East Meets West: Digitizing Humanities at University of Pittsburgh

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Digital Humanities (DH), which began as a term of consensus among a relatively small group of researchers, is now supported on a growing number of campuses by a level of funding, infrastructure, and administrative commitments that would have been unthinkable even a decade ago.\(^1\) It is also well recognized that libraries play an important role in DH. “Librarians” need to proudly identify themselves as DHers, and should fully expect to be regarded as such by peers, colleagues, faculty and administrators, and let the broad work they do engage with that community.\(^2\) However, for the most part, East Asian Digital Humanities (EADH) can still be considered rather new and emerging. Some of the reasons for this belatedness include the nature of the area of study, the small number of readers, language barriers, and other factors. All of these require more subject knowledge for mining, identifying, and evaluating cultural data sets; internal and external (national and international) collaborations; and special processing procedures and skills.

For more than a decade, the University Library System (ULS) at the University of Pittsburgh has establishing long-range goals every three years. A look back ULS’s long-range goals – global outreach, the creation of digital collections, scholarly communication, etc. – have been highlighted. In 1997, a Digital Research Library (DRL) was established to “augment the networked delivery of commercial electronic texts, as well as to create e-text projects in collaboration with faculty and graduate students.”\(^3\) Later, one of the ULS Goals for 2003-2006 was “to digitize and deliver electronic versions of ULS print resources to a large body of users worldwide.”\(^4\) From 2007-2010, the ULS goal became clearer and a specific plan was articulated to “digitize our unique or endangered collections and provide innovative tools to enhance their availability, access, and continued use.” To “provide the technology infrastructure and expertise to support the creation of new digital collections” became a key ULS Goal.\(^5\) In 2011, global visibility was more emphasized to “increase the University’s global impact by ensuring that the output of Pitt researchers was made visible to a global readership, by supporting Pitt’s international research and learning programs, and by fostering worldwide sharing of knowledge.”\(^6\) Over this time and especially in recent years, to reach its consistent and explicit goals, ULS has actively supported work focused on East Asian digitization projects and achieved remarkable results. This paper aims to review the ULS’s EADH efforts, to share experiences and to seek future collaboration opportunities.

1. Modern China Studies Pilot Project

In 2002, the ULS applied to the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to catalog and preserve through microfilming 3,000 acidic and rare books from our Chinese monograph collection. In the grant proposal, Jeanann Haas, now the Head of Preservation and Special

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Collections, stated that “digitizing a small subgroup of these materials will offer enhanced access and provide limited searchability.” The impact of such a ‘virtual collection’ would influence library services in the future. It could lead to a network of library resources between U.S. research libraries, which are currently limited in their access to the foreign language collections worldwide, and libraries outside the United States. The DRL had previously mounted several digitization projects to deliver English language materials of historical significance to a global audience, including the Historic Pittsburgh and 19th Century Schoolbooks projects (http://www.digital.library.pitt.edu). The China Studies project sought to expand its digital projects to include foreign language material. In the wake of the digital revolution, it has been a dream of the East Asian Library at the University of Pittsburgh to offer enhanced access to these valuable materials for scholars and researchers around the world. Upon completion of this project, the Chinese Collection will be well on its way to accomplishing preservation and accessibility worldwide.” In 2003, the ULS received a two-year grant (2003-2005) from NEH and was the only individual institution in the NEH Brittle books and serials category to receive an award that included a component to digitize materials for access. This pilot project was called Modern China Studies. The ULS project became one of the earliest pilot digitization projects in the U.S. to enhance access to unique Chinese primary documents and reference books for both researchers and librarians.

