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A CJK BACKLOG PROJECT: LOW BUDGETED AND USING STUDENT ASSISTANTS

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BACKGROUND

At the beginning of the 1994-1995 academic school year, the Library Administration gave the East Asian Resources unit in Davis Library at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill \$6,000.00 to decrease and eliminate the backlog of materials in the Chinese, Japanese, and Korean (CJK) languages. It was stipulated by the Library Administration that the project to eliminate the backlog of 2,300 CJK titles (ninety percent Chinese, nine percent Japanese, and one percent Korean) was to use the three-student team that had been formed to work on another CJK project, now deemed less urgent.

Because a student team was prescribed, it was not possible at the start of the project to estimate how much could be accomplished. Therefore a specific number goal was not set; the Administration encouraged us to use this project as a benchmark of how much an in-house project using only students could achieve.

STAFF

The student team consisted of two sophomores with intermediate reading ability in Chinese and one native speaker of Chinese who was a graduate student. The project aimed at using these students to do copy cataloging of the backlogged Chinese titles. The planning, training and supervision of the project devolved on the Cataloger of East Asian Language Materials. The Cataloger's assistant, the Library School Graduate Assistant, who worked in the unit for twenty hours a week, took charge of processing into the collection all the materials cataloged. There were two other student assistants, working for a total of twenty hours a week, who helped with precataloging searching and with inputting cataloged CJK records in the OCLC Online Computer Library Center, Inc., (OCLC) database, the Online Union Catalog (OLUC).

EQUIPMENT

The cataloging unit has one OCLC CJK Plus workstation, one Okidata Microline printer, one Data Research Associates (DRA) library on-line computer, and its accompanying Digital LA70 printer. This equipment was shared daily by both the project participants and those who performed the usual cataloging routines.

PREPARATION FOR THE PROJECT

(1) Communication between the Library Administration and the Cataloger

Before the project began, the Library Administration and the Cataloger thoroughly discussed the pros and cons of a project utilizing student help only. Topics taken up in the discussion were: the Cataloger's extra workload with training nonlibrary-oriented students to perform the procedures for copy cataloging, scheduling nonconflicting students' work at the OCLC CJK Plus workstation, finding enough working space to accommodate the increase in student workers, the process of reviewing cataloging copy, and the very possible risk of a high student turnover rate during the period the project took place. The Cataloger stressed the importance of flexibility in managing such a project in the unique East Asian Resources environment in our library to which the Library Administration readily agreed.

(2) Training students as copy catalogers

Perceiving the difference between training regular library staff and nonlibrary student assistants to do copy cataloging and considering the time constraints of the project, the Cataloger decided to emphasize practical working knowledge for the students rather than teaching them the more involved and extensive procedures followed by a regular copy cataloger. Theoretical explanations of the revised *Anglo-American cataloging rules* (AACR2), bibliographic and authority records, machine-readable cataloging (MARC) tagging, subject cataloging, Library of Congress (LC) subject classification schedules, and LC shelflisting rules were introduced to the students only when questions arose and when such an explanation was considered necessary.

The training began with explaining the concepts of why we cataloged materials and how we went about it. This introduction was found very helpful to the students in understanding what they were doing and how their work would contribute to the end product of library services. On the first day of each student's work a Chinese romanization table was handed out the students were asked to learn these systems by themselves.

The students, after the brief introduction, set to work searching the OLUC for bibliographic records that matched the titles in hand and checking the authority records for entries found in the bibliographic records. The newly developed SCAN command in the CJK Plus program receives a lot of credit for making such searches easier and more efficient. Once the students got hands-on experience in searching and matching authority records for names, series titles, and subjects, they began to conceive of what descriptive and subject cataloging entailed.

The fact that only one of our students had the language proficiency to understand the complex Chinese texts gave us little difficulty in choosing her to be trained in the task of examining the works to apply appropriate subject headings. The other two sophomores were directed toward descriptive cataloging tasks and to finding call numbers for the titles they worked on.

