Ithaka S+R Report
On Asian Studies
Faculty’s Research Practices and Needs

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Introduction

The Arizona State University (ASU) Library chose to participate in the Ithaka S+R\textsuperscript{1} research study on Asian Studies faculty’s research practices and needs. The rationale for the study was as follows:

Asian Studies covers a diverse and vital world region that in recent decades has had major centers of both development and conflict. Although different from one another, these fields indicate the importance we place not only in traditional arts and sciences fields but also in the sciences, professions, and area studies that will continue to be important for our society and our universities. This study will generate a richly illustrated description of the field’s practices and needs and make actionable recommendations for how libraries (and others) can best support their research going forward.

The ASU Library\textsuperscript{2} is one of 19 university libraries selected to participate in the study. Among the selected libraries were Harvard University, Indiana University, UCLA University, University of Washington, Colorado University, University of Maryland, and University of Texas. Each university was responsible for interviewing 15 scholars involved in Asian Studies using a set of semi-structured interview questions. The identity of the scholars was kept anonymous. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. Each institution will write a report (to be placed in their university repositories) which will be passed up to the Ithaka S+R team who will write a report summarizing the entire project.

This local research project was implemented by a researcher at ASU with guidance on the research methodology and data analysis provided by Ithaka S+R. The ASU researcher participated in an Ithaka S+R training session which encouraged consistency across all the

\textsuperscript{1}Ithaka S+R provides research and strategic guidance to help the academic and cultural communities serve the public good and navigate economic, technological, and demographic change. Refer to Research Support Services.  
\textsuperscript{2}Appendix A provides an overview of ASU and the ASU Library.
participating institutions. This report is organized into seven sections providing an overview of Asian Studies at ASU and a discussions of the issues resulting from this study. Lastly, recommendations for the ASU Library to support Asian Studies.

**Research Methodology of the Study**

Dr. Ralph Gabbard, senior liaison librarian, was the primary investigator of this Ithaka S+R project as ASU. The project met ASU’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) criteria and was given permission to begin the study. During the late winter of 2017, Dr. Gabbard participated in an Ithaka S+R training session at the University of Washington. As mentioned earlier in this report the training encouraged consistency across all the institutions participating in this study.

During spring 2017, 15 scholars were selected to participate in the study. The scholars were selected from the CAR list of faculty and faculty participating in a CAR grant (Asia Mediated). Faculty were selected from a board range of research disciplines and a variety of geographical areas in Asia. Each of the 15 scholars participated in a semi-structured interview of between 30 to 45 minutes in their offices. The interviews were recorded and transcribed using the Dragon Pro software.

**Asian Studies at ASU: An Overview of Faculty Participants and Their Research Interests.**

Asian studies at ASU is coordinated by the Center for Asian Research (CAR). CAR was established by the Arizona Board Regents in 1966 and supports research and teaching about this diverse continent among faculty, students and the wider Arizona community. To date more than 5,000 students enroll in courses with Asian studies content each year. More than 80 faculty members teach and research about Asia in disciplines and professional programs across the
university. Besides the CAR executive council there are three faculty councils focusing on South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia are a part of CAR.

All but three of the faculty participants (Faculty Associate, Post Doc, and Barrett Honors Fellow) were tenure track faculty, several were senior faculty. All 15 participants were involved in teaching and research. All participants were based on the Tempe campus. The gender distribution was eight males and seven females. English was the primary language of seven participants and the second language of eight of the participants.

Figure 1 below illustrates the major research areas of the faculty participants:

![Figure 1: Asian Research Areas of Study Participants](image)

The breakdown of faculty research areas is distributed evenly. ASU has a very strong program in Chinese and Japanese languages and cultures residing in the School of International Letters and Cultures resulting in a small size increase. Research interests in South Asia is not associated with a particular school or department and is spread through a large range of colleges and schools.
Figure 2 breaks down the research areas by country:

![Research Areas by Country](image)

**Figure 2**
Research Areas of Participants by Country

Note the number participants in Figure 2 is only 14 because one researcher did not focus on a country but focused on a region. The disciplines represented by the participants were anthropology with three faculty, history with three faculty, and religious studies with three faculty. Media studies, art history, ethnomusicology, language, political science and communication studies each with one faculty member. Appendix B provides a breakdown of the participants by ASU College, School and Department.

