Chinese Rare Book Resources in Rlin

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RLIN (Research Libraries Information Network) is the automated information system developed and maintained by RLG (Research Libraries Group) in Mountain View, California, U.S.A. The CJK (i.e., Chinese, Japanese, and Korean characters used in library processing and information retrieval) component of the RLIN database was introduced in 1983, and today it contains about 2,000,000 titles of modern books published in East Asian languages. In the late 1980s RLG proposed an initiative to create full bibliographic records in machine-readable form for pre-nineteenth-century printed books and manuscripts in the form of an international union catalogue of Chinese rare books. For a number of reasons the timing was right and, indeed, it is unlikely that a project of the kind seriously could have been undertaken anytime earlier. For example, by the last decade of the century collections of Chinese rare books had become stabilized and accessible, either in public collections or in known private libraries. New inventories and simple catalogues in book form had been produced or were underway for many of the books. A convergence of sinological and bibliographical research methodologies made possible more sophisticated levels of cataloguing and at the same time demanded a greater variety of bibliographical data for scholarship, especially in order to serve the needs of emerging fields such as East Asian book history. And finally, after several years of use the RLIN CJK system had become refined enough to cope with the complexities of online cataloguing of Chinese rare books.

Great quantities of Chinese rare books exist in the libraries of China and Japan, where most have been under some form of traditional bibliographic control, and where simple descriptions of many have appeared in various published book catalogues. Although the East Asian libraries of Europe and North America hold lesser quantities of books, they nevertheless contain many rare editions, and these often have not been adequately catalogued. All these disparate collections and their idiosyncratic catalogues had never previously been viewed comprehensively as a single resource that could be subjected to uniform cataloguing standards, and few attempts had been made to bridge the gap between the realms of traditional Chinese rare book scholarship and modern library computer technology. It was in this environment that the RLG Chinese Rare Books Project was conceived.

At the time, in 1988, only the National Central Library (NCL) in Taiwan had created automated records for its holdings of Chinese rare books, so the first step was to devise a conversion program to load them onto RLIN in order to review their form and
contents, with the hope that they would serve as a”ase file” for the proposed project. The jingbu section of Chinese lassics” (c. 1,400 titles) was successfully loaded into the RLIN database and, although the records ultimately could not be used for the kind of copy cataloging intended, the titles have remained online as a valuable reference source. It is now understood that the original NCL records have been updated and expanded, and a new priority for the project will be to negotiate a means of converting the entire NCL rare books file for loading on RLIN in a manner consistent with the current standards of the Chinese Rare Books Project.

The next step of the so-called “ilot” phase of the project was to create an International Advisory Committee (IAC) of experts in the field to compile draft cataloging guidelines and standards, which could be tested by traditional rare book cataloguers together with professional RLIN CJK cataloguers. In fact, overcoming the doubts harbored by both factions about the feasibility of successfully integrating their two professional methodologies into a unified cataloguing technique for dealing with this complex publishing and textual tradition was one of the first major hurdles of the project. In February 1989 the first IAC meeting was convened at the Library of Congress in Washington and was attended by librarians and scholars from a wide variety of backgrounds. At the same time a group of five rare book cataloguers was invited from China, four from the Peking University Library and one from the library of the Academy of Sciences (Beijing), to implement the draft guidelines and enter the first trial records for the project together with colleagues from the East Asian libraries of Columbia University and Princeton University. Altogether about 400 RLIN records were created on behalf of the two libraries over a period of five months, after which another meeting was held to reassess the guidelines and cataloguing rules. On the basis of this experience it was possible to solicit participants for the project, find a location for the central editorial office (Princeton University), and submit a cohesive plan for the funding of the project.

After funding for the first two years was secured, the Chinese Rare Books Project officially was launched in September 1991. From the start the project faced staunch challenges, such as the need to create the very guidelines by which the cataloguing was to be carried out. Although the pilot phase had a produced a set of guidelines by which the initial records were catalogued, it was up to the new central editorial office to refine them through the trial and error of cataloguing the widest possible range of books. By spring of 1993, after a special IAC meeting held in Princeton, guidelines for the cataloguing and creation of machine-readable records for Chinese rare books were submitted to the cataloguing standards committee of the American Library Association (ALA), which formed a special task force made up of western rare book specialists as well as East Asian cataloguers to review the guidelines. Most of the recommendations of the ALA task force were incorporated into the guidelines and implemented during 1993 and 1994. In April of 1995 another IAC meeting was held in Princeton and the guidelines once more underwent point by point scrutiny. In the following years additional changes were made to the Chinese and English versions of the text, and now Cataloging Guidelines for
creating Chinese rare books records in machine-readable form is about to be published in a bilingual edition.

