



Inside
MAJOR EAST
ASIAN LIBRARY
COLLECTIONS
in NORTH
AMERICA

Volume 1

PATRICK LO
HERMINA G.B. ANGHELESCU
BRADLEY ALLARD

**Inside Major East Asian Library
Collections in North America, Volume 1**

“This compendium of interviews with East Asian librarians in the USA and Canada affords the reader insight on multiple levels into the careers of individual librarians and the commonalities and distinctive aspects of individual East Asian collections, particularly rare items. A valuable introduction to the world of East Asian librarianship, the book provides a variety of perspectives on daily work, career paths, administration, problems facing the field, and fulfilment found in the work. Collectively, the essays are an affirmation of the importance of printed collections and a ringing endorsement of East Asian librarianship.”

—**Gail King (Retired Asian Librarian, Harold B. Lee Library,
Brigham Young University)**

“Someday, when we all realize how special librarians are, we shall find that this book offers a most intimate insight into their lives. With a consistent set of questions, a comparative perspective emerges from this direct methodology – a new dimension to library studies that allow real librarians to speak for themselves.”

—**Prof. Lian-Hee Wee (Department of English Language and Literature,
Hong Kong Baptist University)**

“I am very glad to hear of the publication of this new book introducing some of the major East Asian library collections and their curators. I am sure it will be read with interest not only by professionals in the field but also by anyone concerned with recent developments in area studies.”

—**Charles Aylmer (Head of Chinese Department,
Cambridge University Library)**

“*Inside the World’s Major East Asian Library Collections in North America* is a highly informative and much anticipated account of many of the world-renowned Asian book and manuscript collections connecting East and West. Celebrated and supported by their academic institutions locally, the libraries discussed in this comprehensive volume are often unparalleled behemoths of knowledge holding published and archival resources that are at times completely unique and yet accessible regionally, nationally, and internationally. In our globally connected 21st century, these exceptional libraries collect the literary genius and recorded histories of the past and allow present and future scholars to study some of the rarest primary sources to advance our field of study in the decades and centuries to come.”

—**Dr Florian Knothe (Director of the University Museum and Art Gallery,
University of Hong Kong)**

“*Inside the World’s Major East Asian Library Collections in North America* is an important new title to collections experts of Asian materials. At a time when the world is facing tragedies of anti-Asian racism, it is critical to continue to collect and preserve Asian collections for scholars and students for teaching, research, and learning to continue sustaining awareness and understanding of Asian cultures and histories. The editors of this volume have insight and experience in balancing the languages and areas of academic libraries of North America, focusing not only on CJK, but important ethnic collections from the Okinawan

to Cantonese collections. It is an outstanding contribution to the field and serves as a key reference tool for librarians, researchers, and cultural administrators.”

—**Allan Cho (Community Engagement Librarian, Program Services,
Irving K. Barber Learning Centre, University of British Columbia)**

“A profoundly interesting and useful volume of 42 interviews with librarians administering East Asian collections in North America. It is an excellent read for those interested in developing an international library collection, as well as students and researchers in East Asian Studies. Contributors discuss how they entered this branch of librarianship, developed their collections, and share their practices. As a developer and instructor of the course “ILS 450: Global Perspectives in Librarianship,” this is a perfect model embracing trends in international collections, a specialization path in Library Science, and research on how international collections are developed. Overall, it is a well-articulated compendium of interviews that are addictive and hard to stop reading.”

—**Dr Tamara E. Blesh (Adjunct Instructor III,
University of Maine at Augusta)**

“The interview-based approach to writing about librarianship is a fascinating choice by editors of this volume. Through conversations with over 40 leading experts in the field, *Inside East Asian Collections in North America* not only charts the history and landscape of the most important East Asian library collections, but it also brings quiet librarianship to life by offering rare insights into the work-related joys, anxieties, and strategic thinking of these key professionals. Their success stories are just as diverse as their backgrounds and career paths. Highly recommended for anyone interested in East Asian studies or area studies librarianship.”

