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EAST ASIAN LIBRARIANS AND THE WORLD WIDE WEB: FAMILIARIZATION, INFILTRATION, CLASSIFICATION AND CONSTRUCTION

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We East Asian Librarians are, I would suggest, at a fifth stage in our relationship with the World Wide Web. In the beginning we familiarized ourselves with it, finding what sorts of materials were on it. Then we began to infiltrate it; we created web pages. These were usually descriptions of collections and staff, the library's location, floor plan and hours; they were often part of a campus-wide effort to describe the library's collections and departmental/branch libraries. Then, we librarians began to serve as active filters; we selected sites and created hot links from our pages to other sites we thought useful to our users. The next step was to treat these links as we treat any other form of information; we organized or classified these links, creating a hierarchy of knowledge. And now, we are beginning to create original material to put on the web. This is my primary focus.

But first, a little background and a report on what my survey of East Asian Librarians found.¹ In general, we, as librarians, rarely look at each others' pages, and so I would deduce that we have little idea what each other is doing. With the exception of librarians who are at those few collections where one person has responsibility for the web pages for the entire East Asian library, most of us have found that writing web pages is considered part of our job, a way of enhancing service to users, similar to preparing bibliographies and class instruction, not something for which there is any particular career recognition. The biggest problem is lack of time; most everyone reported that the support from the local system folk was adequate for their needs. Few reported problems with too many reference questions. I think that this will be an increasing problem in the future, however. One institution reported that they limit their responses to their own clientele, and a librarian reported responding only to those questions easily answered and ignoring about 95%. I believe that the predicament generated by reference questions from outsiders will increase as our web pages are used by more people, since it is closely tied to the conflict between our sense of serving a national audience and the shortage of time to pursue local tasks, but the survey revealed few problems at the moment. Finally, everyone stated that the audience for their pages is not only local but national and even worldwide in scope.

While the best way to create pages of national or international importance is, in my opinion, to put unique resources on the web, the incentives mentioned in the surveys placed an emphasis on local expectations and responsibilities. Some motivations, such as the expectation that writing web pages or selecting web resources is part of one's job, do not interfere with any cooperative project or a project which has a national focus. Neither does "keeping up with the Joneses" either within the library or in comparison with other libraries, or even the rewards gained from renewing one's professional competency or keeping abreast of new technology. But the major gains of writing web pages are predominantly local in scope and benefit; the most frequently reported
purposes were:

- enhanced publicity for resources and services

- improved communication with patrons by providing reference links, online book request forms, ILL forms, information about resources

- alleviation of pressure on public service staff by providing answers to frequently asked questions and guides to research/reference sources

- a handy entry into web information

Only a few people answered sharing unique resources or the availability of outside funding for resource sharing projects as incentives. Nonetheless, it is clear that we are beginning to use the web to facilitate communication and for resource sharing projects, which I will discuss shortly.

The main disincentive to writing web pages is time, or rather the lack thereof. People did not point to inadequate equipment, with insufficient speed and memory; rather they wrote, “our library’s policy is that the time involved in creating and maintaining web pages is best spent in other activities,” or "our pages have not been very developed because of a staffing shortage." Yet another, a Head of a collection, stated that he would be reluctant to assign staff time to a national cooperative project.

The time shortage is, I fear, a given, which each library and individual librarian handle differently; it is a matter of choosing and setting priorities. Two collections have people responsible for all of their library’s web pages. Others ask bibliographers to suggest links which may be organized and classified by staff devoted to web page creation. Still others expect each bibliographer to create pages and teach courses on the Internet.

What are the advantages of writing web pages? For me the selection and classification of web sites enhances my ability to use the web, to find information on it. Search engines, whether classified like Infoseek or key word like Alta Vista, have their limitations – they produce too many irrelevant and duplicative sites and don’t necessarily produce useful results. In this sense, writing web pages enhances one's ability to do one's job.

It can also be argued that each library needs to maintain a core collection of electronic links just as they maintain a core collection of books and serials. These are useful for one's patrons, to introduce them to the web, to facilitate their access, and for bibliographic instruction.

But beyond this core list, there are significant problems associated with creating and writing pages that argue for some sort of shared responsibility. This is the premise of WWW Virtual Library sites. The sheer size of the web and its exponential growth -- 15,000 sites in English on Japan, 10,000 on China, 3,000 each on Hong Kong and Taiwan -- and the tasks associated with creating
web pages, monitoring sites, evaluating them, maintaining links to appropriate ones, is TIME consuming, and yet this is only one of many tasks that we as librarians perform.

