asian Collection to library professionals, scholars, students, administrators, and the general public. We've received many compliments and encouragement throughout the celebration. For example, one recently graduated Ph.D. wrote, "I cannot imagine having any research done without the help of the East Asia Collection and our amazing librarian." A faculty member added, "I don't think we could attract faculty—in any field—in East Asian studies without this unfailing and state-of-the-art Collection and its manager." The President of CEAL, Hana Kim, also sent her remarks "What a shining success story of the East Asian Collection and a thoughtfully curated exhibit!" The following firm and bold support came from UC Irvine's University Librarian, Lorelei Tanji:

The East Asian Collection is an invaluable resource for students, faculty, and community members studying a wide range of topics related to Korea, China, and Japan. In addition, the EAC fosters a "***global perspective***" that is vital to understanding the world today. It acts as a gateway to global perspectives that will become increasingly important in the future for discovering solutions to address society's grand challenges.

All the recognition of the development and status of the East Asian Collection makes all our efforts worthwhile. Upon reflection, it has been a special professional honor to be a part of the celebration of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UC Irvine Libraries' East Asian Collection and a sincere personal hope to experience the Collection's 40<sup>th</sup>, 50<sup>th</sup>, and 60<sup>th</sup> anniversaries.