

REPORTS

CHINESE SERIAL NUMBERS: AN AID TO SERIALS MANAGEMENT

Several changes in Chinese serial titles in 1985 highlighted the lack of bibliographic control over Chinese serials generally. In the absence of sufficiently up-to-date or comprehensive tools, East Asian staff at the Australian National University Library have developed a Chinese Serial Number (CSN) index which has proved helpful, both for the acquisition and cataloguing of Chinese periodicals.

The acquisition of periodicals from China has never been simple. Not all Chinese periodicals are readily available; some which are produced for circulation inside China can only be acquired individually as back issues. The print-run is carefully calculated to avoid wastage and leaves few spare copies for the outside world.

Bibliographic aids are rare. While some serials from Hong Kong and Singapore now contain ISSNs, ISSNs are only now beginning to appear on science serials. Chinese cataloguers use such tools as Chinese periodicals in the Library of Congress, 1978, which, while helpful, are limited in coverage and are not current. More recently, the China press and publishing directory 1985 has appeared listing some two thousand newspaper and serial titles. As a selection tool it is informative but has several limitations, including lack of access by Chinese title.

A number of Chinese serials ceased to arrive at the ANU Library in 1985; others, apparently new and unsolicited, started to arrive. They were in fact changed titles. But how were they to be matched up with the old titles?

Title changes can be picked up by serials staff from announcements in the issues themselves; some can be discovered at the cataloguing stage. Because of the delay, the opportunity to acquire issues from publishers' lists is often missed, resulting in possibly permanent gaps in holdings.

ANU serials staff were alerted to CSNs by a visiting librarian from China. Many Chinese serials in fact have two numbers: kuo nei tai hao (or k'an hao) 国内代号(刊号) and kuo wai tai hao 国外代号. The former is the number intended for internally-circulated titles, the latter for titles to be circulated abroad as well. Those for internal circulation only do not contain kuo wai tai hao. Therefore the most consistently used is the former, and this is the number referred to as CSN in this article.

The CSN consists of up to two digits, a hyphen and up to three digits, e.g. 2-154. The numbers before the hyphen represent a geographic area: for CSN 2-154, 2 signifies periodicals from Peking.

These numbers first started appearing in the 1950s and are now widely, but not ubiquitously used in China. Some academic journals do not contain CSNs and none of the Fu yin pao k'an tzu liao 复印报刊资料 series use them. Nor, of course, is CSN used in Taiwan, Hong Kong or Singapore.

The CSN has other limitations. While no two serials have the same number at the same time, a number may be transferred to a new publication when the original one ceases. If a serial changes its place of publication, the CSN must change because of the geographic content of the code.

Thus the CSN cannot be considered as unique identification in the same way as ISSN and caution should be exercised before declaring one title a continuation of another. Publisher details, tsung 总, numbering and general subject content should also be taken into account.

ANU staff started to develop CSN card indexes: numeric by CSN and alphabetic by title. This index was based mainly on serials in ANU collection and also on the listings in the trade publication Magazines in Chinese 1986 issued by the China National Publishing Industry Trading Corporation, Shanghai. The resulting file contains titles of Chinese serials with CSNs held by ANU plus many current titles not held. Dates and sources of information were noted to give an indication of the current title at those times. The process linked titles which had hitherto been thought unconnected.

As a further development, it was decided to add CSNs to the serial records already in URICA. In order to put CSN into a searchable field, it was re-formatted to fit the ISSN field. At the same time, care was taken to avoid a clash with any existing ISSN. CSNs could be replaced with ISSNs at a later date if ISSNs become available.

In summary, the CSN index, although still incomplete, forms a solid basis as a working tool. Its chief benefit lies in prompt identification of title changes so that the chance of acquiring issues under a new title is not lost. Secondly, it is a useful cataloguing aid as far as the history of serial titles is concerned and, if regularly maintained and developed further, will provide information on new titles not yet acquired by ANU Library.

S MacDougall
The Australian National University Library

