Academic and Cultural Newsletters and News-Disseminating Bulletins in the West Concerned with East Asia

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The growth of widespread academic, cultural, economic, and political interest in China, Japan, and Korea, the increasing number of institutions and organizations dealing with these countries, and the ever more specialized nature of western scholarship and research about East Asia have made it difficult for individuals to keep themselves adequately informed of pertinent professional and cultural activities. The desirability of more systematic channels for disseminating and exchanging information has led to the widespread proliferation of newsletter-type publications concerned in one or more ways with East Asia. On the basis of an examination of the newsletters and bulletins that are found within a privately-maintained, public service-oriented archival collection that centers on these materials, this paper comments on their nature and scope, editorship and sponsorship, publication and distribution methods, and availability. It concludes with a few brief remarks about the Asian Studies Newsletter Archives itself and its role—both present and potential—within the world of information resources concerned with East Asia.

Newsletters in the west specifically oriented towards individuals in the field of East Asian studies are a relatively recent phenomenon. Over the years, scholars have traditionally relied on their networks of personal contact—on the "grapevine" mode of communication—to assist them in keeping up with developments related to their work. Before the explosion of "area studies" in the United States during the 1960s and the establishment or dramatic expansion of Australian, Canadian, and European university programs concerned with China, Japan, and Korea, news-disseminating publications dealing extensively with East Asia appear to have been limited to just a few titles such as the *Far Eastern Association, Inc., Newsletter*, renamed the *Newsletter of the Association for Asian Studies* shortly after its inception. Accordingly, most publications issued nowadays are in particular the products of the 1970s and 1980s, when such academic centers and research institutes as the Australia-Japan Research Centre in Canberra, the Needham Research Institute in Cambridge, England (named after the eminent historian of Chinese science, Joseph Needham), and the Center for Korean Studies at the University of Hawaii became

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*This paper was delivered at the 33rd International Congress of Asian and North African Studies, University of Toronto, August 1990.


2 *Australia-Japan Research Centre Newsletter*. Canberra: Australia-Japan Research Centre, Australian National University, 1987-. 

3 *Needham Research Institute Newsletter*. Cambridge, Eng.: Needham Research Institute, 1987-.
well established, and when such specialized groups as the Committee on Scholarly Communication with the People's Republic of China, the Japan Anthropology Workshop, the Association Française d'Etudes Chinoises, the Vereniging voor Japanse Kunst/Society for Japanese Arts and Crafts, the Association of Korean Christian Scholars in North America, and the Chinese Communism Research Group initiated their own news-disseminating publications. Over four hundred English and other European-language newsletters and news-disseminating bulletins dealing entirely or in large part with China, Japan and/or Korea (often providing information related to those countries within the broader framework of "Asian Studies," "Global Studies," or "International Studies") are currently being published. As a comprehensive directory of these publications does not yet exist and as the holdings of the Asian Studies Newsletter Archives are incomplete, however, the precise number of such publications cannot readily be determined.

In contrast with most scholarly and popular magazines—among them the *China Quarterly*, the *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, the *Japan Quarterly*, and *Korean Culture*—which are oriented towards the publications of articles, translations, and book reviews, newsletters and news-disseminating bulletins generally offer their readers a mélange of factual information, some of it ephemeral in nature. They also frequently vary one from another in their physical appearance and scope, ranging from mimeographed or photocopied newsheets that are published irregularly and distributed to very limited audiences, to widely circulated, regularly scheduled, well known bulletins that resemble professional magazines in a number of respects. Likewise, they range from minimally-funded publications such as the *Early Medieval

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10*CCP Research Newsletter*. Colorado Springs, Col.: Chinese Communism Research Group, 1988-
China Group Newsletter,¹¹ which have relied heavily on the dedicated efforts of one or more individuals for their existence, to news-disseminating publications such as the Asian Studies Newsletter of the Association for Asian Studies,¹² which have been issued by long-established organizations and constitute just one out of a number of publications—including scholarly journals, specialized serial bibliographies, periodic directories, and monograph series—that they may produce during the course of the year. Insofar as one can generalize about the common features of newsletters and news-disseminating bulletins concerned with East Asia, however, they may best be described as publications containing some or all of the following information:

1. news, announcements and listings of conferences, seminars, lectures, exhibitions, film series, and forthcoming events;
2. up-to-date information about the endeavors of various individuals, including their research activities;
3. particulars about course offerings, summer classes, and overseas study programs;
4. announcements about the appearance of new publications as well as bibliographical lists of books, articles, dissertations, and/or conference proceedings on one or more specific subjects;
5. narrative accounts of scholarly undertakings and special projects, often in the form of brief reports;
6. news about the activities and objectives of sponsoring organizations, their leadership and their finances;
7. information about fellowships, scholarships, and other sources of financial assistance;
8. brief notices about visiting scholars and faculty members; and
9. directory-type information such as membership rosters and professional registries.

