Orientalist Libraries in the U.S.: Emerging Issues in Information Exchange

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American librarians have entered the decade of the 80's in a schizophrenic state, at once filled with anxiety over fiscal constraints affecting their ability to acquire, process, and service library materials, and yet brimming with hope and excitement over possible solutions to their problems offered by the evolving library networks. In this paper I should like to address two key issues which will directly affect the ability especially of those responsible for Asian language collections in the United States to provide adequate and economic service to their clientele: (1) The development of national bibliographic controls, and (2) the rationalization of local collection development policies with the objective of cooperatively creating an interlinked national library resource accessible to scholars throughout the country.

1. National Bibliographic Controls

The standardization of bibliographic practice is of course a prerequisite to the development of national bibliographic controls over materials in the nation's libraries. The attempt to standardize book cataloging practice in American libraries and thereby to supply bibliographic data in a uniform format has had a long history in the United States — one of the first committees established by the American Library Association following its establishment in 1876 was the Co-operation Committee on Cataloguing Rules. The year 1876 also marked the publication of the first edition of Charles A. Cutter's Rules for a Printed Dictionary Catalogue, the direct ancestor of the Anglo-American Cataloging Rules, which currently governs all descriptive cataloging practice, including that for Asian language materials, in American libraries.

By the turn of the century descriptive cataloging practice had become so standardized that it was possible for libraries throughout the country to utilize printed cards prepared by the Library of Congress for its own internal control purposes; by 1901, LC had commenced to distribute its printed cards covering Western-language publications to other libraries.

Despite the fact that American libraries had begun to acquire Asian language publications in substantial quantity early in this century, it was not until 1957 that uniform rules for the identification and description of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean language books and serials were adopted. These rules were developed as a result of a collaborative effort involving the Library of Congress, the American Library Association, and the Association for Asian Studies (earlier known as the Far Eastern Association). The publication of the new rules in 1957 opened the way for the development of national cooperation in the cataloging of East Asian language works. Such cooperation had not been possible...
previously because standards had been wanting for romanization practice, for
the citation of personal names and corporate authors in a uniform way, for the
listing of elements of bibliographic description—title, author, edition,
imprint, etc.—in a uniform format, etc. Similarly, rules have since been
adopted for works written in the languages of South and Southeast Asia and the
Middle East, and the widespread adoption of these rules has led to the uniform
cataloging of such works for the first time in the U.S.

Early attempts at the cooperative cataloging of Asian language books ad­
ministered by LC were not notably successful and were succeeded in the late
60's by the National Program for Acquisitions and Cataloging—in essence a
scheme for the centralized cataloging by LC of all books of research value
published throughout the world in cooperation with the producers of national
bibliographies wherever possible. This program has met with signal success
in supplying to American research libraries a high percentage of catalog cards
for the foreign language books currently being acquired.

Insofar as the production of ancillary reference aids based on printed cards
is concerned—the National Union Catalog, for example—neither cooperative nor
centralized cataloging have proved to be as beneficial as might have been
expected in the identification and location of works in Asian, and especially
East Asian languages. The essential problem has been the general inability
to incorporate into the printed National Union Catalog cards produced locally
by libraries outside of LC. This deficiency is particularly noticeable with
respect to older imprints in the pre-1956 NUC. We shall return to this topic
later.

Although the foundation has been laid for the development of national biblio-
graphic controls over Asian and Middle East language materials, the American
library community has been unable thus far to make substantial progress in
the perfection of such key bibliographic tools as the National Union Catalog,
esential for unlocking the nation's library resources for the study of Asia.

The development of the capacity to process catalog records by computer, however,
offers prospects of radically transforming national bibliographic control pro­
grams. Indeed, the success of such bibliographic utilities as OCLC, Inc., in
providing economically and quickly online cataloging services, as well as
traditional catalog cards, has already altered library processing activities.