—**Dr Shexiao Tong (East Asian Studies Librarian,
Edinburgh University Library)**

“The library is an important hub for the exchange of human knowledge and an important organizational form for the exchange of different cultures. For a long time, libraries in North America have collected a lot of valuable literature resources from Asia, especially East Asia and Southeast Asia. These resources have become important in promoting inheritance and mutual learning of Eastern and Western civilizations. Professional librarians who contribute to the collection and service of these resources are the civilized messengers and guardians of this culture. The unique achievements of this book reveal their efforts and ideals for us. It is not only worthy of learning and reference by professionals, but it also enables our wider audience to realize the sublimity of this profession.”

—**Professor Qingshan Zhou (Department of Information Management,
Peking University)**

“The book, being a collection of interviews with North American East Asian librarians, is extremely informative for professional librarians, oral historians, and enthusiasts for literature and libraries. Furthermore, it is inspiring for East Asian

Librarians, and it could enrich their work in terms of building collections and library management. It provides a useful comparison between East Asian collections/libraries in North America – it's quite an accomplishment for the editors.”

—**Katarína Feriančíková (Librarian, Library of Far Eastern Studies, Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague)**

“The diverse experience of East Asian librarians showcased in this book give readers a kaleidoscopic view of this unique group of experts. As an advocate of Eastern culture in the Western world, they ventured into the field with interest and built a successful career with passion. The stories will inspire anyone who listen to their heart.”

—**Esther Woo (Director of Library Services, The University of Hong Kong Libraries)**

“Ultimately, the success of any library depends on its ability to connect with its users through its resources. This publication is a very unique overview of some of the major East Asian Library Collections found across North America. The librarians’ reflections included here not only highlight the commitment they have to protecting information that is culturally and historically significant, but they also explore their professional obligation and determination to provide users with academic sources that reflect a truly global community. The items housed in these great libraries are no longer curiosities; they are acclaimed and relevant academic resources that do much more than simply supplement university collections. Now, at last, an extensive publication has been produced to showcase the great variety of libraries, librarians, and institutions aiming to empower students to find resources that will enable them to produce academic works of cultural significance and scholarship.”

—**Andrew J. Stark (Associate Dean and Head of Libraries and Information Services, The Southport School, Queensland, Australia)**

“This book offers a lively, original, and very instructive introduction to the wealth and diversity of East Asian collections in North America, the largest outside Asia. Focusing on librarians’ perspectives, it underlines the challenges of East Asian librarianship in the context of an ever more globalized and technological world where flexibility, creativity, and cooperation are at the heart of knowledge collecting, sharing, and mediating. As a librarian, I welcome the editors’ approach, which brings to light the passionate efforts of a profession often left in the shadows. These librarians contribute to the essential tasks of advancing knowledge and, even more crucial in these challenging times, helping bridge the gap between cultures. Not only will this book be of special interest for librarians, academics and students in East Asian studies, but it will also prove to be an informative reading for anyone interested in the evolution of area studies librarianship.”

—**Soline Suchet-Lau (Deputy Head of Collection Development Department; Asia Team Leader; Subject Librarian, Taiwan and Chinese Pre-modern Collections, BULAC: University Library for Languages and Civilisations (Paris))**

“Patrick Lo, Hermina Anghelescu, and Bradley Allard introduce the major East Asian and Southeast Asian collection libraries in North America and their librarians to us through a series of interviews they have conducted. This is a grand tour of librarianship and the wealth of knowledge that is well preserved and developed in these major libraries.”

—**Prof. Tai-Lok Lui (Chair Professor of Hong Kong Studies; Director, Academy of Hong Kong Studies; Director, Centre for Greater China Studies, The Education University of Hong Kong)**

“With all of the tensions worldwide, it is important to resolve misunderstandings and build trust. This exploration of East Asian collections in North America, as described by different East Asian Studies librarians, is a doorway to the culture of East Asia.”

