

# **Creative Collaborations and Technological Horizons: Evolving Librarian Roles in Japanese Studies**

Ping Situ & Rachel Castro

## **Abstract**

This article explores the evolving roles of academic librarians working with Japanese Studies programs, courses, and East Asian Studies departments, particularly in the context of increasing faculty collaborations and the integration of maker technologies into the curriculum. Area Studies librarians continue to fulfill traditional responsibilities -- such as developing collections in all formats, providing research consultation, and conducting outreach to promote Japanese and East Asian cultures -- while also expanding their roles to support emerging pedagogical practices. The intersection of maker technologies and humanities education has sparked growing interest among educators seeking to enhance student engagement, promote experiential learning, and foster interdisciplinary connections. In Japanese Studies specifically, academic maker technologies -- such as laser cutting, 3D printing, podcasting, and digital fabrication tools -- are gaining traction as innovative instructional methods. These tools support cultural and historical learning objectives by enabling students to create detailed replicas of artifacts and engage with Japanese culture through immersive, hands-on projects that foster creativity and deeper cultural understanding. Such activities enable students to engage more deeply with course content while developing critical thinking, spatial reasoning, and an understanding of maker literacies -- effectively bridging traditional humanities inquiry with maker-centered approaches. A key outcome of these collaborations is the creation of digital learning objects and instructional

modules, now featured in the University of Arizona's Teaching Tools Hub, a campus-wide platform for open educational resources. These materials are designed to support faculty and instructors interested in incorporating maker pedagogies into Japanese Studies and broader Humanities curricula.

### **Introduction**

A strong relationship between Japanese Studies programs and academic libraries has long been essential to enhancing curriculum and supporting student success. While the structure of such collaborations may vary, they often involve liaison librarians -- subject specialists who support research, instruction, and collection needs. These librarians also engage in outreach at local and international levels, helping to build meaningful community connections.

As educational landscapes continue to evolve, academic libraries have responded by expanding their programs, services, spaces, and expertise to meet emerging needs. At the University of Arizona Libraries (UAL), the traditional model of assigning one librarian to specific subject areas has transitioned into a collaborative, cohort-based approach. There are four cohorts: Humanities, Social Sciences, STEM, and Health Sciences, each consisting of librarians cross-trained to provide more holistic support while maintaining a sustainable workload.

The Humanities Cohort of UAL has combined its disciplinary expertise with that of the experiential learning librarians at CATalyst Studios, the library's makerspace, to integrate hands-on tools and creative technologies to develop activities that support course learning outcomes. In collaboration with Japanese Studies faculty and instructors, CATalyst Studios supports pedagogical goals through the use of crafts, maker technology, and multimedia production, engaging students in more dynamic, hands-on, and learner-driven experiences.

While there is a growing body of scholarship on emerging library services, trends, and the use of technology in higher education, very little has been written about how makerspaces or maker technologies support Japanese Studies. Few studies address how liaison librarianship and creative technology spaces meet the distinct needs of students, faculty, and staff in Japanese Studies programs; most relevant literature remains situated within the broader context of the Humanities.

This article examines the evolving roles of East Asian Studies librarians -- particularly those supporting Japanese Studies -- within the broader context of academic innovation. Despite the distinctiveness of Japanese Studies librarianship, it continues to adapt in response to changing pedagogical and technological landscapes. The authors explore existing scholarship on these shifts and highlight how liaison librarians and makerspace staff are collaborating to meet the teaching and research needs of Japanese and East Asian Studies programs. Drawing on the University of Arizona (U of A) as a case study, the article also traces the transformation of the liaison librarian model and illustrates how CATalyst Studios, UAL's makerspace, partners with library liaisons and East Asian Studies faculty to design hands-on, experiential learning opportunities using maker technologies.

### **Literature Review**

East Asian Studies (EAS) librarianship originated in the post-World War II era, coinciding with the growth of area studies programs in American universities (Wu, 1996).<sup>1</sup> This period marked the formal establishment of East Asian Studies as an academic discipline and the emergence of

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented on August 28, 1996, as part of the Special Conference "The Evolving Research Library and East Asian Studies", held in conjunction with the 1996 IFLA meeting in Beijing, China.

specialized library support for research and teaching focused on China, Japan, Korea, and the wider region. Early EAS librarians concentrated on building and managing vernacular-language collections, cataloging rare materials, and providing specialized reference services tailored to the linguistic and cultural complexities of East Asia (Lo et al., 2022; Lo et al., 2023)<sup>2</sup>. Their expertise in regional histories, languages, bibliographic systems, and publishing cultures has been essential in supporting teaching, learning, and research. Historically, EAS librarians ensured access to diverse materials, including books, periodicals, archives, and grey literature, in multiple languages and formats, forming the foundation for humanities and social science scholarship. Their role extended beyond collection management to stewarding cultural knowledge, requiring fluency in languages and sensitivity to regional research infrastructures (Zhou, 2009; Shen & Yang, n.d. 2018).