The Library of Congress MARC (Machine Readable Cataloging) service, begun in
1966 as a pilot project, is one of the keys to the success of the emerging
library networks. Initially, LC cataloging data in the form of MARC tapes was
available only for works in the English language. This has now been extended
to cover works printed in all roman alphabet languages, and as an interim
measure also to works written in Cyrillic, Greek, Devanagari, Burmese, Thai,
and other nonroman scripts for which there exist standardized romanization
tables the application of which is broadly accepted by librarians and scholars
alike. In the case of Indic language works written in the Devanagari script,
for example, the bibliographic entry is completely romanized during the cata­
logging process, and the data are then entered into the MARC database in ro­
manized form. Romanized entries are necessary because there exists at
present no general capability of entering, processing, and outputting biblio-
graphic data in nonroman scripts. For works in most languages, in short, bibliographic utilities such as OCLC, Inc., and the Research Libraries Group/Research Libraries Information Network (RLG/RLIN) are able to utilize LC MARC tapes in providing cataloging information to member libraries, thus effecting major economies in one of the most important and expensive components of library operations.

Certain languages are not yet covered by the MARC program, however, including those written in East Asian scripts (Chinese, Japanese, and Korean) and in the Arabic and Hebraic scripts (notably Arabic, Persian, Hebrew, and Yiddish). The reason for the exclusion of these languages is that librarians working with East Asian and Middle Eastern collections have insisted that bibliographic data solely in romanized form are unacceptable, and that the capability must be developed to provide for the direct computer processing of vernacular script data without alteration. Romanization, they contend, while useful and acceptable for filing purposes, results in a serious degradation of the information conveyed by the bibliographic record. For example, Chinese titles in romanized form are often meaningless; Japanese authors whose names are normally written in Chinese characters are often unidentifiable in romanization; and existing systems for the romanization of Hebrew do not permit the accurate identification of a work being cataloged if the Hebrew script is lacking.

Insofar as works in Hebrew and Yiddish are concerned, the New York Public Library, a member of RLG, has developed both the hardware and the software necessary to produce a catalog in the Hebraic script.¹ The system has not yet been adopted for general use by RLIN, but that will be its ultimate destiny. As for Arabic, developmental work has been pushed by Pierre MacKay at the University of Washington, Seattle, a member of the Washington Library Network which shows promise for both library and general typesetting applications.² Meanwhile, a computer-processed Near East National Union List is being compiled at the Library of Congress as a project of the Middle East Studies Association, with entries being incorporated into a database in completely romanized form. The use of romanized entries is an interim expedient, which was adopted because equipment and programs for the processing of Arabic script data were unavailable at the time the project was begun two years ago.

The major problem remaining is the processing of bibliographic data in Chinese characters, in the Japanese kana syllabary, and in the Korean han'gul alphabet. Here we may be guardedly optimistic that a processing system will emerge sometime in 1983, according to an agreement entered into by RLG and the Library of Congress in late 1979 whereby RLG, working with LC, is to "develop the capability to enter, manage, store, transmit, and output new bibliographic records containing East Asian scripts in MARC compatible format, cataloged according to Library of Congress/AACR-2 standards."³ Once the system is developed, all new cataloging of books and serials in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean, whether by the Library of Congress or by RLG member institutions, will be produced in machine-readable form, with all libraries, including LC, inputting cataloging data for these works online to the RLIN database.

In anticipation of this agreement designed to bring East Asian libraries into the mainstream of American library automation, the American Council of
Learned Societies—which has for decades supported the development of Asian libraries in the United States—convened a Conference on East Asian Character Processing in Automated Bibliographic Systems at Stanford University in early November 1979. Invited to present papers were specialists from Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, as well as from American libraries. The papers covered such topics as character sets and standards; hardware and software; current automated bibliographic systems in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan; the University of Cambridge project to assess Chinese character processing in automated library catalogs; plans for the inclusion of East Asian records in RLIN; and the content and format of Japan MARC.4

Conference participants agreed that the fundamental technology, both in hardware and in software, now exists, as is evident from input/output systems available from manufacturers in Japan, Taiwan, the United States, and Great Britain. Preliminary tasks requiring attention before an East Asian system can become operational in the United States include the selection of and agreement on character sets, agreement on a standard table of numeric codes for Chinese characters (preferably a table having international support and recognition), and detailed specifications of the capabilities required of the system if it is effectively to serve both intermediate and final users of the database to be created by RLG/RLIN.