As would be expected in such a diverse research area as Asian studies, the participants’ current research focuses where all over the place. One faculty participant was working on Chinese writers and painters who went to Paris after 1930s and their efforts to translate classical Chinese traditional culture and literature to those outside the China. Another faculty research
project investigates Muslin revolutionaries in the inter war period from 1915 to around 1940. And lastly one research project centered on ceramics and printmaking in the late Qing period of Chinese history. As evidenced by these three examples, the range of research is quite broad in Asian studies research.

The research methods used by the participants ranged from interviews, archival work, oral history, to archaeology. However, most participants reported that they used ethnographic interviews/interviews or some form of textual analysis. But more importantly, most of the participants used more than one research method.

The participants in this study collaborated as a rule. Collaboration is understood to be, in terms of this report, interacting with others in some form of intellectual endeavor. Collaboration took the form of attending conferences, interacting with colleagues both at home and aboard, co-authoring books and articles, working on panels at conferences, emails and other forms of electronic communication, workshops, and working with students.

In a field as diverse as Asian Studies keeping up the trends might be daunting. The various forms of collaboration were cited as ways they keep up with the trends in their fields along with reading academic journals and monographs. Several participants mentioned working with graduate students as an excellent way to keep up with trends. For example, one participant commented:

“Actually, working with grad students who tend to be much more updated than faculty, so actually whatever I have an opportunity to teach a grad course I actually get a lot of information from grad students.”

Almost all participants commented that is was difficult to keep up with tends in their field because of the amount of new information constantly being published in many forms and outlets.
All respondents said their research elicited data. All identified their data as primarily qualitative though several also indicated their data was both quantitative and qualitative. The range what participants considered data was quite broad and they defined data broadly. Data included interviews (video, audio, and paper files), music files, geographical information, demographic, results of exhibitions, texts, images, demographic data, and survey results.

**Issues with Discovery and Access**

The problems associated with information discovery and access identified by the participants centered on the issues with primary and secondary sources. As might be suspected, research methods and primary sources are closely related. For example, a majority of participants indicated that ethnographic interviews/interviews were their primary research method and around a third of the participants identified the results of ethnographic interviews/interviews as primary sources. Two-thirds of the participants identified their research method as textual analysis and the same number cited some form of text (print or electronic) as their primary sources. It appears that the research method determined, to some degree, what primary sources the participants used in their research. However, many participants noted that their research, and therefore their primary sources, have changed over time as one participant commented:

“I should say that in the course of my career the focus has moved from a historical trajectory to almost a hypersensitive focus on the present,”

Locating primary sources runs the gamut of possibilities; however, most used networks of colleagues and conferences to locate these sources. Another group used various forms of internet searching to locate primary sources (Google Scholar, library websites, databases and language specific search engines). One interesting response was:
“I’m very old fashioned, I just wonder around and read. I’ve always found it helpful to turn pages because you find things that you didn’t realize were there”

There are problems with locating primary sources especially when dealing with foreign languages and foreign archives. One participant commented:

“Most common is that you just come across references which make you understand there are some resources… and sometimes these references are opaque. so for example I’m talking about Portugal documents or letters written in 1620 or so then there is not a precise reference…just some name…”

Another participant noted that:

“is not easy; usually it's all from other academics, finding out what other people have done similar research; ultimately talking to people finding out which NGOs might have information; one of the challenges was working in Arabic cities which I don't have fluency in and so I rely on research assistants it is also them finding these things from their contacts,”

Along the same lines one participant reported that:

“all scholars have the problem of having to work within the parameters of resources that are available, in a sense that shapes your research; for the modern Indonesia project that involved really aggressive searching in lots of different places to kind of build as large archive of data, in this case old books etc. etc. etc. but I could find, but the frustration is that there are always things that you will never be able to find, you will know about but not be able to find”

Accessing sources can be extremely difficult reported by several participants. Firewalls and the reluctance of archives and libraries, especially in foreign countries, to allow access to materials are some of the challenges respondents encountered during their research. For those whose primary sources were the results of interviews in foreign countries, there were many challenges as one participant commented:

“There is a host of problems with doing interviewing in Indonesia including for example a cultural desire to agree and a cultural desire to make your guest happy or cultural desire to sort of tell him or her what he or she wants to hear.”
The participant goes on:

“because the nature my research has been in the past politically sensitive including stuff
the Indonesian state isn't interested in having researched, it has required me to not get a
research visa and conduct search underground which is risky, if I get caught I could get
blacklisted from the country, and it also has led to run-ins, for example, with the military
or the police on several occasions where I think that it's just a suspicion on their part and
they are doing their job or being told to go find out what this Westerner wants because it
hasn't really led to any severe consequences”

