

RLG'S EAST ASIAN STUDIES PROGRAM†

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ABSTRACT

Membership in the East Asian Studies Program of the Research Libraries Group provides more than a subscription to a bibliographic utility. It is a chance to contribute to a program which encourages involvement, and provides members the opportunity to cooperate with other East Asian collections to set goals, and design and implement cooperative projects that support East Asian research and scholarship. Among those projects and concerns are the East Asian Microfilming Project, the Task Force on Rare Chinese Books, the East Asian Cataloging Subcommittee, a cooperative East Asian retrospective conversion project, and an East Asian Conspectus for collection development.

The East Asian Program objectives guide the developments of the Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN). Since 1983, RLIN has supported the input, display, retrieval, storage, and transmission of bibliographic records containing Chinese, Japanese, and Korean ("CJK") scripts. Four other developments promise to have far-reaching impact; (1) An RLIN CJK Thesaurus, (2) free text searching in CJK scripts, (3) the RLG Multi-Script Workstation, and (4) potential cooperative ventures with institutions in East Asia.

This report outlines the structure of the RLG East Asian Studies Program, describes how the program operates and the cooperative projects currently underway, and illustrates how enhancements to RLIN support East Asian Program objectives to bring scholarly access to East Asian materials from far beyond the walls of any library.

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INTRODUCTION

Let's face it: All libraries are not created equal. But all face fiscal constraints, constraints that impede libraries' common commitment to preserve and present the materials necessary to support scholarship and research. The research libraries that own the Research Libraries Group have created and manage cooperative programs to preserve and enhance our national capacity for research in all fields and to improve scholars' ability to locate and retrieve relevant information. The East Asian Studies Program is but one of these programs. I am the liaison between the RLG members participating in this program and RLG central staff.

In this report, I would like to outline the structure of the RLG East Asian Program to give you some context; then describe how the program operates and the cooperative projects currently underway; and finally illustrate how enhancements to the Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN) support the East Asian Program objectives. My report incorporates comments from a written evaluation recently completed by RLG members participating in the East Asian Studies program.

STRUCTURE OF THE EAST ASIAN STUDIES PROGRAM

All RLG owner-members automatically may choose to participate in the East Asian Program, and 19 have done so. Seven other research libraries have joined as associate or special members only to participate in the East Asian program. These 26 members form the East Asian Program Committee (or "EAPC"), which provides a forum to discuss issues of concern in RLG East Asian libraries and to devise plans for the implementation of projects responding to these issues. RLIN is simply a tool of the program, a tool that anyone can use. Any institution — even individual — can subscribe to RLIN services through the Cooperative Library Agency for Systems and Services (CLASS) in San Jose,

California. But RLG is more than a bibliographic utility. Affiliation with the RLG East Asian Program brings involvement with other East Asian collections on an equal basis, to set goals, design and implement cooperative projects, and participate in various subgroups focused on specialized concerns.

The size of the East Asian collections represented on the EAPC varies greatly, which suffers from the problems common to any joint effort seeking to coordinate the contributions of members of unequal size and significance. The EAPC addresses this in three ways:

1. A "smorgasbord" of activities and projects. Each member can choose to participate, and to what degree, in the activity/project that most fits in with the members' own interest and local priorities. The projects and goals of the committee are reviewed by members annually.
2. "Day-to-day communicability" by means of an electronic bulletin board and regular meetings of the Program's Steering and full committees. These allow each member institution to keep in touch with the status and progress of the other members and of joint projects.
3. "Task forces" or "working groups" dedicated to a certain project or concern. These groups conduct surveys, poll opinions, and recommend steps to implement EAPC projects, supplementing the work of the full committee. Membership to these subgroups is open to any RLG librarian who has expertise in the special area concerned. Let me describe these subgroups in the context of the EAPC's current projects and activities.

SUBGROUPS AND ACTIVITIES OF THE EAST ASIAN PROGRAM COMMITTEE

The East Asian Microfilming Project Managers oversee the implementation of the two-year cooperative project begun last

September to microfilm brittle Chinese materials published between 1880–1949. This EAMP group gathered together the information necessary to submit the successful proposal to the NEH and Henry Luce foundations for the \$270,000 for financing the project. The full committee is now planning a subsequent cooperative preservation project.

The Task Force on Rare Chinese Books works toward establishing an “International Union Catalog of Rare Chinese Books” (or shen pen). In the short-term, the Task Force is identifying the expertise necessary to identify and conserve rare Chinese books, and has surveyed the membership on their holdings of Chinese materials from the Sung through Ch’ien-lung periods. The first phase identified — of what promises to be a multi-phased project — is to create an on-line union catalog of the rare Chinese books held by RLG members.

The East Asian Cataloging Subcommittee focuses on RLIN applications of established cataloging rules and interpretations for the processing of East Asian materials. This past year the Subcommittee has devoted itself to a detailed survey of RLIN CJK users on: searching and input problems associated with forming Chinese keywords; how local policies affect the ability of other members to use a libraries’ cataloging unchanged; and what makes a CJK record desirable as source copy. The Subcommittee conducts open meetings for all RLIN East Asian technical processing staff that serve as a forum to discuss RLIN processing questions and issues.

Of course, not all projects or activities require a working group. The EAPC as a whole is preparing a proposal for a cooperative East Asian retrospective conversion project and striving to coordinate future efforts to divide responsibilities among member libraries for collection development and cooperative cataloging. The EAPC pioneered work on the East Asian Conspectus, a major accomplishment cited by EAPC members in their evaluation. Through the Conspectus the Program has identified the strengths and weaknesses of members’ vernacular collections, and

laid a foundation for eliminating unnecessary duplication. All EAPC projects and activities are supported by RLG central staff, who ultimately report to the RLG Board of Governors, the directors of the research institutions to which EAPC members belong. Cooperation thus has a corporate presence. Through the RLG East Asian Program Committee, its member institutions are budgeted for cooperation.