—**Kazuyuki Sunaga (Professor of Library and Information Science, Kokugakuin University in Tokyo, Japan)**

“Through this volume, Patrick Lo and his co-authors bring to light what is known by some, but unknown by many: that libraries in North America hold some of the world’s greatest collections of East Asian materials. Across Canada and the United States, the range and depth of these collections is brought to light in this fascinating exploration of these major collections. In addition to these explorations, the editors include introductions to the librarians and curators who build and maintain these collections, as well as the scholars who utilize them to serve the growing global interest in East Asian studies.”

—**Peter E. Sidorko (Senior Consultant and Former University Librarian (2011–2021), The University of Hong Kong)**

“Librarians are the bridge between readers and books. East Asian librarians are the bridge between Eastern culture and Western culture. This book is the bridge between the outside world and the East Asian library. It brings to light the characteristics and management of East Asian library collections from the perspective of the librarians, making the East Asian Library a place with warmth and vitality. Through the introduction of this book, the general public can learn that there are so many distinctive East Asian libraries in the United States and Canada.”

—**Prof. Chao-Chen Chen (Chair Professor of Center for General Education and University Librarian of Chung Yuan Christian University)**

“For so many of us, libraries are a place of sanctuary – a space for contemplation, learning, and inspiration. *Inside the World’s Major East Asian Library Collections in North America* takes us behind the scenes of world-leading East Asian libraries and offers an intriguing and detailed insight into the working practices of librarians, as well as the challenges and frustrations they face in managing collections both large and small. This two-volume set not only provides a lens through which to understand librarianship today; it also identifies new trends in

the field and possibilities for the future. In sum, an inspirational and thought-provoking read.”

—**Amelia Allsop (Research Manager at the Hong Kong Heritage Project,
and Co-founder at History Ink)**

The book *Inside the World's Major East Asian Collections in North America* adopts interviews as a unique approach to capture the vigorous development of East Asian librarianship and East Asian collections in the past thirty-plus years. It paints a colorful picture of librarians in this field. They come from different cultural and academic backgrounds – many entered the field as their second-career choice, but all have devoted their passion, energies, and various professional training to librarianship. They have experienced the dramatic changes in the field and have grown and contributed so much. They are one of the main reasons that we see the flourishing condition of East Asian libraries and collections in North America today.”

—**Luo Zhou (Librarian for Chinese studies, International & Area Studies
Department, Duke University Libraries)**

Inside Major East Asian Library Collections in North America, Volume 1

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Foreword 1

The interviews in this volume bring readers inside some of the “world’s major East Asian collections.” It is to the credit of the editors that the major focus is not on the print books and bound journals or e-book packages and databases that constitute East Asian collections. Rather, the focus is rightly on the talented professionals whose expertise is essential in developing East Asian collections and connecting resources to readers.

The contributors vary greatly in terms of national and linguistic background, academic field, and the type of credential they bring to their positions. Their library roles are also diverse. Many are subject librarians in an academic library who support one or more area studies program. Some direct departments that group together all area studies collections. Others are special collections librarians or cataloging and metadata specialists. However, all are eloquent in describing the dynamic and stimulating nature of their professional lives.

There are a number of explicit themes that emerge across the interviews. One, of course, is the “digital turn” in scholarship and information resources, and there are frequent references to the digital humanities, digitization of library resources, open access, and e-resources. Another is the contributors’ extraordinary commitment to supporting their constituencies: the energy they bring to engagement with faculty and students in the classroom and individual research consultations, and to development of web sites, online research guides, exhibits, and innovative new services. A strong focus on special collections also comes through in the essays, with many contributors discussing the need to surface “hidden collections” of rare books, gray literature, and archival materials. As acquisitions practices result in more and more homogeneous collections, academic libraries have increasingly emphasized unique or “distinctive” special collections, and the interviews in this volume show that East Asian collections are very much part of this mainstream.

