

**Improved Means to an Improved End:  
Some Observations on the Development of East Asian Libraries and  
the Training of East Asian Librarians in North America**

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**by  
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Dean Wilson, Dean Bruce, Professor Knechtges, Director Shen, colleagues and friends:

It's a great pleasure to be back at the University of Washington. Some of you know I was a student here sixty years ago, first as an undergraduate and then a student at the School of Librarianship, now the Information School. Although it has been six decades, my memories of my UW days are as vivid as yesterday. I had a brief tour of the campus this morning. Much has changed, but much, to me at least, remains the same. It seems that I have been away only for six years and not sixty. I guess it feels that way because it was here that I got my start in library work, and perhaps equally importantly, I was married here - and to a UW school mate!

I worked as a student helper at the University Library here in the late 1940's. The Library was kind enough to allow me to come to work anytime I could put in two hours at a time. It was a great opportunity because it meant I didn't have to work odd jobs outside the campus, and I also got to read a lot of books. My job was compiling a checklist of the few thousand Chinese books housed in one room in the Suzzallo Library, and making some sort of catalog cards for them. I worked twenty hours a week and was paid \$75 a month, not too bad for those days and just enough to pay for my room and board. When the Far Eastern Library, now the East Asian Library, was founded in 1948, the late Dr. Ruth Krader, the head of the Library, kept me on and I continued my work there, doing more or less the same thing. It was my work there that led me to consider library service as a career. Following my graduation in 1950 I was admitted into the School of Librarianship and in 1951 became the first student from China ever to graduate from that School.

My forty-seven years of library service coincided with the development of East Asian studies in the United States, for the latter is basically a post-World War II phenomenon. Although a few universities offered some courses on East Asia (then referred to as the Far East) before World War II, full-fledged study of East Asia, in all the disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, did not develop until after the Second World War. The war in the Pacific, the transformation of Japan into a democracy, the

communist revolution in China, and the Korean War contributed to a heightening of American awareness of the importance of East Asia in a changing world, and of the need for better understanding of their histories and civilizations. The universities, with generous foundation and government support, responded by expanding their teaching and research programs on East Asia, and today after 60 years, the field of East Asian studies in the United States has become the largest and most comprehensive in the Western world. A concomitant development in this academic enterprise was the building of library resources. Although several American libraries had begun collecting in the East Asian languages long before World War II (the Library of Congress began as early as 1869, Yale started in 1878, Harvard in 1879, UC-Berkeley in 1896, Cornell in 1918, Columbia in 1920, Princeton in 1926, and Chicago in 1936), they all experienced their greatest growth after 1945. A number of today's major collections, such as those at Michigan, Hoover, University of Washington, and UCLA, came into being only in the late 1940's; and others such as Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin, in the 1960's.

I began my library service at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University as cataloger at the Chinese Collection while doing graduate work at Stanford's History Department. In 1959 I succeeded the legendary Mary Wright as Curator of the Chinese Collection, and after my Ph.D. oral was appointed the Curator of Hoover's newly established East Asian Collection in 1961. In 1965 I was invited to become Librarian of the Harvard-Yenching Library at Harvard University, from which I retired in 1997. So, my library career progressed as East Asian studies in the United States progressed. The training I received in the early days at the library school and the work I knew, however, were dramatically different from what is being taught at library schools today and the way library service is delivered.

This change, of course, was brought about by the technological revolution that began during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is still unfolding today. This revolution, even more profound than the Industrial Revolution of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, fundamentally changed the way we live, learn, and communicate, and will certainly continue to define everything we do in the future. While library school graduates nowadays are all well versed in technology, particularly in information management, learning does not stop with graduation from library school. In this fast changing technological environment librarians must keep up in order to be able to do their job properly. That is why professional development opportunities, such as this summer institute, are so important. I congratulate the University of Washington Libraries and the CEAL Committee on Chinese Materials for sponsoring this Institute, the Luce Foundation, the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundations and others for supporting it, and you for having had the good fortune of attending it. I only hope that this kind of opportunity can be made available to more East Asian librarians on a regular basis.

East Asian libraries are late comers in terms of technology. I thought it might be useful, particularly for my younger colleagues here, to trace the road East Asian libraries have traveled to arrive at the digital world of today. It has been an arduous journey, but we learned a great deal along the way. We came to where we are today because we persevered and had the help of many concerned people outside the library community. In

the 1960's and the 1970's, while general research libraries were seriously exploring and making use of technology to improve operations, East Asian libraries were still occupied with the more mundane problems of cataloging standards. Automation was far from everyone's mind and therefore not on East Asian libraries' agenda. A 1975 statement that the Committee on East Asian Libraries (CEAL) of the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) was invited to submit to the Ford Foundation on the "Priorities for the Development and Funding of Library Programs in Support of East Asian Studies" did not make any particular reference to the role the emerging technology could play in East Asian library development. Looking back, this was not East Asian libraries' fault. No serious work was being done on East Asian character codes in this country at that time, and computers could not handle any of the East Asian languages. In any case, the various needs identified in the 1975 CEAL statement to the Ford Foundation were so convincing that in the same year the Ford Foundation urged the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) to appoint a Steering Committee for a Study of the Problems of East Asian Libraries. George Bechman, the late UW's Professor of Asian Studies and Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences who had earlier been an officer at the Ford Foundation, was invited to be the Chairman, with a very high-powered membership composed of two university provosts (Hanna H. Gray of Yale and William F. Miller of Stanford), two professors (Albert Feuerwerker of Michigan and Herman H. Fussler of Chicago), and three librarians (Warren J. Hass, University Librarian at Columbia, Warren Tsuneishi, Chief of the Orientalia Division of the Library of Congress, and me, then Librarian of Harvard-Yenching Library.) As a guide for its work, the Steering Committee commissioned a series of working papers, a number of them written by CEAL members, including Karl Lo (University of Washington), T. H. Tsien (University of Chicago), Weiying Wan (Michigan), Ramond Tang (UC-Berkeley), Thomas Kuo (Pittsburgh), Thomas Lee (Wisconsin), Richard Howard (Cornell), Warren Tsuneishi (Library of Congress) and myself. The Steering Committee made a report in 1977 entitled *East Asian Libraries: Problems and Prospects* with recommendations for bibliographical control, collection development and access, and technical and personnel matters, but without any reference to technology. The report, however, attracted significant attention in library and academic circles. In the following year ACLS, joined by the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), and the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), co-sponsored a Joint Advisory Committee to "review the Steering Committee's report, particularly in the light of comments received from the field since its publication and to oversee the implementation of such modified recommendations as then seemed appropriate." The new committee composed of the following members:

Patricia Battin, Vice President and University Librarian, Columbia University  
Charles Churchill (1980-1981), Dean of Library Services, Washington University  
Hideo Kaneko, Curator, East Asian Collection, Yale University Library  
Fredric W. Mote, Professor of East Asian Studies, Princeton University  
Robert E. Ward, Director, Center for International Studies, Stanford University  
Eugene W. Wu, Librarian, Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University  
John W. Haeger (ex-officio), Director, ACLS-SSRC-ARL East Asia  
Library Program

Witnessing the great strides general research libraries were making in automation, the Joint Advisory Committee charted a new course for East Asian libraries. It was the work of this committee that led to online cataloging in East Asian libraries at a later date. In its report on *Automation, Cooperation, and Scholarship: East Asian Libraries in the 1980s*, the Joint Advisory Committee stated that “after a decade of unprecedented growth along a course linked primarily to foreign area studies programs rather than to the development of research libraries in general...East Asian libraries are at a crossroad,” and with the lessening of federal and foundation funding, they ought to embark upon a new course of sharing work, materials, and access, and of relying “on automation as a principal planning and management tool.” The keystone to this, according to the report, “is the capability to input, manage, store, transmit, display, and output bibliographical records containing East Asian characters in exactly the same automated system already created to perform similar functions for Western language materials and general research libraries.” This basic reorientation of the course of development for East Asian libraries in North America, as advocated in the report, would fundamentally change the way East Asian libraries operated, but it was welcomed by all concerned.

The reason the Advisory Committee was able to recommend this course of action was that the Academia Sinica in Taiwan, under the guidance of Dr. C.C. Hsieh, had at that time invented CCCII (Chinese Character Code for Information Interchange), the first such code that ever came into existence. In 1982 the Research Libraries Group (RLG) derived from CCCII the now national standard EACC (East Asian Character Code for Bibliographic Use) and introduced in 1983, with Ford Foundation support, the CJK (Chinese, Japanese, and Korean) enhancements to the Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN), then RLG’s operating arm. This development made possible for the first time the creation of cataloging records at one library which could then be copied by other libraries and also viewed by researchers everywhere. In 1986 the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) established a similar CJK bibliographic utility. The rest, of course, is history.

I need not mention to this group that revolutionizing bibliographical control is not the only gift new technology has given to libraries. Other equally revolutionary innovations are now at our disposal, such as ordering and public service. Technology also has altered the form of publications libraries collect. Many genres of books and other materials have been rapidly migrating to digital form. (You have just spent the last two weeks discussing digital libraries, and held a symposium on that marvellous treasure trove of Chinese electronic databases CNKI – The Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure). Because of these unprecedented developments, unimaginable fifteen or twenty years ago, the library profession is an entirely different world from what it used to be. A new breed of librarians who are technologically savvy has emerged, and new technology will continue to guide the development of libraries in the future. The centrality of technology in library work is unquestionable. However, it might be useful to pause and ask: Will technology alone help us achieve what libraries are designed for?

I don’t think anyone would disagree that the heart of the library is its collections. I have quoted elsewhere the late Professor John King Fairbank of Harvard who said:

“Great universities all have great libraries. Without a great library there would be no great university.” By “great libraries” he meant libraries with great collections. The question I want to pose here is that in the process of applying technology to provide better and more effective library service, are we in the meantime paying enough attention to the most important mission of libraries: that is, collection building? Are we doing our best to maintain the vitality and health of our collections, built over many decades by our predecessors, that have made America’s East Asian libraries the best in the Western world? It is worth noting that most of the books and other materials that have migrated or are migrating to the digital form are mostly collections that were built long ago. Should we not follow in the footsteps of our predecessors to keep our collections strong and viable so that East Asian libraries can continue to play a key role in the development of East Asian studies in this country?

The key consideration here has to be personnel. The reason East Asian libraries are doing so well in the use of technology is that there is available to them a sufficiently large group of library school graduates trained in technology who also know the languages. It seems to me that there is an equal need in our East Asian libraries for well trained subject specialists who are well versed in the cultures and civilizations of East Asia to serve as collection builders. We need scholar-librarians in addition to business managers and computer specialists. We know from experience that knowledge of the language alone is insufficient to get the job done in East Asian libraries. It takes much more than the ability to speak, read, and write the language. Unfortunately, an impression has been left with the powers that be in some quarters that one needs only to know the language to qualify as an East Asian studies librarian; subject knowledge is immaterial. This is nowhere more clearly and sadly demonstrated than by the case a couple of years ago of a well-known European institution replacing its Chinese studies and Japanese studies librarians with Chinese and Japanese-speaking clerks by declaring the librarians’ positions “redundant.” Fortunately, that institution was eventually forced to rescind its decision and reinstate its Chinese and Japanese librarians. There is a lesson to be learned here from this sad affair, that is, East Asian libraries, while preoccupied with management and technology, must not forget to give equal due to their scholarly function of collection building.

How do we train scholar-librarians? East Asian libraries sometimes are fortunate to attract people with advanced degrees in East Asian studies who are also trained in library schools. That is the ideal situation, but it doesn’t happen often enough. I believe the time has come for the library profession to train its own corps of East Asian scholar-librarians. Many years ago T.H. Tsien, curator of the Far Eastern Library of the University of Chicago and concurrently a professor in Chicago’s Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures, introduced a joint program between the Department and Chicago’s Graduate Library School for the M.A. and Ph.D. degrees. The core of the program included the basic courses required by both the Department and the Library School for graduate degrees, plus special instruction in East Asian bibliography taught by Prof. Tsien himself. The program was very successful, but unfortunately it came to an end when T.H. Tsien retired in 1978, and no other university has offered a similar program since. There are three prerequisites to establishing such a program at a university:

a good East Asian studies department, a good library school, and a good East Asian library. The University of Washington fits this picture perfectly. It meets all three requirements and if it is willing to consider introducing a joint program similar to what the University of Chicago offered, it could make an enormous and lasting contribution to East Asian studies and East Asian libraries in this country for decades to come. For a very long time the law and the medical library communities have paid much attention to the training of law and medical librarians to insure that their fields are staffed by people equipped with a set of core subject competencies in addition to technical expertise. This has worked well for them, and it is what we ought to be thinking about seriously for East Asian libraries.

Thank you very much.