



2-28-2023

## Book Review: The Theory and Practice of the East Asian Library: A Marginal Science

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### BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Xue, Susan (2023) "Book Review: The Theory and Practice of the East Asian Library: A Marginal Science," *Journal of East Asian Libraries*: Vol. 2023: No. 176, Article 6.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jeal/vol2023/iss176/6>

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## Book Review

**The Theory and Practice of the East Asian Library: A Marginal Science.** By Hong Cheng. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2023. Pp. 435. Hardback, £83.99; \$99.95.

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Dr. Hong Cheng, a librarian and a historian at the University of California, Los Angeles, presents groundbreaking and thought-provoking research on East Asian libraries outside of East Asia. The most important contributions he made to the field, through this Karl Lo Award-winning book, are his exploration of a theoretical model of Glocalism for East Asian libraries and his defining East Asian libraries as a marginal science. In developing the theoretical model of “Glocalism” and elaborating on the nature of a marginal science of East Asian libraries, the author interweaves a brief history of East Asian studies and a rather comprehensive history of East Asian libraries into the discussion, which makes the reading of the book much enjoyable learn new ideas and refresh existing knowledge. Using Globalism and the concept of marginal science as the leading threads, the author also discusses various aspects of the field and raises sharp questions about some of the conflicts in practice.

There certainly has been a general assumption that East Asian libraries are influenced and shaped by the academic fields of East Asian studies, but no research literature has explored this from a theoretical point of view. Chapter 2 through Chapter 4 in this book discusses the unprecedented area of theoretical study on East Asian libraries, starting from reviews of historical and current theoretical models in East Asian studies and in library studies, and further summarizes the theoretical models of Glocalism for East Asian libraries. The main point is that there have been fundamental external and internal factors in shaping East Asian libraries, among them, the field of East Asian studies has been the major one that interplayed with East Asian libraries. The author summarizes that East Asian studies as an academic field has developed theories including Orientalism, Multiculturalism, Competing Civilizations, Challenging Ideology, International Strategy, and Globalization Participant. Serving East Asian studies, some of the representative models in which cognitive architectures have influenced East Asian libraries significantly as well as historically. Unlike East Asian studies, the author pointed out, that East Asian libraries have not had a theoretical model—Orientalism and Multiculturalism or Globalism were potential theoretical models, but they had never materialized due to the endless political and economic crises. The conclusion is that as an alternative and substitute to Multiculturalism and Globalism, Glocalism has become a new and emerging theoretical model for East Asian libraries.

Glocalism is a foundation stone for the rest discussion of the practices and operation of East Asian libraries. Chapter 5 through Chapter 11 analyzes all aspects of the operation of East Asian libraries, from resources to management. With the introduction of the theoretical model of Glocalism and the concept of the East Asian library as a marginal science, the analysis approaches the practices of East Asian libraries from a new angle. The most noteworthy merit of the new approach is that while the book provides comprehensive guidance to operational issues including collection development, and public and technical services, it raises sharp questions and stimulates further thinking. Some of the important

questions raised in Chapter 2 are “collection vs. access,” and quality vs. quantity of the information. Chapter 5 further states that “No matter whether in physical or digital formats or for onsite or online access, collections and resources are at the core of the library.” In the middle of the strong voice of promoting access across academic libraries, this argument clearly advocates that East Asian libraries should focus on collections and resources, as a strategy for surviving and moving forward, based on the theory of Glocalism. East Asian libraries and collections are part of larger library systems, whether they can operate on their own, politically and practically, is debatable. However, it is admirable that one of the East Asian librarians clearly articulates reasons, among the different voices, why East Asian libraries should make resources their priority.

The discussion about some of the new practices and issues in collection development also leads readers to rethink their strategies, including the balance between physical and digital collections, DDA/PDA, Open Access, Scholarly Communication, special collections, and censorship. One striking term the author introduces during the analysis is “Involution,” a pattern of involutory growth with little or no improvement in output and productivity. The term is used to describe the internal challenge that East Asian libraries face. Examples of involution include over-investment in managing/digitizing rare books and materials; inputting too much effort and resources into oral history; and inputting unlimited time into translating academic works and ignoring the desolate reactions from the academic researchers. The discussion of involution leads us to rethink what we have been doing, and ask critical questions when initiating a new project: How often will the outcome of the project actually be used in academic research? Does the use of the project increase as more effort is put in?