One paper5 presented at the conference outlines a number of general requirements to be met in designing an East Asian subsystem for the RLIN database. They include the following: 1) That East Asian bibliographic records must include all basic elements—title, author, imprint, etc.—in vernacular characters, precisely as given currently on LC printed cards; 2) that the system must be usable for online cataloging, online acquisitions, and the production of hard-copy products; and 3) that an online authority file, which includes vernacular characters, must be developed to support the database (the present LC name authority records in machine-readable form are available in alphanumerics only).

It is evident that the creation of a nationwide system for the machine processing of all nonroman alphabet data—the ultimate objective of the RLIN program—will enable the American library community for the first time to bring under prompt and effective control all works currently acquired and cataloged by the major research libraries, and hence to make such works accessible to the scholarly public. This is a goal the desirability of which is questioned by none but the attainment of which may not be possible for some years to come. It may be that in the end the goal will prove altogether unattainable in the American information exchange environment. In this connection, it is instructive to look at existing world databases, such as Chemical Abstracts and Index Medicus. All rely entirely on alphanumeric processing systems in which names are provided in romanization and titles in English translation. It may turn out that the volume of traffic in the exchange of East Asian bibliographic information in America is simply too small to justify the enormous costs associated with the processing of vernacular script data by computer.

Insofar as traditional, manually produced national bibliographic controls over Oriental language materials are concerned, we can say that these are quite uneven, varying in degree of adequacy with the language, place, and imprint date of the publication covered. Thus, bibliographic controls are generally adequate
for currently acquired and cataloged publications from South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka), parts of Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, and Brunei), and parts of the Middle East (Egypt and Afghanistan). A high percentage of works flowing into American libraries from these countries are acquired through the Library of Congress' overseas offices in New Delhi, Karachi, Jakarta, and Cairo. The accessions lists produced by these offices not only serve as acquisitions tools, they also serve as country bibliographies (though of a selective character), and the cataloging information developed abroad is utilized in the final cataloging process at the Library of Congress. The accessions lists combine with entries and locations in the National Union Catalog, New Serial Titles, and specialized bibliographies to provide good coverage of the bulk of books, periodicals, and newspapers currently being acquired by American libraries from these geographic areas.

Controls over East Asian materials present an uneven picture. The Library of Congress has only one overseas office in East Asia, in Tokyo, and it procures only for LC. Through a shared cataloging arrangement with the National Diet Library, LC is able to provide quick catalog copy to American libraries for current Japanese books. There is no similar program for Chinese and Korean books, but LC's Chinese Cooperative Catalog in microfiche does provide information on current receipts of the Library of Congress and selected American libraries.

In short, Oriental-language materials acquired by American libraries during the past quarter century are reasonably well covered by existing and future bibliographic control programs. But there remain millions of volumes acquired during the first half of this century which, if cataloged, have been brought under local library control only and which remain imperfectly accessible through existing means to scholars throughout the nation.

We do of course have partial access to these collections through such standard works as the National Union Catalog (pre-1956 imprints), the Union List of Serials, and the book catalogs of East Asian collections published in recent years by the G.K. Hall Company in which are reproduced the card catalogs of East Asian collections at the Library of Congress (for works cataloged from 1958 to 1971), the University of California (Berkeley), the Hoover Institution (Stanford University), the University of Chicago, the University of Michigan, and the New York Public Library. In addition, specialized bibliographies such as H.C. Huang's Chinese Periodicals in the Library of Congress (1978) and A. Kohar Rony's Southeast Asia: Western Language Periodicals in the Library of Congress (1979) provide master listings covering the holdings of single libraries. We may note also that a project is currently underway at Duke University under Avinash Maheshwarl to compile a union list of Government of India serials issued during the period 1930-1955 and held by American libraries.