There is another approach -- to cooperate in building an infrastructure for East Asian Studies. As the WWW-VL sites are cooperating in the collection and classification of electronic links, I refer to the creation of information and its classification. The creation of unique databases can benefit the entire community of scholars interested in East Asia, whether based in North America, East Asia, Europe or elsewhere.

I think we as area studies librarians already approach our collections with a wider audience in mind than just our local clientele, and so we are well positioned to pursue a strategy of mounting unique databases. By contrast with the focus of many humanities and social science librarians on local users, area studies librarians have been building collections to serve a national audience. To shift from providing guides to local resources and selecting links to making unique resources available nationally or putting up materials that serve a national clientele is not a big jump. There are a number of such projects underway, and I will survey just a few.

- **Resource Files**

  - **Bibliographic Instruction Clearinghouse at UC-Santa Barbara**
    (http://www.library.ucsb.edu/chiu/house.html) provides access to bibliographies for East Asian Studies prepared at various institutions for undergraduate and graduate instruction as well subject specific bibliographies for China, Japan or Korea.

  - **Resources for Japanese Studies at Duke**
    (http://www.lib.duke.edu/ias/eac/japanesestudies.html) an extensive series of bibliographies that provide guides to resources by subject and links to information available online (in addition to links to web sites organized by subject, there are hot links to online versions of white papers and journal tables of contents). The web pages can also be used for writing grant applications, subscribing to listservs or finding materials not held locally as well as teaching classes on research in Japanese studies.

  - **CIC: Table of Contents**
    Several universities in the CIC (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, Ohio State and Wisconsin) have mounted tables of contents for selected Chinese, Japanese and Korean journals. Sometimes these are scanned, sometimes they are digitized and searchable. Sometimes tables of contents for the entire run of the journal is available; most of the time the tables of contents begin in 1994 or 1995 when funding for the Project was received from the Department of Education. The titles selected are not duplicated elsewhere and are usually focused on a subject area; for instance, Minnesota has scanned mostly literature and history journals, while
Illinois has focused on the Japanese economy and Chinese language and history. Other titles reflect unique holdings or particular institutional strengths, such as the film journals at Iowa or *Gekkan New Policy* at OSU. They can all be accessed through the East Asian Cooperative World Wide Website at Ohio State University (http://pears.lib.ohio-state.edu/). There are also links to individual journal tables of contents through the Duke subject pages.

**Digitization or Scanning of Unique Resources**

- Two projects underway at Columbia are 1) letters from Abe Kobo to Donald Keene, and 2) Ling Lung Women's magazine published in Shanghai in the 1930's. Columbia seems to have the longest run in existence and received funding from the United Board. (http://www.oclc.org/oclc/presres/cul_ling/lingsmp.htm)

- Future Columbia projects include: Ukiyoee prints, oracle bones, Chinese Paper God Collection from Mrs. Goodrich, other letters from Japanese writers

- **Genji database at UC-Berkeley:** UCB is scanning the stroke order catalog to make these records accessible (http://genji.lib.berkeley.edu/).

**Holdings Lists:**

- OSU Company Histories (http://pears.lib.ohio-state.edu/dbase/DbaseHP.html)
- Chinese yearbooks published in the PRC and post-1949 Chinese local histories (http://www.library.ucla.edu/libraries/eastasian/)

- **Union Lists:** Union Lists of Japanese serials (in the planning stages).

- **Digitization of Original Texts:** Sponsored by the University of Virginia Library Electronic Text Center and the University of Pittsburgh East Asian Library, this is a collaborative effort to make texts of classical Japanese literature available on the World Wide Web. (http://www.library.ucla.edu/libraries/eastasian/)

There is clearly room for more of the same. The future may not lie in tables of contents as more and more periodical indexes from Japan, Korea and China become available in this country, but holding lists, finding aids for special collections, unique materials, guides to information regardless of format, all have merit and need to be done.

What I want to stress is that we need to accent the interdependence of our collections and we
need to KNOW what each other is doing so we can make links between our pages and their work. Subject-oriented projects provide a way of organizing our efforts. And we need to cooperate with and coordinate internal institutional efforts by faculty and other researchers, many of whom are putting up unique materials on the web. There is much to be done, but we will all gain by the doing.

NOTES

1. I am grateful for the extensive comments on the survey questions by Bob Felsing (Oregon), Hideyuki Morimoto (Berkeley), and John Little (Duke Webmaster) before I sent it out. The survey was conducted over Eastlib in early March, 1997; there were 25 responses from the U.S., four from Canada, and one from Great Britain.