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East Asian Research at the Latter-day Saints Genealogical Library

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The East Asian collection at the Genealogical Library, Salt Lake City, Utah, is small compared to the rest of the Library's holdings, but significant when compared to other repositories of similar nature. For instance, the Library's growing collection of Chinese clan genealogies and local histories is probably the world's largest outside of China. In Japan, we have been negotiating with a local university in the hope of beginning a cooperative project to film religious surveillance and Buddhist mortuary records in that country. Another project of special importance to overseas Japanese is the recently approved filming of a large collection of Japanese emigration records. The Library's impressive Korean clan genealogy collection has recently been audited in order to target whatever genealogies have not yet been acquired; work to acquire them is underway. Many other types of records have also been collected, the only criterion being that they be useful in genealogical research.

The value of such records in many other areas of scholarly inquiry is obvious, but first one must get access to them. Unfortunately, this is not always easy. Because of the Library's special status as an arm of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), its policies and procedures often vary from what is considered standard practice in a university library. The Asian section deviates still further from many of the Genealogical Library's own standards. This paper will give a brief summary of the Genealogical Library's major East Asian holdings, then explain in detail the workings of the Library and its system of branches.

The Chinese Collection

The actual size of the Chinese collection is rather difficult to determine. The number of records considered accessible is a matter of question because Chinese cataloging and card production presently have a five-year backlog. Titles caught in the backlog are technically unavailable, but access can be given (with difficulty) in special instances. Still, some fair estimates of collection size can be made, based upon 1980 statistical reports, camera operator reports, and counts made since 1980 of specific record types.

The Genealogical Society of Utah (hereafter, the Society) has been avidly collecting clan genealogies (zupu) and local histories (fangzhi) from major collections and private individuals since 1971. By 1979, cataloged genealogies numbered around 2,600. As of this writing, the count is several thousand more, with perhaps some 8,000 to 10,000 in the backlog not yet accessible. Completeness, quality, format, etc., vary among genealogies from public and private collections, with materials from public sources tending to be more extensive and complete.

Local histories numbered over 5,000 as of 1985. The great majority of these are from twelve provinces: Guangdong, Hebei, Henan, Hunan, Jiangsu, Jiangxi, Shaanxi, Shandong, Shanxi, Sichuan, Yunnan, and Zhejiang. The Society is working to fill
out its collection and eventually acquire those titles and editions which are lacking, as the budget will allow.

Aside from the card catalog itself, the best means of access to Chinese genealogies up to 1979 is Chinese Genealogies at the Genealogical Society of Utah: An Annotated Bibliography, compiled by Telford, Thatcher and Yang. Genealogies are arranged by surname and locality in stroke-count order. Entries also include title, page/volume count, editor/compiler, year of publication, the film number assigned by the Society, the call number of the original copy (where applicable), and some notes on ancestors. Telford and Yang are presently working on a similar volume for local histories. It will be completed—tentatively in 1987.

In 1983, the Society and the First Historical Archives in Beijing began a cooperative filming project. By May of 1984, the Archives had filmed 954,700 exposures of Qing Dynasty documents, major portions of which are genealogical records of the Imperial Clan, personnel records of the Imperial Household Administration, and examination rosters of the Grand Secretariat. A second filming project, just completed, produced 650,000 exposures of records pertaining to stipend registers of branches of the Imperial Clan; records of the Grand Secretariat concerning promotions, salaries, and noble titles granted, capital criminal cases, inspections, etc. A third project is being planned. Restrictions allow circulation of copies of these films to branch genealogical libraries, but photoduplication by patrons is prohibited.

Miscellaneous sorts of records, including civil and military examination rosters and biographies, have been acquired in varying amounts. There have also been several filming projects among overseas Chinese communities worldwide. As projects in major repositories are finished, searching out smaller collections becomes inconvenient and costly, and therefore the work usually dwindles. For this reason, the Society is always glad to learn of individuals who will volunteer to loan personal genealogical materials for filming. When genealogical materials are lent by institutions to the Society for filming, the owner also receives a free copy of the film made of its records. Private donors receive the same courtesy upon request.