ENHANCEMENTS TO RLIN SUPPORTING EAPC OBJECTIVES

RLIN, and the collective records entered by members into the RLIN data base, support EAPC program objectives. And East Asian Program objectives guide the development of RLIN enhancements. The CJK enhancements to RLIN are now in their fourth year of operation: On March 2, 1987 the number of CJK records in the RLIN data base containing East Asian scripts passed the quarter-million mark. As Dr. Marsha Wagner, Director of the C. V Starr East Asian Library at Columbia commented: "The shared data base reinforces the enthusiastic attitude of cooperation among participating libraries and facilitates interlibrary loan of East Asian materials." The enhancements support not only the core program objective of technical processing and bibliographic control of East Asian vernacular materials, but also: preservation, by indicating which East Asian materials have been designated to be filmed; collection development, by showing which materials have been acquired by other members; and shared resources, by supporting extremely flexible searching capabilities for reference use and including complete local holdings information for inter-library loans.

Four other developments promise to have far-reaching impact: (1) the RLIN CJK Thesaurus; (2) December 1986 RLIN Searching Enhancements; (3) the RLG Multi-script Workstation; (4) potential cooperative ventures with institutions in East Asia.

The RLIN CJK Thesaurus, implemented March 1, 1987, is

a resource file of 35,000 records, with each record representing an East Asian character. Each character is identified by an RLIN East Asian Character Code (REACC), which is then mapped to the codes in the East Asian character code standards established in the PRC, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. For RLIN CJK users, the Thesaurus is an on-line, multi-indexed, multi-lingual dictionary; each character record shows such information as radical, stroke-count, readings in the three East Asian languages, and how to compose the character. The CJK Thesaurus also shows all variant forms associated with a particular character. The CJK Thesaurus can be consulted even while creating or updating a bibliographic record.

The RLIN CJK Thesaurus can be considered an "East Asian character authority file" for CJK bibliographic records and is administered by the Library of Congress. (Hard copy of the REACC graphics is available through LC's Cataloging Distribution Service.) As extensions to East Asian code standards are implemented, LC will add the code mappings to ensure that East Asian MARC records can be accurately converted.

The Searching Enhancements to RLIN, implemented in December 1986, have been hailed by RLIN reference librarians as "the most revolutionary enhancement in the last five years". RLIN has always had extremely flexible searching capabilities that allow, for example, access to records by subject indexes and key words in title or corporate/conference names. Such indexes also support searches with CJK characters; one set to retrieve all variant forms of a character and another to retrieve only the specific form (for example, PRC simplified characters rather than traditional forms). The Searching Enhancements, implemented in December 1986, let RLIN users choose from an extended range of qualifiers to restrict the scope of a search, including: by a particular library or libraries in a certain geographic area; by a range of publishing dates; by a specific language or geographic code; by text entered either in Roman or CJK characters anywhere in a bibliographic record, including notes.

The RLG Multi-script Workstation is called "Multi-script" because it will support not just CJK but all other RLIN-supported non-Roman scripts, and "workstation" because it will feature CJK word-processing and CJK interface with other software as well as RLIN functions. RLG has offered RLIN terminal emulation software for PC's since 1985; in 1986 this software was enhanced to support Cyrillic characters in RLIN as well. Later this year, software will be available to support all non-Roman scripts on AT-class machines configured with the appropriate ROM character board and monitor. Eventually, we expect that scholars will be able to search the RLIN data base for relevant materials; download the records to floppies on their workstation; massage the data into bibliographies and text; and print the multi-script document off on a letter-quality or even laser printer.

The dramatic technological developments in the past four years have slashed the cost of such workstations. Actual cost depends on the options a user chooses to fit local needs. But the entire RLG multi-script workstation configuration, including software and printer, can cost less than \$6000 per unit. Members may well start considering locating such workstations outside the walls of the library — in Asian Studies departments or faculty offices, for example.

Potential cooperative ventures with institutions in East Asia are actively being pursued. More than two years ago, RLG signed a memorandum of understanding with the Academia Sinica in Beijing outlining possible cooperative ventures. Last December, Shi Jian, Director of Academia Sinica, reported in a letter to RLG that at their 2nd National Meeting they had discussed the necessity for "the Libraries of Academia Sinica, Peking University, and Tsinghua University to build an information network such as your RLIN in China for the cause of Sino-American scientific, technical, and cultural exchange". They concluded, "The Library of Academia Sinica ought to cooperate furthest [sic] with RLG in developing the Chinese Research Libraries Information Network." RLG staff visited Academia Sinica last August, and this June a

delegation from Academia Sinica will be visiting RLG to continue our discussions on programmatic and technical cooperation.

SUMMARY

In summary, the RLG East Asian Studies Program focuses on the needs of East Asian research and scholarship. The RLG East Asian Program Committee provides the corporate structure necessary for pursuing solutions to common problems on a nationwide basis. The EAPC structure allows members to contribute according to each one's ability and local priorities while benefiting from projects they could not possibly finance on their own budgets. New RLIN enhancements — the CJK Thesaurus, free text searching in CJK scripts, and the RLG Multi-script Workstation — together with the possibilities of international cooperation, promise to bring scholarly access to East Asian materials from far beyond the walls of any library, big or small.