

**INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION TO REVEAL RARE CHINESE MATERIALS  
HIDDEN FOR HALF A CENTURY**

**by**

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Making Hidden Mexican, Jewish, and Chinese Collections Discoverable**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper discusses the international collaborative project between University of Washington Libraries and University of British Columbia Libraries (Canada) to reveal the hidden treasures of Chinese language materials, including rare books, special collections, archival materials, etc. printed from the 14th to the early 20th century. It addresses collaborations in project planning and management, resource sharing, staff exchange and training between the two institutions across national boundaries, and with academic libraries in China. The paper also demonstrates how international collaboration can optimize libraries’ capacity and resources to accomplish difficult tasks, and illustrates challenges of working with policies, laws, and regulations of different countries.

Among the best libraries specializing in East Asian studies in North America, the University of Washington (UW) Libraries and University of British Columbia (UBC) Library serve as major regional, national, and international bases of information and research about East Asia.

Through more than half a century of collection development, the two libraries have built outstanding collections including unique Chinese rare books and other special materials. Many of these special materials, however, are yet to be cataloged, due to the lack of funding and

staff expertise. In 2014, UW and UBC received jointly a CLIR grant of Cataloging Hidden Special Collections and Archives to conduct an 18-month project entitled *Discovering Modern China: University of Washington and University of British Columbia Collections* to catalog these hidden treasures and make them discoverable to users and scholars worldwide. This project is also one of only two international collaborative efforts ever funded by CLIR, and the first involving a Canadian university library. The grant enables UW and UBC to collaborate in project planning and resource sharing, staff exchange and training, and sharing collections and user services about these hidden materials. The CLIR project also enables us to receive expert consultation and personnel exchange from academic libraries in Asia. As a result, UW and UBC libraries will create 2,000 original bibliographic records in OCLC WorldCat and the Union Catalog of Rare Books of China Academic Library and Information System (CALIS), an Academic Library Consortium in China. Since its launching, the project has already created several hundreds of records and increased the awareness of and access to these treasures, which benefits not only the scholars of the two institutions but also scholars worldwide. An international joint effort as such, the work process is just as important as the result. This collaboration has been the core of this project from the very beginning and through its planning stage to current operational process.

#### 1. Identifying Hidden Treasures for the Project

UW and UBC library collections contain rare and unique materials originally owned by private families, scholars, and collectors. Many of them came to our libraries through various routes in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, during China's troublesome time. Throughout the past half century,

however, access to the proposed collections has been extremely limited, materials have been kept in storage and were not organized; on-site browsing has been the only method of access.

The Chinese collections of the two institutions identified for this project complement each other with their own uniqueness. For example, the UW collections include rare historical archives and unique special collections such as the wooden fish books, whereas the UBC collections are known for several noteworthy private collections of traditional thread-stitch bound rare books. Both collections are rich in the traditional thread-stitch bound books and recognized for their significant research value. To propose and plan for this project, we connected to the world renowned scholars who browsed and benefited from the hidden treasures in the two libraries. The scholars from the United States, Canada, China, and Europe not only gave strong recommendations but also helped with selection and planning. Some of them are leading international research teams and excited to see that we are also taking an international collaborative approach to unveil the hidden treasure to the world.

Phase One of the project focuses on searching the numerous un-cataloged materials to identify unique and highly valuable titles. We employed and engaged graduate students of Chinese studies for the first phase of the project to conduct bibliographical searching, sorting, creating inventory list of unique titles, and marking their preservation needs. For both institutions, especially UW, Phase One of the project has yielded a significant number of potential rare books for CLIR consultant librarian to evaluate.

## 2. Collaboration in Applying Cataloging Guidelines and Rules

The UW and UBC project teams follow closely the Research Library Group (RLG) *Cataloging Guidelines for Creating Chinese Rare Book Records in Machine-Readable Format* as well as the PCC RDA hybrid bibliographic records guidelines. Created to reconcile Anglo-American cataloging rules with cataloging practices of centuries-old traditional Chinese rare books, these guidelines set an international collaborative model ahead of us. The East Asian library community in North America has been working to apply these rules to the MARC 21 format. As we plan not to confuse the guidelines with the new cataloging rules of RDA (Resource Description and Access), we have been mindful about maximizing sustainability and interoperability by adding hybrid RDA fields and relationships in the online bibliographic records created for the project.