Participants indicated that peer-reviewed academic journals were the primary source of
secondary sources followed closely by monographs. As reported in the paragraphs about primary
sources, the breath of research projects in Asian studies impacts the kinds of secondary sources
used in research. For example, novels, newspapers, Non-government Organization’s white
papers, United Nations reports, and exhibition catalogs were cited as additional secondary
sources by participants. One participant noted their present research uses:

“newspapers, magazines, a lot of current political science writings, databases places
where you go for current population figures about figures, (unsure) all that kind of thing;
and then read in certain specific fields like the environment, the economy, politics, the
military, foreign relations, so this product, aside from the historical part, is pretty present
oriented so I'm using materials like that.”

Most participants used some form of online searching (Google, library web sites,
publishers’ sites) to locate secondary sources. A small number of participants used
bibliographies which is rather interesting and appears to be a result of the internet on academic
research. One participant commented that “I stumble on things” I image that more faculty
stumble on things than said so in the interviews, I know I do.

Challenges in working with secondary sources center on access to material especially
“firewalls. You know someone will send a link and say, oh I just published this article in the
journal, look at it here, you click on it and then, we don’t have the journal, so you can see it”.
Another area of concern cited by several participants was with the flood of information it
become more and more difficult to keep and to select relevant material. One participant
commented “I think the world is flooded with information right now so the problem becomes choosing material”. In addition, another participant noted “Just keeping on top of it I guess, there’s much coming out all the time, the challenge is trying to keep up”.

Another set of challenges in accessing materials are translation issues. One participant noted that “translation is one because of frequently there is a lot of material that isn't translated and is valuable or at least for my research”. Other participants echoed this statement.

Overall, challenges in accessing sources, either primary or secondary, in Asian countries often are caused by political problems as noted by one participant:

“I talked a little bit about being questioned by the secret police that was in Ambon during the dissertation research; I also went to province called Papua in Indonesia or West Papua that is particularly difficult to get into there's only two cities where you go without traveling permit but I was able to secure traveling permit before I went; I was followed by the military and questioned by the Military probably two or three times and one of my primary concerns there and in Ambon was also in protecting the anonymity of my sources; arrive so I didn't want, I wanted any meetings occur where we would discuss the potentially dangerous things for them; that I wanted to be on their terms so that they felt comfortable and free and willing to discuss without having for their own safety; so that was one, another is that if I was caught again I could be blackballed out, thrown in jail and so I had to be very careful in conducting that research.”

Another participant provides this story:

In the past, and it continues to be a problem, in two ways… in the India project India had a very suspicious attitude towards research on border issues… I was not given certificate to get my fellowship… I had to change my project on paper in order to get my fellowship… again in my second project I did not get permission but I was able to finish my project… interestingly when the government wouldn’t give me permission the Indian military archive did give me permission… in Pakistan the first time I had no problems but as American and Pakistan relations became on tense I had problems… but I was able to pursue my study

As for mitigating these challenges, most replied nothing could have been done. Several indicated that by making a lot of personal contacts one would be able to, sometimes, overcome the access challenge.
The preceding section highlights the problems associated with getting access to primary and secondary sources for Asian Studies faculty. Access to sources is the foremost problem for Asian Studies faculty.

**Issues with Storing and Management of data and Information**

Storing of information, regardless of form (electronic or print), is an area of concern for participants. Most stored data on their personal computers though a number used only had only paper files. One respondent had both computer files and paper files. One participant commented:

“I write everything important in longhand first and then create a file, type it up and from then on I work from that file. I'm not one of these people who insist on doing everything the old way, I try and stay on the learning curve for new things but honestly I pretty much paper file, pencils, I'm old fashion that way.”

Another issue with storage voiced by several participants was concerned with the storage of media (images, videos, and tapes). Besides the problem of the size of media files, there is the problem of media migration as one participant noted:

“Storage problem yes… the problem is migration, always innovating new media, right… I have to take films done earlier in the 1980s and the 1990 on VHS, I had to work them into another form and now I'm in the form of the cloud and fully digitized… and that's something, that's a process costs money.”

Most of the participants, even if they used their computer, were managing and storing information on the computer as if they were paper files though the cloud and dropbox being used more often by the participants. Almost all the participants noted that they really didn’t have the time to organize past files, either paper or computer files.
Most participants stored secondary information on their computers as one participant noted:

“I work extensively with scanning material especially. I just have to see the huge database file on my computer which I have organized myself…a huge amount of keywords historical and geographical and then I can find I’ve done.”

