Bibliographic Instruction for East Asian Studies in Academic Libraries: A Survey Analysis

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I. Background

Bibliographic instruction (BI), according to the American Library Association (ALA) BI Handbook,\(^1\) refers to any planned activities, outside the reference interview, designed to teach the library user how to locate information efficiently. Basic BI includes library tours and orientation to acquaint students with the layout of library buildings, library services, and the procedures and rules for using libraries. After they are familiar with the facility and the rules and procedures, instruction can be expanded to cover effective use of library resources, such as catalogs and reference tools. BI should include the structure of the literature and the general and specific research methodology appropriate for a discipline as students progress in their academic pursuits.

BI has become an established field in general librarianship and there are BI clearinghouses in many states. The American Library Association (ALA) has a committee on bibliographic instruction and so do most state library associations. If one is to plan a BI program for users of western language materials, there are plenty of resources to draw on. Unfortunately, programs for users of East Asian languages materials are an area waiting to be explored. How should one efficiently design an effective BI program to meet the needs of these users? How do you avoid reinventing the wheel? What works and what does not? What do our users need to know in order to use East Asian collections effectively? To better answer these questions, one needs to know what has been done and how.

II. Survey

A survey can be the best way to gather such information as how and what BI programs in East Asian studies have been conducted. With this idea in mind, I designed a five-page survey questionnaire to collect information from East Asian collections in North America. The questionnaire included four areas:

1. What (if any) BI programs have been offered by the East Asian collections?

2. What BI courses have the departments of East Asian studies offered?
3. What do East Asian librarians think should be covered in BI programs? In what format do they think BI should be conducted?

4. What are the interests in building up centralized BI resources — e.g., a clearinghouse — for East Asian studies?

Sixty-two questionnaires were sent out in July 1992 and a follow-up letter was sent by e-mail in February 1993. Out of the 62 libraries, 44 (71%) responded. Six (including 1 academic, 1 public, 1 national, and 3 special libraries) indicated the survey questions did not apply to their specific situation. Of the 38 usable responses (all from academic libraries), 18 (47%) have no BI programs and 20 (53%) do. Several respondents expressed confusion about the definition of BI — does BI refer to library skills or to something more?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>questionnaires sent</th>
<th>usable responses</th>
<th>percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**FIGURE 1**
Percentage of usable responses received

The survey questionnaire implies that BI consists of several levels ranging from library tours to teaching bibliography. One respondent suggests BI be divided into two parts: general orientation and bibliography courses.

The following are brief summaries of responses to the survey questions:

1. How important do you think it is to have BI programs?

Regardless of the confusion over just what BI is, the majority of respondents rated the importance of BI programs high. The reasons given include:

   a. Finding and using East Asian materials is difficult and complex.

   b. Better utilization of the collection could be gained; or, it facilitates the use of the East Asian collection.

   c. BI enhances librarians' scholarly images.

   d. It is good public relations.

   e. It ensures more success for users in their research.
FIGURE 2
Rating of the importance of BI programs from all thirty-eight respondents.

FIGURE 3
A comparison: rating of importance of BI between collections which have BI programs and those which do not.

Only 17% of the libraries which do not offer regular BI programs rate BI as "most important" while 60% of those which do rate BI as "most important." The reasons for not offering BI can be summed up as follows:

a. Users of East Asian collections are mostly graduate students and faculty. They know how to use the facility.

b. Shortage of staff or of resources.

c. The department of East Asian studies offers BI courses. The library staff provides bibliographic reference assistance on an individual basis.

d. The general library or main library provides bibliographic instruction. East Asian collection staff provide occasional BI upon request.

The reasons may vary from one collection to another. However, it is clear that BI is not a high priority for the majority of those collections which do not have BI. More than half (56%) of them do not think that they will develop BI programs in the foreseeable future.
2. What BI programs currently exist in East Asian collections?