The Japanese Collection

So far, the Japanese collection has the misfortune to be the least systematic. The Library has large genealogies, Buddhist records, and local histories—from archives in Akita, Miyagi, Nagasaki, Tōkyō, and Yamaguchi prefectures, but comparatively little from the rest of Japan. Then, too, those things obtained from the first four of the above-named locales do not constitute any kind of uniform or complete collection. The largest single collection, from the Yamaguchi Prefectural Archives, appears to include all records pertaining to the Mōri clan of Chōshū. Microfilming in Japan was suspended in 1983, inadvertently giving us time to study other possible acquisitions and re-think negotiation policies. The Society’s Asian acquisitions section has been largely reconstituted since then, and filming resumed in mid-1986.

Because privacy laws make household registry records (koseki tōhon) unavailable, the Society is concentrating on Buddhist mortuary registers (kakochō) and religious surveillance records (shūmon aratamechō and ninbetsuchō). Kakochō can be obtained only through negotiations with each individual temple, and much depends on the abbot’s good will. Surveillance records were superseded by the koseki registers in the late nineteenth century and are scattered throughout Japan. Negotiations have been underway to begin a cooperative filming of kakochō and shūmon aratamechō, starting with the Nōbi region.
The Library has more or less complete collections of the genealogies (kafu) of the imperial family, as well as of many other great clans, down to the Meiji Restoration. We are now trying to round out this part of the collection, though genealogies are not as comprehensive or widespread in Japan as they are in China or Korea. There are also large collections of cadastral survey records (kenchichō) for a few widely scattered locales.

The Korean Collection

The Library held 3,668 Korean clan genealogies (chokpo), representing 131 surnames, as of 1980. In 1985, a team headed by Mark A. Peterson of Brigham Young University audited the collection to determine which known lineages are not represented by genealogies in our collection. Genealogies of these unrepresented lineages will be targeted for acquisition. The team also found that we have even acquired genealogies for some previously unknown lineages. Filming in Korea was suspended in 1981 because a faulty audit showed a high duplication rate, but Peterson's team found that the rate was actually less than 10%, so filming of chokpo resumed in 1986. Peterson also believes that copies of practically all genealogies in North Korea were taken to the South by refugees.

Also as of 1980, the Library held 326 local histories (chijii), 2,533 titles of individuals' collected works (munijip), 1,951 household registers (heijok), and other materials such as examination rosters, Yi dynasty records, etc. Further acquisitions of these types of records may occur during the chokpo filming project if negotiations are successful. It should be noted that in the filming of the munijip, often only the biographical/genealogical portions were filmed, and not an author's entire works.

The Genealogical Society of Utah

The Genealogical Society of Utah was organized in 1894. It was absorbed by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to become the Church's Genealogical Department in 1973, though it is still legally registered to do business as the Genealogical Society. The Society's mission is to collect and preserve records which uniquely identify deceased individuals by time, place, and family relationship in order to satisfy a major tenet of Church doctrine. The Library, one of several divisions in the Genealogical Department, is in charge of its own book and periodical acquisitions, but it and its branches serve mainly as public outlets for microfilmed information collected by the Society's acquisitions division.

The Library and the Granite Mountain Vault

Microform masters acquired by the Genealogical Society are stored at the Granite Mountain Record Vault in Little Cottonwood Canyon, twenty miles south of Salt Lake City. The Vault is one of the world's finest storage facilities, naturally maintaining ideal humidity and temperature for film storage and being impervious to almost any conceivable disaster. Visitors, too, are severely restricted to keep dust and microbes down to a manageable level.

The Vault briefly loans film masters to the Library for cataloging, but never to patrons. Positive copies of heavily used films are kept in the Library or in nearby storage for patron use. All copies are supplied to main Library patrons at no cost. Asian films are by definition "little used;" therefore patrons must expect a two- to five-day wait when requesting a copy of an Asian film master. Once a copy is
made, though, it will usually be retained by the Library, and later patrons can have immediate access to it. Patrons can plan ahead and order films to be sent to the main Library in advance of their visit. Those who can stay for extended periods are best served, whether a film copy is immediately available or not.

