

# Dispersed Collections in Exile

## Thai Collections in Libraries outside of Thailand

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*A previous research conducted by White and Choemprayong in 2019 indicates that libraries in Thailand have encountered multidimensional challenges in contributing to global bibliographic and resource sharing networks. As libraries outside Thailand may have a strong influence on representation in the global bibliographic universe, this paper investigates how libraries outside of Thailand manage Thai collections, particularly acquisitions and cataloging. Adopting Merton's Insiders/Outsiders doctrine as a contextual framework, this study applies an exploratory mixed-method approach using observation and interview methods.*

Sharing through library lending and cooperative cataloging systems has become a normative approach to improve the efficiency of collection management and to enhance the accessibility of collections. To support collection sharing on a global scale, library communities have standardized collection management and description practices for decades. However, these standards have been criticized in terms of biases, particularly the challenges of acquiring and cataloging collections representing marginalized populations or topics.<sup>1</sup>

Standard or central Thai is Thailand's official language, and "is the language used at all levels of education and has been so almost exclusively for about one hundred years."<sup>2</sup> While Thai people have migrated elsewhere around the world (e.g., Thai diaspora), the collections written in the Thai language are mainly produced and distributed from within Thailand itself. Lee observed that there was a shortage of academic content written in the Thai language.<sup>3</sup> Even within Thailand-based institutions, a number of academic libraries have a larger collection in foreign languages, especially English, than in Thai. Previous studies have found that Thai libraries face numerous obstacles in participating and contributing to the global bibliographic and resource sharing networks, including inefficiency from maintaining multiple versions of bibliographic records, additional efforts for transliteration, budget limitations, and challenges integrating content into OCLC.<sup>4</sup>

Nonetheless, the collection of Thai materials in institutions outside of Thailand has occurred since the seventeenth century.<sup>5</sup> Thai manuscripts, publications, and artifacts can be found in libraries, museums, and collectors' private collections around the world. Additionally, Thai studies, as a multidisciplinary field of study, has existed since 1904.<sup>6</sup> Research interests in Thai studies have been extended to scholars in many countries within and outside of Thailand. Libraries outside of Thailand collect Thai language materials for two reasons: to serve the needs of the Thai speaking diaspora and to support Thai Studies

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researchers. Changes to library budgets and collections in the twenty-first century resulted in less emphasis on print material and more focus on nationalistic approaches to collection building and maintenance.<sup>7</sup> This study investigates the extent to which Thai materials have been collected and described in libraries outside Thailand.

## Literature Review

### Collection Management of Thai Materials

In general, Thai collections outside of Thailand can be divided into two major categories: manuscripts and contemporary publications. Collecting of Thai manuscripts in Europe started in the early seventeenth century.<sup>8</sup> Manuscripts and documents were originally taken outside of Thailand by traders, travelers, and soldiers and later by scholars, missionaries, administrators, and commercial agents.<sup>9</sup> According to McDaniel, “when travelers from Europe, North America, and Japan, among other places, started exploring Southeast Asia, they often brought manuscripts back to their own museums and homes.”<sup>10</sup> Manuscript collections of Thai materials outside of Thailand usually focus on content from the nineteenth century with major collections located in Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, Italy, Japan, and the United States.<sup>11</sup> McDaniel argues that most Thai manuscripts were brought to other countries as part of diplomatic exchanges or royal gifts, and despite ending up in university special collections, these items were not purchased as part of a larger collection development plan.<sup>12</sup>

A few sources agree that it was not until after World War II that collectors and librarians outside of Thailand started to actively seek out Thai materials.<sup>13</sup> This could be for two reasons: (1) “The decade from 1947 was critical in both reinforcing the need to develop resources for the study of Asia and in implementing collecting policies. UNESCO was particularly active in promoting cultural exchanges, including the development of exchanges between libraries,” and (2) American-based Asian studies programs in the 1950s were well resourced and funded.<sup>14</sup> The Southeast Asian book trade from the late 1940s until the end of the 1970s was difficult because it was “unorganised, undercapitalised, and relatively inefficient.”<sup>15</sup> Other changes from the post-World War II collecting era show a shift of knowing little about the person or people who brought the collection originally from outside of Thailand to having detailed information about collections and donors.<sup>16</sup>

As previously noted, donations from private collections or gifts provide one source of materials.<sup>17</sup> Roughly 650 Thai manuscripts are held in public collections in the United States.<sup>18</sup> British institutions house around 500 Thai manuscripts.<sup>19</sup> Thailand and Japan had a relationship to share

Buddhist texts in the seventeenth century and then again in the early twentieth century, and there are a number of Thai items at Japanese temples or universities.<sup>20</sup> Thai materials in Germany are sparse and scattered, with many Thai items being unidentified and uncatalogued.<sup>21</sup> There is no single resource that points to all the major Thai collections (manuscript or otherwise) outside of Thailand.<sup>22</sup> Information about contemporary Thai collections is less abundant than that of Thai manuscript collections. Many sources of information about contemporary Thai collections are available on institutional websites and in LibGuides. Moreover, national libraries and consortia can play an important role in the collection of contemporary materials by creating connections and programs to support the larger library collecting community.