At the beginning LC records were used as samples on which to practice cataloging and to gain familiarity with the format of cataloging records. Typographical errors in LC records were focussed upon to practice checking for errors. The Cataloger sorted OCLC member cataloging copy according to cataloging quality before presenting them to the students. The students used good copy records to practice checking descriptive bibliographic information as well as call numbers against our shelflist file. They also practiced assigning call numbers to the copy records if the records did not have call numbers given.

In assigning call numbers, the students were taught to apply the first subject heading given in the cataloging record to a search in our library's Data Research Associates (DRA) local database to find the call number that had been assigned to the same subject. This practice recovered eighty-five percent of call numbers appropriate to the materials in hand. The language-proficient student then examined the student-assigned subject headings against the material itself, the subject headings in our on-line public access catalog, and the LC subject headings. If the student found during this review that the subject headings needed revision, she would correct the call numbers accordingly.

Students were directed to refer to the LC classification schemes only if they had a question in assigning a call number for a specific title. This practice allowed the Cataloger to instruct the students in how to use the schemes and the tables that accompanied the schemes, such as those in the P and PL schemes, making the instruction more concrete and easier for the students to understand. The students quickly grasped the concepts of the LC classification schemes and they were using the schemes to assign call numbers early in the second week of their employment. Only the student reviewer received training in applying LC shelisting schemes.

(3) Quality control

Copy cataloging was input into the OLUC after the Cataloger reviewed it. The East Asian Resources Bibliographer proofread the printed catalog cards when they were produced; this enhanced the accuracy of the information being processed. Detected errors were corrected by the unit's Library Graduate Assistant in both the manual card file and the on-line file.

The students working in the project were asked to correct their own errors, thereby raising their awareness of how they made mistakes. But as the project moved

forward, it became increasingly clear that we could not hold back the material with errors for the students themselves to correct. Due to the scattered work hours of the students during the week and, at times, their absence for a variety of reasons, it was decided that the Cataloger and the student examiner would make corrections as soon as an error was detected. Also, the unit's Library Graduate Assistant participated in post cataloging maintenance.

If the same error was found to be made by one of the students persistently, the Cataloger collected several examples to explain to the student the nature of the error. This practice of error detection and quality control contributed to the smooth workflow throughout the time the project was active.

(4) Management of the project

As the project progressed, we encountered several constraints that hindered the smooth operation of the project and that required changes to be made.

(a) New acquisitions vs. backlogged materials

One of the inescapable limitations to the success of this project was the equipment and the work area it needed had to be shared with regular ongoing cataloging work. At the start the students working on the backlog cataloged only the backlogged titles while regularly assigned students worked solely with new incoming titles. As the project unfolded, the two parallel operations created in our limited working space a bottleneck of heaps of unfinished cataloged materials awaiting review and production into the OLUC. As a consequence, shelf space available for new acquisitions became more and more difficult to provide. Staff and students trying to work within this constricted area became increasingly stressed.

(b) Instability of student work scheduling and insufficiency of computer equipment

Although we were expecting alterations to the students' work schedules because they had study demands to meet, we found it quite a challenge to juggle schedules that changed on the average every two weeks for the three-member project team and the two regular students, especially with the operation of our one OCLC workstation. Besides this, computer time was also needed for the Cataloger to review the students' work and to produce records in the OLUC.

Adding to this pressure, we frequently ran into the situation of students wanting to make up their schedules in the same period of time. Although it was possible to simply deny these requests, we also had to consider that, if we

insisted on a strict scheduling policy, we might drive these students away from continuing work on the project. For our part, training anew fresh students in cataloging procedures was the least desirable option.

(c) **Increase in quantity of processing work**

The increasing amount of work required to process the material generated by the project, such as preparation of material for binding, filing shelflist cards, and so on, created substantial processing bottlenecks for our Graduate Library Assistant who historically had always played an important role in the processing procedures, catalog maintenance, and even in some work in public services. Our Assistant came to us through the Library School scholarship program, working as an intern in the unit for the two years while he or she studied library science. As the project progressed and production increased, the Assistant's work became confined to typing and filing shelflist cards.

This situation was unsatisfactory for both the Assistant and for us because we needed her refined computer skills for database maintenance in the DRA technical services module and other sophisticated processing tasks. For the Assistant's part, she wasn't provided much stimulation to learn library work by doing purely clerical work.