The Branch Genealogical Library (BGL) System

The Library maintains over 700 branches throughout the world, wherever there are enough LDS Church members to warrant them. The Library resists the idea of joining online library networks because of the private nature of many materials in the collection, preferring to use the Branch Genealogical Library system for wide dissemination of non-restricted materials. A BGL is nearly always housed in a room at an LDS chapel, and the Library publishes quarterly address lists for free distribution. Branches are of three types, ranging from a table with one film reader to a fully equipped facility. The staff are unpaid volunteers.

Films borrowed through the BGL system can be used only at the branch for a limited time period, and a shipping and handling fee of $2.50 per reel is charged. (This fee varies according to country.) In most cases, ordering a reel is simply a matter of locating the desired record in one of the four computer-output microfiche catalogs supplied by the Library to all branches. The patron gives the film number to the branch librarian, who sends it to Salt Lake City. Waiting periods vary; the librarian knows how long it will take to fill a request.

The Genealogical Library Catalog (GLC)

Before 1979, the Library used a dictionary card catalog, interfiling authors, titles and subjects. It has nearly disappeared as all catalog records, except for those in non-roman scripts, are input online. The online conversion project will be complete by the end of 1986.

The entire card catalog was microfilmed for distribution to branches in 1976. Though these films (known as the MCC: Microfilm Card Catalog) are badly outdated, the BGL office continues to supply the MCC film list to branches. The bulk of the MCC--all but the non-roman catalog records--has been entirely superseded by the computer-output microfiche catalog. The East Asian portions have been replaced by new filmings, to be described later.

The microfiche catalog (officially called the GLC: Genealogical Library Catalog) is produced by the Library's online cataloging system and is distributed annually or semi-annually to the branches. The fiche are color-coded: yellow (indirect locality catalog), pink (surname catalog), blue (Library of Congress subject headings [LCSH] catalog) and green (author/title catalog). Some East Asian records were input when the automated system came up in 1979, but Asian input soon ceased because it was felt at the time that romanized headings did not provide enough information for access.

The most exciting development in automated access to the Library's holdings is the compression of the entire catalog and all of the software controlling it onto a single 5.25" laser disc. The catalog which used to fill up dozens of huge cabinets now takes up only half of one disc. The disc can be copied and shipped to branch libraries at a fraction of the cost of the fiche catalog. This phase of access to the catalog is still only in its developmental stages, but a prototype is available for patron experimentation in the main Library. It operates on an IBM PC/AT, but
later will be usable on other computers as well. We may assume that the GLC on disc will eventually supersede the GLC on microfiche.

The Asian Card Catalog at the Main Library

The Asian card catalog is in two fourplex cabinets on the International floor (B1) of the new Genealogical Library. One entire side is occupied by the Chinese catalog. The other side houses the Japanese, Korean, and Asia/International catalogs. Like the GLC, the drawers are color-coded: yellow (for locality), pink (surname), blue (Library of Congress subject headings), and green (author/title). Each colored section is further subdivided into two parts which reflect the history of Asian cataloging at the Genealogical Library: one part is entirely in vernacular; the other holds cards with entries in English/romanization.

For some years, Asian cards were typed entirely in English, and titles were even translated. Then the change was made to vernacular records, with characters handwritten, but entries remained in English/romanization. This policy continued even after vernacular typewriters were obtained. In 1979 the decision was made to catalog entirely in the vernacular. This worked very well for Japan and Korea, whose cards could be filed phonetically, but the Chinese cards had to be filed in stroke-count order according to the cumbersome method devised by the National Central Library in Taiwan. Filing and searching became too difficult and time-consuming, so in 1985 the Chinese catalog reverted to cards with content in Chinese and headings in English/romanization, filed alphabetically. It is important to know that information in the vernacular parts of the catalog is not duplicated in the English/romanized parts. We hope someday to recatalog all records which are not up to present standards, and to unify the parts of each catalog.

