

During my Directed Fieldwork at the University of Washington Libraries, I worked with the Chinese Cataloging Librarian to support the cataloging and authority control of Chinese-language materials. My work involved bibliographic record creation and enhancement in MARC21 using OCLC Connexion, authority record creation through NACO, and subject analysis using Library of Congress standards. I also became familiar with the Ex Libris Alma system and developed a hands-on understanding of applying RDA and CJK cataloging rules to diverse print materials. The fieldwork took place in a hybrid format, which allowed me to blend asynchronous, detailed metadata work with synchronous mentorship and discussion.

I aimed to deepen my technical knowledge of cataloging standards and tools, with a strong focus on culturally sensitive metadata practices. I mapped my goals to five learning outcomes: mastering MARC21 and Connexion, applying RDA and CJK rules, performing NACO authority work, constructing subject analysis using Classweb Plus, and managing inventory in Alma. As I progressed, it became clear that the technical tasks were deeply intertwined with ethical and cultural considerations, especially when describing authors, communities, and concepts that don't always map neatly to Western bibliographic practices.

One moment that crystallized this understanding occurred while working on a book by a Singaporean author. The romanized name provided in the colophon did not follow standard pinyin transliteration. My training had emphasized strict adherence to pinyin, but this moment forced me to pause and reconsider: should standardized transliteration override the author's self-representation and regional norms? In consultation with my supervisor, we confirmed that according to cataloging rules, because the work was published in Chinese, the authorized access point must use the pinyin form. While we maintained compliance with these standards, the moment sharpened my awareness of the tension between authority control and identity

representation. It underscored that cataloging is not only about maintaining consistency, but also about navigating how identities are shaped, recognized, and made visible in bibliographic systems.

Another experience that deepened my critical engagement with cataloging was my work on Chinese rare book materials. Unlike modern publications, these works often present a fundamentally different notion of authorship. In many cases, the text might be compiled, annotated, or reprinted by multiple individuals over time. None of whom are “authors” in the modern Western sense of sole intellectual ownership. Moreover, the colophon or preface may contain ambiguous references to people who edited, transmitted, or copied the work. These complexities challenged me to reconsider how I applied field 100 or 700 in MARC records.

My background in studying pre-Han and Han Chinese texts gave me a deeper appreciation for the complexity of authorship in classical Chinese literature. I’m well aware that entire seminar courses could be dedicated to debating the authorship, compilation, or transmission of a single ancient text. So while cataloging rare Chinese book materials during my DFW, I frequently found myself asking not just “What does the record need?” but “How would a researcher find this?” This question became especially poignant when working with classical texts that have layered histories—compiled over dynasties and annotated by scholars. As catalogers, we often lack the time or disciplinary depth to fully capture the nuanced textual history of every rare item. And yet, we must still make authoritative choices—whether or who to use a personal name in the 100 field and whether to record a compiler or an editor. This experience prompted me to think about striking a balance between the constraints of cataloging systems and the open-ended, interpretive nature of humanistic inquiry.

Reflecting on the entirety of my fieldwork, I believe I demonstrated strong attention to detail, initiative in asking questions, and growing confidence in interpreting cataloging standards in context. One challenge I encountered was managing ambiguity—especially in rare materials or regionally idiosyncratic romanizations. At times, rules offered incomplete guidance, and I had to weigh competing priorities between standardization, institutional policy, and authorial intent. I'm still developing fluency in that decision-making process, but this DFW gave me a solid foundation. Going forward, I plan to incorporate what I've learned into my remaining coursework, particularly around digital curation, archival description, and ethical cataloging. The fieldwork has reshaped how I view metadata as a constructed system that demands continuous questioning and care. In this way, my DFW experience served not only as technical training, but as a lens through which I can better understand the social impact of information work.