THE CHANGE

In view of these difficulties, we adjusted our strategy to integrate the backlog project into our regular cataloging work. Both the backlog team and the regular students became one cataloging team. The change was justified after we reconsidered the main purpose of this project which was to catalog the material still uncataloged and ultimately to improve access, to our users, to the East Asian material in our library's collections.

To ensure that any change in procedure would not deviate from our original objective but, instead, would simplify working procedures and clear the bottlenecks mentioned above to allow the project to proceed, we drew up a list of priorities for the students to follow.

The list consisted of changes to:

- (1) catalog newly acquired titles for which OCLC cataloging copy was found,
- (2) backlog for the time being all new titles requiring original cataloging,
- (3) catalog backlogged titles after all new titles able to be processed had been cataloged, and
- (4) help out if called upon with shelflist filing. (Having the knowledge gained in assigning call numbers, the students needed little instruction in how to file.)

These new procedures immediately smoothed out the flow of work in the unit. We witnessed improvements in areas such as:

- (1) Students knew what to do when they came in each day even if their supervisor was not present. Supervising and accommodating students working in the same time period became easier for the Cataloger.
- (2) There was only one batch of student work to review instead of two. It enabled the cataloger not only to reduce the stressful working conditions but also hastened the review of student work and the feedback on their work to the students.
- (3) As newly acquired titles were either cataloged or backlogged, shelf space became more available for more new acquisitions; the flow of materials within the unit became smoother.
- (4) With students participating in filing shelflist cards, the Library Graduate Assistant was relieved of doing only routine clerical work and could contribute more time to DRA local database maintenance.

In the readjustments made in managing the project, all the students learned one another's jobs. Once the change was made, the team tackled vigorously the tasks that needed to be done. Throughout the project we could not avoid making further adjustments because of the students' changing work schedules; however, none of the students left our employ. By retaining these students, the resulting sum reached in the project was much beyond what we estimated it would be.

THE RESULTS

The backlog before the project began was 2,300 titles in 3,046 volumes. As we said above, ninety percent were in the Chinese language, nine percent were Japanese, and one percent were Korean. The project ran from 1 September 1994 to 11 August 1995. The following statistics reveal the outcome of our project.

Table 1. Number of titles and volumes of the CJK backlog cataloged

MONTH	TITLES*	VOLUMES
September	175	186
October	127	153
November	182	188
December	164	178
January**	97	105
February**	2	2
March**	5	5
April	200	203
May**	71	80
June	136	145
July	150	154

August	243	252
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Totals	1,552	1,651

"Titles" refers to each unique title being cataloged. "Volumes" refers to each physical piece that was processed. Thus, one title may be a two-volume or three-volume set, etc.

From January to March a large quantity of new acquisitions came in. The students were directed during this period to work on processing the new titles to prevent new titles that can be processed from being backlogged. In May student attendance at work was at its lowest due to final exams and the semester's end. The students continuing with us did not return until 17 May.

The following numbers show the amount of new acquisitions processed and the amount placed in the backlog during this period.

Month	Processed		Backlogged	
	Titles	Volumes	Titles	Volumes
January	81	122	78	183
February	278	382	25	25
March	166	216	1	1
April	75	121	11	15
May	11	47	6	6
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Totals	611	888	121	230

CONCLUSIONS

The project to use student help for performing work at a technically sophisticated level was considered a success. The prime advantage was low cost. It was also easier to control the quality of the product because it was an in-house operation.

We found that the major shortcomings of such a project were:

- (1) Student utilization caused some uncertainty because attendance and quitting were not predictable.
- (2) The training and supervision of the students placed a heavy burden on the supervisor's time and resources. Quality control of cataloged materials needs an extra effort of attention from the library professional staff.
- (3) It proved difficult for the supervisor to manage the sharing of cataloging equipment and working space for both the project and for regular ongoing work.

Several good lessons were learned from the experience of managing such work and of solving the problems that cropped up.

- (1) Flexibility in procedures and planning is important.
- (2) Team work and training students to handle each other's jobs in an effective practice.
- (3) The help of other professional staff in the unit was very productive.

We were very reassured to have such team spirit on such a project which ensured the smooth operation of the project and its success.

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