The role of academic librarians supporting Japanese Studies has undergone significant transformation over the past two decades. Traditionally focused primarily on collection development and technical services (such as acquisition, cataloging, and physical processing), East Asian Studies librarianship (including Japanese Studies) within this field now encompasses a broader set of responsibilities that respond to evolving research and teaching demands. One recent study that content-analyzed over 60 job postings for East Asian Studies librarians in the United States and Canada from 2008 to 2019 highlights this transformation, identifying newly added responsibilities such as liaison work, outreach, instructional services, and digital scholarship (Li & Li, 2021). The growing emphasis on outreach, collaboration, and digital

---

<sup>2</sup> The books draw on a large number of interviews with librarians specializing in East Asian studies -- including many who have worked directly with Japanese studies -- in the U.S. and Canada over the past thirty-plus years. These narratives highlight the evolving roles of East Asian studies librarians in the digital age, reflecting both the opportunities brought by emerging technologies and the challenges of adapting to new demands -- especially in the context of working with vernacular languages and supporting increasingly diverse research needs.

humanities skills among librarians supporting Japanese Studies -- and East Asian Studies more broadly -- reflects a clear and ongoing shift in their professional roles. This evolution signals a move beyond traditional responsibilities toward more dynamic, interdisciplinary engagement with faculty, students, and researchers. As such, it points to a broader transformation not only within EAS librarianship but across the wider landscape of area studies librarianship, which is increasingly integrated with emerging technologies, pedagogical initiatives, and cross-campus partnerships (Hoodless & Pinfield, 2021).

This professional evolution reflects broader shifts in academic librarianship, where subject specialists increasingly support faculty, students, and researchers in adapting to emerging research and teaching endeavors. EAS librarians play a vital role in facilitating access to data management resources and tools, guiding digital humanities initiatives, and promoting open access publishing as well as Open Educational Resources (OER). Moving beyond their traditional roles as area studies librarians, they serve as informed collaborators who bridge disciplinary expertise with evolving technologies and methods, helping academic communities effectively engage with new tools and frameworks alongside their cultural and linguistic knowledge and expertise.

Another recent study further highlights how EAS librarians, including those specializing in Japanese Studies, are balancing traditional responsibilities with emerging digital demands (Zhang, 2023). It offers an in-depth analysis of how these librarians in North America are adapting to institutional transformations and evolving disciplinary expectations. Together, these studies underscore the complex balancing act undertaken by East Asian and Japanese Studies librarians, who continue to fulfill their roles as stewards of specialized collections while

simultaneously responding to the challenges posed by digital scholarship, shifting institutional priorities, and evolving user expectations.

The increasing integration of advanced technologies and tools -- such as makerspace, artificial intelligence, and digital humanities -- demands a high degree of adaptability from library professionals. In response, they are taking on expanded roles that include supporting emerging research methodologies, facilitating experiential and creative learning, and ensuring access to complex digital resources. They are also at the forefront of developing innovative strategies to engage users, enhance instruction, and connect traditional scholarship with new, technology- enhanced modes of inquiry.

When higher education first became interested in maker technology, the library was identified as an ideal place to house makerspaces. Initially, higher education focused on the applications of 3D printing. Over time, makerspaces have evolved from 3D printing labs to creative learning spaces housing a variety of maker technologies serving a broader audience (Childrey, 2025). In a 2021 study, Nagle performed a literature review on the implementation and operation of academic library makerspaces. It was noted that makerspaces should plan their growth in response to campus needs and engage with courses at their institution to remain relevant. To better serve the needs in higher education, some university libraries have created a librarian role that specializes in experiential learning pedagogy in the makerspace.

A recent study (Ambrose & Poklop, 2015) highlights the various benefits, including a deeper understanding of their field of study and a growth mindset. Students can more easily build on

their existing knowledge and apply what they have learned to new contexts, resulting in resilience that provides lifelong benefits.<sup>3</sup>

As the work of experiential learning and makerspace librarians grows, the ability to understand the impact of academic makerspaces also increases. While there have been many attempts to create a framework for the literacies developed in makerspaces, one has appeared at the forefront. The University of Texas at Arlington received a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Sciences (IMLS) to create the Maker Literacies (Peery, 2021). The set of literacy frames and sub-competencies is used to identify learning outcomes, develop relevant assignments or activities, and create assessment tools that accurately measure impact. This results in more consistent and relevant experiences for makerspace partners.

Current trends emphasize digital scholarship, open access, and international collaboration, alongside ongoing challenges in professional development, funding, and intellectual property management. East Asian and Japanese Studies librarianship continues to evolve -- blending specialized knowledge with interdisciplinary and technological engagement to support research and preserve cultural heritage in a rapidly changing academic environment.