Substantive articles, when combined with more traditional newsletter-type material, frequently focus on scholarly resources or on academic developments that have some newsworthy character. Generally, they appear in news-disseminating publications which prominently bear the word "bulletin" within their titles, but some "newsletters" serving the field of East Asian Studies—among them the Japan

¹¹Early Medieval China Group Newsletter. Stanford, Calif.: East Asian Studies Department, Stanford University, 1988-. This publication initially appeared as the Newsletter of Nan-Pei-Ch’ao Studies (Rochester, Mich.: John Marney, Oakland University, 1977-) and subsequently changed its title to Nan-Pei-Ch’ao Studies (Late Han-Early Tang).

The editors of most newsletters and news-disseminating bulletins concerned with East Asia in the west may be broadly divided into two groups: specialists (most commonly faculty members) in a particular field or subject area who edit these specialized publications as a service to their colleagues with only limited institutional support and without much if any remuneration for their efforts, and the employees of professional associations or cultural, government, or business organizations whose newsletter editorships constitute part of their formally assigned responsibilities. Few of these individuals have received professional training in the art of editing and publishing but, as a result of their working experience, some of them develop considerable expertise which they then apply to the improvement of their publications. In many instances, editors are very dependent on informal contributions of information and news—frequently obtained through their networks of personal contacts as well as from their periodic general solicitations of assistance and information—but established boards of assistant editors or "area editors" who bear part of the responsibility for the gathering of appropriate materials do exist in the case of a few publications, among them the Committee on East Asian Libraries Bulletin\textsuperscript{15} and the International Association of Orientalist Librarians Bulletin.\textsuperscript{16} The vitality, reputation, and overall success of many newsletters have understandably depended on their editors' ability to secure sufficient news and information on a timely basis. This, in turn, has influenced their ability to attract an adequate number of individual and institutional subscriptions to cover, at the very least, their printing and distribution costs. The newsletters of various Chinese American librarians associations,\textsuperscript{17} the Zhouyi Network,\textsuperscript{18} the East Asian Tertiary/Quaternary Newsletter,\textsuperscript{19} and Newsletter: East Asian Art & Archaeology\textsuperscript{20} are representative publications within this category. By contrast, publications serving as an official means for disseminating news and information on behalf of university centers, government


\textsuperscript{17}For example, the Chinese-American Librarians Association Newsletter (various places of publication: Chinese-American Librarians Association 1973- ) and the Chinese-American Librarians Association/Midwest Chapter Newsletter (Urbana, Ill.: Chinese-American Librarians Association/Midwest Chapter, 1983- ).


\textsuperscript{19}East Asian Tertiary/Quaternary Newsletter. Hong Kong: Center of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong, 1984- .

bodies and well-established academic and cultural organizations concerned in some way with East Asia have tended to flourish more easily. The expenses incurred in their production and distribution have normally been borne by the organizations themselves or by their dues-paying members. Typical of the publications found within this category are the *Institutsberichte* ("institutional reports") and *Jahresberichte* ("annual reports") of such Central European centers as the Institut für Japanologie at the University of Vienna\(^{21}\) and the Japanologisches Seminar of the University of Bonn,\(^{22}\) the *Center for East Asian Studies Newsletter* of the University of Kansas,\(^{23}\) the newsletters of several Japan-America Societies,\(^{24}\) *Britain-China,\(^{25}\) and *Asia in Washington,\(^{26}\) the latter being a monthly calendar of events and related information issued by the Washington, D.C. Center of the Asia Society.

A growing number of newsletters and news-disseminating bulletins concerned with East Asia in the west have been benefitting from the rapid advances in desk top publishing. Computer technology has enabled both individuals and organizations to produce publications with considerably more ease, with greater freedom of layout and design, at a relatively modest cost, and on a much more timely basis than could previously be achieved. Late breaking news and last minute changes can easily be incorporated just before an issue goes to press, and news items can be selectively highlighted in imaginative, eye-catching ways. As a result of both these developments and the increasing desire for improved networks of communication among people sharing common interests related to China, Japan, and/or Korea, there has been a perceptible upsurge in the number of newsletter-type publications making their initial appearance in recent years. It remains to be seen, however, whether newsletters in general during the 1990s will continue to flourish or will gradually be replaced by electronic networking or some other form of information sharing.

