READERS' SERVICES AND BIBLIOGRAPHIC INSTRUCTION IN EAST ASIAN LIBRARIES†

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Users of East Asian collections often enjoy the most personalized and informed type of reference services; this is because East Asian collections are usually segregated from the general collection, with the staff and books together in a single well-defined location; the number of users is small enough that the library staff can know them and their particular research interests; staff are specialized in Asian studies only, unlike general reference librarians who must cover all fields of academic endeavor; and the staff is often stabler than that of libraries in general.

In the area of bibliographic instruction, we librarians may not be serving our constituencies as well. A relatively sophisticated level of library use is often assumed to pre-exist among faculty and students, and lower-level bibliographic instruction and even attractive graphics are the kinds of things which have been traditionally ignored in our sober-minded collections. Moreover, librarians are not the real leaders in bibliographic instruction; rather, it is faculty members who usually teach the bibliography courses for those concentrating in East Asian studies. Only in a few universities in this country are these courses taught by librarians, even if they are the curators or heads of collections; generally it is a regular faculty member who is responsible for instructing students in the use of our libraries. There are at

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least two reasons for this: inadequate education of librarians and an emphasis on teaching students about the information in the books themselves rather than how that information is arranged and how to approach it for research projects.

I would like to deal first with bibliographic instruction. You know if you read any of the current library literature or attend any library conferences that bibliographic instruction is a hot topic today. Much emphasis is given to undergraduate instruction in library use and initial introductions to the research library in general, a far cry from the origins of bibliographic instruction under such library luminaries as William Warner Bishop and William Frederick Poole at the beginning of the century. In East Asian collections, we do little with undergraduate instruction, assuming that our undergrad users are probably the best and brightest and can find their own way around our collections until their language skills are sufficiently high for them to enroll in bibliography courses at the graduate level, where they are firmly ensconced.

At most of the major centers for East Asian studies in this country, courses in Chinese, Japanese and Korean bibliography are upper-level graduate courses, requiring as a pre-requisite an average of three years of modern language or one of classical language. They generally meet in a seminar format once or perhaps twice a week. The titles, according to university bulletins, vary from the succinct such as “Chinese Bibliography” to the more elaborate “Proseminar: Methods and Materials Used in Conducting Research in Japanese Studies.” These are usually full three-credit courses, though some schools grant only one or two hours of credit; at many schools these courses are required for graduate students.

Most of the courses boil down to two components: materials and methods. In the materials section, the students learn what materials are available, their historical background and how to use them; the methods section teaches such things are how to narrow down a topic for a research paper, how to explore inten-
sively the search process itself, how to compose a thesis statement, the proper research channels to pursue, and in what format to present the completed work.

In the general research library, methods are being emphasized more and more perhaps to make up for deficiencies in students' background, or perhaps because this is an area where librarians can be of good use to students. When this is the case, the purpose of the course is to teach students how to be self-sufficient in the library, rather than merely to show them what bibliographies exist.

The types of pedagogical methods used in East Asian bibliography courses are the time-tested ones; in fact, some are considered outmoded by bibliographic instructors in other fields since the thrust of our courses is often toward bibliographies and the mechanics of using them, not so much toward the "bibliographic search" or taking the skills which are acquired in the classroom and creatively applying them to materials exclusively related to an individual's specialty.

Generally the structure of the course is to give an introductory background to books, printing and traditional bibliography then introduce the books which include indexes, dictionaries, encyclopedias, bibliographies, yearbooks, maps, handbooks, biographical sources, abstracts and documents. In class the students are shown how the sources are used, and exercise questions are given as assignments. The final project usually consists of an annotated bibliography or bibliographic essay.