### **Redefining Roles: Innovation and Interdisciplinarity in East Asian Studies Librarianship**

Over the past two decades, research and teaching in East Asian Studies (EAS) have grown increasingly interdisciplinary and globally contextualized, expanding beyond narrowly defined

---

<sup>3</sup> This study solicited student interviews where they were asked to describe co-op experiences (i.e. most interesting, most difficult, things they haven't done before, etc.).

national or philological frameworks. Scholars now engage with a broad range of themes -- including transnational migration, environmental humanities, gender and media studies, and digital cultures -- drawing on methodologies from the social sciences, digital humanities, and creative arts. In parallel, EAS librarianship is undergoing a significant transformation, evolving from a traditional subject-specialist model into one that is more interdisciplinary, practice-based, and collaborative, mirroring the shifting landscape of higher education (Kranich et al., 2020).

While deep language and subject expertise in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean studies remain foundational, today's EAS librarians are increasingly called upon to support cross-disciplinary research, foster teaching innovation, and enhance inclusive learning experiences. This broader role includes active involvement in digital scholarship -- such as text mining, GIS mapping, digital curation, and metadata creation for East Asian-language resources. Simultaneously, librarians are taking part in experiential and project-based learning initiatives, integrating maker technologies like 3D printing, physical computing, and digital storytelling into the exploration of East Asian history and culture. These hands-on, innovative approaches not only deepen student engagement, but also encourage creative inquiry and critical literacy.

This evolving role opens up exciting possibilities for librarians to act as connectors across disciplines, technologies, and communities, shaping how East Asian resources and perspectives are taught, interpreted, and shared. Yet, this transformation also presents challenges: navigating limited resources, balancing specialized and generalist responsibilities, advocating for language-based expertise, and ensuring equitable access to both analog and digital content (Zhou, 2009). Still, the trajectory is clear -- the field is moving toward a learner-centered, innovative, and inclusive model of librarianship, one that sustains cultural traditions while embracing new forms

of scholarship and engagement within East Asian Studies.

### **Evolving Trends in Library Support for East Asian and Japanese Studies**

In recent years, the responsibilities of area studies librarians, particularly those specializing in East Asian Studies, have expanded well beyond their traditional scope. Historically, these librarians focused primarily on collection development and management, providing reference and research assistance, and teaching students how to search for and use library materials. While these foundational duties remain vital, the role has evolved significantly in response to shifting academic priorities and the increasingly interdisciplinary nature of research and teaching (Zhang, 2023).

Today, area studies librarians are more deeply involved in liaison work, engaging in proactive outreach to academic departments, cultivating faculty partnerships, and contributing to curriculum development (Li & Li, 2021). This evolution toward relationship-building and collaboration calls for librarians to serve as strategic connectors across campus -- advocating for user needs while integrating library resources more fully into the fabric of teaching and research.

At the same time, new skill sets have become essential for librarians to stay effective and relevant. Maker literacies and the ability to facilitate experiential learning enable librarians to support hands-on, project-based pedagogy, often in collaboration with makerspaces and innovation labs. In addition, as OER continues to grow, librarians play an increasingly vital role --not only by connecting faculty and students with these materials, but also by collaborating with instructors and library colleagues to develop new ones. Together, these contributions play a key role in advancing affordable learning initiatives. Collectively, these expanded responsibilities

reflect a broader transformation in area studies librarianship: from custodians of specialized collections to dynamic collaborators in knowledge production, digital innovation, and interdisciplinary engagement within and beyond East Asian Studies (Ilesanmi, 2013).

Within the broader transformation of East Asian Studies, Japanese Studies librarianship is evolving to bridge traditional strengths with emerging approaches. While its foundation remains rooted in deep knowledge and comprehensive library resources across formats, there is an increasing emphasis on innovation, outreach, and interdisciplinary collaboration. In response to changing research and pedagogical needs, Japanese Studies librarians are engaging more actively with experiential learning and maker-centered practices, integrating tools such as 3D modeling and printing, laser cutting, podcasting, and hands-on interactive workshops into cultural and historical exploration. These activities not only enrich student learning, but also open new avenues for faculty partnerships and community engagement. By collaborating with campus units such as makerspaces, digital humanities centers, and academic departments, librarians are reimagining their role as facilitators of cultural inquiry, creativity, and scholarly connection. This shift reflects a dynamic redefinition of Japanese Studies librarianship -- one that honors its traditional core while embracing innovative, learner-centered strategies for the future.

### **Makerspace Engagement at the University of Arizona**

At U of A, providing students with skills that support their success during both their student journey and future profession has become extremely relevant. As such, experiential learning pedagogy has been embraced as a means for students to move beyond theory and connect with topics in a more concrete, personal way. CATalyst Studios, the makerspace at UAL, provides

campus-wide support to instructors who want to incorporate makerspace tools, hands-on projects, and multimedia productions into their courses.

The University of Arizona Libraries first began developing services to provide access to emerging technology, like 3D printing, with a collaborative meeting space named Innovation Space, or iSpace. Initially equipped with DIY visualization screen and a single 3D printer, the iSpace rapidly expanded, providing access to 3D printers, laser cutters, sewing machines, crafts, and virtual reality headsets.

