

# The East Asian Library at Princeton During The Covid-19 Pandemic *(to be continued...)*



*Martin Heijdra, Princeton*  
CEAL Annual Conference, Online, March 16, 2021

# Today's Talk



- Note I will skip over many of the details of the slides; you may wish to look at the details later.

# March 2020: Beginnings

- **Friday 3/6: some AAS meetings begin to be cancelled; CEAL, CCM go online (but first local issues already in January, with returning students and faculty from China)**
- Monday 3/9 NY state of emergency; first university directives: begin “social distancing”, limit travel and meetings, only online classes from March 23
- Wednesday 3/11: all undergraduates need to go home, graduates if possible; job interviews frozen
- Sunday 3/15: NJ state orders to stay at home. Libraries closed for users, staff situation unclear; users have one day to retrieve personal material



# March 2020: Library Closed

- Friday 3/6; first positives in library (privacy: do not know who/where), some staff uncomfortable and stay home; people start using gloves, hand sanitizer. No masks yet (discrimination concern)!
- Library establishes Library's Emergency Planning Team
- Wednesday 3/11: fewer and fewer hours are decreed, some staff urged to work from home
- Thursday 3/12: plans change frequently (issue: union staff); but **by mid-Friday 3/13 all libraries closed**, all staff to work from home, expected to last for two weeks
- EAL prepares all staff computers for remote access, addresses mail delivery etc.



- Much Zooming, for classes, reference sessions with faculty and students, meetings and later, socialization
- Vast majority requests still able to be filled
- **EAL librarians work on local, national and international level to increase electronic support, start trials (including Arabic books offered in China!), and announce new services (general on library web page, specific ones through direct emails)**
- 4/4: Hathi Trust Emergency Temporary Access helps (E-book lending for items library owns in paper); **but not that good for CJK until some changes on 5/6**; Internet Archive opens National Emergency Library, later sued
- 4/8: From university: situation extended indefinitely. All departments, including library, ordered to curtail spending, **no new hires**, no increase salaries



- **Paper ordering suspended, only e-book ordering allowed.** Paper orders saved for future
- Delivery of packages stopped from vendors; but international shipments still many under way. No staff to open books, and we are not allowed to pay invoices for books not opened
- Some catalog professionals continue to work, but not necessarily on CJK books (union staff do not need to work from home!)



# Response from Users

- **5/4 letter from 15 departments in humanities that some physical access to books is needed for grad students and faculty; electronic access not sufficient**
- **Originally library looks at over-all numbers (“can help on 90% of cases”); but electronic options are not equally available in all fields, areas and languages**
- **While librarians are happy with HathiTrust, focus groups show users not too happy (no printing, difficult to read), want print**
- Many events that would normally only be held locally are now online with possibility to join from everywhere (dissertation defense, scholarly workshops, talks); might this stay?



# June 2020: Return to Work Preparation

- Mid-April Return-to-Work Task Force established: all libraries including EAL are asked for plans how to safely adjust staff spaces, work, times schedules. Involves moving computers, areas, scanners, using public areas for staff space
- New services planned: pick-up services, increased digitization (still copyright!)
- **Some difficulties, because staff space is shared by several departments.** EAL takes over some small classrooms within library, receives high-level permission



- 5/18: University and Library Safety teams come to EAL to look at our plans. Later also union leadership (many signs required)
- 5/28: Main library announces new services starting June 8, branch libraries could delay, but EAL is ready on time
- At last moment, pickup just inside library has to move to just outside. Libraries remain closed for users otherwise



# June 2020: Early Summer

- **6/1 we start the new services, with in EAL daily 2 students, one professional librarian. No interaction with users (pickup outside). The EAL could hire some students out of the very few still on campus (only ones allowed).**
- Everyone has safety training from EHS. Books: 24 hrs. quarantine
- **Largest problem: where is the mail (boxes, journals, invoices): accumulated in 4 different places, takes time to find out**



# July 2020: Summer

- 6/22 NJ announces libraries can open with **up to 25% of capacity**
- 7/6 Library announces all staff including union staff need to return to work, but those who can work from home need to continue to do so
- Weekly testing for staff working more than 8 hours on campus; students tested twice a week
- **EAL staff issue: as planned, our library circulation supervisor left, while other vacancies frozen; we go from 2.5 to 0.5 FTE**



- With return staff, print orders restarted, alongside some e-preferred approval plan
- **Also official start CDL (Controlled Digital Lending) allowed by Council. One-user at a time, but one can buy cheap second copies for more users**
- For CDL: see [http://www.aserl.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Future\\_Thinking\\_ASERL\\_CDL\\_Resource\\_Guide\\_PDF.pdf](http://www.aserl.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Future_Thinking_ASERL_CDL_Resource_Guide_PDF.pdf)
- **CDL is part of fuller workflow: chosen only if buying full e-book, partial scan (negotiating with user etc.) is not an option. Scanned book is sequestered, not available for loan. Not fully announced or advertised**