Also fascinating are some of the less explicit themes that emerge in these chapters, all of which point to a significant blurring of boundaries across the terrain occupied by East Asian studies librarians and collections. One of these shifts has been clear for some time: more and more East Asian studies librarians are not native speakers of the region’s languages. Improvement in language training in past decades has equipped a cohort of non-native speakers to function as effectively as native speakers in these roles. National boundaries have also become less of a hindrance in some cases, as is clear in references to the “opening” of the People’s Republic of China, which allowed so many talented individuals to move into North American universities and, ultimately, jobs in East Asian collections.

Another boundary – that between faculty and librarians – has also clearly become permeable. While this is easy to discern in discussions of faculty status, there is a more fundamental restructuring underway. When subject librarians are fully qualified to teach – and do teach – academic “content” courses and pursue scholarly research objectives like their faculty colleagues, it suggests that the old divide between the two groups has gradually become less salient. Unlike the “scholar-librarian” of old, these new library professionals are equipped with a formidable range of knowledge and skills related to librarianship in addition to their deep subject knowledge. This, along with their immersion in the world of digital technology, gives their roles unique relevance in contemporary academic institutions.

Within the academic library itself, East Asian collections are no longer a world apart. Several of the contributors mention how technological barriers to the input and processing of East Asian scripts fell some time ago. This has allowed the integration of East Asian materials processing into centralized operations. In like way, East Asian studies librarians are increasingly situated within larger departments and their activities directed, in some cases, to support of larger operational goals. Some contributors also mention participation in library-wide anti-racism initiatives, showing how East Asian collection staff are enlisted in support of broader library and institutional goals.

The fundamental barrier between local collections and regional and national collections is also clearly crumbling. So many of the contributors allude to collaborative collection development, collaborative preservation initiatives, and inter-institutional library services. The move away from dependence on local collections based on “just-in-case” logic toward a notion of the “shared collection,” as cogently argued by theorists such as Lorcan Dempsey, is already discernable among East Asian collections.¹ Collaborative approaches are blurring the boundary between East Asian collections, leading to increased cooperation between their librarians and an immeasurably improved access to regular and special collection materials.

Finally, the boundaries of the East Asian collection are no longer fixed in yet another way. Collection resources that are “owned” can only be considered in relationship to resources that are potentially owned (as with patron-driven acquisitions), licensed for use, or identified as open access. The librarians who contributed to this volume are in the midst of grappling with this fundamental shift in thinking about “the East Asian collection” and clearly find the challenges of collection development in a networked environment intellectually rewarding.

The loss or diminution of boundaries that emerge through the interviews suggest the constantly changing nature of the library profession. Some of these changes have been ongoing for some time; some are entirely new. These contributions were being written precisely when previously unimaginable change

¹Dempsey, L. (2016, January 31). The facilitated collection. *Lorcan Dempsey's weblog: on libraries services and networks*. Retrieved from <https://blog.oclc.org/lorcand/towards-the-facilitated-collection/>. Accessed on March 5, 2021.

occasioned by the coronavirus pandemic was underway. Some of the interviews highlight the concern over a push to focus primarily on electronic resources in support of campus-wide online teaching, despite the fact that East Asian publishing practices still have a strong bias toward print.² There is also mention of intensifying pressure on area studies collections' materials budgets and staffing. However, there is also evidence of creative approaches to new services in light of pandemic constraints.

All of the above challenges require not only problem-solving and innovation, but also advocacy for East Asian collections and services and the needs of those who use them. As the interviews show, East Asian studies librarians in North America are already serving as admirably effective advocates. Their stories offer compelling evidence of the importance of the East Asian studies librarian and testimony to the exceptional commitment these individuals bring to their jobs.

Ellen H. Hammond
Head of the East Asia Library
Co-Director of the Department of Area Studies and
Humanities Research Support
Yale University Library (Retired)

²Several East Asian studies librarian professional associations have addressed this issue. See the "Council on East Asian Libraries' (CEAL) Statement on Collection Development and Acquisition Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic." Retrieved from https://www.eastasianlib.org/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/CEAL_Statement_COVID-19_FINAL_2020.8.13.pdf. Accessed on March 5, 2021.