These collections included works produced in the early- to middle-decades of the twentieth century that provide insight to the political, economic, and educational conditions of China. The selection of 37 key titles (approximately 10,500 pages) formed the nucleus of this digital experiment. Project objectives included detailed analysis of inherent structure of the texts to guide in the creation of structural metadata and pagination; Romanizing bibliographic and structural portions of the texts into Pinyin; converting the text into digital image files, adhering to internationally-recognized imaging standards; creating a website for the global dissemination of the texts, among other concerns. The project provided visitors with a website where they could view and print digital pages; browse the texts by subject and title; navigate a hyperlinked table of contents for each text; and search the bibliographic and structural elements of the texts. In order to facilitate the browsing, viewing, and searching of the bibliographic information of the texts, the DRL acquired and created appropriate metadata. This consisted of two key components: a MARC record, and structural and descriptive information for each text.7

When the project opened to the public, it received high usage even when only 37 books were available for access on the Internet. Below is the Modern China Studies Monthly Website Usage in 2005 (Table 1)

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>homepage views</th>
<th>full-text page views</th>
<th>unique books viewed</th>
<th>% of total books viewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Views</td>
<td>Visits</td>
<td>Views</td>
<td>Visits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May-05</td>
<td>966</td>
<td>845</td>
<td>1,388</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun-05</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jul-05</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug-05</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although the final product can’t be compared with full-text searchable products today, and usage statistics decreased (see Table 2) due to more and more Chinese e-books becoming available in the past ten years, the pilot project did enable the DRL to experiment with adapting new methodologies, tools, and techniques for creating, processing, and indexing digital library content for foreign language materials. In their final report to NEH, Jeanann Haas and Edward Galloway, Head of the Archives Service Center, stated that “The University Library System gained valuable experience participating in this pilot project to create digital access to foreign language print material. In the end, we succeeded in providing online access to the selected Chinese language texts. Never before has the Internet community had access to these works. As a result, we hope our small step will increase the dissemination of additional texts documenting Modern China.”

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Pageviews (Homepage only)</th>
<th>Unique Pageviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q2 2012</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3 2012</td>
<td>82</td>
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<td>Q4 2012</td>
<td>60</td>
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<td>Q1 2013</td>
<td>89</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q2 2013</td>
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<tr>
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<td>56</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3 2014</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4 2014</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Digitization of East Asian Special and Unique Collections

Due to the nature of special collections and archives – rarity, uniqueness, and limited access – special collections are increasingly becoming the focus of digital projects in museums, archives, and libraries. DH cannot simply be confined to digitizing rare books and manuscripts housed in Special Collections and even more challengeable to digitize East Asian special collections. To start a DH project requires defining a sustainable strategy: identification, evaluation, and selection. Institutional impact also needs to be considered.
Japanese Digitization Projects

A couple of years ago, the ULS completed two digital projects relative to Japanese art: Tsukioka Kōgyo: The Art of Noh, 1869-1927 and the Barry Rosensteel Japanese Print Collection.

Nōgaku zue 能楽圖繪, or Pictures of Noh, is a spectacular series of Japanese woodblock prints by the artist Tsukioka Kōgyo 月岡耕漁. Pitt owns a rare, complete set of this series, published at Tokyo between the Meiji years 30-35, or 1897-1902. The series is comprised of five volumes of 261 prints that were inspired by the plays of classical Japanese noh theatre. The ULS set of prints is located in the Special Collections Department. Over a third of a century, from the early-1890s until his premature death in 1927, Kōgyo created hundreds of paintings, prints, magazine illustrations, and postcard pictures of nō and kyōgen plays. Kōgyo also produced paintings and prints of flowers, birds, and genre and even wartime scenes, but it is for his theatre paintings and prints that he is best known and remembered. In 2009 the ULS partnered with Dr. Richard J. Smethurst, research professor of history at Pitt, to create a website focused on the ULS set of the prints. Also key to this collaboration were several other Pitt personnel, as well as generous funding from the Toshiba International Foundation, the Japan Iron and Steel Federation and the Mitsubishi endowments at Pitt. The key components for the ULS included scanning all of the woodblock prints and creating a website. Dr. Smethurst and his colleagues created all of the metadata that is part of the descriptive catalog and the contextual essays. These components are key elements to the website, which continues to draw visitors from around the world.