The purpose then is to use the books, as it should be. However, this means that theory of bibliography or approaches to research problems in a more general sense are probably not covered. Thus, the skills gained by the students are limited to isolated cases and must be transferred by them on their own to other areas. The exercises are also to be done on an individualized basis which does not take into account the impact of group dynamics or group learning which should be as important in East Asian library situations as others. Some of the interesting
studies that are being published lately on bibliography courses in other fields report on the use of such concepts in these courses. Probably these studies are not known to most instructors of East Asian bibliography courses since as full-time faculty members they are not in the habit of reading library literature.

The degree of individual initiative and imaginativeness shown in teaching these bibliography courses vary from school to school and year to year. Some universities have courses of long standing, complete with well-conceived and abundant materials, often compiled by an instructor who is a genuine bibliophile if not a certified bibliomaniac. At other schools, the bibliography course is given over to the newest junior faculty member who may have to compile all materials from scratch and who may never have had any real training in bibliography. If this is the situation, the course often is not offered every year, much to the privation of the entering graduate student who needs every tool he can get as he enters the world of advanced seminars.

Many of the courses that are offered are of high caliber and are held in some esteem by the students who have completed them, since they train students in a thorough fashion. A frequent alternative to a full-blown bibliography course is one session of a regular seminar devoted to the bibliographic sources available in that field. These one-class sessions are helpful but only in a limited sense since one cannot gain bibliographic skills by studying bibliography obliquely in other courses. A good materials and methods course, however, can not only show students what books they may consult, but also prepare them to do independent research, which is what one of the primary intentions of such a course should be.

An adjunct purpose is to teach students how to come to grips with certain concepts unique to East Asian studies and to manipulate basic reference tools which exhibit these concepts. We are still not in the happy state that American studies or French studies are where any new graduate student can be expected to know how to use dictionaries and chronologies in his field. It is still common
for a new graduate student to be competent in Chinese, Japanese or Korean, but have little notion of how to convert a date from heavenly stems and earthly branches to a Gregorian date, much less to write a paper using sources in an East Asian language, particularly if the sources are pre-modern ones. We can assume only minimal familiarity on the students' part with even standard East Asian reference works while anyone in Western studies can find his way through biographical dictionaries or even *Social Sciences Citation Index* and *IBZ*. A student may have successfully completed even four years of Chinese or Japanese without once having come in contact with *Tź’u hai* 辭海 or *Toyogaku bunken ruimoku* 東洋學文献類目.

It is also our responsibility to prepare students to use libraries in Asia as well as our more familiar American variety since not many scholars today care to claim to be Occident-bound Arthur Waley's. This means that at some point in their careers, students should learn the make-up of the Nippon Decimal Classification System or the Chinese *ssu-k'u* (四庫) system as well as every conceivable romanization system. Analogous skills are simply not required of students in such areas as Latin American studies, not to mention American government or English literature.

We are indeed in an unordinary position vis-à-vis bibliographic instruction and what is required of it in East Asian studies. As if learning any one of the languages we deal in were not already sufficiently formidable a task, the fields of East Asian studies overlap to the point that a student of Korean literature must be able to work comfortably in Chinese, and a student in Chinese history should have a working knowledge of at least some sources in Japanese. To this end we must also instruct people in using materials in a language of which they might have only a rudimentary knowledge at best. It is no easy undertaking to convince someone who knows only Chinese that using Morohashi's *Dai Kan-Wa jiten* 大漢和辭典 is neither impossible nor need be intimidating.

Converting dates and identifying pseudonymous names or
using the four-corner system are other skills solely taught in East Asian bibliography courses. It may be at the expense of giving practice in methodology and the principles of research techniques that we must teach such other skills. The only way to remedy this situation is to divide our materials and methods courses into two—one to cover materials and basic language and bibliographic skills which are not covered in subject-related seminars; and another full course for methodology and research techniques.

It is the second course where more in-depth coverage could be attempted in such spheres as local gazetteers or translation of religious or other texts requiring special dictionaries and concordances. At present only a couple of university catalogs list an advanced course of this nature or even one which specializes in a narrower area of bibliographic studies such as historiography or modern history. In reality probably such courses are not even offered every year.