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Foreword 2

My first extensive experience with a significant East Asian collection in North America is with the Harvard-Yenching Library. I started to learn about the library's holdings as an undergraduate, working with primarily English-language resources to complete my assignments and toward graduation, with Chinese and Japanese materials to write my senior thesis. As a graduate student, my experience with the library deepened. I spent more time in the library to conduct research and for a year, to work on reshelving and checking the Western, Japanese, and parts of the Chinese and Korean collections to ensure that everything was properly placed in their new locations. The library became my second home, even when my actual residence was just three minutes away by walking. I met other graduate students who spent most of their waking hours poring over texts in the reading room. I relied on the librarians to find materials that were recorded in the online catalog as "lost" and discussed the progress of my work with them. Their responses to my questions and our informal conversations about my research showed that they not only cared about my intellectual growth but also often guided me subtly toward new ways of thinking about the topics.

Although more than a decade has passed since I left both the Harvard campus and the United States, I still consider the nine years that I spent in the Harvard-Yenching library as a formative period of my professional development. Now I am based in an East Asian country and at a university that has an eminent collection of resources for research about China. I am privileged to work with librarians as my colleagues who are knowledgeable in various areas of East Asian Studies and who are generous with their time and wisdom to support not only my work but that of my undergraduate and graduate students. I regard the classification and Romanization systems for East Asian language materials that I learned from the Harvard-Yenching Library as valuable tools that I use regularly to search for sources, and which have endowed me with a common idiom that I share with my librarian colleagues.

This volume opens up the inner lives of several important East Asian collections in North America through the candid narratives of the librarians who cultivate them. It provides insight into how these significant repositories operate, and how the field of East Asian librarianship fits into the broader context of information science and technology around the world. The experiences of individual librarians also reveal meaningful patterns about how their libraries serve their diverse groups of users and how librarians are overcoming many external constraints to the maintenance of their collections. Compiled during the era of

the COVID-19 pandemic, this book stands out as a record of extraordinary circumstances. It is moreover a testament of how librarians have always exercised resilience and creativity in dealing with obstacles in their shared professional mission and that such attributes have just been magnified in the past two years.

As described in many of the interviews in this volume, expanding the breadth of their collections and facilitating access to both physical and non-physical resources are profound challenges even and perhaps due to the technological advances of this century. Librarians use every method possible to develop the collections, even as factors like budget constraints, digitization, and unexpected disasters like fires and pandemics complicate this work. This volume teaches us about how managing the quality and quantity of holdings depends palpably on the librarians' expertise in information science, which is often taken for granted by users. Moreover, we see that librarians are actively contributing to the evolution of information science through strategic decisions about collaboration with peer institutions, including joint purchase and use of electronic resources, and the dissemination of knowledge through alternative means during the closures of physical spaces. In particular, although the field of digital humanities is widely regarded as an innovative mode of scholarship and an effective means to enhance the reputation of sponsoring institutions, the data management of libraries, including but not limited to digitalization, is less appreciated because its execution is often seamless and therefore less visible. However, the day-to-day work of librarians affirms that the conservation *and* expansion of collections, including increasing both in-person and remote access to them, are not merely "routine activities" within libraries, but rather are achievements that are possible because of the keen ability of librarians to discern how to make essential improvements.

The interview-based approach of this book furthermore reveals the intertwining of the multi-dimensional remits of librarians as researchers, teachers, and administrators. The user experience in the featured libraries is directly enhanced by many librarians who are active scholars and who therefore understand how to adapt their collections to users' needs and to respond to broader trends in scholarship. Librarians' work in publishing about their professional experiences embodies the best of practice-based research. Those who are active scholars and teachers in their disciplinary fields build and sustain intellectual networks that connect libraries not only in North America but in East Asia and other parts of the world. It is likewise necessary to recognize the value of librarians as teachers to their colleagues and students. Handling voluminous correspondence as a part of every librarian's day shows that the librarians are indeed "the libraries embodied" because they must know and convey the details of the collections to both users within and outside of their home institutions. As project managers of their units and divisions and as members of faculty or university-wide committees, librarians assume many active roles in administration. The diverse backgrounds of librarians, especially the overwhelming majority who have transitioned into their current positions from other professions, are veritable assets in carrying out their complex responsibilities. Their experiences confirm that specialized knowledge is necessary but that they often inspire the "eureka" moments for users by drawing upon their personal, interdisciplinary repositories of knowledge. Librarians are