In 2017, the Arizona Board of Regents approved over \$300 million in funding to create the Student Success District, a hub for student services across four buildings -- the Main Library, Albert B. Weaver Library, Bear Down Gym, and a new building called the Bartlett Student Success building. Part of the renovation at the Main Library included a new makerspace area, rebranding iSpace as CATalyst Studios.

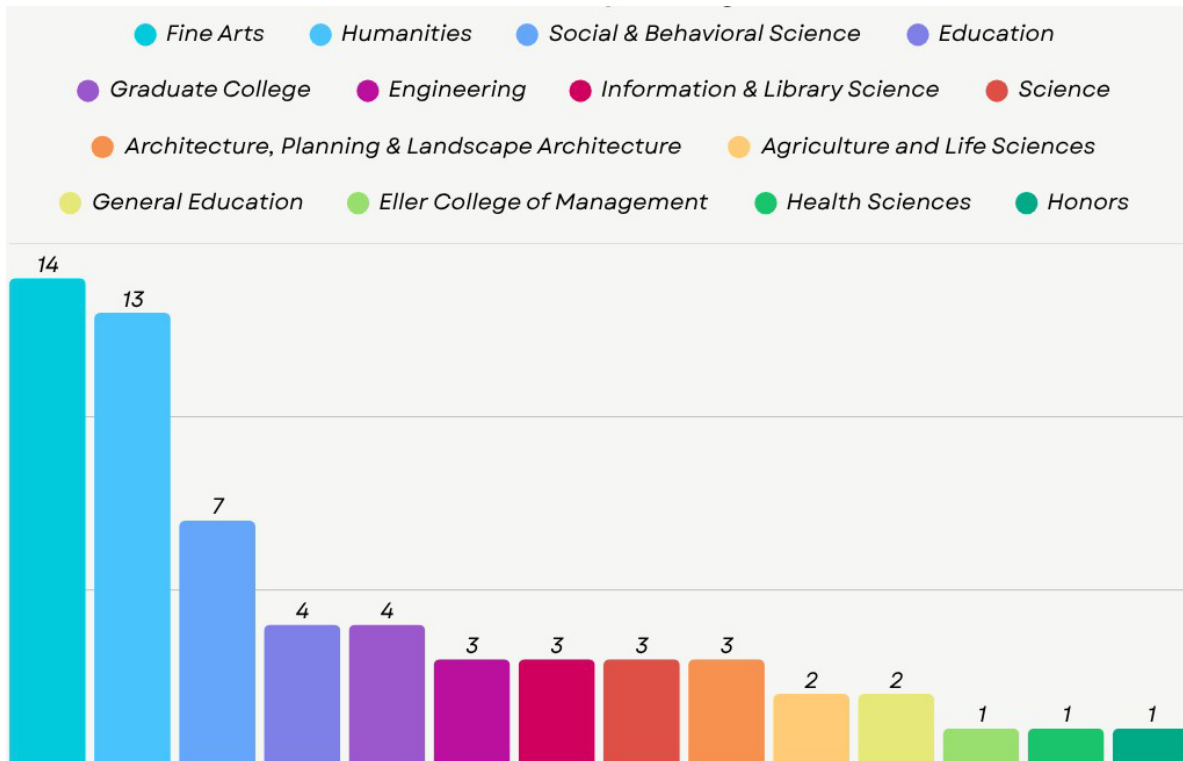
Once complete, CATalyst Studios provided a much-needed increase in square footage, as well as additional tools and equipment to accommodate rising campus usage. The facilities include: the Maker Studio that offers 3D printing, laser cutters, woodshop tools, electronic circuitry, vinyl cutters and sticker makers, sewing, and a variety of craft materials; the Terry Seligman Virtual Reality Studio, where students can explore immersive content using VR headsets, 360-cameras, and volumetric scanning; the Green Screen Studio, where students can take photos and video; the Sound Studio, with podcasting and audio production equipment; and the Data Studio, which hosts high-resolution data.

CATalyst Studios opened its doors in early 2020. Unfortunately, the library was forced to close only eight weeks later due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the 18-month closure, CATalyst Studios offered what support they could to courses virtually and identified a need for a dedicated experiential learning librarian to support campus-wide curricular needs and faculty outreach. When CATalyst Studios reopened in August 2021, the Experiential Learning Librarian and CATalyst staff began providing programmatic instructional support, shifting away from one-off tours toward meaningful experiential learning activities intentionally designed to align with course learning outcomes. Over the past four years, CATalyst Studios has collaborated with Japanese Studies faculty to redesign assignments and syllabi, create scalable hands-on workshops that fit course schedules, develop digital learning objects for asynchronous learning, and facilitate instructor-focused certifications.