However, one participant commented that:

“A lot of it I don't store, this is secondary stuff, it's here on the bookshelves, it's out there we count on it now to be out there so we don't have to store it.”

**Dissemination Practices.**

Monographs including book chapters and edited volumes and peer reviewed academic journals were the overwhelming choices for participants to publish their research. In fact, most participants published in both. For example, one participant commented:

“Books predominately, I've done book chapters and edited volumes but that's been the primary; the secondary both area studies and global studies journals dominated, less anthropology; my current work is not ethnographic in the traditional sense so it bridges so many different disciplines it's hard to really fit so I've been more comfortable area studies, global studies in international journals then in disciplinary journals.”

By and large, participants felt their publishing was typical of the field though several disagreed. One participant had an interesting take on the issue:

“I think I have the luxury of not being required to put together a book and being trained in musicology and now doing more work film studies I could see where the book would be coming together in the near future but not as obligated to produce so I see a lot of my friends having to get the book out for your tenure which is not an issue for me.”

Though most junior faculty are under pressure to publish at least in journals while most senior faculty seem to publish monographs more often.

When asked about publishing beyond scholarly venues several faculty indicated that they did. The outlets included newspapers, blogs, Non-governmental Organizations’ white papers,
magazines, exhibition catalogs and documentaries. On participant provided the following why reason for this kind of publishing:

“I did because the issues I write about are very important, freedom and human rights… what do these revolutionaries mean in today’s environment in India and Pakistan…to remind them what freedom was and aware of what has it was in the past…of course speaking out in India and Pakistan is difficult and sometimes I am uncertain of the political fall out.”

The issue of publishing in open access venues revealed a misunderstanding about what constitutes open access. Many participants thought Academia.edu was open access which it is not. Once that was cleared up most participants indicated they had not published in in an open source venue. Several had published in open access venues mostly in white papers and policy papers, open source journals, social media and magazines. Those participants that were involved in government grants were required to place their research in open access repositories.

When asked why they chose to publish in open source venues most often the reason was the topic was of more interest than just to the scholarly community or that they were interested in a broader audience for their work. However, when the participants who answered they had not were asked why the largest responses was they hadn’t thought of it or they weren’t familiar with any publications in their field. One participant offered this reason:

“I still feel that the book or the published exhibition catalog, is the primary object; you can scan it and put it online and fine as the information is transmitted; to me wouldn't be the same thing if it didn't get printed; I'm old-fashioned about that.”

Another reason among non-tenured faculty for not publishing in open source journals is that presently open source journals are not acceptable in tenure materials so credit for publishing is not given to open source journals.
Outlook for the Field of Asian Studies.

Comments on the challenges facing the field many participants identified, in various ways, was the need for the field to provide better and more linkages to knowledge, to histories of the past, and to linkages among scholars working in different disciplines. One participant commented:

“I see the challenge of getting closer conversations and collaboration between scholars in Asia and scholars outside of Asia about Asia and I see the challenge of bringing together humanities and social science research and really big challenge of bringing together natural scientists with social scientists and humanists.”

All participants noted that the field was in a critical time. As one participant put it:

“I think the Asian studies is moving into very critical time… there are ways in which things are moving very positive direction… but there's counter currents as well. I think there's a lot of challenges like that and the whole increasing growth of nationalism across the world is I think is going to have a negative influence … on some of the kinds of questions and issues that we deal with in Asian studies…there’s a move to sort of work across East Asia trans-border as a kind of counter effort but the tides of nationalism both in Asia and in America and Europe are on an upsurge…so it's difficult to predict how Asian Studies will work on those problems.

However, one of the most interesting comments, echoed by others as well, is:

“I think the biggest challenge for the field of Asian studies remains convincing Americans that Asia matters as much as it does, they’re going to be surprised so I think that's still the biggest challenge, it shouldn't be but it is case for teaching about Asian, learning Asian languages become literate about the wider world and we are still fighting it, I think that I think that having Trump makes this problem much bigger yes is not that he's wrongheaded and a lot of other bad things but also because the country so obsessed with him this all we talk about; so were not paying attention to anything, not even our smartest people and journalists all focused on him while the rest of the world is moving fast.”
Discussion. Recommendations and Conclusion

One factor that became very apparent, not surprisingly, was that research was very interdisciplinary by the Asian Studies faculty. Table 3 details the number of disciplines engaged by the faculty.