The discussion of technical and public services in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 addresses the metadata and standard issues and elaborates that as a marginal field, it is challenging for East Asian libraries to fit into the mainstream and find an acceptable position in setting library standards. The discussion of service and technology in East Asian libraries touches upon many issues: pros and cons of independent vs integrated setting in terms of collection’s physical location; transition to access services due to the development of technology and digital resources; social media in library services; what service models work best for East Asian libraries; the importance of collaboration and outreach, new forms of services such as film screening and festivals; and the challenges AI brought to the service of East Asian libraries. As the reflection of Glocalism in East Asian libraries, the technical service shows a feature of globalization in a networked technical environment. But as the library users tend to be more diverse and service becomes more personalized, the public service shows a characteristic of localization. Therefore, Glocalism is well demonstrating the tendency of the contemporary library system.

One of the rarely touched areas in other research literature about East Asian libraries is the librarians and library staff, their professional development, and how current issues such as the policy of equity, diversity, and inclusion apply to the East Asian library. Chapter 8 discusses that as the most important human factor in East Asian libraries, it is critical that librarians and staff require continuing education to keep up with the development of library technology and services. The author particularly points out that professional ethics is something that this community needs to pay attention to. As in other areas of library systems,

we also see cases of conflicts of interest and confusion about intellectual property rights claimed by individuals when it should be a group effort. One another area rarely touched about East Asian libraries is leadership and management of the East Asian library. Chapter 9 analyzes the position of management in an academic and professional field, especially in East Asian libraries that are shadowed by the influence of East Asian culture. Chapter 10 through 11 extends the research outside of the East Asian library itself. Chapter 10 introduces the associations and foundations related to the field of the East Asian library, which have a huge influence on the East Asian library's research projects and collection emphases. Chapter 11 further extends observation to the area of education and communication related to the East Asian library. The interesting part of the discussion is how communication style can lubricate the East Asian library, making it operate smoothly and effectively. The author states that no matter whether it is formal or informal, education and communication should not be overlooked.

East Asian librarians would agree with Dr. Cheng's statement that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many East Asian libraries and collections have fallen into financial or organizational instability. He further pointed out that if East Asian libraries keep up routine or tradition, they will become more and more marginalized by academic institutions and major professional organizations. To avoid such a fate, the author believes the Glocalism model could be a solution for the marginal field of the East Asian library, making the East Asian library individually distinguished (localized) with a general global vision (globalized) could put the East Asian libraries at the cutting-edge frontier of the academic research of East Asian studies. It is groundbreaking to develop a theoretical model of Glocalism for East Asian libraries, however, there are questions deeming further exploration: First, the relations between Glocalism and scholarship in languages other than Chinese, Japanese, and Korean (CJK). One of the factors that have shaped Glocalism is the historical development of East Asian studies and East Asian libraries. The major theories developed by English-speaking scholars constituted the cornerstone of East Asian studies. Meanwhile, one of the features of East Asian libraries is that their resources are in vernacular languages, as defined by the author. This contradiction seems seriously undermine the theoretical model. It also leads to a further question about "localized" collections—what roles East Asian libraries and East Asian librarians should play in collecting research materials in languages other than CJK? Second, what role does local research interest play in shaping Glocalism as well as on localized collections? In addition to the factors that have shaped Glocalism in the Author's analysis—the academic disciplines that East Asian libraries serve, the geographic domains, and the historical development, local research interest should also play an important role. Further, the vision of localized resource development should tie closely with academic disciplines as well as local research interests. East Asian libraries should not only passively respond to local needs, but further proactively develop resources on new development in geographic domains (East Asian countries). Third, it is debatable that Glocalism can indeed be independent of political considerations, as the author states. In documenting the historical development of East Asian studies as an academic field in Chapter 2, the influence of political factors appears in the background of major theories. There is no clear-cut distinction between history and politics.

Rather than making conclusions on many aspects or issues, Dr. Cheng provides food for thought: "While stressing that the East Asian library is a marginal cross-field information

service system, I hope my research on the theory and practice of the East Asian library will bring new thoughts and approaches to the field.” At a time when East Asian libraries are facing great uncertainty and budgetary crisis, the issues and perspectives raised in this book will lead to a rethinking of East Asian libraries and their role in global interactivity with East Asia systematically. The theoretical model of Glocalism serves as an inspirator and hopefully stimulates further research and discussion.