While CATalyst Studios is open to both the UA campus and the public as a part of the University of Arizona's land-grant mission, the makerspace focuses on academic needs. The makerspace has heavily invested in training student workers, allowing a primarily student-operated, peer-to-peer learning model. We also pay close attention to the financial impact on students. It is free to use any of the equipment at CATalyst Studios, and we only charge a market price for certain consumable materials. CATalyst only recoups the cost of some of the materials. To further lower financial barriers for new learners, currently enrolled students are given a \$50 credit that can be used to cover material fees.

Over the past two academic years, CATalyst Studios facilitated 241 visits, supporting 61 distinct courses across thirteen colleges at the University of Arizona.

*CATalyst Studios Curricular Engagement: Number of Distinct Courses by College*



*Note: This data reflects distinct courses in academic years 2023-24 and 2024-25*

Many courses have multiple sections, and some courses may visit CATalyst Studios more than once per semester or academic year. Of these courses, thirteen of them are housed in the College of Humanities, and five of these courses are Japanese and East Asian Studies courses.

**Collaborations Between Japanese and East Asian Studies and CATalyst Studios  
Over the Past Two Academic Years**

*EAS 202: Symbol, Society, and Social Change -- Contemporary East Asia*

This course introduces students to recent histories, evolving cultures, languages and literatures, and changes in China, Japan, and the Korean Peninsula. The class comes for a tour of  
of

CATalyst Studios and learns how to use the podcasting equipment in the Sound Studio. In a later assignment, students are given the choice of writing an essay or recording a podcast about a person, event, or concept learned about in the course.

*EAS 240: Imagining the Buddha: Images of Buddhism in Asia and the West*

This course guides students in narrating the lives of Buddhist images by tracing their creation and movement in Asia, as well as in cultural encounters within Europe and the U.S. During the visit, students tour CATalyst Studios with a focus on multimedia production, followed by a guided discussion that encourages them to evaluate the tools and training needed to complete their entry into a student exhibition at the end of the semester. The projects are typically digital artifacts, but students can choose to incorporate physical media.

*EAS 384: Religion and Conflict in East Asia*

Students in this course consider how conflict between religion and politics shapes the meaning of religion and religious experiences, ideas, and practices. During their visit to CATalyst Studios, students are trained to use the podcast equipment. Students can choose whether to write a term paper or create a podcast about a concept or historical event they have selected.

*EAS 496c: Special Topics in East Asian Studies*

This course focuses on material culture in East Asia. The class visited while studying Japanese woodblock printing. While at the CATalyst Maker Studio, students laser-cut a set of wooden stamps featuring a tit bird in traditional Japanese illustration style and carved a stamp from erasers using hand tools. These activities were used to jumpstart a conversation on the technical skill of traditional craft, how technology impacts the marketplace, and the ethical use of art.

*JPN 345: Megacity Tokyo*

In this seminar course, students explore diverse perspectives in history, geography, anthropology, cultural studies, and how they intermix in Japan's fascinating metropolis of Tokyo. The course comes to CATalyst Studios to learn about the various tools in preparation for a final assessment where they complete a multimedia or creative project that offers a “tour” of a place in Tokyo or an introduction to an aspect of life in Tokyo. The tour provides an opportunity for students to ask questions about how to get started accessing resources at CATalyst and culminates in a virtual reality demo using Google Earth to explore Tokyo neighborhoods.

**Horner Fellowship: Connecting Libraries and Cultures Across Arizona and Japan**

The evolving role of librarians supporting Japanese Studies is also evident in meaningful outreach activities and international collaborations. Programs such as the Arizona Library Association (AZLA) Horner Fellowship exemplify the profession’s commitment to cross-cultural exchange, positioning librarians as cultural ambassadors and educational collaborators who link local learning environments to global contexts.

While many international initiatives, such as the Sister Libraries program, encourage cross-cultural learning, few are as uniquely structured as the AzLA Horner Fellowship, which connects two national- and state-level library associations in a formal, long-term partnership (Humphreys, 2018; Joshipura et al., 2017). Over the years, the program has supported librarians from a wide range of settings, including public, academic, rural, special, and private libraries, whose interests span haiku poetry, puppet theater, manga collections, Information Literacy instruction, academic services, and outreach to multilingual and underrepresented populations.

Recent fellowships have focused on pressing topics such as digital services, multicultural programming, and youth engagement, reflecting the evolving priorities of libraries and the communities they serve. These exchanges enrich institutional knowledge and foster global perspectives on Japanese culture and society, sparking enduring professional relationships and innovative ideas that extend well beyond the fellowship itself.

By connecting professionals across linguistic, cultural, and disciplinary boundaries, the Horner Fellowship contributes meaningfully to the broader goals of area studies and global education. It highlights the evolving role of librarians as cultural ambassadors, educational partners, and collaborators in advancing teaching, research, and community engagement within and beyond Japanese Studies (Joshiyura et al., 2017). In doing so, it aligns closely with the Japan Studies Association's mission to deepen understanding of Japan through interdisciplinary and intercultural collaboration.