### National Libraries Role in Collecting Thai Materials

National libraries, such as the British Library, the Library of Congress (LC), and National Library of Australia, can play an important part in collecting materials from other countries. Based on a 2015 International Federation of Library Association (IFLA) National Libraries Section Study, the role of some national libraries in collecting “foreign” materials states,

Some national libraries are tasked with collecting foreign material related to the country in question. In most developed countries the national library acquires and maintains large collections of foreign literature in most fields of research to provide encyclopedic reference services to the nation’s researchers or to supplement research collections in other libraries. National library acquisitions mandate is influenced by national priorities in research, the availability of other collections in the framework of national provision, and the availability of material through alternative sources, for example, by connecting to content via online services.<sup>23</sup>

Based on the idea of the role of national libraries, a brief discussion follows the history of collecting Thai materials by three national libraries: the British Library, LC, and the National Library of Australia. By no means are these the only national libraries that collect Thai materials, as a number of other national libraries collect either manuscripts or contemporary Thai content. However, these western countries have a long term historical and political relationship with Thailand and strong visibility in terms of interest in collecting Thai materials.

The British Library’s Thai collection is “the most

extensive and important collection” in the United Kingdom, and “one of the most significant in Europe.”<sup>24</sup> Because long-established international bibliographic exchange programs, “in the early twentieth century, most publications by the Thai National Library (formerly Vajirañāna Library) were deposited at the British Museum Library.”<sup>25</sup> Over time, collections in other British institutions were merged into the British Library’s current Thai collection. For example, “although the first fine illustrated Thai manuscript came into the India Office Library in 1825 (MS Pali 207), and some other Thai manuscripts were transferred from the British Museum Library to the British Library in 1973, the Thai manuscript collection was mainly built up from 1973 onwards.”<sup>26</sup> Most of the items in the Thai collection were gifts from Christian missionaries.<sup>27</sup> According to the British Library’s Thailand, Laos and Cambodia collection website, information about Thai printed books published prior to 2000 are not cataloged or available online, and are only available via a physical card catalog found in the Asian and African Studies Reading Room.<sup>28</sup> Since 2008, the British Library has digitized many of their unique Thai pieces.<sup>29</sup>

LC has about 55,000 Thai language items consisting of both manuscript and contemporary collections. Additionally, LC has managed an overseas office in Jakarta, Indonesia since 1963, which coordinates the acquisition of materials from Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.<sup>30</sup> The overseas office also coordinates LC’s Cooperative Acquisitions Program for Southeast Asia (CAPSEA) program and materials exchange programs. One of the Jakarta suboffices is in Bangkok, Thailand at the US Embassy. This sub-office acquires around 750 serials and 1,500 monographs annually.<sup>31</sup>

For many years, the National Library of Australia (NLA) “house[d] the largest and most actively developing research resource on Asia in Australia.”<sup>32</sup> This includes a large collection of post-World War II Thai language-based materials. Thai collecting at the NLA started in the 1950s.<sup>33</sup> By the 21st century, NLA’s Thai Collection housed more than 30,000 monographs and 100 current journal and popular magazine titles.<sup>34</sup> The NLA decided in late 2019/early 2020 that it would stop collecting in many Asian languages, including Thai materials due to shifting national priorities that impact budget.<sup>35</sup>

### Consortia Roles in Collecting Thai Materials

In 1978, the National Libraries and Documentation Center of the Southeast Asia Consortium was founded to initiate the interlibrary exchange program among national libraries and documentation centers in Singapore, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand.<sup>36</sup> However, there is no publicly

available evidence describing how the network operates. In addition to collaboration among national libraries, there are two prominent international consortia that discuss and share information about collecting Thai materials and other Southeast Asian resources: the Southeast Asia Library Group (SEALG) in Europe, and the Committee on Research Materials on Southeast Asia (CORMOSEA) in North America. The CORMOSEA website emphasizes the important role that LC’s Cooperative Acquisitions Program for Southeast Asia (CAPSEA) plays in assisting member institutions to build their collections.<sup>37</sup> Interestingly, CORMOSEA is a group of libraries that organizes under the Thai studies community, rather than a library-based association.

