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RLIN CJK: A Historical Perspective

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This fall of 1993 is the tenth anniversary of the automation of East Asian libraries in North America. It is hard to believe that the Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN) Chinese-Japanese-Korean (CJK) program has been in operation since 1983. Nonetheless, as of March 31, 1993, there were over a million RLIN CJK records entered by thirty-seven participating institutions. In addition, there were 131,597 CJK records batch-loaded in RLIN, mostly by the Online Computer Library Center, Inc. (OCLC). There is no question that the advent of RLIN CJK enhancement was a singularly momentous occasion in the annals of the East Asian collections in North America. It brought mechanism for national bibliographic control of CJK materials, which the East Asian library community had been seeking for so many years, and it now also provides a basis for coordinated collection development and shared access to collections for the community.

This paper will trace the efforts of the East Asian library community and its constituents which led to RLIN CJK and try to put these efforts in a historical perspective. Just how far back in time we should go to explain the chain of events which led to a certain event is always a difficult question to answer. In the case of RLIN CJK enhancement, I believe we should go back at least to March 26, 1972, when the East Asian library community held the first conference on Chinese cooperative cataloging in New York City. The second conference, held March 29, 1973 in Chicago, and the third conference, held March 31, 1974 in Boston, followed and discussed the long-standing issues of the lack of a national union catalog for East Asian language materials and the mounting backlogs of uncataloged Chinese materials for which the National Program for Acquisitions and Cataloging (NPAC) was never made available. The NPAC for Japanese books greatly facilitated cataloging of Japanese materials in North America for the period 1968 to 1985. One result of these conferences was the Chinese Cooperative Catalog (CCC) issued by the Library of Congress (LC) from 1975 to 1982. The CCC listed LC preliminary cards and printed cards from LC and from other selected libraries, unedited, with no added entries, cross references, or additional holding location identification. It began in book form on a monthly basis with an annual cumulation and switched to bimonthly issues and in microfiche format in July 1977. However, the CCC was never extensively used and never considered a satisfactory solution to the problems.

In the meantime, on the initiative of the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) and the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), working through their China committees (the Committee on Studies of Chinese Civilization and the Joint Committee on Contemporary China), a conference of scholars was convened at Barclay Hotel in New York City November 8-9, 1973, to explore priorities and planning for the China field. There were twenty-eight participants among whom were two librarians: Eugene Wu and Chi Wang. C.
Sumner Spalding, Assistant Director for Cataloging of LC's Processing Department, attended as an observer. The wide-ranging topics at the conference included the matter of regional library systems for Chinese studies as well as the need for more systematic and national planning for the further development of Chinese library resources and services. The participants also expressed regret for the lack of a China Center in NPAC. In order to carry the demands of the field more directly to the point of action, the conference recommended that the two Councils establish and support an ad hoc committee on library problems in the Chinese studies field.4

With this momentum, the Committee on East Asian Libraries (CEAL) organized its Subcommittee on Resources and Development, which consisted of Thomas Kuo (CEAL chair), T. H. Tsien (Subcommittee chair), Warren Tsuneishi, and Eugene Wu. The subcommittee held its first meeting during the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) annual meeting in April 1974, and met again in Pittsburgh on November 8, 1974. Besides other business covered, preparations for a national plan for the future development of East Asian library resources were discussed in the hope of attracting funding for the East Asian library community. In this connection, it was proposed to hold a national conference on resource development of the East Asian libraries with librarians, faculty members, and library administrators as participants. In March 1975 the subcommittee met with representatives of the Ford Foundation to discuss possible support for a national conference on priorities and development of East Asian libraries and submitted a CEAL statement on the “Priorities for the Development and Funding of Library Programs in Support of East Asian Studies.”5

Following the recommendation of the Barclay Conference discussed earlier, the ACLS/SSRC Task Force on (Chinese) Libraries and Research Materials (chaired by F. W. Mote, Professor of East Asian Studies, Princeton University) was organized and met with members of the LC staff on July 11, 1975, to discuss problems centering on the acquisition and bibliographic control of Chinese materials by American libraries with special attention to the national role of LC in the overall process.6