The impact of the Horner Fellowship is both personal and institutional. It fosters transformative professional development, cultivates lasting international relationships, and inspires the adoption of innovative practices that enhance library services on both sides of the Pacific. By bridging cultural traditions with forward-looking approaches, the Horner Fellowship stands as a compelling model of how international collaboration can strengthen librarianship and promote global leadership in academic and cultural exchange (Humphreys, 2018).

## **Outreach and Collaboration: Strengthening Support for Japanese Studies at the University of Arizona**

In parallel with international exchange programs like the AzLA Horner Fellowship, on-campus outreach initiatives are also playing a vital role in redefining Japanese Studies librarianship. Through strategic partnerships with campus departments, national outreach organizations, and makerspaces, librarians are bridging traditional Japanese cultural education with emerging pedagogical practices. This momentum sets the stage for an even deeper exploration of how Japanese Studies librarianship is advancing through creative and interdisciplinary engagement.

Recent examples of this collaborative approach include the *English Rakugo in Tucson* workshop and performance held in February 2025 and the *Kissa Arizona* 喫茶アリゾナ event organized in June 2025. Both events were the result of a joint initiative involving the English Rakugo Association 英語落語協会, the Japan Outreach Initiative (JOI), the East Asian Studies Department, the Center for East Asian Studies, and the University of Arizona Libraries.

The *English Rakugo in Tucson* introduced participants to the traditional Japanese art of comic storytelling, adapted for English-speaking audiences, while also offering insights into performance techniques, cultural nuances, and the role of humor in Japanese society. It served not only as an entertaining experience, but also as a platform for cross-cultural exchange and language engagement.

*Kissa Arizona* 喫茶アリゾナ created a relaxed, Japanese teahouse-style atmosphere within the library, inviting students, instructors, and researchers to explore Japanese culture in a casual and welcoming setting. Participants enjoyed traditional Japanese tea and snacks while engaging

with Japanese Takoku 多読 books, selected for their easy and enjoyable reading experience. The *Kissa Arizona* 喫茶アリゾナ event featured two distinct sessions. In one, the JOI coordinator introduced seasonal summer activities, such as making and decorating Furin 風鈴-- traditional Japanese wind chimes -- while participants shared laughter and engaged in friendly, relaxed conversations about Japan and its culture. The other session incorporated makerspace fun, offering hands-on activities where attendees designed and crafted themed stickers and buttons. This seamless combination of cultural immersion and interactive creativity fostered a vibrant, learner-centered experience that connected language, culture, and technology.

Collectively, these events exemplify how Japanese Studies librarianship is embracing innovative programming that connects traditional cultural content with contemporary learning practices. They highlight the value of partnerships that span campus units -- and even cross national borders -- while reflecting a growing emphasis on outreach, creativity, and meaningful cultural engagement.

### **Adapting to Change: A New Cohort-Based Model for Liaison Librarianship at the University of Arizona**

In response to the evolving demands of higher education, including rapid technological advancements, shifting user expectations, and persistent challenges such as budget constraints and staffing shortages, the University of Arizona Libraries has undertaken a strategic reorganization of its liaison services through the Academic Liaison Group (ALG) initiative.

This initiative marks a transition from the traditional model, in which individual librarians were assigned to specific colleges, departments, units, cultural centers, or academic programs, to a disciplinary cohort structure. Under this new model, liaison librarians are grouped into broader academic clusters--Humanities/Fine Arts, Social Sciences, and STEM--forming collaborative teams. This cohort-based approach allows for greater flexibility, shared responsibilities, and cross-disciplinary support, helping librarians respond more effectively to users' needs.

The ALG model is designed to enhance access to library services and resources by reducing service bottlenecks, fostering deeper collaboration among librarians, and building a more resilient and sustainable structure. Through mutual accountability within cohorts, the model promotes strategic planning and innovation, while also supporting cross-training to develop broader subject expertise. This equips librarians to better support interdisciplinary research and teaching and ensures service continuity during times of staffing changes or increased workload.

An essential feature of this model is its emphasis on evidence-based assessment, particularly in evaluating how library services contribute to student learning, faculty research productivity, and overall academic success. For area studies librarians--especially those specializing in East Asian and Japanese Studies--this shift presents a meaningful opportunity to share their deep cultural, linguistic, and historical knowledge more broadly across the library and campus. As specialists in vernacular languages such as Japanese, Chinese, and Korean, librarians bring vital expertise in acquiring, managing, and providing access to non-Roman script materials. Their work often involves collaborating with international publishers and book vendors to ensure that faculty and students have access to essential scholarly resources.

The cohort-based structure enables librarians supporting Japanese and East Asian Studies to contribute these unique expertise and skills in ways that foster interdisciplinary collaboration, enhance their visibility, and strengthen cross-campus partnerships. While encouraging broader engagement, the model continues to value and support the highly specialized knowledge that defines the field.

