Half a Century of Japanese Cataloging at Columbia University

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In the 1920s, when U.S.-Japan relations were far from amicable, Ryusaku Tsunoda (1877-1964) arrived on the campus of Columbia University with the intention of studying western philosophy and American history. Being painfully aware of the tension and adverse state of affairs existing between the two countries and convinced that education was the foremost means for fostering mutual understanding, he launched a crusade to stir up interest and support both here and in Japan to create a center for Japanese studies in this country. Uppermost on his agenda was the establishment of a collection of Japanese books to support the study of Japan and her culture. Nicholas Murray Butler (1862-1947) was President of the University at the time. He and other members of the Columbia community were enthusiastically supportive of Tsunoda’s undertaking. In time, tangible results emerged resulting in what eventually became the Japanese Collection at Columbia University. Tsunoda was appointed its curator while simultaneously serving as the sole instructor of courses in Japanese studies. A detailed account of the birth and development of the Japanese Collection is contemplated for a later date. Here, the focus will be on some of the technical problems encountered during the formative years of Japanese librarianship in this country and how they were resolved.

As the flow of books from Japan increased, cataloging and servicing the materials became a pressing problem. By a fortuitous coincidence the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) was showing an active concern to cultivate and promote Chinese studies in this country. One of the primary goals was directed to making important collections of Chinese books in America more available to scholars as well as to the general public. With this as its objective, the ACLS sponsored an experimental project in Chinese cataloging at Columbia University which shortly thereafter was expanded to include Japanese cataloging. At this juncture, Tsunoda appointed Osamu Shimizu, one of his graduate students, to undertake the Japanese portion of this project.

Shimizu, born in Canada, had received both a western and Japanese education. A graduate of Keio University, he possessed an enviable fluency and polish in both Japanese and English. To undertake this assignment, he proceeded to take courses in the School of Library Service while simultaneously meeting the primary academic requirements toward a doctorate in Japanese history. Under the supervision of Tsunoda, he plunged himself into the uncharted waters of Japanese cataloging in this country, not suspecting how this turn of events was to leave a lasting impact on his life and career to follow. It will be remembered by a number of us that, following some years of teaching at Columbia, he served as Chief of the Japanese Section of the Division of Orientalia (since renamed Asian Division) of the Library of Congress until his untimely death in 1965.
Since Japanese cataloging in a western environment necessitates romanized elements for the convenience of the user, the first matter to be determined was the system of romanization to be used. As it turned out, this was the simplest of all the problems to be confronted, for at that time both the United States and Japan were using what was commonly referred to as the revised Hepburn system as found in the 1931 edition of Kenkyusha's New Japanese-English Dictionary, in which euphonic changes are accommodated by substituting "m" for "n". Once the Japanese/Chinese characters were rendered in romanized form, however, the matter of word division and hyphenation became a thorny and persistent problem. Compounds made up of three or more characters and various peculiarities inherent in the Japanese language created dilemmas of major proportions. On the other hand, capitalization, not used in the Japanese language, and punctuation marks, applied far fewer times than in western practice, were applied as needed in conformity with the rules spelled out in Cataloging Rules, Author and Title Entries, 1908 edition, compiled by the American Library Association. After a period of intensive experimentation, a set of rules gradually took shape.