Figure 1 Kambara, Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido

The Barry Rosensteel Japanese Print Collection consists of 126 wood block prints, representing works by over forty artists and dating from the eighteenth to early-twentieth centuries. The images primarily portray Japanese culture through detailed depictions of portraits, landscapes, wildlife and theatrical performances, taking into account some of Japan’s rich history. A small number of prints depict Chinese scenes. The earliest print is by Kitao Shigemasa (1739-1820) and dates to 1760. The collection includes fifteen works by Utagawa Toyokuni (1769-1825), whose portraits of kabuki actors garnered much success. One of his noteworthy pupils was Utagawa Kunisada (1786-1864), who was also known for his portraits of kabuki actors, many of which are found in the collection. While born in Paris, Paul Jacoulet (1902-1960) spent a very large part of his life in Japan. It is thought that he created around 30,000 prints yet less than two hundred are known to exist, twelve of which can be found in the Rosensteel Collection. These high-quality prints were scanned and described in detail. Finally, a website was built to promote discovery and access.

Figure 2 The actors Kataoka Tsuchinosuke I as Kotobuki Chitose and Kataoka Gado as Kotobuki Sanbaso, by Yoshitaki, Utagawa (1841-1899)

Chinese Land Records

Over the past few decades, the field of Chinese Studies in North America has experienced a very rapid growth. Access and use of Chinese archives is crucial to advancements in academic programs. In some of fields of study, using archives plays an even more indispensable role in
research. For reviewing academic achievements done by the “post-revolutionary” generation of Chinese political specialists in the past two decades, Dr. Elizabeth Perry indicated that “Taking advantage of the two main avenues rendered accessible to foreign scholars since the 1980s, some political scientists pursued historically grounded research in government archives while many more undertook grassroots fieldwork.” Chinese archives have opened their collections to scholars more than ever before. However, it is still very limited.

Years ago, the EAL purchased a significant group of Chinese land records from a private collector in China. The collection includes land deeds, property trade documents, possession draw documents, tax bills, etc. It includes more than 200 items that span over three hundred years from the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) to the mid-twentieth century. It is the largest collection of such documents in North America. These records are important and valuable primary documents that reflect land ownership in different historical periods, land tenure changes, and the overall land management system of China. As historical records they are indispensable for the research and study of Chinese politics, economy, social life, etc. In 2014, to make the collection more accessible for research, the ULS decided to embark upon a digitization project, which turned out to be an interesting challenge. Certainly, it required a person who was fluent in Chinese. It also required someone who could devote their entire work schedule around the project, thereby eliminating regular library staff as they had so many other duties and responsibilities on a daily basis. As the ULS has hosted visiting librarians from China for many years, it was determined that a visiting librarian might be an answer to our personnel needs. In 2013, the ULS hosted a visiting librarian and the digitization of Chinese Land Records was listed as a major task for the visiting librarian during his stay. The visiting librarian helped with processing the land records, recording relevant information such as location, owner, seller, and date. He also arranged the records chronologically, scanned each item, and finished up by writing a guide to the collection in both English and Chinese. As a result, this project was the perfect opportunity to form a partnership among the East Asian Library, the Archives Service Center (ASC), DRL, and ULS Special Collection departments. The end result not only offers scholars an open path to these special primary sources, but also produced a very unique archival gem at ULS, and also provided a good experience of collaboration both internationally and among ULS departments.