Area studies faculty and departments on campus, including East Asian Studies, have traditionally operated independently and, at times, in relative isolation. Yet, by nature, area studies programs are inherently cross-disciplinary. The new cohort model offers a valuable framework for fostering inclusive collaboration across academic disciplines, both within the library and across campus. It positions area studies librarians as integral partners in curriculum development, faculty research support, and student engagement. This model highlights the importance of culturally contextualized learning and empowers area studies professionals to articulate and advocate for their distinctive contributions within broader institutional planning and assessment efforts. Through cross-training, shared responsibilities, and alignment with the wider Humanities cluster, area studies librarians are increasingly well-positioned to demonstrate the relevance and impact of their expertise throughout the university.

East Asian Studies (including Japanese Studies), like other area studies fields, is defined by its deep linguistic, cultural, and historical expertise. The ALG model offers a promising pathway to bridge these rich area studies traditions with the broader academic environment. By fostering cross-disciplinary collaboration while honoring subject-specific expertise, the ALG cohort model enables East Asian and other area studies programs to preserve their distinct identity while more actively participating in campus-wide research, teaching, and strategic initiatives.

## Conclusion

This article has examined how subject specialization, liaison librarianship, and functional expertise are evolving to meet emerging needs in Japanese Studies. While shifts in how users engage with the library may raise initial concerns, team-based approaches -- such as the academic liaison librarian cohort model implemented at the University of Arizona Libraries -- offer numerous benefits. These include access to expertise from multiple librarians, more flexible scheduling for consultations and instruction, and a more sustainable workload for library staff--particularly important given ongoing budget constraints and staffing reductions. By distributing responsibilities, this model allows liaison librarians to build capacity in emerging areas such as data management, copyright, scholarly communication, and innovative pedagogy.

The growing collaboration between the library's makerspace and Japanese and East Asian Studies faculty further illustrates the potential of this evolving model. Historically, Japanese Studies has operated in relative disciplinary isolation. However, recent partnerships reflect a shift toward more interdisciplinary and creative engagement. This trend points to a promising future in which academic libraries serve as active partners in cultivating cross-disciplinary learning communities that value a diversity of knowledge, experience, and expertise. These librarian/faculty collaborations have played a critical role in developing an open-access teaching resource housed in the UAL's Teaching Tools Hub, which are designed to support librarians and faculty in integrating maker-centered approaches into Japanese Studies and the broader Humanities.

## Bibliography

- Amano, Eriko. "Young Librarians Unite: Possibilities for Professional Transformation in Japanese Librarianship." *The International Information & Library Review* 43, no. 3 (2011): 144–48.
- Ambrose, Susan A., and Laurie Poklop. "Do Students Really Learn from Experience?" *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning* 47, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 54–61.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00091383.2015.996098>.
- Chen, Chuanfu, and Ronald Larsen, eds. *Library and Information Sciences: Trends and Research*. Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2014.
- Childrey, Cynthia. "Scaling Innovation: How Academic Library Leaders Can Develop and Sustain Next Generation Makerspaces for Student Success and Community Engagement." *Journal of Library Administration* 65, no. 2 (February 17, 2025): 235–43.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2024.2437965>.
- Denecke, Wiebke. "East Asian Studies in the Era of Global Humanities: Why We Need the Region and Regional Literary Histories Now." *Journal of Singoraphic Philologies and Legacies* 1 (2025): 2.
- Enis, Matt. "LABS IN THE LIBRARY: High-Tech, Specialized Collaboration Spaces Center the Academic Library as a Hub for Interdisciplinary Learning." *Library Journal (1976)*. Library Journals, LLC, 2019.  
[https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A581622689/GRNR?sid=summon&u=uarizona\\_main](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A581622689/GRNR?sid=summon&u=uarizona_main).
- Harootunian, Harry D., and Naoki Sakai. "Japan Studies and Cultural Studies." *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 7, no. 2 (1999): 593–647.
- Hoodless, Catherine, and Stephen Pinfield. "Subject vs. Functional: Should Subject Librarians Be Replaced by Functional Specialists in Academic Libraries?" *Bibliosfera : Zhurnal Po Bibliotekovedeniiu, Bibliografovedeniiu, Knigovedeniiu i Informatike*, no. 4 (2021): 21–39.  
<https://doi.org/10.20913/1815-3186-2020-4-21-39>.
- Humphreys, Alexandra. "International Library Partnership Profile: Arizona Library Association and Japan Library Association." *International Leads* 32, no. 4 (December 2018): 15.
- Ilesanmi, Titilayo Comfort. "Roles of the Librarian in a Research Library in the Digital Era: Challenges and the Way Forward." *New Review of Academic Librarianship* 19, no. 1 (January 1, 2013): 5–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13614533.2012.740437>.
- Iwabuchi, Koichi, Eva Tsai, and Chris Berry. *Routledge Handbook of East Asian Popular Culture*. Routledge London, 2016.  
<https://api.taylorfrancis.com/content/books/mono/download?identifierName=doi&identifierValue=10.4324/9781315643106&type=googlepdf>.