The subject catalogs bear a little explaining because they are unique to the Genealogical Library. As noted above, authors and titles are interfiled in their own section, but subject headings are divided into locality, surname, and LCSH sections. Because locality is vital to identifying an individual (place of birth, etc.), the best means of access to most of the Library's records is through searching the locality indirectly. For example, to find a fangzhì for Chieh-hsien in Shansi Province in the English/romanized catalog, look under "Shansi, Chieh Hsien--Gazetteers." (All romanized Chinese headings are in Wade-Giles romanization. Japan and Korea use Hepburn and McCune-Reischauer.) The book collection includes many atlases, gazetteers, and geographical dictionaries to help the patron find the present name and jurisdiction of any place in China, Japan, or Korea. The Library has also devised a list of topical subdivisions--largely borrowed from the LC "free-floater" list--to tack onto the ends of the locality headings. A list of Chinese, Japanese and Korean translations of the locality subdivisions used in the vernacular catalogs is available from Asian Cataloging.

Though surnames are technically LC subject headings, they have their own section in each catalog. Surname searching is simple, especially because catalogers have appended the ancestral locality to the surname heading wherever possible: e.g., "Mōri (of Yamaguchi)." Names of individuals who are subjects of biographies are filed in the LCSH catalog.

Access to the Asian Card Catalog at a BGL

Asian cataloging is still limited to handwritten worksheets and hand-typed mats, which are photocopied onto cardstock and filed manually. Therefore, while the Asian card catalog in the main Library is still the most complete list of holdings,
the five-year cataloging and card production backlog severely limits its usefulness. The Asian catalogers are studying various means of automation or semi-automation to reduce the backlog and supply better access to the collection in both the main Library and the branches, but such a project is very low priority for the Genealogical Society.

Because the original filming of the MCC had become useless, the locality and surname parts of the Chinese catalog were refilmed in 1985. New filmings of the corresponding parts of the Japanese and Korean catalogs will be available by the end of 1986. Lists of the new filmings are available from Asian Cataloging. But it is a well known fact that patrons dislike using the card catalog on reels of film. One problem--in addition to the dizziness caused by seeing hundreds of images spin by on a film reader--is that, if cards were misfiled in the first place, they will be harder to locate on the film. Another problem is the fact that, during filming, at least one handful of cards always gets dropped, and is sometimes put back without the catalogers being informed. Still, for all its disadvantages, only the new Asian MCC gives branch patrons full bibliographic information, including Chinese characters, on the greater part of the Asian collection.

Because films of the catalog are expensive to make, copy and distribute, and because the Asian catalog falls into the "little used" category, the Asian MCC is ordinarily supplied only to branches in Asia, or to branches near large communities of overseas Asians. Anyone who wishes to peruse the Asian MCC at a non-Asian branch may be told that he must pay the regular per-reel fee himself to get it, and that after he uses it, it will be sent back to the main office in Salt Lake City. Many Library employees feel that access to the entire catalog should be free to all, so managers in Cataloging and the BGL office are trying to work out some means of providing the Asian MCC to non-Asian branches without charging the patron or burdening the branch itself with the cost. Whatever the solution, because updated filmings of the card catalog are rare, the MCC will never reflect the entire holdings of the Asian collection, even if the backlog should disappear.

Books cannot be lent through the BGL system, but all materials of clear genealogical value not yet on microfilm will be filmed (whenever legally permissible) in the near future. In fact, many of the Library's more fragile Asian books have already been filmed for preservation, and those films can be borrowed through the system. (The need to complete this preservation filming project was strikingly underlined in the fall of 1985, shortly after the Library's move to its new building, when a faulty sprinkler soaked 3,000 volumes of the Asian book collection, including the entire Korean collection. All but two minor volumes were rescued.) Also, in accordance with a new policy, online input of romanized versions of catalog records for all Asian books and films will resume, not so much to provide access as to improve control over the collection, realizing that there is no access without control first. Thus, a measure of access to the Asian book and film collections will be provided to BGL patrons through both the Asian MCC and the GLC.

Additional Information

Anyone with a question about East Asian research at the Genealogical Library is welcome to contact the author directly. In spite of our technical problems, we do try to be "patron friendly." Below are the addresses of the main Library and branch libraries established so far in Asia. Complete lists of all branches can be obtained by writing to the main Library.
Notes