If no course in bibliography is part of the curriculum, then some instruction must be conducted on an informal basis in the library as people discover themselves unable to use certain materials or such essential tools as the card catalog. We as librarians should of course urge that some course be taught or volunteer our services for non-credit courses if a full-fledged course cannot be fit into the curriculum. It is time- and patience-saving for us to explain the use of a work such as Chung-kuo ts'ung shu tsung lu 中國叢書綜錄 once a year rather than each time a new person needs to find his way through it.

And though it may be easier to answer a reference question by merely producing the answer as if by magic, we should take such opportunities to teach the users of our collections actually to handle and master the tools for themselves. Chances are they might need them again and would be as much mystified the second time around unless we take seriously our role as instructor in library materials, not merely selector and interpreter of them.

Since the materials and methods course has had a long history in East Asian studies departments, there has necessarily
been an accompanying evolution going on in what instruction is necessary and what needs to be emphasized as new fields gain currency. Where a text concentrating on traditional studies such as Teng and Biggerstaff’s *Annotated Bibliography of Selected Chinese Reference Works* is a classic and still a required text in many bibliography courses, supplemental texts are needed for modern and contemporary works and to aid students in fields such as economics or government. These texts and bibliographies are appearing in heartening numbers, for instance, Endymion Wilkinson’s *History of Imperial China: a Research Guide* or Berton and Wu’s *Contemporary China: a Research Guide* and others too numerous even to list.

In Japanese Studies, Herschel Webb’s *Research in Japanese Sources: a Guide* too is still one of the only works around that can be used for self-study effectively. However, as it has been out of print for some time now, a new guide would be most welcome, as would a similar handbook for Chinese students. This is where we as librarians can make a contribution to bibliographic instruction even if we do not engage in actually teaching a course. New, updated works are needed, and we, as the ones most closely in touch with newly issued materials, should be the ones to undertake their compiling. Beyond general guides, such works as a union list of local gazetteers or rare books, or any number of concordances to literary works would also be worthy projects.

To progress now to library services in East Asian libraries, I will touch only on reference service, not circulation or reserve since in these areas we do not differ significantly from general collections. Libraries in this country are possibly the most solicitous libraries in the world as we go to great lengths to verify sources or answer obscure questions. However, we are lax in such elementary matters as explaining the use of the card catalog to users. We have probably all heard users say things such as: there is no entry in the catalog for Ssu-ma Ch’ien, which can only point up to us how very complex our catalogs are. With our existing multitudinous classification schemes and AACR II newly imple-
mented, East Asian catalogs are among the most complicated conceivable. Yet under current conditions most users must find their ways through them unaided or just not find their ways through at all. We should be sure at the beginning of each academic year to offer at least thorough tours of our collections for new students, and also for new faculty who are as likely to be baffled by an unfamiliar library as the newest student.

Instruction in the use of computer terminals will soon become a part of our regular reference service also. As we are led out of the dark ages by automation of Chinese, Japanese and Korean we will be the ones who will in turn have to lead the faculty and students into the age of computers.

Currently there is a contradiction in East Asian reference service. That is that our service is estimable but not too visible. Often we have no designated reference desk in a reading room or other public area, and the only truly prominent staff member may be the person who mans the circulation desk. If there is a desk designated for reference purposes, the person assigned there may be a non-specialist professional librarian who, in other words, knows no East Asian language, can be of next to no help to users with anything but superficial questions; or the person there may be a non-librarian—a student assistant, for example, whose knowledge of the collection is limited to the works in his own area of interest. Yet this reference desk is a very important position, the first point of contact many users have with library staff. The person primarily responsible for reference should minimally hold a master’s degree in Asian studies as well as a library science degree. Even in general reference departments most new positions require graduate work in a subject area. How much more should this be true in East Asian libraries. The days when we had to get by with professional staff who were hired by virtue of their being native speakers have long passed. Our staff must be over or above the level of our graduate students in area specialization if we are to provide good service.