From the outset it was deemed preferable to use the title as the main entry, following the traditional practice favored in Japan over the years. It follows then that the catalog card would be in the form of the "hanging indention". The title was to appear first in romanized form followed by the characters which in turn was to be followed by its English translation or a characterization of the contents of the work in brackets. This last was one of the requirements set forth by the ACLS for the execution of its project. In retrospect one can readily appreciate the need for this extra step in view of the fact that Japanese language instruction was still in its infancy and it would have been unrealistic to expect the general user to comprehend in every instance the nature of a given work from its Japanese title alone. Following the title statement, the author's name was to be given in romanized form and in characters. Place and publisher, however, were to appear in romanized form only for the sake of conserving space on the card. Next to follow was the publication date in Japanese with its western equivalent supplied in brackets. For the physical description, rules provided in Cataloging Rules cited above were to be followed. The series note, when present, was to be given in romanized form followed by its characters. All additional notes were to be supplied in English. Another requirement set forth by the ACLS was to provide English subject headings. This was readily satisfied through application of the Library of Congress Subject Headings, 3rd edition, 1928. However, it was soon discovered that this early edition proved inadequate for covering the wide spectrum of subjects pertaining to Japan and other countries of the Far East which the books treated. Consequently, certain headings established in Japan were selectively introduced, which then necessitated the creation of a Subject Authority File. Throughout these deliberations emphasis was placed on creating records convenient to users familiar with western library practice. Particulars of the above are elucidated in full in "Report of the Project for the Cataloging of Japanese Books at Columbia University" by Osamu Shimizu to be found in Notes on Far Eastern Studies in America, No. 9, (June 1941), pp. 7-21, a publication issued by the Committee on Chinese and Japanese Studies of the American Council of Learned Societies in Washington, D.C.
A Name Authority File, a prerequisite in cataloging, was then created patterned on the
established American practice. As all Japanese-language librarians can attest, the reading
of most Japanese proper names constitutes a formidable task in itself. In order to maintain
consistency in form and spelling, each personal name was painstakingly researched and all
alternate readings, pseudonyms, and other special names were meticulously recorded on the
verso of the main card and cross references made for each. Hokusai (1760-1849), for
instance, one of the most prolific when it comes to the profusion of alternate names, boasts
of some forty-three names. Each source consulted was recorded in abbreviated form on the
main card. Birth and death dates were provided as far as possible and, when called for,
dates prior to 1873 were converted from the lunar calendar to their Gregorian equivalents.
This intensive work was extremely time-consuming to say the least. However, its value soon
became apparent. The file, maintained in the Reading Room, was readily accessible to
users of the collection and served as a minidictionary of names. Students in particular found
it useful since each name and all variant names were spelled out in romanized form. A
separate authority file was also created and maintained for names of government offices and
corporate bodies.

Some years later, the Library of Congress requested that Columbia allow the Name
Authority File to be reproduced in its entirety for the purpose of interfiling the cards into
the authority file maintained in its Japanese Section. To comply with this unexpected
development, the entire file, containing tens of thousands of cards, was packed into boxes,
tray by tray, and shipped out to be reproduced. As is customary, it had been the practice,
as indicated above, to record alternate names on the verso of the main card. This method,
however, created technical difficulties in the reproduction process. Consequently, from this
time on, cross reference notations were recorded on the recto of each main card. A copy
of all Japanese name authority cards subsequently produced at Columbia was routinely sent
to the Library of Congress, contributing to the establishment at that library of the largest
Japanese Name Authority File in the country.

The classification system being used at that time throughout the Columbia Libraries with
the exception of Law and Health Sciences was Dewey. This schedule, however, was found
to be unsuitable for Japanese materials because of its limited scope of coverage of Far
Eastern topics. Therefore, preference was given to the Nippon Decimal Classification
devised by Kiyoshi Mori, 1931 edition, with minor revisions subsequently incorporated, based
on the revised and enlarged edition of 1942.

When cataloging procedures were finally established, two college graduates, a Japanese and
a Japanese American, were assigned to assist in preliminary cataloging and card production.
For preliminary cataloging 3" x 5" yellow slips were used and, in accordance with instructions
in force at the time, they were handwritten with a No. 3 pencil. Upon being reviewed and
revised by Shimizu, the manuscript record was then typed on white catalog cards. Adequate
spaces were to be left blank for later insertion of relevant Japanese/Chinese characters.
When the typing was completed, the card was routed to Shimizu who inserted the
appropriate characters in his distinctive hand, using a straight pen with nib dipped in India
ink. It may come as a surprise that ballpoint pens were not a routine item of library supplies at that time. Errors in typing or calligraphy were erased, not by using an ink eraser, for that would have left a rough surface on the card, but by gingerly scraping off the ink with an implement called a scraper. This tool consisted of a wooden handle at the end of which was attached a pointed, curved metal blade, both edges of which had been sharpened like a penknife. Care had to be exercised to leave a smooth surface so that writing over the erasure would not produce a smeared or blurred character. Unless the card was irretrievably damaged in some way, no one ever thought to copy the data onto a fresh card since that would have meant wasting a perfectly serviceable card!

