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*Sören Edgren, "Chinese Rare Books Project Report", The East Asian Library Journal 10, no. 2 (2001): 1-5, accessed January 14, 2017,
https://library.princeton.edu/eastasian/EALJ/edgren_sren.EALJ.v10.n02.p001.pdf*

Chinese Rare Books Project Report

SÖREN EDGREN

The Chinese Rare Books Project (CRBP) is an international cooperative project to create a unique electronic catalogue of Chinese rare-book holdings. The work was initiated in 1991 by the Research Libraries Group (RLG), and since then the Central Editorial Office of the project has been located in the East Asian (formerly Gest) Library of Princeton University. The chief aim of the project is to catalogue and enter all available Chinese rare-book holdings in North American libraries on the RLG Union Catalog, a major international bibliographic database maintained in Mountain View, California. Although participation is voluntary, the project expects to eventually include all significant holdings in the United States and Canada. Concurrently, the project encourages participation by Asian and European libraries in order to achieve the ultimate goal of an international union catalogue of Chinese rare books. In fact, over 50 percent of current on-line records represent the holdings of libraries outside North America.

The project was announced in 1992 by John Haeger in the *Gest Library Journal*.¹ I had the pleasure of making two brief reports on the project in 1993,² but since then many changes have taken place, and much progress has been made. It is fitting, therefore, to take this opportunity to offer an up-to-date report, one that describes the state of the

project as of July 2002, to the readers of the *East Asian Library Journal*.

In my first report in the *Gest Library Journal* I noted that, as of September 1992, on-line records for the holdings of nine North American libraries had been created. I pointed out that work on the holdings of two libraries in Beijing, the Peking University Library and the Library of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, would soon begin. At that time the total number of records was a mere 734. Progress was slow at first because each of the titles had to be catalogued anew, and at the same time we had to compile the cataloguing rules by which the work was to be done. Whenever a rule was changed, we felt obliged to revise earlier records before creating new ones according to the new rule. Nevertheless, we made steady progress, and three years later, in September 1995, we could boast of having 5,836 full bibliographic records on-line for fourteen libraries, including five in China. As of July 2002, statistics show that a total of 18,841 records have been produced for Chinese books and manuscripts published before 1796, including the full collections of the East Asian libraries of Columbia University, Princeton University, and the University of British Columbia. Because of the way that bibliographic records for identical editions automatically “cluster” on the RLG Union Catalog, as many as 10 percent of the records are duplicated. To date thirty major libraries in China, Europe, and North America are associated with the project. Sixteen of the libraries are inactive, having contributed all the available data, and cataloguing for them is currently suspended; fourteen libraries are actively contributing data, and cataloguing for them is ongoing. (See the appended list of libraries.)

The latest additions to the project are the Indianapolis Museum of Art, whose small collection of unique fifteenth-century illustrated Buddhist sutras has been completely catalogued; the American Museum of Natural History (New York), whose Berthold Laufer Collection was acquired in China exactly one century ago; and the Richard Rudolph East Asian Library of the University of California at Los Angeles. The year 2002 will also see CRBP participation by medium-sized collections such as the East Asian Collection at Indiana University and the East Asian Library of Brown University. In the fall of 2002 we expect to welcome the Wason Collection of Cornell University as an active CRBP member. The project’s major accomplishment in the second half of 2001 was the

completion of on-line cataloguing of all 1,430 Ming and earlier printed editions in the Harvard-Yenching Library. Later in 2002 planning will begin for cataloguing of Harvard's Ming and Qing manuscripts and all early-Qing printed editions. In the meantime, efforts are being made to increase the total of on-line records for the collection of the Library of Congress.

As indicated above, one of the project's greatest challenges was to create guidelines for on-line cataloguing that fully recognized the special characteristics of Chinese traditional books and the value of Chinese bibliographic tradition. Through an extensive compilation and review process, which involved a twenty-two-member committee, a bilingual edition of guidelines was compiled. *Cataloguing Guidelines for Creating Chinese Rare Book Records in Machine-Readable Form* was published by RLG at the end of 2000, and the long-awaited volume has been enthusiastically received. A recent unsolicited comment from a professional Chinese cataloguer reads in part, "Your book can serve as the Bible, not only for cataloguing Chinese rare books, but also for the standardization of cataloguing terminology related to MARC tags, AACR2, etc. [even in the] Chinese version."

In 1996, administration of the Chinese Rare Books Project was transferred from Stanford University, which was affiliated with the Research Libraries Group in California, to Princeton University. Since September 1996, the Chinese Rare Books Project has been administratively organized within the Department of East Asian Studies of Princeton University, and Professor Susan Naquin, Department of History, serves as project director. The Central Editorial Office currently has three staff members: Sören Edgren, editorial director; Chi-wah Chan, cataloguer; and Guangmei Li, data-entry clerk. In addition to performing their normal duties, members of the CRBP staff continue to answer librarians' queries related to Chinese rare-book cataloguing as well to assist scholars searching for CRBP data in the RLG Union Catalog.

To date, several foundations have helped to underwrite the Chinese Rare Books Project. The project has received major economic support from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), the Henry Luce Foundation, the Starr Foundation, the Chiang Ching-Kuo Foundation, and a significant anonymous donor. The Research Libraries

Group has made valuable cost-sharing contributions, and Princeton University has hosted the project since 1991 and solely administered the project since 1996, thereby providing for all overhead needs.

At the beginning, RLG rightly saw the project as an opportunity to help its member libraries in North America address a growing international demand for access to these unique resources. It was equally clear that participation by major libraries in China would increase the value of the contents of the database, as well as provide a vehicle for unprecedented scholarly cooperation.

In all ways, the Chinese Rare Books Project greatly expands access to the rich trove of Chinese books and manuscripts not only in the West but in China itself. To be able to state that the project now enables scholars to work as effectively in traditional Chinese sources as they can in most contemporary sources in major research collections represents no small accomplishment.

CHINESE RARE-BOOK-PROJECT RECORDS ON THE RLG UNION CATALOG

Records for sixteen inactive 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), Indianapolis Museum of Art (INMA), Bayerische Staatsbibliothek (GYMO), Oxford University (UKOR), combined total:	426
University of Toronto (ONTG)	536
University of British Columbia (BCUO)	1,064
Columbia University (NYCP, NYCG)	1,120
Princeton University (NJPX)	<u>2,149</u>
	5,295

Records for fourteen active libraries

Harvard-Yenching Library (MHVO)	1,703
Library of Congress (DCLP)	305

University of Chicago (ILCO)	379
University of California at Berkeley (CUBO)	219
American Museum of Natural History (NYMN)	13
University of California at Los Angeles (CULX)	246
London University (UKSO)	<u>342</u>
	3,207
Tianjin Library (CHTR)	1,120
Renmin University (CHRR)	1,828
Chinese Academy of Sciences (CHAO)	1,856
Liaoning Provincial Library (CHLR)	1,707
Hubei Provincial Library (CHHR)	1,488
Peking University (CPUO)	1,271
Fudan University (CHFR)	<u>1,069</u>
	10,339
Chinese rare-book records on the RLG Union Catalog as of July 31, 2002	18,841

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

NOTES

1. *Gest Library Journal* 5.1 (Spring 1992), pp. 90-92.
2. Ibid. 6.1 (Spring 1993), pp. 101-103; ibid. 6.2 (Winter 1993), pp. 103-105.