Often in the collections which have no prominent reference
area separate from circulation and reserve materials, the head of
the collection is responsible for reference. Then the service given
should be second to none since this person is an area specialist
and often has a Ph. D. and/or is the author of reference works,
not merely someone who uses them. The contradiction, restated,
is that our reference service is of the first order when it is given by
the one ultimately responsible, but often where to find the person
with the answers is not easy, as the collection head generally has
his office away from the public areas of the collection.

At least we in East Asian collections usually do not have to
cope with one inhibition to ready reference service which is often
ture in other area collections. That is that one finds a Slavic
bibliographer or Latin American bibliographer, for instance, whose
office is in some remote part of the library nowhere near the cor-
responding collection. Fortunately East Asian collections in
general are more physically coherent units than many other area
collections, and our staffs are usually positioned with the books.
Thus we do enjoy an identity usually easily recognized throughout
a library system.

Nonetheless, there are other ways in which we do not serve
our constituents as well as we might. For instance, not many
East Asian collections give tours to entering faculty, graduate
students and undergraduate majors. This device, so commonly
used in the general collections, denotes a deeper committment
to the lower level of library instruction than is often found in
East Asian collections. Also we often do not provide first-step
reference guides on specific topics such as the Pathfinders de-
developed by MIT’s Model Library Program.

It is rare to find courses in updating or re-education given
for the faculty though we could save them hours of misdirected
searches if we once a year offered up-date courses for new faculty
members or others interested in finding out the latest tools which
may not yet have come to their attention. Berkeley’s general
reference department, for instance, runs a regular course of several
weeks duration for faculty where the latest indexes and other
reference materials are discussed. Reaction to this course has been extremely favorable, and there is no reason to doubt that it would not be equally favorable among East Asian specialists.

So while we are among the most accommodating of librarians as we can offer good service in book orders, reference problem solving, bibliographic verification, etc., areas where we might improve, do still exist. We should remember the neediest, who in our case are the undergraduates who have the least familiarity with the library. We should display our reference services in high relief and trust this important function only to those who are specialists in East Asian studies. And we must look forward to the days of automation when we shall have to instruct ourselves first in computerized methods so that we can help prepare our users for the machine age.

In the area of bibliographic instruction we should be sure to encourage the chairs of departments to establish courses in bibliography if they do not yet exist, and without hesitation offer our services in organizing and conducting them either alone or as a team-teaching partner with a regular faculty member. CEAL could also have a subcommittee on bibliographic instruction, using for a prototype the committee by this name of CEAL’s Latin American counterpart, the Seminar on the Acquisition of Latin American Library Materials. We might also try to initiate a summer workshop for those who teach materials and methods courses, perhaps under the sponsorship of the ACLS as once was proposed. It would be beneficial to initiate courses for faculty to inform them about the latest materials. And in the regular graduate bibliography courses, in order to make these courses as relevant and professional as possible, we should try to tie them into regular coursework, use them as forums where students could discuss research problems, and encourage students to publish the annotated bibliographies which are usually the final assignments in these courses.
References

1. One example of such works is Robert D. Stuaert and Richard D. Johnson’s *New Horizons for Academic Libraries*. New York: K.G. Saur, 1979, which includes several articles on bibliographic instruction.

2. Information gleaned from a survey of over a dozen major university bulletins.


4. John A. Bollier. “Bibliographic instruction in the graduate/professional theological school.” In Stuaert and Johnson.

5. A discussion of some needed works is given in Daniel Bryant’s “A note on concordances to Chinese poetry,” *CLEAR* January, 1981.


7. Anne Grodzins Lipow. “Teaching the faculty to use the library: a successful program of in-depth seminars for U of C, Berkeley, faculty.” In Stuaert and Johnson.

8. This and other suggestions on integrating bibliography courses into the general curriculum are given by Bollier.

Other Sources