Figure 3

The earliest piece in the collection, 1584

Figure 4

The rarest piece in the collection, 1916

Szeming Sze Papers

In May 2014 the ULS received a collection about Szeming Sze 施思明 donated by his descendants. Dr. Sze was a prominent Chinese medical expert who was instrumental in the creation of the World Health Organization (WHO). His father, Dr. Alfred Sao-ke Sze 施肇基 was China's ambassador to Great Britain at the time, and the younger Sze spent much of his childhood in London. Sze was educated at Cambridge and started out on his career by working at St. Thomas Hospital in London. Sze returned to China in 1934, although he traveled to the
United States often. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, Sze remained in the U.S. as part of the country’s Lend-Lease agreement with China. He began working with the diplomat T.V. Soong, and accompanied him to the 1945 United Nations Conference on International Organization, which would later become the United Nations, as part of the Chinese delegation. At the conference, Sze was one of only three medical professionals in attendance, along with Dr. Karl Evang of Norway and Dr. Geraldo de Paula Souza of the Brazilian delegation. Over lunch, the three men agreed that an international health organization should be established through the United Nations. When they tried to gain support and pass a resolution for such an organization, they found little success. However, during a conversation with Alger Hiss, the secretary general of the conference, he pointed Sze in the right direction and they were able to pass a declaration calling for the creation of an international conference on health. In 1954, he was appointed medical director of the United Nations, and remained in that role until his retirement in the 1960s.

Figure 5 Szeming Sze (施思明) April 5, 1908 – October 27, 1998

The Szeming Sze Papers contain a variety of documents relating to the creation of WHO. They include correspondence, Dr. Sze's personal diaries from the 1945 United Nations Conference and 1946 International Health Organization conference, official conference documents, some documents with handwritten notes by Dr. Sze and his colleagues, photographs, and one VHS tape. There are also copies of Dr. Sze's personal memoirs, as well as publications from the different conferences. This collection also contains newspaper clippings on the formation of the United Nations and the World Health Organization, as well as a later interview with Dr. Sze about his early work. In October 2014 the ULS completed the digitization of the entire collection and opened it to the public via the Internet. Once available online, the collection immediately caught the attention of scholars both nationally and internationally.

Regarding these the four digitization projects, it is clear that because their physical conditions were particularly valuable and rare, the original motivation for digitizing these special collections was to provide broad access to scholars and researchers.

Oversea Chinese Student Newsletters

The ULS holds the largest collection of campus newsletters written by overseas Chinese students in North America. Altogether there are 220 titles, amounting to 1,100 issues. The earliest was published in 1964 and the latest in 1997. The majority of the newsletters were published in the United States, with a few published in Canada, Hong Kong, and other countries. Most of them are in Chinese, although a few are in English, Vietnamese, and Korean. The newsletters were donated to the East Asian Library by several anonymous donors who wanted to make sure that their thoughts and efforts were preserved for future generations. The content is very rich and colorful, reflecting Chinese student life on campus, their enthusiasm and participation in community activities off campus, their literary and artistic creations to enrich their extra-curricular lives, and their thoughts on and involvement in social, economic and political issues in
domestic and international affairs in the 1960s and 1970s, such as the People’s Republic of China (PRC) entry into the United Nations, the establishment of diplomatic relations between PRC and the United States, Taiwan issues, and the social movement of Senkaku Islands issues among overseas Chinese students and local Chinese communities.

Since these newsletters are not widely available, and the physical condition of most of them is not good, the East Asian Library recognized that a digitization project could promote access while also enhancing preservation of the originals by limiting their physical handling. These newsletters are not only important historical records of Chinese student life, more importantly, they are primary sources that contribute to research on East Asian politics, economics, culture, and sociology, while also providing insight to the relations between PRC and US, PRC and Taiwan, and PRC and Japan. This digital project commenced in fall 2016 at the ULS Archives Service Center and was completed in spring 2017.

3. Exploratory Pilot Projects

With digital technology gradually maturing, libraries will always have to face new challenges to discover, identify, and evaluate primary documents for potential digitization projects. For future library digitization projects, we must consider the following question. 1) How do libraries work with faculty members and use their subject expertise to identify objectives of digitization projects? 2) What is the proper way to approach faculty members who hold valuable collections that have potential for a unique digitization project that will benefit all in a research field? During past years, ASC at ULS has been attempting to work with faculties on digitizing their special collections to provide broad access to scholars and researchers. An example is American Left Ephemera Collection, representing materials collected by Dr. Richard Oestreicher, associate professor of history at the University of Pittsburgh, over a 35-year period that document the history of the American Left from the 1890s to the present. The online portion of the collection opened to the public in 2012. Another example is the Wilfrid S. Sellars Papers. Dr. Sellars was a very prominent American philosopher who made significant contributions to philosophy of science, epistemology, and many other areas within philosophy. He was particularly known for his contributions to metaphysics and to philosophy of mind. The collection consists of manuscripts of nearly all of Sellars’ work (including autographed manuscripts of his texts), research notes, preliminary notes for further development, drafts of articles, working papers, correspondence, teaching materials, and lecture notes. In June 2007, digital reproductions of a major portion of the collection was completed and made available online via links within the finding aid, which has proven to be a very efficient method of access.