### Thai Collections and Euro-American Bias

Libraries outside of Thailand play a role in creating access to information about Thai language and culture. Those libraries outside Thailand are uniquely positioned to collect materials and ephemera that may otherwise not be collected within Thailand itself. For example, this may include print publications or online content related to “shifts in politics and ideas,” social movements, coups, or content critical of the monarchy that would not normally be collected and maintained in institutions within Thailand.<sup>38</sup> In another respect, Thai language collections outside Thailand represent a mainly Western lens or filtered view of Thailand and its aboutness.

Information about these collections emphasize a Euro-American centric value system that privileges white, Western experiences as adding validity to Thai materials, thus impacting how materials are acquired, described, and maintained. For example, “the British Library’s Southeast Asian collections, were strongly based on and reflected British imperial involvement in the region,” and reflects the personal interests of long-time curator Henry Ginsburg.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, when discussing Thai collections outside Thailand, the donor, instead of the materials, are a huge focus of the collection information. Examples are apparent in presentations like Ashmun, and papers such as those by Walker and Kerekes and McDaniel.<sup>40</sup> These works emphasize how the donor experienced Thai culture, but not the content or materials that reflects the culture itself. These acts center on westernness and whiteness and not the Thai experiences, viewpoints and culture seen in the materials themselves.

### Euro-American Bias in Description, Access, and Discovery of Thai Materials

The bias of knowledge organization systems, cataloging standards, and controlled vocabularies is widely known within the library community.<sup>41</sup> Many cataloging and metadata researchers have examined how the standards and

systems created to aid description and access in libraries are socially representative of the time and context in which they were created, and therefore not easily used outside those contexts. The problematic nature of the standards and systems used for description can impact users' ability to find and access the material they need.

Transliteration, also known as Romanization, is the conversion of a non-Latin script to a phonetic-based Latin script to assist in retrieval. Romanization continues to be a common practice in library discovery systems. Numerous attempts have been made to Romanize Thai script. The first attempts originated from French visitors trying to record the Thai language on paper based on what they heard using French linguistic patterns.<sup>42</sup> In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, more structured attempts by Asian Studies scholars “distort[ed] the spelling of native Thai words,” causing criticism from King Vajiravudh (Rama VI).<sup>43</sup> Thai attempts to create Romanization systems resulted in a practical system created in 1931, and the Royal Institute of Thailand published a Romanization guide in 1968.<sup>44</sup> Currently Thammasat University's Plangarn transliteration system is widely used by libraries in Thailand.<sup>45</sup>

The first LC/American Library Association (LC/ALA) Romanization system was established in 1958 and has since been continuously updated.<sup>46</sup> According to LC, “Romanization is primarily for LC staff and staff at other libraries without language expertise working in: 1. Circulation 2. Acquisitions 3. Serials check-in, 4. Shelf listing, 5. Shelving 6. Reference. Romanization is also for systems that cannot use non-Latin forms, have support for only some scripts, or require Romanized fields for indexing and sorting purposes.”<sup>47</sup> The most recent LC Thai Romanization table was published in 2011. LC's current documentation states that Romanization still “merits continued application and support,” despite also acknowledging that “users who can read those languages and scripts (i.e., languages in their original scripts) appreciate our [LC] providing bibliographic information in those scripts.”<sup>48</sup>

In February 2020, the Cornell University Library Usability Working Group conducted a study about patron use of the catalog to search for Thai language materials.<sup>49</sup> Cornell University Library is known for both its manuscript and contemporary Thai collections.<sup>50</sup> The study results indicated that “participants said that using Thai is important when searching but think that Romanization is useful to have.”<sup>51</sup> Additionally, while “most participants used a standard Romanization scheme,” the users did not use the LC standard that was implemented in the catalog. Instead, they used a different scheme, which was unidentified in the study results.<sup>52</sup>

According to Weinberg, the Romanization process in an era of advanced library systems is “a philosophy of Anglocentricity vs. multiculturalism.”<sup>53</sup> She argues that “fully

Romanized bibliographic records coincide with *Anglocentricity* in the United States—the view that everyone throughout the world should learn to speak the English language and master the alphabet in which it is written.”<sup>54</sup> This privileging of Anglocentricity and whiteness has impacted how Thailand-based catalogers and librarians interact with international standards and systems.