Sometime later, with the advance of technology, the scraper was replaced by an electric eraser, cylindrical in form with the awkward dimensions of a four-inch girth and six-inch length. This newfangled gadget, designed to be held like a pencil in the crook between the thumb and forefinger, proved cumbersome at best. Because of the size and weight of the mechanism encased within, manipulating it to best advantage required practice. This implement was plugged into an electric outlet customarily reserved for the electric fan. In those early days, providing creature comforts was not a consideration of any significance and air conditioning was far from routine, particularly in those hallowed halls graced with a two-storey high ceiling. The eraser, when in operation, made a buzzing sound much like that produced by an electric razor. Once the proper technique was mastered, it proved to be a convenient and timesaving tool although caution and attention were required at all times, for too much pressure applied on the card would produce a tidy little hole. With diligence and patience, such daily trials were overcome as a matter of course and the cards made ready for reproduction.

The reproduction process in use at the time was known as "dexigraph". As one step in this process the cards were immersed in a liquid solution which, upon drying, caused them to warp to a certain degree. Filing such cards created a rippling effect in the catalog tray. Quite frequently, moreover, the cards displayed a telltale gray. From this primitive method, technological advances gave us the multilith process. This process required the use of a specially treated paper which had been measured out to accommodate eight cards per sheet. The surface of this paper was slippery smooth and required the use of a special kind of pencil, the lead of which had a slightly oily element in its composition. The finished product came out uniformly white and proved infinitely more satisfactory. Besides, the warp-ripple effect was totally eliminated. Some year later, with the introduction of the xerox machine, card production became a breeze, although here again an extra step was required to indicate the number of cards to be reproduced for each unit card. Estimating the number of cards needed was not condoned, since that would have resulted in an excess of cards for those titles requiring fewer added entries. The installation of a xerox machine on the premises would have greatly facilitated and simplified processing. But to expect a xerox machine to be installed in a library not in the mainstream of general library operations was unthinkable. Efficiency and effectiveness were expected to be achieved without wastage of materials, but saving time and labor was not of the highest priority. The World War II years contributed to the emphasis on this kind of work ethic. For instance, there was a period when pencil
stubs had to be saved as proof to justify the ordering of a fresh supply of pencils. Throughout these different stages of card production, it was a regular routine to provide one copy of each finished main card to the Library of Congress for inclusion in the Japanese Union Catalog maintained in the Division of Orientalia.

In time, as cataloging and card production gradually turned into a steady flow of output, a handful of libraries in charge of growing Japanese collections, under the aegis of the American Library Association, mulled over the possibility of initiating a cooperative cataloging program in order to eliminate the staggering amount of duplication of work and expenditure being borne by a growing number of institutions throughout the country. The principals of this new venture were California (Berkeley), Columbia, Cornell, Harvard, Michigan, Stanford, and Yale with the Library of Congress providing impetus as leader-coordinator. This signaled the birth of cooperative cataloging in the East Asian field. Representatives from each of these institutions met for a series of meetings conducted at the Library of Congress. Selected professional members in technical processing at the Library of Congress, including Japanese librarians, were generous in sharing their expertise and wide experience in all aspects of cataloging. They provided invaluable counsel and guidance without which the project could not have reached fruition. Sheaves and sheaves of working papers were generated at each of the meetings and, as might have been expected, the matter of word division commanded center stage. After painstaking analyses and discussions on a variety of solutions proposed, a set of rules was finally formulated and incorporated in *Cataloging Rules of the American Library Association and the Library of Congress: Additions and Changes, 1949-1958*, published by the Library of Congress in 1959.