Gao Archives

Experience has shown that to work with faculties on digitizing their collections is a complex process involving many issues including ownership of the faculty members’ collection, roles the library and department play, joint grant proposals, legal and practical procedures, etc. This is especially true when we tread the exploratory path to work with East Asian studies specialists who have special collections in non-English languages and could be potential digitization objectives. Instead of introducing a successful East Asian studies project in this part, we will
instead discuss the questions raised by referencing the Professor Minglu Gao archives as an example of an on-going project.

Minglu Gao 高名潞 is research professor in the History of Art and Architecture Department (HAA) at Pitt. Gao has been an active critic, curator, and scholar of contemporary Chinese art since the mid-1980s. His exhibitions on the subject are considered among the most important ever assembled in the U.S. and China. His many publications explore the changing relationship between global art movements and Chinese tradition.

Why is the Gao archive important? In the 1980s, Chinese contemporary art appeared in the historical sense. Early Chinese contemporary art was rebellious, independent, and non-governmental, thereby distinguishing it from the Chinese Artists Association System. From the early 1980s to the first decade of twenty-first century, accompanied by political, economic, and social changes in China, Chinese contemporary art underwent tremendous growth and change. An eye-witness to the development of Chinese contemporary art, Gao had the foresight to collect what has become a massive quantity of what are, today, valuable primary research materials. They include manuscripts and diaries from artists, correspondence, records created by art groups, records of historical events and debates in both visual image and text, art works, underground publications, exhibit catalogs, and much more. Collectively, these documents are indispensable to the study of contemporary Chinese art.

It’s fair to ask why the ULS moved forward with the Gao archive project. Prior to the 1980s, research and exhibition on Chinese contemporary art in North America, indeed, around the world, was quite limited. During the past three decades, Chinese contemporary art has emerged as one of the liveliest areas of study within international contemporary art. The number of schools that offer Chinese contemporary art courses and doctoral programs specializing in Chinese contemporary art has grown as well. The publication of academic monographs and articles on Chinese contemporary art has grown rapidly. All of this has led to an increasing demand for broad access to relevant documentation and literature. In 2014, representatives of the ULS and HAA met with Professor Gao to let him know that his collection was well worth preserving for future generations of students and scholars, and that we would welcome the opportunity to make that happen at Pitt. Certainly, preserving the original materials would be an essential step, but where digitization and an online presence, including the creation of a database of contemporary Chinese art, were subjects worth investigating. Professor Gao welcomed the overture of a collaborative project.

The project is complex and challenging. First, the majority of this archive is in a non-English language – primarily Chinese but also other languages, such as French. Second, unlike many other collections that are presented in a relatively single format and stored in one place, Gao’s archives include a wide range of materials, as previously noted. For the materials in China, a special carry-out plan is required. The transfer of materials, which has already begun, will be an on-going process. The digitization of small portions of the collection is being planned, recognizing that copyright questions must be resolved during the process. As the archive collection is coming from a faculty member who is actively involved in teaching and research, his needs to have access to certain materials must be addressed. Outside financial support is also
a consideration that’s being investigated. Flexibility, collaboration, and cooperation among ULS departments and the donor will be critical. The project is expected to be completed over several years, so the current work is really just the beginning. To quote an old Chinese saying - Long March begins with one step 万里长征始于足下. We have been marching smoothly for about six months, with a survey of the collection to be completed by June 2016. This past fall we received news that the Provost Office of the University of Pittsburgh, as part of its Year of the Humanities initiative, approved our proposal for funding that will support an exhibit of some of the Gao materials in the main library, along with a reception and presentation to recognize Professor Gao’s work.