As of December 2020, there are twenty-one Thailand-based OCLC member libraries and almost 1 million WorldCat.org records representing cataloged Thai language resources. The number of resources in these libraries outnumber the number of records shared within the WorldCat system. Although the purpose of the OCLC program is mainly to promote resource sharing among libraries worldwide, there seems to be barriers for Thai libraries to join and successfully contribute to the network.<sup>55</sup> White and Choemprayong identified that various standards and configurations of different local and international consortiums have become a source of burnout for Thailand-based librarians who view creating and editing bibliographic records in network platforms as an unnecessary process, consuming additional time and resources in the collection management and cataloging workflow.<sup>56</sup>

The contributions of Thai libraries in providing access to their holdings in any network system can be difficult to observe and estimate for several reasons. For example, while Thai catalogers appreciate the availability of cataloging copy, they are reluctant to update and share their own records in the network system.<sup>57</sup> Instead, Thai catalogers tend to edit and restrict records to their local catalogs and not share revisions. If updating is required, Thai catalogers typically create new records, rather than update the existing ones. Additionally, the Romanization of cataloging records is perceived as a great burden as it increases the time to process an individual record. The barriers to entry to the network systems among Thai libraries raises an essential concern regarding access to current and future Thai materials. With a low number of participating Thai libraries in global networking infrastructure, the majority of Thai materials represented in global networks are from institutions located outside Thailand. The purpose of the study presented here is to examine Thai language collections outside Thailand to understand where these collections are located and how they are being maintained and described.

## Method

This study used a library and information science approach, as opposed to a Thai studies approach, for examining Thai language collections in libraries outside Thailand by focusing on library-based sources and perspectives related to collection maintenance. An exploratory mixed method

approach to examine Thai collections outside Thailand was used and expanded upon the Bangkok-focused research presented by White and Choemprayong, which focused on the cataloging practices of Thai librarians across library sectors.<sup>58</sup> An exploratory sequential approach was used to observe an issue/problem that are not clearly defined.<sup>59</sup> In this study, a quantitative content analysis of libraries websites, catalogs, and LibGuides was first conducted to identify characteristics of Thai materials outside Thailand and their collectors. A qualitative semi-structured interview was carried out subsequently to obtain rich information, including opinions and perspectives regarding the current practices and issues regarding managing these collections. This study, unlike the previous one in 2019, focuses more on collections while using catalog data and the global cataloging community to find and understand the ecosystem of Thai language collections outside of Thailand.

### Conceptual Framework

This study focused on the practices and perspectives regarding collection management of resources that circulated within and transferred across libraries within and outside Thailand. Merton's social epistemological conceptualization of the Insiders/Outsider doctrine provides a conceptual lens to understand the worldviews of library collection management inside and outside Thailand.<sup>60</sup> Notably, Merton's conceptualization was the foundation of Chatman's notion of small world, a renowned information behavior framework.<sup>61</sup> In Merton's Insiders/Outsiders doctrine, members in a group with a "privilege access" to certain knowledge or information can be considered as the Insiders. In contrast, the Outsiders expend more effort, consume more resources, and encounter a higher risk to access to the same knowledge and information.<sup>62</sup> The segregation is based on the innate status (i.e., geographical location for this study), rather than merit. From an Insider's perspective, the Outsiders neither have a direct experience nor continuously engage in socialization activities. Thus, the Outsiders lack an "intuitive sensitivity," "shared realities," and "fine-grained meanings of behavior, feelings, and values."<sup>63</sup> The Outsiders have substantial distinguished aims and goals concerning issues relevant to their own values and interests. This doctrine also concerns the conditions of interactions between Insiders and Outsiders, particularly in the intellectual and ideological domains. For instance, in conflicts, holding predominating arguments (i.e., Insiders) that are accepted by ones who hold the opposite view (i.e., Outsiders) can be considered as a triumph of Insiders. However, the Outsiders who seek an acceptance by Insiders may portray a stronger passionate action and enthusiasm than the Insiders would do. While Merton argues that the social structure of Insiders and Outsiders in realities are dynamic, complex, and fluid, the

application of the doctrine in an ascribe dimension (herein inside and outside Thailand) would provide an in-depth interpretation framework on how libraries outside Thailand manage Thai collections.<sup>64</sup> Earlier studies in library and information science adopted Merton's doctrine to explain how information users seek and share information within and outside their social world.<sup>65</sup> In this study, Merton's notion was applied to libraries outside Thailand. In addition to the geographical location of the libraries, the social structure of interest includes the cultural identity of the library staff (i.e., Thai versus non-Thai) involved in Thai material acquisition and maintenance.

### Research Question

This study's research question is "what are the current practices for Thai collecting and description in libraries outside of Thailand?" By answering this question, the researchers aimed to discover some libraries that currently hold and collect current Thai materials, how Thai collections are obtained and described, and to gain an understanding of the staff who work with these collections.