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All the faculty engaged in more than one additional discipline in addition to their own discipline. In fact, five faculty engaged three additional disciplines. Two faculty engaged with the highest number, seven disciplines.

For most participants the data collected, irrespective of format, was qualitative in the form of interviews, texts, visual images and films. Data was defined by the participants rather broadly when compared with data normally associated with scientific research.

Another factor was that management and storage was in transition regardless of format (data, primary sources or secondary sources). There was a mix of paper files and computer files.
However, few created databases to organize and manage their computer files. In fact, management of sources regardless of format was usually lacking for most participants.

Primary sources ranged from manuscripts, interviews, images, and oral histories to name a few. However, the area of secondary sources academic peer reviewed journals and monographs were the most commonly used sources.

Access was cited by most participants regardless of format as one the greatest problems associated with their research; however, access meant differently to each participant. Access to archives, access to databases, access to online journals, access to libraries (special and international) were some of the access problems identified by the participants.

Dissemination of their research followed traditional avenues. Monographs and peer-reviewed journals were the most commonly use method of disseminating their research. While quite a few of the participants did publish outside traditional avenues, open source dissemination was not universally accepted by the participants though all philosophically agreed with the open source concepts. They felt to some degree constrained by the current academic environment regarding open source.

Lastly many participants felt this was a critical time for Asian Studies as:

“Apart from the experience that the world become ever more complex…. my work was considerably easier 20 years ago when those you know when those connections East and West where on a much more simpler structure than they are today… more things, more concerns, more administration, more bureaucracy…. when I do my work I have to pay attention and be aware.”

It is a little difficult to provide recommendations for the library that do not cost. Certainly, as most participants noted, the need to increase the library budgets for monographs, databases and journals is of great importance. And the library would certainly agree with that request, but cost is a major concern. That is one of the reasons the library supports open access
journals etc. to reduce cost issues. Another area that would help alleviate these cost problems would be more cooperation between libraries when purchasing materials, especially databases and large collections, for Asian Studies.

Access issues are another area of concern, in some ways related to cost issues. However, there is one way the library could enhance access by developing more library to library collaboration agreements. At present the library does have several general collaboration agreements with libraries in China and other Southeast Asian libraries. In the future one of the major areas of collaboration could be in the sharing of resources especially special and distinctive collections. Presently the library is adding agreements with more libraries in China, India, and Myanmar with the hope of developing more resource sharing between libraries. This would result in increasing the resources available to Asian Studies faculty at ASU.
Appendix A

Environmental Scan --ASU and the ASU Library.

ASU is a comprehensive public research university. The university prides itself on being measured not by whom it excludes, but rather by whom it includes and how they succeed; advancing research and discovery of public value; and assuming fundamental responsibility for the economic, social, cultural and overall health of the communities it serves.

With over 71,900 students on five campuses in metropolitan Phoenix Arizona and an additional 26,200 students online only for a total of 98,146 students makes ASU one of the largest single campus institutions in the United States. The student body is served by over 3,400 faculty in 17 colleges, schools and Institutes offering bachelors, masters, PhDs, and JDs in a wide variety of disciplines.

The ASU Library has over five million volumes (over one million + e-books) in its collection in nine library facilities across five campus locations. Its mission is to:

1. Deliver high-quality resources to all ASU users – whatever they need, wherever they are-in support of academic excellence and accessibility.
2. Collaborate with faculty and students in a culture of "inquiry entrepreneurship" – defined by active learning and original research – and through innovative partnerships and professionalism.
3. Inspire and engage the ASU community and the world through creative design that enhances the local impact and social embeddedness of library services, programs and expertise.
The Library has two specialist librarians to support and assist students and faculty with their research in Asian studies.
Appendix B

Breakdown of Colleges, Schools and Departments of Study participants

1. College of Liberal Arts and Sciences-
   i. School of International Letters and Cultures
      1. East Asian Languages and Civilization – 3 participants
   ii. School of Historical, Philosophical and Religious Studies
      1. Religious Studies- 5 participants
      2. History – 3 participants
   iii. School of Human Evolution and Social Change
      1. Anthropology 1 participant

2. Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts
   i. School of Art
      1. Art History -1 participant

3. Barrett Honors College-1 participant

4. Hugh Downs School of Human Communication - 1 participant

It is important to note that several faculty held dual appointments in more than one school or department.