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National Bibliographic Control of Current Publications in South Korea

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National bibliographic control refers to a process in which published materials are identified and registered with central cataloging agencies. National and trade bibliographies are usually compiled and published as a result of the process. Such bibliographies and catalogs are available in most modern nations.

There are one national bibliography and several trade catalogs of current publications in South Korea. They provide information on current Korean publications by listing imprint data such as title, author, publisher. They mirror an immense pool of data which contain annually nearly forty thousand published titles.

They provide the most comprehensive information on Korean books and serials available either in the market or from the issuing bodies. From these bibliographies or catalogs, selections are made and numerous titles are added to Korean collections in American academic libraries. Each issue of trade and nontrade bibliographies and catalogs are routinely checked over for the identification of titles and their acquisitions.

Book selection is made by a Korean librarian who is responsible for building a collection adequate enough to support research and instruction on Korea in the institution to which he belongs. Such book selection must reflect the needs of faculty, researchers, and students who are the primary users of Korean materials and are engaged in Korean studies in the academic institutions where the bibliographer works. No material can be acquired for its own intrinsic value without reference to the primary users' needs. Book selection and acquisition cannot be done casually or on an ad hoc basis but has to be formal and standardized so that they are effective and workable. There arises a need to formulate a document to guide the Korean librarian in his book selection as to the range and depth of the subjects of material he is going to acquire.

A typical collection building policy statement defines the subject of material to be acquired and the degree of emphasis to be placed on the respective subject. It is a formalization of the findings from the librarian's consultation with and surveying of the primary users. It serves as a frame of reference for the librarian in conducting selection from the large supply of books listed in national and trade bibliographies. It is also the statement in which a library declares its responsibility for collecting material in the subjects so defined and to the degree of emphasis placed on these subjects.

I. Collection Policy Statement

A typical form for a collection policy statement is a pattern of topics denoted by subject codes used in the Library of Congress classification system. "History of Korea," for instance, is denoted as DS900 - DS935; these codes are subdivided into narrower historic periods. Under each heading there is a collection level code indicating the degree of emphasis. There are five collection levels, namely, minimum, basic, study, research,
and comprehensive. Each level is denoted by an arabic numeral in descending order: 5 for minimum, 4 for basic, 3 for study, 2 for research, and 1 for comprehensive.

In many academic libraries a Korean collection acquires material on a research level in most of the subjects they cover and, only exceptionally, on a study level for a few subjects. This implies that a Korean collection acquires only major published source materials for dissertations and independent research which includes materials containing research reports, new findings, and similar information useful primarily to researchers and only sometimes material necessary for undergraduate instruction. Instruction on Korean subjects on the undergraduate level is far less than that on other areas of East Asia in most universities and colleges. Accordingly, with few undergraduate courses for the library to support, most Korean collections are built solely on the research level. Collection building solely on a research level without including a study level is the exception rather than the rule in library practice; but that is the practice of most Korean library collections.

II. National Bibliographic Control

With the collection building statement formulated to guide the Korean librarian, he looks for the tools with which to identify and select material. Publications in Korea grew fifteen times in volume in the last two decades, and national bibliographic control improved dramatically. One national bibliography and several trade bibliographies currently list Korean publications. Selected titles of national and trade bibliographies are listed below.

A. Trade publications


   This is the most useful guide to current publications in Korea. It is so for its rich annotations, reviews, and expository comments of noteworthy books, and numerous illustrations. Another feature is publishers' advertisements, which give an overview of books in print by the publisher.


   The new book section of this monthly journal, called "Idal ui sing`gan" (This month's new books), is the most reliable source for current trade publications because it is the authentic listing of the publishers' association. The rest of the columns are dedicated to publication news, which is of little interest to outsiders of the Korean publishing community. For titles listed, it includes pagination, size, price, and Korean Dewey classification number.

This is a trade catalog issued by one of the largest book distributors. The arrangement is similar to that mentioned in item 2 above, but it has a brief annotation under each item. It is selective because it lists only those items available from the store. It is accompanied by a bimonthly supplement which includes rather extensive reviews and reports.


This is the annual cumulation of item 2. A title index is added. This is especially useful for identifying the imprints of large multivolume sets and series.

**B. Nontrade publications**


This is the national bibliography issued by the central cataloging agency of South Korea. It includes government and other nontrade publications as well as trade publications and theses and dissertations above the masters degree level. The government and its affiliated agencies' publications are listed by their issuing bodies. Trade publications are listed in a classified arrangement with Korean Dewey classification numbers added. This is the only bibliographical guide to government and nontrade publications. It therefore gives the only comprehensive coverage of both trade and nontrade publications. There is no other means to identify the numerous materials issued by government agencies, academic, and research institutions.