### Finding Thai Materials Outside Thailand

Since there is no published exhaustive list of libraries that currently hold Thai materials worldwide, potential participants who worked with Thai collections in libraries outside Thailand were identified using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The researchers consulted library websites, catalogs, and LibGuides as a main source to identify potential libraries with Thai collections. Furthermore, library networks specializing in Southeast Asia collections mostly in the United States and United Kingdom were also used to identify potential participant libraries. A general email invite was circulated on library cataloging discussion lists in Europe and North Africa/the Middle East. The National Library of Thailand Exchange List was also consulted to find potential participants.

Openly available online information on Thai collections was gathered from potential interview participants, including reputation about Thai specialization, number of volumes in the Thai language, and currency of the collection. Specific collection information was placed into three categories: special collections (such as historical collections and cremation volumes), manuscripts (such as palm leaf manuscripts), or current collections (actively collecting items published from 1950 onward). It is important to identify libraries that were actively and consciously collecting Thai materials because they would likely have policies and procedures specifically for Thai collections. Thus, if a collection was identified as having the following:

- a strong reputation (based on review of literature),
- evidence of Thai specialization: a collection of 1,000 or more current (1950 to present) titles in Thai language, and
- actively cataloging materials themselves,

an interview request was sent to a collection or cataloging library professional at that institution.

### Data Collection

Data collection occurred between November 2019 through August 2020. First, openly available online information found on library websites, catalogs, and LibGuides (as noted in the sampling section previously) was used to answer basic questions related to characteristics of materials and the collecting libraries. Content collected for this section included institution name, potential contact, date contacted, notes about the Thai collection, region where the institution is located, plus the criteria listed in the sampling section above.

Website, catalog, or LibGuide data was collected from fifty-one libraries in North America, Asia, Europe, and Oceania. Libraries elsewhere were investigated, but Thai collections could not be identified in China, Russia, North Africa, the Middle East and South America. Attempts to contact librarians in these regions were not successful. After the initial online data was collected, all fifty-one libraries were contacted for collection clarification. A total of thirty-two libraries responded to initial inquiries related to the interview qualifications: reputation, Thai specialization, and actively managing the collection.

Nineteen libraries were excluded from the study. Reasons for exclusion include (1) the participant did not respond to initial contact, (2) the library no longer held Thai materials (i.e., the collections were transferred to other institutions), (3) the library lacked dedicated staff responsible for managing the Thai collections, (4) the library used outsourcing to process Thai collections, (5) the library does not acquire new Thai materials, and (6) the library holds only special small collections (e.g., rare books, personal collections, and language materials).

Thirteen libraries were invited to participate in interviews, with nine agreeing. Table 1 shows the number of participating libraries categorized by global region, both for online data collection and interview participants. Six libraries participated in the interviews via email. Two interviews were conducted in-person. One interview was conducted using video chat. Various types of libraries participated in the interview portion of the study, including three national libraries, four academic or research libraries, and two special libraries.

Semi-structured interviews were used to elaborate on practices and opinions about Thai material acquisition and maintenance. As approved by Curtin University's

**Table 1.** Number of Participating Libraries by Region

Region	Number of Library Participants (Online Data)	Number of Library Participants (Interview)
Asia	9	3
Europe	15	2
North America	21	2
Oceania	6	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>9</b>

Ethics Committee, the interviews were conducted either in person, via video call, or by email. Since it was impossible to visit all participants in-person, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, the participants chose their preferred method of communication. All interview content is available in English or Thai. The interview questions used in all interview modes in this study are included in appendix A. Questions addressed cataloging related activities and based on responses, follow up questions were asked related to collections and acquisitions. Additionally, participants were allowed to provide other comments or observations regarding practices in Thai material acquisition and maintenance. For in-person interviews, audio recordings were used to capture the interview content and the researcher's notes. The interviews recorded using video calls were recorded. During the interviews, the researchers created memo notes that were used during the data analysis for data triangulation.

### Data Analysis

Two researchers conducted a deductive thematic analysis of websites and interview data based on the RITA method, which involves rapid identification of themes as opposed to precise transcription.<sup>66</sup> The original theme was developed based on the research question and constructs of interest from relevant literature. Data analysis was iterative and conducted from August 2020 through December 2020. Emerging codes were added into the original coding scheme. The coding process was done manually. All codes were categorized into relevant themes. The resulting themes included collection characteristics, staffing, acquisition practices, and cataloging practices.

### Data Reporting and Anonymity

This research is supported by Curtin University Ethics HRE2019-0684, which was approved in October 2019 and renewed in October 2020. Institution names will be included when data collection related to research question part A,

as it collocates information that is openly available online, is reported. The names of institutions and the individuals who were contacted will not be included in respect to the anonymity process of the data collection. All interview participants provided informed consent prior to the participation.