indispensable representatives of their own disciplinary areas and ambassadors who can address the comprehensive and varied interests and concerns of senior administrators, donors, and users.

All of these interviews also remind us that East Asian libraries in North America are vital gathering places for research and guided learning and gateways to knowledge even as accessing resources remotely becomes preferable for both voluntary and involuntary reasons. The individuals who have shared their insights about East Asian librarianship inspire us to welcome their tireless efforts to make their valuable collections more open and available, reducing the factor of distance to make them substantial even when virtual.

Dr Loretta E. Kim
Associate Professor and Director
China Studies – Arts Stream
School of Modern Languages and Cultures
Faculty of Arts
The University of Hong Kong



Photo 1. Loretta E. Kim.

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Foreword 3

How do we describe libraries and collections today? What makes a collection special and unique, what makes a library important, good, or indispensable? Usually, the size of a collection, the outstanding quality, important services, or the influence of a library on other collections are cited to answer these questions. What is certainly true is that excellent collections need sufficient resources, both human and financial, and that they need time to develop.

A big budget does not guarantee a first-class collection. A large budget over a short period of time does not necessarily ensure building a truly significant collection. Collections also need time. They are built to last and defy, just a little, today's pressure to produce quick and lasting success messages on an almost daily basis. One aspect is that it is also very important when considering collections is responsibility. Who is responsible for a collection? Who influences directions and services? Who seeks joint projects with whom, in order, for example, to find contemporary answers to questions in the process of digital transformation services?

Here, curators, librarians, and also mixed teams in libraries are as important as a good acquisition budget or good infrastructural framework conditions of the institution. Librarians bring their own experience and background, their knowledge, their skills, and their ideas. They work in larger libraries as part of a team and thus influence others while at the same time benefiting from the exchange within departments. Curators, however, always influence collections. They are responsible for specific and smaller imbalances in collections that are so important. Good collections reflect the personal interests of a librarian. In this respect, the impact of curators and librarians should not be underestimated. In addition to the necessary management tasks, the passion of librarians plays an important part. Even if passion is nowadays somewhat relegated to the background in view of the challenges of digital transformation, it is precisely this challenge of digital transformation that demands good management in combination with passion.

In this book, the change of perspective, away from the important libraries and their collections and toward the individuals, offers a complementary view of what constitutes and influences East Asia and Southeast Asia collections. We learn, alongside the personal careers of colleagues from North America, how they themselves and their institutions are coping with the expansion of computational methodologies into the traditional research areas in the context of the sweeping digital transformation. All this will have an impact on other Asian libraries and the professional and unofficial networks. The book offers this change of perspective and focuses on North America.

As a representative of a large Asia collection in Europe, I can say that here, too, infrastructural conditions and people play a major role. The large European collections have much longer histories than the North American ones. Nevertheless, I have to say that Asia collections in Europe have a quite different status. European Asia curators and librarians today have to solve somehow very different problems than our colleagues in North America. For this reason, too, it is an advantage that the book focuses on the North American collections and libraries. A complementary work with colleagues in Europe would have to take into account the fact that in Europe, entirely different framework conditions make for very unstable and not always sustainable conditions.

Inside Major East Asian Library Collections in North America offers interesting insights into what collections are all about. And these insights are wonderfully complementary to what we know about different collections in North America.

Matthias Kaun
Director of the East Asia Department
Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz



Photo 2. Matthias Kaun.