- **Princeton has developed its own implementation for CDL using its digitization platform Figgy; items scanned work like the HathiTrust's ETAS (Emergency Temporary Access Service): same benefits and problems**
- **Problems** (in addition to on-screen reading): no downloading or printing, bad screen space use, difficult to copy and print illustrations or maps, cannot OCR texts, use translation services (cf. Russian archaeological reports of Central Asian sites): is not as good as a pdf...
- Also recurrent issues with **multi-volume sets or periodicals**: “yes” or “no” availability is title-, not volume-based, and manual adjustments are labor-intensive (esp. CJK series! **中共重要历史文献资料汇编**)



# July 2020: Fall Semester Preparation

- **In July 6 expectations half of the students will return; a month later, August 7, cancellation. Grad students not affected**
- Library buys **Seats** program to provide study spaces and browsing capability. In EAL, since also staff and the 25% occupancy rule, limited seats made available.
- Physical seats: safely spaced, chairs taken away. Registration for seats allows browsing stacks (with “quarantine tables”)
- **In EAL and some branches: most seats are graduate student carrels, not public seats.** Poll indicates students want to keep carrels; finally, with a few moved carrels, safely spaced seats just reach the maximum allowable number.  
**Students can access carrels, but not sit there**



- Other issues: access to computers, scanners, copiers (Library Fall Task Force at last moment decides no access at all); EAL solves access to some dedicated databases through remote access
- Staffing still tight; intricate rotation makes reacting to sick days (not necessarily Covid-related) difficult; also, pickup etc. services based upon honor system, no staff to oversee closely
- Planning frantic; many: “urgent! need answers today”; branch issues not necessarily understood by all Fall Task Force members





- **Sudden drawback: after scheduling trained undergraduate student workers, sudden university announcement three days before opening that we cannot hire any.** Difficult for us *and* them
- **EAL received permission to continue some special projects which had stopped** (digitization project with NCL; even sending a hard disk in April was difficult!)

# August 2020: Fall

- 8/17, EAL opens, but not completely because of the lack of student workers (3 seats only, no browsing). Pick-up moves inside. Hours Monday-Friday 9-5 only
- **After plea, we get more graduate students, and open fully on 8/31, with seats in several categories: 6 open to all, 10 only to usual EAL users (we have list)**
- **One special course (with some books, quarantined every second day): Japanese** course on whether certain subjects, events or people are mentioned in local gazetteers, without knowing where: **there remain certain kinds of research for which scanning is too problematic**
- Students and faculty happy. Seats see steady, but low use: not at all the numbers of graduate students who said they would use carrels



- Some small issues keep showing up: about who has access to outside buildings and which library services (takes some time to work out, between several university and library lists; pick-up originally uses too limited a group); student access to staff functions (seat management, doors); statistics keeping; digitization workflows for CJK (some assigned staff elsewhere cannot read page numbers); even gloves allergies
- **EAL traditionally has more outside users than other libraries; none is allowed by university**
- To deal with decreased staff in EAL, but also because reserves etc. goes fully online, new workflows are implemented; but not always correctly



# December 2020: Spring Semester Preparation

- **For Spring: students will be allowed to come back (finally 60%, of whom 20% not on campus, but in town)**
- **Mid-December we are told to be open normal hours, no changes; including weekend/evenings. That despite all branches having difficulties hiring back their previous students**
- We are asked to increase number of seats; but EAL still under same occupancy rules, cannot increase much (main library increases greatly). We change ratio public/EAL users however (from 6/11 to 13/6)
- However: hooray! New EAL Library Supervisor starts Jan. 1. Also starting early January, many new students start to apply: and while training has to be late (quarantine!), numbers are sufficient, so training issue is just temporary



# February 2021: Spring

- 2/1 we open with new seat situation; indeed much more use. Still no computer access, but use of one public scanner allowed
- But we started with snow days, and old solutions no longer work; we have to make some adjustment to give some student workers more access to open doors
- Slightly unexpectedly, more CDL and digitization requests than in fall (professors realize new scanning possibilities), but we can cope



# Special Accomplishments

- **Project to digitize 99 rare book titles, 65,000 images for NCL successfully completed despite intermittent access problems**
- RTI-digitized oracle bone collections put online at CADAL alongside Columbia's collection
- In December, we received, and publicized, **Chinese Covid-19 poster** collection to great acclaim
- EAL librarians part of major Princeton-led IPLC effort to archive **Global Social Responses to COVID-19** (many other libraries also participate). See [libguides.princeton.edu/covid-ivy](https://libguides.princeton.edu/covid-ivy) and <https://archive-it.org/collections/14022>