## Results

Study results begin with providing collection characteristics in libraries outside Thailand, while still maintaining anonymity. This section discusses study findings based on three areas: staffing, acquisition practices, and cataloging practices.

### Characteristics of Materials in Libraries Outside Thailand

Of the fifty-one libraries researched, twenty-six had some type of Thai collection, either in the past or present. Eleven participants had larger Asian region collections, while eight focused on Southeast Asia generally. Three libraries only collected in East Asia, and the last three had collections that contained random Asian materials or could not be clearly identified into the other Asian region classifications.

As twenty-six of the contacted libraries indicated having some type of Thai collections, many libraries had stopped collecting Thai materials for a variety of reasons including: a refocus of collection development policy, changing budgets, the institution no longer taught Thai or Thai studies, no longer having institution-based researchers who study Thai topics, or no longer having staff who could read Thai.

### Types of Materials

Thai materials collected outside Thailand are generally diverse, but unsurprisingly similar to other library collections. There are a wide range of collection types in these participating libraries. Table 2 includes a list of resource types of Thai materials in libraries outside Thailand based on the study findings.

### Staffing

One of the study's main findings focused on the variety of staffing issues in managing and describing Thai materials. For those libraries with in-house Thai language cataloging, the catalogers were typically born in Thailand and now live in the other country as Thai diaspora. Most Thai staff in libraries outside Thailand who participated in the interview do not hold a library and information science degree. Those staff normally have in-house, on the job training related to library practices. One European-based participant's library

has a branch office/library based in Bangkok. The staff located in Thailand were responsible for cataloging Thai materials using the centralized cataloging system.

Based on the interview responses, some libraries lack Thai staff in the collection development or cataloging team, and instead have non-ethnically Thai professional librarians working with Thai materials. A few librarians received additional training on Thai language in Thailand prior to working with Thai materials. Nevertheless, in some libraries, the local staff obtained the knowledge about working with Thai materials from the part-time Thai staff or previously full-time staff. These staff reportedly could not read Thai. Instead, they relied heavily on the sources of cataloging records, which will be explored in detail in the cataloging subsection. Yet a number of libraries reported not having someone on staff who can catalog Thai materials. In those cases, two approaches are used: outsourcing to vendors and contractors or leaving materials uncataloged or backlogged. One Oceania region participant uses their former retired librarian to catalog Thai materials on a part-time basis.

### Acquisition Practices

Study findings show that Thai collections are acquired in various ways, depending on institutional budgets, and collecting priorities. Asian library participants indicated that Thai materials are available through local markets or vendors. However, most reported that there are only a small number of local distributors for Thai content, or even other Southeast Asian materials. Local sources were not listed as a major supplier for participant libraries outside of Asia.

Direct purchasing or exchanges from sources in Thailand was the most popular method used by study participants. Some of these purchases happened when librarians traveled to Thailand and purchased directly from stores during their trips. One North American participating

**Table 2.** Types of Thai Materials held in Collections outside of Thailand

<p><b>Monograph</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Textbooks</li> <li>• Research publications including theses and dissertations</li> <li>• Cremation volumes</li> <li>• Donated personal collections</li> <li>• Buddhist text and tipitaka collections</li> <li>• Language learning materials</li> </ul>	<p><b>Archival Materials</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Microfilms</li> <li>• Palm leaf manuscripts</li> <li>• Rare books (as early as 1840 and colonial period)</li> <li>• Maps</li> </ul>
<p><b>Periodicals</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journals</li> <li>• Magazines</li> <li>• Newspapers</li> </ul>	<p><b>Recreational Materials</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literature and fiction</li> <li>• Films</li> <li>• Videos</li> </ul>

library used a former employee who now lives in Thailand to purchase from stores in Thailand. Other participating libraries used agents or vendors based in Thailand. Library exchange programs with the National Library of Thailand was another source of materials. Collections that rely on the interests and connections of one particular researcher was observed in two cases (one in North America and one in Oceania). In one case, the entire collection growth was based on annual gifts from one particular professor with no other funding provided to grow the Thai collection.

### Cataloging Practices

Three areas of cataloging practices are explored in this subsection: sources of cataloging records, describing collections, and assigning controlled vocabularies and classification.

#### Source of Cataloging Records

Most libraries relied on LC and OCLC to obtain bibliographic records of Thai materials. However, a few participants reported that bibliographic records for Thai materials, and other Southeast Asian collections, are sparse and unauthoritative in OCLC. In some Asian libraries, where Thai materials are strongly represented, national cataloging networks are used to obtain bibliographic records. Other libraries that were cited as sources of bibliographic records include the National Library of Australia, Thammasat University Library for Romanized data, and the National Library of Thailand's website for Thai language-based records.