For collections that offer BI programs, 5 out of 20 indicate having formal BI courses. The majority offer single lectures and course-integrated BI, covering the following topics (in the order of popularity):

a. Local on-line system
b. Subject index, linked to the card catalog
c. Romanization
d. Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN) or Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) Chinese-Japanese-Korean (CJK) use
e. Other (such as library tours, individual instruction)
f. Bibliography

The BI programs are mostly evaluated by participants on an informal basis or through faculty feedback. The most common methods of publicizing BI programs include personal contact with students and faculty.

3. What should be covered by BI and in what format?

The top four choices of topics to be covered in BI are: on-line catalogs, subject indexes, bibliography, and general indexes. The top two choices correspond very well with what exists in current BI programs. Instruction on romanization, RLIN or OCLC CJK, card catalog, and library tours are not viewed as important partly because of how East Asian collections are organized within larger libraries and partly because of trends in the field of librarianship. In many collections, library tours are held regularly by main libraries and romanization tables are posted in the public service area for patrons to use. As more collections move into automation, the card catalog no longer serves as the main finding tool. Although RLIN CJK and OCLC CJK are excellent finding tools, in most libraries only the staff have access to RLIN or OCLC CJK. Instruction on bibliography gets the second highest rating as the most important BI topic but, in practice, it takes the most preparation and expertise. Only two respondents currently offer it. Given adequate time and resources, more than 85% of the libraries surveyed may develop instruction on bibliography.
least important ----> most important

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<th>5</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>Card catalog</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>49 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>Romanization</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>71 %</td>
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<tr>
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<td>92 %</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>82</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>85 %</td>
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</table>

FIGURE 4
Topics to be covered in BI for East Asian studies rated by collections which currently offer BI. (Three out of twenty respondents did not provide any rating.)

* Weight is the result of number of votes multiplied by rating of importance.
** Percentage = actual weight / full weight
(Seventeen respondents chose to answer this question. If all of them think a certain topic is most important, that topic will get full weight (17 x 5 = 85) and the percentage will be 100% (85 / 85). In cases where some respondents chose not to rate a certain topic, the full weight for that topic stays the same as though all rated it except that some rated it 0.)
Topics to be covered in BI for East Asian studies rated by collections which currently do not have BI. (Four respondents out of eighteen do not provide any rating; one gives partial rating.)
FIGURE 6
A comparison of ratings of topics to be covered between collections which offer BI and those which do not.

As for the three types of format – formal courses, course-integrated instruction, or single lectures – the majority of respondents are in favor of course-integrated BI and single lectures. With the liberty to choose more than one format, twelve respondents selected formal courses for credit, ranging from one to three credits. Three respondents stated that a formal course can provide more in-depth instruction and is most useful in terms of facilitating successful research. Most respondents do not have strong feelings on whether BI programs should be conducted by librarians or teaching faculty. One respondent puts it this way: "Whichever works."

4. What BI programs have East Asian studies departments offered?

Fourteen respondents indicated that their Asian studies or East Asian studies departments offer credited BI courses. Ten of them are taught by teaching faculty, two are taught by librarians, and the other two are taught by joint appointment librarians/faculty members. These courses, directed at graduate students, bear various names but cover similar topics: research methods, research sources, bibliography, etc. These courses are listed in the university general catalogs and, in most cases, are required courses in the discipline. They are evaluated formally by students through questionnaires.

From the very small sample, it is hard to determine whether there is a general division of labor between librarians and faculty, in which librarians teach library skills and faculty teach
research methods and bibliography. However, it does indicate that few librarians are teaching formal in-depth BI courses. BI taught by joint appointment librarians/faculty members is a relatively new model. Some argue that the strengths of faculty are the weaknesses of librarians and vice versa. Maximizing the strengths and minimizing the weaknesses in BI programs can be accomplished by having BI coordinated by a full-time faculty with a joint appointment in the library or the other way around. The survey result shows that this type of arrangement is also emerging in East Asian studies.

5. How do you like the idea of establishing a clearinghouse for East Asian BI materials?

There is generally high interest in having a BI clearinghouse for East Asian studies. The majority of respondents are willing to support the clearinghouse with action. There is not much difference in this rating between collections currently offering BI and those which do not. Those who rate this item low and are not interested in supporting with action give reasons such as:

a. Shortage of staff.

b. There is nothing to contribute.

c. There is no need for a clearinghouse at the level of current BI.