The Head of Technical Services of UW East Asian Library, Charlene Chou, has prepared questions and comments derived from the rare book cataloging practices of the project, and will submit them to the Committee of Technical Processing of Council on East Asian Libraries. Charlene is leading the committee and its rare book working group.

### 3. Identifying the Importance of Communication

Both the UW and UBC project teams have selected unique and rare materials from the hidden collections to create original bibliographic records. We have established a clear scope of work and workflow through close communication. The two teams took day trips to visit each other in and their libraries to inspect the collection conditions and work space setup. We took advantage of communication technology to conduct regular Skype meetings and instant messaging and image sharing. Both teams have launched the project websites and posted

project status reports, exciting discoveries and scholarly engagement activities. We also utilize Google Drive to share working documents. While following our own library's cataloging local policies, we conducted vivid discussions and debates about best practice. The collaborative experience has enhanced quality of our work in general; the well documented working papers will be important reference for future efforts and collaboration.

#### 4. Sharing Staff Expertise between Our Institutions

UW East Asia Library has a very strong Technical Services unit led by an internationally reputable cataloging librarian. The head librarian specialized in Chinese history and international scholarly engagement. To ensure high quality work of the project, UW provides training for all CLIR project staff via telecommunication and in person visits. Training and technical workflow are fully documented and made available on the project website (<https://staffweb.lib.washington.edu/units/east-asia-library/procedures/clir-chinese-cataloging-project/clir-project-workflow>). The project also employs international expertise, which is shared by both institutions. Professor Boyue Yao, a Chinese rare-book librarian of Beijing University Library in China, has joined the CLIR project at the East Asia Library of UW starting January 6th for a 13-month appointment as the CLIR project librarian for Chinese rare-books and cataloging. He will also join the UBC Library as a Chinese rare-book consultant for two months in April and May 2015. Mr. Ya Min Wu, former assistant director of Liaoning Provincial Library, has been appointed CLIR rare book cataloger at UBC for twelve months since December 2014. Both librarians are well-known Chinese rare-book experts in China. Their participation brings in-depth knowledge and expertise to our CLIR project.

To maximize the significant impact of the CLIR project on cataloging, the principal catalogers in central technical services of UW and UBC Libraries have discussed NACO training for the project to contribute name authority records. As a matter of fact, this project has started partnership beyond Chinese hidden collections, and enhanced communication and collaboration between the two libraries in many more areas, such as preservation and conservation, digitization, staff exchange, training, and future grant proposals, etc.

Although copy cataloging is not part of the CLIR project, both UW and UBC libraries have encountered tough decision-making about how to deal with copy cataloging during the project. Both institutions have done searching, selecting, and inventory listing all the unique and rare materials that have no holdings showing in OCLC WorldCat for this project. At UBC, copy cataloging belongs to union membered catalogers, and cannot be handled by student assistants or non-union personnel. Since there are not any Chinese copy catalogers on the staff, UBC library has to leave those books behind the locked doors. It is a challenge and the library needs to come up with a new strategy to tackle the copy cataloging resulting from the CLIR project.

The UW experience in handling copy cataloging provides a good model. A parallel plan has been developed for the CLIR hidden collection project since Phase One. While searching for hidden treasures, copy cataloging is performed by highly trained student assistants and paraprofessionals. Copy-cataloged materials go right into circulation and become available for interlibrary loan requests. Thanks to the strong technical service unit at the UW East Asia Library, searching, selecting, and copy cataloging are smoothly integrated in the workflow and

satellite projects have been created in support of the core CLIR project. In such an integrated working environment, the impact of the CLIR project has been optimized, and the result reaches way beyond the proposed original cataloging of 1000 Chinese rare books.