In July 1975 the ACLS appointed, with funds provided by the Ford Foundation, a Steering Committee for a Study of the Problems of East Asian Libraries, composed of university administrators, library directors, East Asian librarians, and scholars specializing in East Asian studies. The members were: George M. Beckmann, Professor of Asian Studies and Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, University of Washington (chairman); Albert Feuerwerker, Professor of History and Director, Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan; Herman H. Fussler, Martin A. Ryerson Distinguished Service Professor, Graduate Library School, University of Chicago; Hanna H. Gray, Provost, Yale University; Warren J. Haas, Vice-President for Information Services and University Librarian, Columbia University; William F. Miller, Provost and Vice-President, Stanford University; Warren Tsuneishi; and Eugene Wu.7
The Steering Committee explored the full range of problems by commissioning information and position papers and by collecting data. The first group of papers were commissioned as a guide to the work of the committee:

Karl Lo, "Users and Collection Development: a Preliminary Paper."
Tsuen-hsuin Tsien, "Needs and Problems of the Training Program for Special Librarianship in East Asian Studies."
Weiying Wan and Raymond N. Tang, "Accessibility: Status, Problems and Solutions."
Eugene W. Wu, "Some Comments on Bibliographic Control of East Asian Publications."

After discussions by the committee revealed that more focused and detailed treatment of various issues and problems was needed, the following papers were prepared: (1) inclusion of East Asian bibliographic records in MARC (James Agenbroad), (2) union list of East Asian microfilm (Edwin G. Beal, Jr.), (3) union list of East Asian serials (Edwin G. Beal, Jr.), (4) special subject bibliographies (Thomas Kuo), (5) processing of East Asian materials (Thomas H. Lee), (6) East Asian union catalog (Karl Lo), (7) accessibility to East Asian materials (Raymond Tang), (8) personnel training (T. H. Tsien), (9) NPAC (Warren Tsuneishi), and development of East Asian library resources and collections (Weiying Wan).

Finally, the following papers were commissioned as general summary papers on the two principal facets of the Committee's study and findings:

George M. Beckmann, "Collection Development, Access, and Preservation."
Richard C. Howard, "Problems of Bibliographic Control in East Asian Libraries."

After a two-year study, the Steering Committee drafted its report, which was discussed at a meeting of some forty librarians representing major and medium-sized East Asian libraries in the U.S. and Canada held in Chicago on September 9-10, 1977. The Steering Committee's final report, *East Asian Libraries: Problems and Prospects; a Report and Recommendations*, was presented to the Ford Foundation in January 1978. The report called for the strengthening of the East Asian library collections of major research universities, the creation of regional consortia and national pools, and the development of a comprehensive bibliographic database. The report specifically recommended the development of union lists of monographs, serials, and microforms, and the recommendations were to be followed up by another committee.

In August 1978 the East Asian Library Program was organized to succeed the Steering Committee for a study of East Asian libraries. The program, which was supported by a
grant from the Ford Foundation and cosponsored by the ACLS, the SSRC, and the Association of Research Libraries, was comprised of a part-time director, John W. Haeger, and an advisory committee representing the field of East Asian studies, East Asian libraries, and general libraries. John Haeger, former Chairman of the Department of Chinese at Pomona College, served concurrently as Visiting Professor of History, Linfield College (1978-79) and as Director of Program Coordination, Research Libraries Group (RLG) (1979- ). The Advisory Committee members were: Patricia Battin, Vice-President and University Librarian, Columbia University; Charles Churchwell, Dean of Library Services, Washington University (1980-81 only); Hideo Kaneko; F. W. Mote; Robert E. Ward, Director, Center for International Studies, Stanford University; Eugene W. Wu; and John W. Haeger, Chairman (ex officio).9

The charge to the Joint Advisory Committee was to review the Steering Committee's recommendations, particularly in the light of comments following the publication of its report, and to oversee the implementation of such modified recommendations as then seemed appropriate. The Steering Committee was explicit about the need for such oversight, stating in its report that "some kind of initiative and leadership will have to be exerted over time in order to ensure that all the critical parts of this set of proposals are carried out."10 This was the logic for the organization of this committee as advisory to a director and project, and the arrangement was very effective in that the director was able to devote a considerable time in investigating possible means of solutions and in leading in the dynamics of consultations, modifications, and the decision-making process.