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<th>votes</th>
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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<td>With BI</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>73 %</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W/O BI</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>71 %</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FIGURE 7**
A comparison of interests in establishing a clearinghouse for East Asian studies between collections with BI and those without.
III. Further research needed

Although the survey questionnaire is five pages long, it is unable to cover a very important area — users of East Asian materials. Can suppliers provide the best goods or services to customers without knowing what those customers want or need? Maybe not. As suppliers of information services to East Asian studies patrons, we need to learn several things about our clients in addition to our collections:

a. How do East Asian collection users look up information?

b. How much do they know about our collections or information retrieval systems?

c. What kind of assistance do they want?

d. How comfortable are they in seeking assistance?

e. What are their research patterns?

Many studies on these topics have been done for different types of collections. For East Asian collections, research has been focused on the use of the card catalog and RLIN or OCLC CJK. East Asian materials are very different not only in the vernacular characters in which they are written but also the expanse of knowledge and periods of time East Asian civilization encompasses. Locating information on East Asian studies is not easy even for experts. Assisting or instructing others to locate successfully what they need involves both parties: the seeker and the person assisting. A thorough understanding of the materials of East Asian studies plus a clear knowledge of our patrons’ needs will help us accomplish our mission as information specialists.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

Unlike collection development or cataloging, there exists very little cooperative effort for BI within the East Asian studies community. East Asian librarians work in an isolated environment in terms of implementing BI programs, yet more than half of the academic East Asian collections currently offer BI programs. How much time and energy could be saved if they knew what others in their field are doing?

The collections that do not have BI programs do not have them for different reasons. One compound reason is shortage of staff and lack of resources. Another is that BI is provided by the main library or the department of East Asian studies. The other reason is that librarians think their users are knowledgeable enough to work and learn on their own. The majority of these librarians offer instruction on an individual, tailor-made basis. Could they instead make the instruction more efficient and systemized, like offering a formal BI course, so as to reach more users with a minimum of staff?
Local on-line catalog and subject indexes are among the most highly rated topics for BI and are taught by most libraries. Instruction on bibliography is highly rated but few East Asian collections have offered it. It may be because bibliography courses require the most preparation time and expertise and current resources are not adequate to support them. On the other hand, the card catalog rates low for instructional importance but has been taught most often in practice. The current trend to automate East Asian collections has created a common perception that the card catalog will be abandoned but, in reality, many libraries are still relying on card catalogs for locating East Asian materials.

The majority of libraries are in favor of course-integrated BI formats or single lectures in both practice and for future planning. Some also like formal, credit-bearing BI courses because a formal course provides more in-depth instruction and is, in turn, better for facilitating successful research. Formal in-depth BI courses are presently taught more by teaching faculty than by librarians. Although one cannot conclude from this small survey sample that there is a clear division of labor in which librarians teach library skills while teaching faculty teach research methods, there is a clear indication of a new trend for jointly appointed librarians/faculty members to conduct BI courses.

Collections which offer BI and those which do not widely disagree on the importance of BI programs. The ones offering BI give much more weight to it than those without it. However, both groups agree on such areas as topics and formats. The two groups also agree strongly about the need for the establishment of a BI clearinghouse. The percentage of respondents in favor of a clearinghouse is 73% for those offering BI and 71% for those lacking it. Most of the libraries that participated in this survey would actively support the clearinghouse.

Many respondents expressed interest in establishing systemized BI programs even though some of them already have BI in place. BI is performed on many levels, from the very basic level of library tours to instruction in research methodology and the literature of a specific discipline. Although more research is needed on the users of East Asian collections, information on what BI has done and what works will help East Asian librarians develop successful BI programs in a more effective and efficient manner. A BI clearinghouse for East Asian studies could very well serve to make such information generally available. As the leading national organization of East Asian studies, the Committee on East Asian Libraries of the Association for Asian Studies would be best suited to oversee the establishment of the clearinghouse. It is to be hoped that the clearinghouse can become a reality to serve East Asian librarians in the near future.

NOTES