CR/10 Project

CR/10 (Cultural Revolution: 10) is an experimental oral history project supported and sponsored by the University Library System and carried out by its East Asian Library. Its primary goal is to obtain digital videos of ordinary people recounting their memories and impressions of China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, which lasted from 1966 to 1976. Interviews began in December 2015 and continues to the present. Thirty-two interviews were posted on the University of Pittsburgh’s Digital Collections website http://culturalrevolution.pitt.edu in September 2017. Additional videos will be posted in 2018. So far 106 interviews were conducted.

Why did we initiate CR/10? History is multi-facted. A person's memory varies according to his or her experiences, geographic location, age, profession, family background, and many other factors. All of these factors taken together influence an individual's understanding of historical incidents. The Cultural Revolution was a tumultuous period of in China. Many of the participants in CR/10 faced extraordinary challenges—including the loss of family members and friends—in their personal lives. History cannot be quantified. CR/10 does not focus on the number of interviews gathered or aim to assemble a vast collection of interviews that can be examined to find common ground among them. Rather, the project's primary goal is to record and express individuals' distinct experiences. Each interview has its own unique worth.

Since CR/10 launched we have received a lot of positive feedback on its archival value, research value, and teaching value. Moreover, this project is a meaningful exploration of librarianship from warehouse to scholarship initiative. In addition to collecting, storing, preserving, and serving, librarians can also be pro-active in the creative process of preserving history.

In summary, East Asian Digital Humanities is very much still under development. Due to the collection's nature in content and languages, the digitization work is supremely representative of a team of scholars, graduate students, digitization specialists, librarians, and administrators. The challenges of discovering, identifying, and evaluating primary documents for potential digitization projects require subject scholars and experts' involvements. Legal considerations, a need for a staff with language skills, and cultural knowledge, etc., make the process challenging, yet also very interesting and rewarding. The University Library System at the University of Pittsburgh has made great strides since 2000, being one of the pioneers in the digitization of East Asian research materials. It will continue to explore new developments and improvements to
provide greater access to its unique materials, enhancing teaching and research not just on the campus of Pitt, but throughout the world via its digital endeavors.

NOTES


3 ULS Goal 1997-1999

4 ULS Goal 2003-2006

5 ULS Goal 2007-2010

6 ULS Goal 2014-2017

7 http://digital.library.pitt.edu/e/eal-mcs/


9 http://digital.library.pitt.edu/k/kogyo/index.html

10 http://images.library.pitt.edu/r/rosensteel/contents.html.

11 Tsukioka Kögyo 月岡耕漁 (1869-1927), the preeminent graphic artist of the nō and kyōgen theatres.


13 http://digital.library.pitt.edu/cgi-bin/f/findaid/findaid-idx?type=simple;c=ascead;view=text;subview=outline;didno=US-PPiU-sc201101


15 Sze, Alfred Sao-ke 施肇基 1877–1958. A prominent Chinese politician and diplomat during the most turbulent period in modern Chinese history.

16 http://digital.library.pitt.edu/a/americanleft/

17 http://digital.library.pitt.edu/a/americanleft/

18 http://digital.library.pitt.edu/cgi-bin/f/findaid/findaid-idx?type=simple;c=ascead;view=text;subview=outline;didno=US-PPiU-asp199101

Gao has curated a number of important exhibitions of Chinese contemporary art, including notably the China/Avant-Garde exhibition (Beijing, 1989), Inside Out: New Chinese Art (1998, New York), and others. For publication information please visit http://www.haa.pitt.edu/person/gao-minglu

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Note: This paper was originally presented at the conference titled “Beyond the Book: A Conference on Unique and Rare Primary Sources for East Asian Studies Collected in North America” in Stanford University on July 1, 2015. This is a revised version.