In contrast with the majority of scholarly periodicals, newsletters have frequently experienced short or erratic lives. In many cases they have flourished only during periods of intense scholarly or cultural interest in a particular subject area, or only when one or more energetic individuals have assumed the editorship of a new publication. All too often they have subsequently withered or disappeared.

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\(^{23}\) Center for East Asian Studies Newsletter. Lawrence, Kan.: Center for East Asian Studies, University of Kansas, 1980- .

\(^{24}\) For example, the *Bulletin of the Japan-America Society of Washington* (Washington, D.C.: Japan-America Society, 1957- ), and the *Japan America Society of Georgia Newsletter* (Atlanta: Japan America Society of Georgia, 1981- ).


altogether, sometimes within just a year or two of their establishment.\textsuperscript{27} Adding to both an acquisition librarian's and a cataloger's nightmare are the frequent changes in titles that newsletters and bulletins in the field of East Asian Studies have experienced,\textsuperscript{28} as well as the peripatetic nature of their editorial and/or publishing offices. Several of them, moreover - among them the Sung Studies Newsletter\textsuperscript{29} the Modern Chinese Literature Newsletter,\textsuperscript{30} and the Chinese Republican Studies Newsletter\textsuperscript{31} - have evolved into full-fledged journals and, as a result, the need for new media of communication that can rapidly share news, announcements, and information among individuals in Chinese studies has again been felt in some quarters.

Most newsletters and news-disseminating bulletins concerned with East Asia in the west are inexpensive to acquire. Indeed, many are distributed free of charge to individuals who express an interest in their receipt. On account of their frequently perceived ephemeral nature, however, many of them have not been routinely acquired by libraries nor have they been placed under satisfactory bibliographical control by documentation centers or research institutions. Those publications which are regarded by at least some people as "gossip sheets", which rarely if ever contain any substantive reports or articles, or which lack the word "bulletin" within their titles are generally not retained by their recipients (individuals or institutions) on a long-term basis. Despite their important role not only as conveyors of timely information but also as sources for tracing and documenting the evolution of East Asian Studies, the accomplishments of East Asia-related organizations and associations, and western research and interest in the countries and civilizations of East Asia, back numbers of many of them are not even available among the cataloged holdings of the Library of Congress, the single largest repository in the west of a very wide range of published and unpublished materials about China, Japan, and Korea. In response to this situation, the Asian Studies Newsletter Archives has been privately maintained on a part-time, voluntary basis since the 1970s as a service on behalf of those individuals interested in East, Southeast, and South Asia who at some time or another may have a particular need for access to these publications. With more than 1,000 titles (comprising over two hundred linear shelf feet) from around the

\textsuperscript{27}Consider, for example, the Israel Association for Asian Studies Newsletter (Jerusalem: Israel Association for Asian Studies), which was published only in 1972 and 1973; and the Manchu Studies Newsletter (Seattle: Department of Asian Languages and Literature, University of Washington, 1977-1981), which ceased publication after only four issues.


\textsuperscript{30}The Modern Chinese Literature Newsletter (San Francisco: Chinese Program, San Francisco State University, 1975-1981) has been succeeded by the journal Modern Chinese Literature.

\textsuperscript{31}The Chinese Republican Studies Newsletter (Urbana, Ill.: Center for Asian Studies, University of Illinois, 1975-1983) is now being published as the periodical Republican China.
world on file, the Archives has sought to bring together an increasingly wide array of both retrospective and current newsletter-type materials, to publicize their existence and bring them to the attention of potentially interested students and researchers, to preserve them for long-term scholarly use, and to provide a basis for the preparation of various bibliographies and related research tools. The Archives has benefitted from the cooperation of many newsletter and association bulletin editors, university centers, cultural groups, and other organizations that have generously donated their publications. Regrettably, however, more than a few important titles and little known publications have eluded acquisition—at times because of the lack of funding to purchase them, at other times because of the lack of knowledge about their existence—and some back files still remain incomplete. Nevertheless, the Asian Studies Newsletter Archives has already demonstrated its ability to respond to a variety of scholarly needs, and several short bibliographies have already been compiled on the basis of its holdings. Once its bibliographical and holdings records are fully computerized and a comprehensive, annotated guide to the many past and current newsletters and association bulletins that relate in whole or in part to Asia is published, the Archives should even more effectively constitute an information source for people interested in the study of China, Japan, and Korea in the west.

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32 Bibliographies prepared by Frank Joseph Shulman on the basis of the holdings of the Asian Studies Newsletter Archives include:


