PROBLEMS AND STRATEGIES FOR EAST ASIAN LIBRARIES IN THE 1980’s †

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The Problem

In the 1980s East Asian libraries will face the same series of problems already confronted in the 1970s. These problems can be subsumed under a single statement: how to develop an East Asian collection under fiscal adversity? All libraries, big and small, face the same basic problem. My brief remarks below will define the meaning of collection development in the 1980s and explore certain aspects of fiscal adversity. In doing so, I will give examples of how the Hoover Institution EAC has been preparing for the 1980s and suggest through implication how other collection might do the same.

Collection Development

Collection development means many things. The criteria I now present is not comprehensive but it most certainly covers the core elements. First, the major collections in America possesses certain strengths in their materials. Hoover’s EAC for example unique pamphlets, government reports, and surveys on China between 1911 and 1949 and on Japan from early Meiji to the end of World War II. The element I cite is that libraries must try to build on those existing strengths wherever possible as old and new materials become available. For minor collections which seek to be effective all-round research-servicing collections, they must decide each year what items will provide that all-round usefulness they have provided in the past. But aside from building on pre-existing strengths, the major collections should try to


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develops new areas of materials to anticipate research of the future.

Second, virtually all libraries are currently suffering storage-space problems and have very limited space for future expansion. This is a vexing, troublesome problem, which will become serious and severely penalize users who must wait for considerable time to pass while a book is being retrieved from a distant annex.

Third, all libraries must confront the serious problem of how to preserve fragile materials that are deteriorating or have been damaged through use.

Fourth, every library must have an efficient, hard working, and dedicated staff to process accurately and speedily all in-coming materials to prevent a back-log of uncataloged materials. Equally important, this same staff must provide an efficient and courteous service to its users. Such library service involves not only visitors and library-loan users but entails making available checklists and bibliographies which can assist patrons to make even better use of the collection.

To ensure these criteria are met, library managers must make numerous decisions: to select appropriate library items; to design administrative systems to plan for space expansion; to devise new systems of material preservation; to encourage bibliographical studies; to manage library staff on a day-to-day basis and elicit high work standards and performance from them while at the same time maintaining high morale. To make the correct decisions in all costs is no easy task. Faulty decisions can produce dismal, costly outcomes. But before discussing some of the strategies to be used to meet the above criteria, a brief comment on our definition of the term fiscal adversity.

**Fiscal Adversity**

By fiscal adversity I mean not merely the shrinking value of the library manager’s budget as inflation erodes purchasing power, foreign exchange rate fluctuations reduce the purchasing power of the US$, and costs of acquisition, shipment, processing, and binding continue to rise rapidly. Fiscal adversity certainly means the characteristics just mentioned, but it also means the new pressures from outside sources to either cut library budgets or prevent such budgets from being expanded rapidly as in the recent
past. It is the combination of these elements, economic in part and structural in part, which have made more severe the fiscal conditions under which library managers must now make their many decisions.

Let me now cite three aspects of fiscal adversity of the 1970s which will be with us in the 1980s and beyond.

First, the cost of monographs rose dramatically in the 1970s. I cite the example in the Hoover EAC between 1968/69 and 1977/78. We estimated the costs of book price and postal cost for samples of books obtained from dealers in Japan, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Our findings showed that acquisition costs spurted most rapidly between 1972-73 and 1977-78. The over-all costs showed that in U.S. dollars a Japanese book and a book from Taiwan in 1978-79 cost 2.3 times that of 1962-69. For books from Hong Kong the figure was 3.6 times. In the late 1970s exchange rate change accounted for two-thirds of the rise in costs for books from Japan whereas from Taiwan and Hong Kong exchange rate change accounted for only one-third of the rise in costs. Inflation had accelerated more in the Taiwan and Hong Kong book industry but had moderated in Japan.

Turning to postal costs the rate per Japanese volume rose nearly 70 percent in the ten year period with the biggest increase coming in the last five years. For Taiwan the increase was 90 percent, again taking place mainly in the past five years. But for Hong Kong postal costs per volume rose almost 500 percent.

For the 1980s we cannot predict the cost trends, but we can expect that these trends will be upward and that their annual rate of increase is likely to exceed that of the growth of the annual library budget certainly, for the 1970 these annual cost increases exceeded to percentage growth of the annual budget.

I now cite an important structural factor which libraries can off-set only with the passage of time and much effort.

East Asian libraries are only used by a very small group of users which probably does not exceed 10-15 percent of the number of patrons that use the main library of every large university. Therefore, an item placed in the East Asian library may never be used in a quarter of a century or longer. This is always the dilemma of specialist libraries. My point in mentioning this, how-
ever, is that if university officials in the 1980s are confronted with severely declining enrollments and sharply rising costs they will desperately cut from the budget wherever they can. Privileged co-ordinate libraries in the university library system might be seriously hurt because of this official awareness of under-utilized capacity. I will speak no more to this issue, but turn now to some strategies libraries can use to solve their problems.

Strategies for the 1980s and Beyond

After World War II library budgets expanded and by the golden years of the sixties libraries were unabashedly competing and duplicating each other’s acquisitions. Collection growth exploded, but by the early 1970s a shortage of funds had forced many libraries to reappraise their collection policies. In the light of the major problems alluded to above, this reappraisal must be carried out to its logical end: namely, a deliberate slowing-up of the growth of collection development and a strong emphasis given to high quality of acquisitions along with building on areas of recognized library strength. Therefore, the first strategy recommendation for the future is a severe assessment of the areas of strength for future growth and a vigorous attempt to acquire information for purchasing only the major, high quality materials in those areas of given excellence. It is very unlikely that libraries can or should try to maintain excellence across the board for all fields. Some areas will have to be slighted, and prudent judgement must be exercised by those making collection development purchases. Wide-ranging consultation with faculty and key scholars ought to be made on which of those future frontier-areas will become important.

Some libraries will be in an advantageous position to cooperate an collection development with nearby libraries located up to several hundred miles away. This sort of cooperation can produce very high benefits for all parties. First, such libraries can advance their specialization and build on existing strengths by reaching agreements on areas to complement each other. Second, these same libraries can agree to consult on purchases of expensive items exceeding $500 or $1,000 US$ to avoid duplication. These two types of agreements must be predicated upon trust and general confidence which extends as well to the establishment of working
agreements. At first, such discussions are bound to be frustrating, but as both sides gain trust in the other, agreements will be forged.

Another strategy has been used by the EAC of Stanford and the EAC of Berkeley, California to great advantage in the past several years. For example, these two libraries have agreed upon projects to survey the extent of Japanese and Chinese periodical duplication and to produce checklists of Chinese local gazetteers, Japanese local gazetteers, Chinese and Japanese newspapers, Japanese company histories, and Japanese government publications held in each library. The great value of these projects is that both libraries are informed of areas of existing duplication and strength. As a result of these projects both libraries have agreed upon a scheme to demarcate Japanese prefectures and Chinese provinces for selective acquisition of local histories by each library. This decision to divide collecting responsibility by region means that both libraries will achieve greater coverage for both countries and yet save budget funds. As for joint-library sharing, I should like to point out that both libraries ignored such cooperation throughout the 1950s, the 1960s and early 1970s until late 1976 when the first agreement was reached to permit scholars and students in each campus to use the East Asian library of the other. There is no doubt in my mind that such cooperation could have been introduced earlier in those years had the will to do so existed. Clearly, it never existed.

The third strategy involves the production of new bibliographies or checklists to specify certain collections of unique materials held in some libraries but not others. Such lists are invaluable to librarians and scholars. For some decades librarians have produced these tools, but their rate of production seems to have diminished in recent years, in part because of the scarcity of funds and in part because many librarians have decided not to continue to inventory their libraries to produce special checklists. In this regard librarians must collaborate with scholars to examine which clusters of documents can be considered for annotated checklists. Both librarians and scholars must consider the practical means to select items relevant to today’s and tomorrow’s research topics. This effort will require boldness and imagination.

Good management depends upon the flow of information
between supervisors and staff. Such information must clearly explain the tasks to be done and the relationship of all tasks within the organization. Every staff person must be given a sense of purpose and importance within the organization. Periodic meetings to discuss the problems and achievements of the library will convey a sense of pride and urgency amongst library personnel to contribute their best effort and to increase a deeper sense of responsibility and loyalty toward the library. These are difficult times. But we cannot neglect the problem of work morale and spirit within library organizations. For this reason, short staff meetings to promote communication and good work morale can go far to defuse staff resentment and misunderstanding.

One new technological development, soon to come, holds great promise for libraries to utilize and share their resources more effectively. It is the adoption of the computers to provide for the storage, recall, and transfer of huge quantities of information. Business organizations already use the computer to store and recall complex information. Means now exist to introduce ideographs into the computer and recall them according to number and sequence. By 1983 a number of East Asian libraries will have computer terminals and a shared storage system by which cataloging information can be introduced, recalled, and utilized by all libraries within a single library system. Such a break-through will produce a shared system of cataloging information for all libraries that participate in the computerized system.

The advantages will be considerable. Libraries will have shared access to the cataloged information of the entire system.

Duplication of acquisition materials can be reduced and budget savings realized. New and existing areas of specialized holdings can be created and expanded. Checklists of periodicals, newspapers, and other items can be generated and made available to all participants of the library system. In other words, when computer technology is fully harnessed by a number of libraries in the mid 1980s both librarians and users will benefit and the problems cited above might be minimized considerably.

The coming of the computer, however, will also bring new problems. Trained staff persons must be recruited and existing staff skills up-graded. New organizational problems will arise and
require solution. Steps must continually be taken to prevent excessive ambitions from outstripping current practices and thereby subjecting libraries to new pressures and stresses.

Conclusion

The above remarks have ignored the library user and user needs. The EAL at Berkeley and EAC recently conducted a survey of several hundred East Asian academics in the western region to determine user sentiments and needs. The responses showed general satisfaction with the two libraries, but many respondents expressed the desire to visit major collections for short periods to gain first hand familiarity with libraries. To resolve this problem libraries of excellence might apply for government funds to encourage scholars to visit for short periods on a revolving basis.

In the last five years East Asian libraries have responded pragmatically and efficiently to declining budgets and rising acquisition costs. Some have done better at this than others. There are many strategies library managers can adopt to ensure better quality collection development, improved usage and lay-out of library, and more efficient library operations. There is no magic formula for achieving these goals over-night. But careful reflection of the above problems and an imaginative adoption of correct strategies can improve both the quality and effectiveness of East Asian libraries in the years ahead and greatly improve the services we provide to our users.