#### Describing Collections

When libraries' materials were cataloged in-house, Resource Description and Access (RDA) was the commonly used standard among the participating libraries. Libraries may only apply RDA to new materials (published in 2013 or later), while earlier materials (published before 2013) were cataloged following the Anglo-American Cataloging Rules 2nd Revision (AACR2) format. A number of participating libraries use national-level cataloging rules to describe Thai periodicals. The application of certain MARC encoding schema is also dependent on local policies and standards (e.g., UNIMARC vs. MARC21). Romanization and when to apply it was a main source of discussion in relation to challenges with description.

#### Romanization Issues Related to Thai Materials

Finding records for Thai materials in OCLC was identified as a major challenge for interview participants. An issue that may contribute to this challenge is how titles are

Romanized. As cited in the literature review and findings sections, Romanization of Thai in general is a difficult task due to numerous reasons because

describing the title of books in accordance with the LC Romanization method is the one of the most challenging works. Thai Romanization table, especially Thai word division has many exceptions (16 pages in total), therefore, describing Romanization properly is almost impossible unless we understand the Thai Romanization table correctly and are familiar with Thai pronunciation. "Plaengsan" (<http://164.115.23.167/plangarn/>) provided by Thammasat University Library is a useful Romanization tool, but sometimes it has mistakes, so we should modify them in usual.<sup>67</sup>

Interview results revealed four variations in Thai title descriptions and deciding whether to Romanize. Those were (1) Romanized title, (2) original Thai spelling, (3) original Thai spelling with tokenized terms, and (4) translated title. For Romanization of Thai titles, two systems are used: the ALA-LC Romanization table and Thammasat University's Romanization table. While LC records disregard the original Thai spelling, some libraries reportedly use both variations in describing the title. Some choose to provide only the Romanized title in bibliographic records. Other libraries provide descriptions and indexes in the native language in combination with English. One participant explained that the Romanization of Thai for materials with Buddhism-related content is the most difficult task since the title normally contains both Thai and Pali. The cataloger must decide whether to use the Romanization of Thai or of Pali, with little choice to use both.

Additionally, the structure of the Thai language presents a challenge for retrieval. In Thai script, a sentence or phrase is normally written without separation or spacing between words. It also does not contain systematic punctuation (e.g., full stop or comma) or capitalization to indicate the overall structure. This creates an issue where search strings can be matched with any section of a text, even if it is illegible in the sentence. Therefore, some libraries provide a tokenized title to assist with discovery and retrieval. Other challenges include incomplete bibliographic information for materials published prior to the 1980s, and the complex structure of unique Thai materials such as cremation volumes.

#### Assigning Controlled Vocabularies and Classification

When asked which cataloging process was the most challenging, the most frequent response was creating and



applying subject headings. LCSH was the most popularly used controlled vocabulary, yet participants indicated that it was frequently insufficient to describe Thai materials. Many institutions have developed local controlled vocabularies in response to these difficulties.

Regarding classification, Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) and LC Classification are frequently used. In places like Japan and Korea, the Nippon Classification System or Korean Decimal Classification System, derivatives of DDC, are used. As seen with controlled vocabularies, a number of institutionally based classification systems have also been created.

### **The Changing Library Ecosystem Related to Thai Materials**

Findings from this research indicate that Thai materials are being described by people with Thai ethnicity. Yet the necessity of collecting Thai materials at all in libraries outside Thailand is being questioned due to changing budgets and collecting priorities. A number of libraries that hold a large collection of Thai materials no longer acquire new Thai materials. The National Library of Thailand has a list of libraries around the world with which they maintain material exchanges. The researchers of this paper contacted libraries on this list, and several respondents were not aware of any Thai materials within their collections.

### **Discussion**

Applying Merton's Insiders/Outsiders doctrine, libraries outside Thailand are considered the Outsiders. However, the way that these libraries have their own interests and values is reflected in their practices with Thai materials and may indicate that they perceive themselves as Insiders. From a global perspective, knowledge about Thai people and Thai culture is considered of less of concern due to the limited socio-political power of Thailand itself. Yet for this paper, Thailand and Thai collections can be seen as an example of the representation of nondominant cultures in library collections. This relates to library topics around diverse perspectives and colonization. In a more extreme Insiders' perspective, it can be perceived that Thai materials (and materials of other nondominant groups) are treated as a peripheral domain supplementing the dominating western knowledge, which is claimed to be more conventional, universal, and neutral.

