

Collaborating, Collecting, and Diversifying: A Targeted Acquisitions Initiative

by Caitlin Soma

Like many academic libraries, Pitts Theology Library at Emory University has spent the past few years reckoning with our collections' foundations in White, Western, heteronormative, Christian teachings. In 2021, we conducted a diversity audit of a subset of our collection and found that more than two-thirds of the material was from White authors, male authors, and/or published in Europe or the United States. Although dramatic, these numbers were not particularly surprising. In fact, they likely represent a vast improvement over the past few decades. However, it was clear that we needed to create more intentional means of building collections that not only contain material from a wider variety of backgrounds and perspectives, but also more effectively serve the specific needs of our patrons.

In 2021, this interrogation of our collecting practices happened to overlap with the last few months of our fiscal year. While putting together budget reports and tracking our spending from general collection funds, I started looking into our library endowment accounts. Through long standing collaboration with our development office and generous donors, we have several named endowments for the library collection. We typically used these accounts to supplement year-end spending, which is enormously helpful, but purchases weren't focused on any specific part of the library's collection. We simply spent the money where it was most needed at the end of each year. This method was effective, but it seemed like these accounts could be doing more for the collection and that we could be doing more to highlight their importance.

After spending down the endowment funds for the 2021 fiscal year, I spoke to our library director about creating a more intentional focus for the endowment funds each year. The general plan was to select an area of the Candler School of Theology curriculum that could use some extra representation in the library's general collection. I'd spend the year working with faculty in that area to curate resources that would be helpful to them and their students but that the library wouldn't otherwise have been able to purchase. We would use the endowment income to buy those resources and add them to the collection. The next year, the focus would shift to a different area of the curriculum.

After much discussion, we decided that for our first year, we would focus on Asian Christianity, defined broadly. This had always been part of the Candler curriculum, but engagement on topics in this area had grown recently, and many of the resources were outside of our usual collecting areas. In collaboration with the Dean of Faculty, the library director and I put together a list of faculty members who would have expertise in this subject area. The list included faculty across the school, from Biblical Studies and World Christianity to the new Missionary Practitioner in Residence at Candler. Together, they had decades of experience studying theology in Asian countries as well as in the United States, and I was excited about the opportunity to bring their perspectives into this collection-building process.

Over the course of the academic year, we communicated with these faculty members about the types of resources that they'd like to see added to the collection. Some were excited about the opportunity to get niche materials related directly to their research, while others recommended that

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we return to basics for this collecting effort. Candler School of Theology has had long relationships with several universities in Korea, and every incoming class includes a number of Korean students. As this population has grown, so have the services that the school offers to support these students, but our collection of Korean language materials has remained stagnant. We had a few Korean items in our general collection, but we had never done any targeted collecting of Korean language books. These faculty members recommended that we add resources written in Korean to the Pitts collection to help support these international students.

For the initial phase of the project, I started by collecting a list of textbooks assigned for required introductory level courses. However, assigned textbooks alone did not fully encompass the research needs of first year students. Additionally, I wasn't able to find Korean editions of many of the textbooks from our usual vendors and since I don't know any Korean, I found it nearly impossible to navigate Korean vendor sites. At this point, it was clear that if I wanted to do justice to this collection and truly meet the needs of our students, I would need more collaborators.

When searching for additional help for this project, I took a two-pronged approach. I needed more feedback on the materials than faculty had time to give, and I needed assistance in finding how best to purchase the books. Because Pitts Theology Library is at Emory University, we have access to the expertise of subject librarians at the Woodruff Library. The subject liaison for Japanese Studies and Korean Studies directed me to a website called Kyobo, which he described as "Korean Amazon." Due to international shipping and payment limitations, we could not order directly from Kyobo, but he knew of another Korean vendor who could source the books for us if we sent them bibliographic information from Kyobo. Using Kyobo throughout this process helped us work across the language barrier to ensure that we were communicating effectively with the Korean vendor, despite not being fluent in the language.

With a purchasing solution in hand, I focused my attention on how to identify the Korean language editions of texts. Although Kyobo was an effective source of bibliographic information, I still needed assistance using it. When I searched for English titles or with the ISBN of the English editions, all I got were English books that are also sold through the website. I needed to be able to search in Korean. At the time, we happened to have a Korean theology student working in our cataloging office. I spoke with him and his supervisor, and they both agreed that he could use some of his hours at work to assist with this project.

To identify Korean editions of texts, the student assistant translated each title into Korean and searched it on Kyobo. In some cases, he had to try a few different translations depending on how the book was published, but he was already familiar with the Korean editions of many of the titles. While we worked, he explained that while attending school in Korea, he had purchased many of these books in Korean. When coming to study in the United States, he wasn't able to bring all of his books with him, so he would have his sister scan or photograph pages and send them to him when he needed to reference the Korean editions. He shared these scans informally with other students, but he emphasized how much better it would be to have the Korean books available at the library. As a theology graduate student, he was familiar with the various commentaries, textbooks, and primary sources that I was trying to find. In several cases, he offered feedback on which version of a text was more frequently used in Korea. As we worked, I created acquisition goals for this collection, which included textbooks for first year courses, resources for studying Biblical Greek and Hebrew, foundational systematic theology resources, and a set of Korean commentaries.

Through a lot of careful searching, we put together a list of items that would meet these needs. It included Korean translations of texts like Pannenberg's Systematic Theology as well as reference

items originally written in Korean, such as a Biblical commentary set produced for the 100th anniversary of the Korean Christian Book Society. Once we had this list, we turned back to our faculty members. We asked the faculty member who had recommended this approach to the collection to offer any insights he had about the list of titles. He was familiar with many of the authors and translators and recommended we switch out a few titles for options with preferred translations. This input helped us build confidence in the collection. Because he had helped shape the group of titles we purchased, this faculty member was excited about the new books arriving and would be sure to encourage his students to use them. We knew that when the books arrived, there would be an eager audience waiting for them.

Placing the order with the Korean vendor, which had been tricky to envision initially, was the easiest part of this process. I emailed them a spreadsheet with links and the Korean titles from Kyobo. There were a few titles that they weren't able to provide, but they recommended different editions as alternatives, which we reviewed and agreed to switch out. They sent an invoice about a week later and the books were on their way. The books are scheduled to arrive in time for the Fall 2022 semester and for the incoming class of Korean students to use in their courses.

It's clear that none of this project would have been possible without collaboration. Our library staff are highly skilled, but in this case the barriers were simply too high to overcome on our own. It was only by working creatively across the university that we could successfully create this endowment collection, and the collection is stronger because of the variety of people who had a hand in putting it together. Having endowment accounts available for projects like this is an enormous privilege. I see it as our duty to put these funds where they will have the biggest impact, both for the good of our researchers and to uphold our responsibility as stewards of library donations. As we look forward to the future of these endowments, I'm excited about the opportunities future researchers will have and the new partnerships each year's collection focus will build.