The problem of the full retrospective coverage of Asian-language works acquired and cataloged before the advent of automation will remain with us throughout this decade and perhaps into the indefinite future. In a study issued in 1977 by a special committee examining the problems of East Asian libraries, first priority was given to the compilation and issuance of a retrospective national union catalog of monographs and a national union list of serials. The com-
illation and publication of a national union catalog of East Asian monographs incorporating reports on some 6.7 million volumes representing 2.6 million discrete titles held by 85 libraries in North America in 1976 is an enormously difficult and expensive undertaking, and prospects for such a compilation are not good at the moment. The problems include the existence of millions of records in non-uniform format and the necessity to edit entries to conform to a common standard, especially with regard to rules for entry.

A retrospective national union list of serials covering 30,000 discrete titles in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean is considered to be within the realm of possibility, however, and is indeed one of the projects under study by RLG/RLIN. For a variety of reasons, romanized entries for serials are regarded as acceptable, especially as an interim solution. The CONSER database of current and retrospective serials, for example, includes thousands of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean language serials cataloged in recent years and input in completely romanized form. At RLG, the compilation of the East Asian union list is conceived of actually as a product of an ambitious plan to identify all serials held by selected research libraries (including non-RLG members, such as LC, Harvard, and Chicago), consolidate holdings, and microfilm completed holdings both for preservation and for service to scholars. Cataloging will be online into the RLIN database, initially in completely romanized form, and subsequently in mixed roman and vernacular characters as RLIN acquires the capacity to process East Asian scripts. The University of Washington is currently upgrading its machine-readable cataloging capabilities by converting East Asian serials data in romanized form to the MARC-S format. The University, a member of the Washington Library Network (WLN), will make an archival tape of its serial record available to RLIN, which will merge its records with the Washington tapes, and thus provide a database for the larger program for consolidating, preserving, and incorporating East Asian serials into a union list.

2. Cooperative Collection Development and Resource Sharing

The "information explosion" of recent years has combined with steadily escalating world book prices and fiscal retrenchments in American higher education (and the consequent budgetary restraints placed on academic and research libraries) to lead the profession toward a fundamental reassessment of traditional acquisitions practices. Whereas at the turn of the century academic libraries might aspire to comprehensive coverage of the world of publications, ancient and modern, Western and Eastern, in keeping with the mission of universities to offer instruction and support research in the entire universe of knowledge, there has developed in recent years the realization that such a vision is not practicable, if it ever was, at least for university libraries. As one of the leaders in the movement to fundamentally change attitudes toward library resource development, Warren J. Haas, President of the Council on Library Resources, has put it: "A revolutionary change in the meaning given to self-sufficiency [in libraries] is taking place: it is now coming to mean the attainment of the capacity to tap internal and external resources to meet the needs of the local user. Such a change is leading to a major transformation in the areas of acquisitions, retention, and preservation. Through the planned sharing of resources, it will become possible to rationalize acquisition development by seeing individual libraries as parts of a whole."
"Rationalization of acquisitions" is thus the catch phrase of the day, despite the fact that historically cooperative or coordinated collection development programs involving the nation's research libraries have rarely worked, whether under the Farmington Plan approach or under more modest plans. Optimism exists today, however, because of the emergence of a decisive mechanism lacking in past attempts: the computer and its associated rapid and economical communications network.

Moreover, research libraries in recent years have increasingly turned to detailed, formalized guidelines to govern their acquisitions. Such policy statements spell out in considerable detail classes and subclasses of materials to be acquired, levels of collection (generally four or five, from basic to comprehensive), form of material to be acquired (monographs, serials, microforms, maps, graphic materials, etc.), language of publication, etc. By specifying topics, levels of collecting, etc., in which local instructional and research needs are taken into consideration, bibliographers seek to rationalize the development of their collections.