In contrast, the results indicate that the majority of Thai collections outside Thailand are dependent on the work of enthusiastic non-Thai researchers and collectors. Some collections outside Thailand may be perceived as having less value than when they are collected by Thai libraries. Donors

and advocates of collections of Thai materials outside Thailand are converted Outsiders since their passion and enthusiasm can be interpreted as an act of acceptance seeking from the Thai-based scholarly community. Nonetheless, due to the influence of library users on the management of Thai collections outside Thailand, it is worth investigating further how the perceptions and experiences of users of Thai materials within and outside Thailand. Such a study would provide a more in-depth analysis on the demand of Thai materials and perhaps provide recommendations on collection management practices of Thai materials in a diverse global network environment while still respecting the identity and original value of the culture.

The practice of collecting foreign collections is common in libraries and other cultural institutions. While this study focuses on Thai collections in exile, the study findings serve as a compelling example of multidimensional perspectives on how materials of nondominant cultures are managed in a complicated global context. Findings testify to the existence and proliferation of, conceivably involuntary, social segregation and polarization in modern library collection management practices. Library services and collection management can be a part of a dialog on social segregation, prejudice, and eventually inequality. Using a customized library classification system as one of the supporting cases, Feinberg strongly argues that classification has a communicative power to persuade audiences.<sup>65</sup> While the variety of managing Thai materials can reflect different values and interest of the collectors and users, it may intensify the perception of dominating and submissive culture and knowledge (i.e., the Insiders/Outsiders doctrine).

### **Study Limitations**

As with any study, there were limitations based on design and implementation. This study took a library focused approach for identifying possible collections. The researchers had language skills in Thai, English and Japanese, and could identify only a limited number of collections. There may be others available that they were unable to identify. Additionally, the research focused on publicly available library collections and did not consider private collections or collections in museums or archives. The researchers are implementing a follow up study to focus on collections as identified by Thai studies scholars that will likely include private collections. Furthermore, a large part of the data collection for this research was conducted during the 2020 global pandemic. A number of potential participants were contacted who did not respond to email inquiries due to the challenges of providing library services during a crisis. In particular, it would be valuable to get a higher level of participations by North America collections once the pandemic situation has been stabilized. If the study had been

conducted during a different time, it is very likely that participation would have been greater.

## Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the acquisition and cataloging practices of libraries outside Thailand in managing Thai materials. Applying a mixed-method approach, websites, catalogs, and LibGuides of fifty-one libraries worldwide were reviewed for their information about the characteristics of Thai materials. Purposive sampling was applied to recruit nine participants for semi-structured interviews via either in-person, by video call, or through email. The results highlight the dependency of advocate scholars in contributing Thai collections and the widely adoption of conventional Euro-American systems and standards in describing and classifying the materials. Subsequent issues regarding access and representation of Thai knowledge

systems in a broader context are also discussed. Although Thai collections of materials can be relatively small in size and considered as a niche collection in a global context, the issues of Thai materials in libraries outside Thailand can be assimilated to collections of other underrepresented communities or groups. The current global social structure of library networks and description standards play significant roles in contributing to such an issue. The result of this study exemplifies how library practices may influence the alienation or exile of nondominant cultures through acquisitions, cataloging and collection management choices.

While equal access to information has been a foundational principle of modern libraries, its interpretation and implication should be extended beyond allowance to entrance. On a global scale, library communities should engage in an in-depth analysis on how to manage foreign collections to support inclusive access and representation while still respect the values and interests of their own users.

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions

In general, we would like to learn about your experience in cataloging and maintaining Thai materials. These are our initial questions. After receiving your responses, we may have additional questions to follow.

1. What type(s) of training and qualifications did you have to obtain to get to do this job?
2. What type of materials do you catalog most frequently?
3. Could you describe the process you would go through to add a Thai material to your library catalog?
  - 3.1 What is your original cataloging workflow like?
  - 3.2 What is your copy-cataloging workflow like?
4. What type of cataloging resources do you use/consult at your job?
  - 4.1 For subject headings?
  - 4.2 For call numbers?
  - 4.3 For descriptions?
5. Among the following tasks, which part of cataloging is the most challenging for Thai materials? and why?
  - 5.1 creating subject headings is the hardest task
  - 5.2 creating call numbers is the hardest task
  - 5.3 creating descriptions is the hardest task
6. Do you use local systems to organize your materials? If so, could you explain about these systems?
7. What resources and networks do you consult when you have questions about cataloging Thai materials?
8. What institutions do you consider are authorities for Thai bibliographic data?

Further questions address acquisitions and collecting approaches based off of information included in the answers above.