As had been anticipated, a number of the newly established word division rules went counter to the policy adopted earlier at Columbia. To avoid having to revise all the catalog cards already in the files and mindful of the disadvantages that would accrue from maintaining separate catalogs to accommodate two different systems of word division, the filing arrangement was overhauled in toto from a word-by-word filing system to a letter-by-letter arrangement. Since the Japanese Collection had always maintained three separate public files, i.e., title, subject, and author, this new filing system affected only the title file.

Some years later, the Library of Congress initiated a Shared Cataloging Program along the lines of the one already in place for German publications. Central to this project was the availability of a printed National Bibliography produced and maintained by the country whose books were being cataloged. Under this requirement Japan qualified since the National Diet Library in Tokyo was maintaining just such a bibliography. Special arrangements were worked out between the Library of Congress and the National Diet Library with the result that records originated at the latter institution were airmailed to the former for enhancement through the addition of supplementary data provided in English. Libraries participating in this undertaking benefitted from hybrid cards beautifully produced. Upon receipt of these cards, call numbers and added entries were typed on locally and the cards prepared for filing.
This project advanced the quality and quantity of cataloging output, but there still remained a sizeable volume of titles requiring original cataloging. The National Diet Library, having been greatly influenced by traditional American library practice, elected to use the author as its main entry. It was at this point that the title entry format heretofore used by the Japanese Collection was changed to that of author main entry. As part of this international interlibrary arrangement, Columbia elected to subscribe to all Japanese printed cards generated at the National Diet Library. Since data on these cards appeared only in Japanese, the cards, when received, were maintained in a separate file for purposes of reference only. When printed book catalogs of the holdings of the National Diet Library became available, this practice was discontinued. Throughout these proceedings a tremendous amount of correspondence and consultation was conducted between the two national libraries which set the stage for improving communication channels among Japanese collections in this country. When one stops to think how a major undertaking of such impressive proportions was successfully carried out before the advent of the fax machine, the amount of time, effort, and dedication expended can but command wonder and admiration. Despite the intricacies and complexities encountered, the feasibility and value of international cooperation were fully proven through undreamed of benefits shared by all participants.

Meanwhile, back at the home front, the central library administration required statistical records to cover every conceivable aspect of work in progress as well as results achieved. The bookkeeping needed to maintain these detailed statistics required time, diligence, and perseverance at a time when calculating machines and hand calculators were unavailable to small specialized collections, considered and treated as being outside the scope of general library operations. In such circumstances heavy reliance was placed on an age-old instrument — the abacus.

Some years earlier, the central library administration decided to switch the classification system used at Columbia from Dewey to that created by the Library of Congress. This was a direct result of the then rapidly developing Research Libraries Information Network and the multifaceted advantages evidenced by adopting technical uniformity on a nationwide basis. In the early 1980s, when East Asian libraries became a part of this mainstream, the Japanese Collection discontinued its use of the Nippon Decimal Classification.

With the dawn of the computer age in East Asian librarianship, when a more intensive cooperative effort among North American libraries became a reality, the romanization system heretofore used at Columbia was changed to that used in the 1954 "entirely new edition" of Kenkyusha's New Japanese-English Dictionary which summarily dispenses with the earlier concerns over euphonic changes. Problems of word division and hyphenation having been resolved to a great extent, the rules are now spelled out in ALA-LC Romanization Tables, published in Washington, D.C. in 1991. It may be of interest to point out that the thinking and patterns arrived at during the 1930s and '40s seem to have left their impact, and certain overtones of deliberations of an earlier era still linger.
As technological advances bring forth evermore sophisticated capabilities, the hand-wrought records spanning half a century have become artifacts of a rapidly receding past. It is to be hoped that the time and effort saved by means of computer-generated records will provide opportunities for librarians and their assistants to work more familiarly with the books and other materials entrusted to the library's care, thereby enhancing services to patrons who use and depend on these precious resources.