The Research Libraries Group is currently undertaking a searching examination of the means by which major university libraries can cooperate in the coordination of their individual acquisitions programs. Preliminary investigations are underway in establishing precise collecting patterns, which can then be woven into a national resource development mosaic.

What appears to be emerging is a novel approach characterized by the following features: Individual library collections would be conceived of as parts of a national resource; primary collecting responsibilities would be assumed by individual RLG member libraries, and these responsibilities would be spelled out in great detail by formal guidelines which can be adjusted as local instructional and research programs change over the years; information on changes in guidelines, as well as detailed information on individual purchases, would be available online throughout the Research Libraries Information Network; and certain national libraries, such as the Library of Congress, would serve as systems equalizers, acting as backstops with strong core collections to absorb responsibilities which local libraries might be forced to relinquish and which others cannot take up.

Part of this grand scheme, administered by RLG, is already in existence under the RLG's Collection Management and Development Program. This is the Cooperative Purchase File, which provides online information on all new serial subscriptions and all individual purchases valued in excess of $500.00 reported by RLG's 19 member libraries.

Turning specifically to American library acquisitions from Asia and the Middle East, we may note that such receipts are substantial, with the Library of Congress alone accessioning close to 50,000 monograph volumes annually in the languages of Asia and the Middle East. To this must be added over 5,000 serial titles and over 200 newspapers currently received from these countries.

The overseas programs in South and Southeast Asia and in the Middle East administered by the Library of Congress may be regarded as cooperative ventures. Through them publications are acquired in multiple copies and distributed to
major American centers dedicated to the study of these regions of the world. Changes are in the offing for the India program. Thus far, the New Delhi operation has been based on the availability, to the U.S. Government, of rupees in the U.S. account originally generated by the Public Law 480 (Food for Peace) program. These funds are nearing exhaustion, and at some point during this decade, the entire program will require reappraisal.

For South and Southeast Asia, moreover, the Center for Research Libraries—which describes itself as a "Libraries' Library"—acquires under its South Asia Microform Program (SAMP) and Southeast Asia Microform Project (SEAM) expensive microfilm and microfiche of publications from these two areas, which generally can be expected to receive infrequent use. Financial support for these programs and advice regarding their coverage come from American libraries having major collections for the study of South and Southeast Asia.

For East Asian publications no such cooperative acquisitions arrangements exist, but two programs of great promise are now under active consideration. First, while RLG's East Asian Library Program is currently concentrating, as previously noted, on designing a system to include East Asian vernacular records in the RLIN database, it is also planning for the next phase, which will involve collection development. Once the bibliographic system is in place, it will be possible to include East Asian acquisitions activities in the coordinated national resource development plan referred to above. Second, the Center for Research Libraries, provided with new funding, is planning for the first time an expanded East Asian acquisitions project. The project's objective is to develop a centralized collection of materials from which libraries can borrow freely and quickly, either directly or through photocopy. Certain to be included is an East Asian microform program, to parallel CRL's existing projects for the acquisition in microform of Southeast Asian, South Asian, African, and Latin American publications. In addition, CRL will step up its collecting of expensive or infrequently used materials of research value, thus building up a national resource accessible to scholars throughout the country through inter-library loan facilities.

In this paper, I have focussed on two key issues—national bibliographic controls and the cooperative development of national library resources—to the exclusion of other equally vital issues confronting us today, such as a national preservation program, and the improvement of services to the nation's scholarly clientele. All of these issues are of course interlinked, and improved bibliographic controls, acquisitions, and preservation all inevitably contribute to increased reader satisfaction. The instrument of improvement has always been interlibrary cooperation, as the founders of the American Library Association in 1876 realized. Today, a century later, American librarians, faced anew with the necessity to cooperate, and having at their disposal as never before intellectual and mechanical means to meet the challenge, appear to be moving finally toward the creation of mechanisms which will successfully tie together the nation's research libraries in one massive cooperative network.
Notes


2. Patricia Myers-Hayer, "Middle East librarians annual meeting in Salt Lake City," Foreign Acquisitions Newsletter. no. 50 (Fall 1979) 67.