The advisory committee met six times from September 1978 to May 1981 and sponsored a fact-finding tour of Japan and Taiwan in June 1979 and a conference of experts in the field at Stanford in November 1979. The committee was from the outset in full agreement with the basic analysis in the Steering Committee report: rapidly rising costs and diminishing financial support for East Asian libraries made institutional autonomy the impossible dream of a bygone age, and cooperative acquisitions and shared access were necessary to cope with the situation and were absolutely dependent upon effective national bibliographic control.11

However, as early as its first meeting in September 1978, the Joint Advisory Committee was immediately disturbed by the cumbersome nature of the manually-compiled random union catalog (a series of shelflist catalogs in microform) with a computer-assisted index in romanization as summarized in the Steering Committee's report. On the other hand, the committee was greatly impressed with the progress toward national bibliographic control of roman alphabet material being made in the on-line computerized bibliographic networks such as OCLC, RLIN, and the Washington Libraries Network. The demonstrated success seemed to assert two things. First, control of current and prospective materials offers the possibility of significant savings in original cataloging costs to the East Asian libraries. Second, large on-line databases are constantly updatable and more flexibly searchable than any other card or book form catalog. The central question then became whether the technology which supports bibliographic utilities for roman alphabet materials could be extended to manage East Asian script data. Accordingly, at its first meeting, the Joint
Advisory Committee began investigation of available technology for machine manipulation of East Asian scripts.  

At its second meeting in February 1979, the committee agreed that the technological problems central to the capacity for machine manipulation of bibliographic records containing East Asian scripts had been resolved, and that hardware was now available to input, output, and manage East Asian scripts in conjunction with conventional alphanumeric data, efficiently, conveniently, and at acceptable cost. The remaining technical problems were minor; they were primarily to devise satisfactory means of formatting the East Asian script data within a record, so that the computer could escape to it and from it. This could be done only within the context of an operating system. The first priority then was to secure the adoption of the new technology by the Library of Congress or by RLG or by both.  

This assessment was largely confirmed at an international conference to explore the state of the art with respect to automated processing of East Asian scripts and its bibliographic applications, which was organized and convened by the Joint Advisory Committee in November 1979. Thirty-two librarians, computer scientists, administrators, and information specialists from Japan, Taiwan, Korea, the United Kingdom, and the United States met for three days at Stanford University to discuss systems currently in use or under development and to consider priorities for needed work. The final recommendations of the conference indicated among other things the need for standardized character sets to facilitate information interchange and the need to refine in Japan and develop in China machine-readable formats for bibliographic data analogous to the MARC formats already developed for roman-alphabet material.  

The Joint Advisory Committee's interest in the automatic processing of East Asian script data fortuitously coincided with the reorganization of the RLG and the interest of its network, RLIN, which included among its users seven of the ten largest East Asian collections as well as a number of smaller collections. In November 1979, on the recommendation of the committee, RLG and LC executed a Memorandum of Understanding whereby the two organizations would cooperate in the development of the RLIN CJK enhancement project and, when it was developed, LC would catalog all Chinese, Japanese, and Korean vernacular material on-line into the RLIN database. Also, in November 1979, with the committee's support, RLG sought grants to build East Asian enhancements to RLIN over a three-year period. Subsequently it received $968,851 from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Humanities.  

For the project, RLG central staff was advised by the CJK Task Force, specially organized to represent relevant experts from LC and RLG member institutions as well as other organizations, and by RLG's standing committees, BibTech, Public Services, and particularly the East Asian Program Committee (chaired by Princeton's University Librarian, Donald Koepp). The project proceeded on time and the first CJK cataloging record was entered by LC on September 12, 1983.
It was a landmark in the long history of cooperation among the East Asian libraries, research libraries, and the scholarly community of East Asian studies. The long-standing dream of having a mechanism for national bibliographic control of East Asian materials had finally come true, and it is certainly fundamental to any kind of national planning for the East Asian collections and for the support of research in East Asian studies.

NOTES

1. Research Libraries Group, "Cumulative RLIN CJK Statistics as of 03/31/93."


5. Ibid., no. 48 (1975), p. 3.


7. Ibid., p. 2.


12. Ibid., p. 3-4.


15. Ibid., pp. 5-6.