As a practical necessity, a chronological cut-off date is used by the guidelines to define the scope of the project as all Chinese language printed books and bound manuscripts produced in China before 1796" (i.e. through the Qianlong period). 1796 has replaced the more traditional date of 1644, or the end of the Ming dynasty, as a reasonable date for inclusion. This coincides conveniently with the current notion of 1800 as a cut-off date for western rare books, which approximates the time of the transition from the hand press to machine-driven printing presses. Incidentally, Chinese language books published outside of China (for example, in Korea or in Japan), as well as non-Chinese language books published in China, are not included. The cataloguing guidelines developed for the project, however, clearly allow for chronological extension or regional expansion of the scope, should that be desired at a later time. With the exception of the rare book collection of Princeton Gest Library, where our office is located, and a few isolated examples, we generally do not get to inspect the original editions we are cataloguing. Rather we work from detailed worksheets, supplied by participating libraries, and accompanied by relevant photocopies from the books. In fact, these paper documents provide us with an invaluable research archive.

Finding a common ground between the special characteristics of traditional Chinese books and the specific conditions and requirements of online cataloguing, without harming the integrity of either, always loomed as the chief concern of the compilers of the guidelines. Although the guidelines are intended for libraries following ALA/Library of Congress cataloguing rules, and although they are based as fully as possible on AACR2 (Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, 2nd edition, 1988 revision), it is hoped that they will find a much larger audience. Here it needs to be emphasized that the project does not merely transfer existing data from one form (paper) to another (electronic) but, in fact, catalogues each item anew in the course of creating these RLINE records. The following are but a few issues addressed by the guidelines that go beyond the usual comparisons of western books vs. Chinese books or manual cataloguing vs. online cataloguing. Firstly, the Chinese Rare Books Project attempts to standardize the source of cataloguing information for traditional Chinese books, such as preferring the caption (juanduan) as the chief source of title and statement of responsibility, etc. Moreover, the sources are always indicated in the body of the record. New standards of edition discrimination have been introduced, especially the means of distinguishing among unacknowledged, contemporary, variant editions. Indexing has been expanded to provide access points far beyond the traditional author, title, and subject indexes of manual catalogues, offering the capacity to search for all sorts of corporate and personal names and their various functions, even including the names of former book collectors and blockcarvers. The examples of our rare book records to be shown shortly will clearly demonstrate how some of the problems have been dealt with.
The value of accurate descriptions of and improved access to early printed books and manuscripts for scholars cannot be overestimated. The original planning and advisory committees recognized a number of deficiencies that needed to be overcome in order for an online cataloguing project for Chinese rare books to be successful. The problems included a lack of uniform standards for cataloguing, such as no universally accepted criteria for bibliographic description, no collation data in many printed catalogues, and unsophisticated edition discrimination. In compiling the guidelines and developing a work methodology close attention has been paid to these particular problems, and satisfying results have been achieved. It is worth remembering that a database catalogue not only enumerates the titles of books and the names of authors, but it allows for establishing relationships among them, and as it grows the likelihood of fruitful searches increases immensely.

By the time that the first working phase of the project, begun in September 1991, came to an end in April 1996, a total of 7,495 Chinese rare book records had been created by the project and entered in RLIN. Since 1996, after coming completely under the administration of Princeton University, our online records have nearly doubled to a total of 14,380 (see Fig. 1) The distribution of the titles among the four main divisions of the traditional classification scheme, namely jingbu (classics), shibu (history), zibu (philosophy), and jibu (belles-lettres), is surprisingly balanced, although the jingbu and jibu sections are larger, especially the latter one. To date, altogether twenty-five libraries have participated in the Chinese Rare Books Project, eighteen in North America and Europe, and seven in China. The titles within the scope of the project held by the following libraries have been completely catalogued and entered online: University of Alberta, Columbia University, Freer and Sackler Galleries of Art, University of Hawaii, University of Minnesota, New York Public Library, University of Pennsylvania, University of Pittsburgh, Princeton University, University of Southern California, Stanford University, and University of Toronto. The libraries of the University of British Columbia, University of California at Berkeley, University of Chicago, and London University, as well as the library of the Academy of Sciences (Beijing), Fudan University, Hubei Provincial Library, Liaoning Provincial Library, Peking University, Renmin University, and Tianjin Library are still active participants. At present, the Harvard-Yenching Library and the Library of Congress in Washington are preparing to begin participation.