This index covers 480 serial publications, almost all of the periodicals and journals published in South Korea. Articles are listed by author under a classified subject arrangement. This is the only means with which to identify and evaluate the contents of individual periodicals.


This is the annual cumulation of *Munhon chongbo*, item no 5 above, with title index added.


This is the annual cumulation of item 6 above. The cumulation adds an author index.
C. Subject index


This is an abstract of books and articles on Korean history. It also carries news of societies and institutions engaged in the field of history. The coverage is wide, carrying abstracts and indexes of articles and books on political and social conditions as well as on Korean history.

To reiterate, there is more than enough bibliographic coverage for current Korean trade publications. Book reviews are also available to afford sensible book selection. There are, however, two noticeable blind spots in the coverage.

One area is nontrade publications. There is *Munhon chongbo* which is supposed to list all national imprints, but there are hundreds of documents, papers, and reports issued by such nontrade publishers as government agencies and academic institutions that are not listed there.

The other area is foreign language materials. Since most of them are issued by non-trade publishers, they naturally go uncovered. A growing number of foreign language materials are distributed to recipients overseas as gifts without going through the domestic book distribution system.

With the notable tools of national bibliographic coverage identified and described, it now seems worthwhile to see the environment under which they are utilized by selectors in the Korean collections in academic libraries.

III. Environment

The Korean librarian in most of American academic libraries faces an environment markedly different from that of his peers. In most academic libraries, the cataloging function is separated from collection building, and collection building is further divided into book selection and acquisitions. In most cases, the Korean librarian must undertake both functions, that is, he or she has to select, order, access, and catalog Korean material, leaving him little time for research for positive collection building.

The clientele he serves is small and scattered over many academic departments, so their demands are diverse and each of them requires material for his or her own research or instruction. The collection building effort has to focus on the specifics of their various needs and the collection development policy must be tailored to suit their specific research interests. This means that material is selected for its relevance to the interests of particular faculty members, researchers, and graduate programs; this is the emphasis rather than trying to collect as many noteworthy books as possible on the subjects recorded in the collection policy.

Such a particularistic approach to collection building is not one mandated by any central administrative regulations but is the necessary product of the book fund allocation formula adopted by the library administration. Funds are allocated primarily according to the number and size of academic programs. Korean academic programs are fewer than any of the other East Asian programs and thus are allocated the least portion of
funds for area ethnic studies. The only viable solution therefore is to meet the immediate and direct demands of the users, which becomes the decisive factor in book selection. Such a limited fund allocation results in a lower collecting level than is called for by the policy. Even though a library may have declared its collection development responsibility to be at the research level, it ends up collecting only a few selected items rather than as many books as are called for by the collection policy.

IV. National bibliographic control and a Korean collection

We have surveyed the national bibliographic control of Korean current publications. And we have seen how academic libraries define standards for selection of the titles listed in the national and trade bibliographies and catalogs.

We further have seen that a Korean collection tends to select books needed by specific research and instructional programs rather than by attempting complete coverage of specific subjects, due to constraints on its book funds. In such an environment, the librarian often has to forego trade publications in favor of nontrade materials unavailable in the trade market. The collection acquires both trade and nontrade materials, and indeed nontrade publications account for two thirds of a Korean collection's serials acquisitions and approximately one third of its monographic acquisitions.

American academic libraries, because of their insufficient coverage of national imprints, are not utilizing satisfactorily the tools of Korean national bibliographic control. Furthermore, we are witnessing a growth and diversification of the clientele of Korean collections; many undergraduate students and non-Korean reading researchers are now seeking data on Korea. Sooner or later, the Korean collection will have to revise its collection policy to incorporate Korean current publications in English and other western languages.

Insufficient coverage of nontrade materials and foreign language materials leaves the Korean librarian completely in the dark as to how to acquire these materials and challenges his ability to successfully build a Korean collection to be useful both today and in the future. Eventually such deficient bibliographic coverage must be supplemented by the librarian's efforts. By searching and identifying prolific nontrade publishers and compiling their publications list, he may partly make up to some extent the deficient bibliographic coverage.

In addition, the Korean librarian has to overcome a primitive distribution system. There is no well-established and reliable vendor for foreign buyers in Korea. Relationships with vendors are personal and unbusinesslike. Numerous letters and inquiries precede book orders. Finding reliable vendors and maintaining good relations with them is an additional step toward overcoming the inadequacies of national bibliographic coverage, because it would be of no use to identify and select material without a vendor who can secure the selected material and supply it to the library.