- Joshipura, Smita, Alexandra Humphreys, and Jeanne L. Pfander. "Librarians as Ambassadors: The Horner Fellowship Exchange Program for Arizona and Japan Library Personnel," 2017. <https://library.ifla.org/id/eprint/2036/>.
- Kamada, Hitoshi. "East Asian Collections and Organizational Transformation in Academic Libraries." *College & Research Libraries* 63, no. 2 (2002): 125–37.
- Kranich, Nancy, Megan Lotts, Jordan Nielsen, and Judit H. Ward. "Moving from Collecting to Connecting: Articulating, Assessing, and Communicating the Work of Liaison Librarians." *Portal: Libraries and the Academy* 20, no. 2 (2020): 285–304.
- Kumpulainen, Kristiina, Anu Kajamaa, Jasmiina Leskinen, Jenny Byman, and Jenny Renlund. "Mapping Digital Competence: Students' Maker Literacies in a School's Makerspace." *Frontiers in Education (Lausanne)* 5 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2020.00069>.
- Kung, Wen-kai. "A Guide to East Asian Collections in North America." *Libraries & Culture* 29, no. 2 (1994): 252–54.
- Li, Junhua, and Jing Lin. "Innovation-Oriented Makerspaces in Academic Libraries: A Systematic Literature Review." *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, April 21, 2025 <https://doi.org/10.1177/09610006251333447>.
- Li, Xiang, and Tang Li. "The Evolving Responsibilities, Roles, and Competencies of East Asian Studies Librarians: A Content Analysis of Job Postings from 2008 to 2019." *College & Research Libraries* 82, no. 4 (2021): 474.
- Lo, Patrick, Anghelescu, H., & Allard, B. (Eds.). *Inside Major East Asian Library Collections in North America. Volume 1*. Bingley, England: Emerald Publishing, 2022.
- Lo, Patrick, Anghelescu, H., & Allard, B. (Eds.). *Inside Major East Asian Library Collections in North America. Volume 2*. Bingley, England: Emerald Publishing, 2023
- Mann, Leah. "Information Literacy and Instruction: Making a Place for Makerspaces in Information Literacy." *Reference and User Services Quarterly* 58, no. 2 (2019): 82–86. <https://doi.org/10.5860/rusq.58.2.6927>.
- McVey, Kuniko Yamada. "Future, or Memory: Japanese Studies Librarianship in the 21 St Century." *Journal of East Asian Libraries* 2005, no. 136 (2005): 5.
- Nagle, Sarah Beth. "Maker Services in Academic Libraries: A Review of Case Studies." *New Review of Academic Librarianship* 27, no. 2 (April 3, 2021): 184–200. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13614533.2020.1749093>.
- Oguma, Eiji. "Studying Japan as 'the Other': A Short History of Japanese Studies and Its Future." *Rethinking Japanese Studies*, (2017): 19–31.

Patrick Lo, Hermina G. B. Anghelescu, and Brad Allard. *Inside Major East Asian Library Collections in North America. Volume 2*. Bingley, England: Emerald Publishing, 2023.

Peery, Katie Musick. *Maker Literacies for Academic Libraries: Integration into Curriculum*.

American Library Association, 2021.

<https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=NNTFEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=Maker+Literacies+for+Academic+Libraries:+Integration+into+Curriculum&ots=HRrAe4ZtWU&sig=fdZxbswJMZzqUEUHQlh0SyPzKH0>.

Rendina, Diana. "AASL Post: 3 Reasons Why Making and Literacy Aren't Mutually Exclusive."

*Renovated Learning* (blog), January 30, 2017.

<https://www.renovatedlearning.com/2017/01/30/making-literacy-arent-mutually-exclusive/>.

Wu, Eugene W. "Organizing for East Asian Studies in the United States: The Origins of the Council on East Asian Libraries, Association for Asian Studies," *Journal of East Asian Libraries*, no. 110 (1996): 3.

Wu, Eugene. "CEAL at the Dawn of the 21st Century." *Journal of East Asian Libraries*, no. 121 (2000): 3.

Wu, Eugene W. "The Development of East Asian Libraries in North America." *Chuanfu Chen Ronald Larsen*, (2014): 163.

Zhang, Cecilia. "Inside Major East Asian Library Collections in North America." October 1, 2023.

Accessed May 28, 2025.

<https://openurl.ebsco.com/contentitem/gcd:174460391?sid=ebsco:plink:crawler&id=ebsco:gcd:174460391>.

Zhijia Shen, CEAL, and A. Jidong Yang. "Journal of East Asian Libraries." Accessed May 28, 2025.

<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2727&context=jeal>.

Zhou, Peter X. "Managing Change: East Asian Libraries in Transition." *Library Management* 30, no. 6/7 (2009): 383–92.