As I have argued elsewhere, for the Chinese Rare Books Project to be truly successful it must employ and promote the following three principles: the highest standards of scholarship, the most advanced technology, and the broadest international co-operation.
Now I would like to show you some typical examples of our records. For those of you not familiar with the MARC (MAchine-Readable Cataloguing) format, in this case the USMARC version as modified by our project, here is a labeled RLIN record.

*Yunpu benyi* (Fig. 2), from Princeton Gest Library, shows fields and subfields generally encountered in a project record (the edition source and collation of the woodblock format are important elements of the notes area). Compare it with the meager entry (Fig. 3) in the Chinese national union catalogue of rare books, *Zhongguo guji shanben shumu*, published in book form. Also compare the entry (Fig. 4) in the rare book catalogue of Academia Sinica, *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo shanben shumu*, also in book form, which contains a typo (*ke* for *dou* in the collator name), which in an online catalogue can be corrected at will.

*Yangchun xianzhi* (Fig. 5), from UC Berkeley East Asian Library, provides another rather typical project record of a unicum edition with a distinguished provenance. *Zhouyi jianyi* (Fig. 6), from the Gest Library, is a rather more complex record with numerous personal name added entries for enhanced access. This automated record may be compared with the traditional bibliographic description (Fig. 7) by Wang Zhongmin for the Library of Congress copy of the same edition. Note Wang’s digressive comments and lack of concrete, comprehensive description.

Finally, I would like to illustrate the sort of problem that the Chinese Rare Books Project takes very seriously. The following two records for *Dongpo xiansheng shijizhu* (Fig. 8 and Fig. 9), both from the Liaoning Provincial Library, provide an example of the kind of edition discrimination that the project willingly assumes responsibility for. Although traditionally catalogued as two separate editions, we have clearly described them as two separate issues of the same edition.

Compare the NCL rare book catalogue (*Guoli zhongyang tushuguan shanben shumu*) description (Fig. 10) of different editions, which agrees with many other catalogue entries, such as that of the *Zhongguo guji shanben shumu* (Fig. 11), which here includes the very Liaoning copies that we have catalogued. As evidence of the circumstances underlying our conclusion, we may compare photocopies of the caption title page of the Mao Wei edition in an early impression (Fig. 12) with the same page of a later impression (Fig. 13), after the woodblocks had got into the hands of Wang Yongji, to see that the later issue by Wang has been physically altered. This is one of many ways in which the Chinese Rare Books Project hopes to contribute to the qualitative development of this important resource.

Figure 1.
CHINESE RARE BOOK RECORDS ON RLIN BY CRBP PARTICIPATING LIBRARIES

Cataloging completed for twelve libraries
New York Public Library (NYPO/NYPG), University of Alberta (ABUO),
University of Hawaii (HAUO), University of Southern California (CSCO),
University of Pennsylvania (PAUO), University of Minnesota (MNUG),
Freer/Sackler Gallery (DCFO), Stanford University (CSUO), University of
Pittsburgh (PAPO), combined total 371
University of Toronto (ONTG) 532
Columbia University (NYCP/NYCG) 1,109
Princeton University (NJPX) 2,094
4,106

Cataloging continuing for thirteen libraries
University of Chicago (ILCO) 332
University of California/Berkeley (CUBO) 208
University of British Columbia (BCUO) 969
London University (UKSO) 266
Oxford University (UKOR) 2
Bayerische Staatsbibliothek (GYMO) 3
1,780

Tianjin Library (CHTR) 639
Renmin University (CHRR) 1,121
Chinese Academy of Sciences (CHAO) 1,501
Liaoning Provincial Library (CHLR) 1,464
Hubei Provincial Library (CHHR) 1,455
Peking University (CPUO) 1,257
Fudan University (CHFR) 1,057
8,494

Total Chinese rare book records on RLIN as of 31 December 1999: 14,380

N.B. The National Central Library (Taipei), Oxford University/Bodleian Library, and Bayerische
Staatsbibliothek either have participated in the pilot project or have contributed a small number
of trial records only.

Figure 2
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Figure 4
Figure 5
1) Tung-p'o hsienosheng shihochiochu ;†bsanoshihoeihochüan /†cSu Shih chu ; Wang Shih-p'eng tsuanochi ; Mao Wei yüeh.

246 3 東坡詩集詩
260 [China : †bMao Wei, †cMing Wan-†i, between 1590 and 1620]
260 [China : †b茅 繆, †c明 万曆, between 1590 and 1620]
300 20 v. ; †c27 cm.
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注：

- 表示方法仅供参考，具体含义需结合上下文理解。