## 5. Resource Sharing Worldwide

Thanks to Professor Yao, CLIR project librarian from Beijing University Library, the UW-UBC CLIR project has joined CALIS Rare-books Union Catalog. Thus UW and UBC libraries have become the first members outside China. This CALIS system has twenty-five top Chinese academic libraries as its members. Many records in the system are not available in OCLC WorldCat; valuable bibliographical information can be easily derived from a similar edition in the CALIS union catalog for our original cataloging. Its customized interface for rare book-specific information is user friendly. Records can be converted between CN MARC and MARC 21. Joining CALIS Union Catalog not only speeds up the cataloging for our CLIR project, but also promotes our newly unveiled hidden treasures to scholars in China. Meanwhile, UW and UBC professors and students have just gained access to the Chinese rare-book collections held by twenty-five best academic libraries in Mainland China, Hong Kong and Macau through the half million online rare-book records and over 270,000 images.

The CLIR project plans to scan one to three images from each rare book that we catalog to provide crucial information for edition authentication for Chinese rare books. The images will be linked to the online cataloging records, which will enhance research potential of these materials and benefit scholars and researchers worldwide.

The UW-UBC CLIR project has optimized our libraries' capacity and resources to accomplish difficult tasks via international collaboration as mentioned above. By February 13, 2015, the second month of Phase Two of our project, we have already cataloged hundreds of unique and extremely rare titles and contributed authority records and triggered several conservation plans. We have discovered rare sets with some volumes held in libraries in China and others held in our libraries. For example, a rare book set held at UBC reported a few volumes missing, which were considered being lost permanently, but now identified at Beijing University Library. The genealogy of the rare books and their collecting history in the past centuries have instantly attracted research interests from the professors and graduate students. The possibility also exists that scattered volumes of original collections away from their home towns may be identified and linked together virtually. Once the project is completed, we are hopeful that some of the efforts of the original collectors will be realized, albeit across long time span and wide distance. CLIR project has allowed our hidden collections at UBC and UW to enter a new world, gain new life, and enjoy continuity of the heritage.

## 6. Challenges of International Collaboration

The benefit of our international collaboration through the CLIR project is profound and long-lasting; however, international collaboration also can be very challenging. We have run into obstacles working with different policies, laws, and regulations of different countries and communicate within different administrative and organizational structures and reporting systems. For example, we have selected a seasoned cataloguer from Taiwan National University Library for UBC, but failed to obtain her work permit to work in Canada. We anxiously waited



for Professor Yao's application for a Canadian visa, which was more complex and took much longer time, and has delayed his arrival in Seattle, therefore the second phase of the project. When UBC team brought Professor Yao over to UBC for a one-day visit after a team visit at UW, however, he ran into tough questions from immigration officers at the border, such as "why can't you work remotely for UBC by video conferencing?" "Do rare book consultants really need to touch the actual items?" These are just some examples.

The CLIR project has provided us an invaluable learning opportunity about international collaboration. As libraries and information services become increasingly globalized, there will be more need for international collaborations. We hope the lessons learned and experiences gained from our CLIR international collaborative project will benefit future CLIR applications and projects internationally.

#### **Brief Vita of Presenters:**

**Zhijia Shen** joined the University of Washington (UW) Libraries as Director of the East Asia Library in 2006. Since 2013, she has also taken on the responsibilities of the Chinese Studies Librarian. She has led several successful grant-funded projects to digitize and catalog Chinese and Japanese special collections held by UW Libraries. Prior to coming to the UW, Zhijia worked as head of East Asian libraries at University of Colorado and Pittsburgh, where she also held faculty appointments in library administration and history. She served as Chair of the Committee on Chinese Materials and was a member of the Executive Board of the Council for East Asian Libraries of the Association for Asian Studies (2005-2008). She is currently a member of the Board of Directors of the Chinese American Librarians Association. Her research and publications focus on the areas of East Asian librarianship and history of Modern China. She has a Ph.D. in History from the University of Chicago and an MS in Library and Information Science from University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana.

**Liu Jing** joined the Asian Library at University of British Columbia (UBC) in 2000 as the Chinese Language Librarian and Technical Services Supervisor. She has led or coordinated international collaborative virtual reference, rare book research and digitization projects. Jing received a MLS from University of Washington and Master of Asia Pacific Policy Studies from UBC. Prior to coming to UBC, Jing worked for academic, public, and special libraries in major cities worldwide including Beijing, New York, Chicago and Seattle.