

Korean E-Book Metadata Enhancement & Withdrawal Project: Promoting Digital Collections & Environmental Sustainability

Donghyun Kim¹  

¹ University of Hawaii at Manoa

Abstract

The Korean E-Book Metadata Enhancement & Withdrawal Project at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa's Hamilton Library addressed two interconnected challenges: limited shelf space in the Asia Collection and insufficient discoverability of newly acquired Korean e-books. Conducted from June to August 2025, this pilot project focused on enhancing e-book metadata in Alma using OCLC WorldCat records and identifying corresponding low-circulation physical volumes for withdrawal. The project enhanced 350 e-book records and withdrew 257 print volumes based on loan and in-house use data. The workflow involved Korean-script title searching, MARC record overlay, editing of key bibliographic fields, and careful review of withdrawal candidates. Challenges included inconsistent romanization, limited subject and genre metadata, and the difficult decisions about balancing preservation and space management. The project demonstrates how targeted metadata enhancement can improve digital resource discoverability while supporting environmentally sustainable library practices. It also highlights the importance of linguistic expertise, inclusive metadata practices, and future batch cataloging workflows for continuing Korean e-book access initiatives.

1. Introduction

The Asia Collection of the Hamilton Library at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa houses an extensive print collection of Korean materials. However, space constraints have become a critical issue due to the continuous influx of new volumes. To address this, the Korean Collection Librarian purchased approximately 2,400 Kyobo e-books to replace existing print copies and provide digital access to patrons. Unfortunately, the quality of the bibliographic records provided by the vendor was insufficient for effective patron access. Consequently, the **Korean E-Book Metadata Enhancement & Withdrawal Project** was initiated to improve metadata quality and withdraw low-circulation physical volumes, thereby reclaiming vital shelf space.

2. Overview

Conducted from June to August 2025, this collaborative project was led by **Nackil Sung** (Head of the Acquisitions Department), **Donghyun Kim** (LIS Intern), **Ellie Kim** (Korea Collection Librarian), and **Erica Chang** (Korean Materials Cataloger). The team focused on two primary objectives: enhancing metadata for newly acquired e-books within the library catalog and identifying corresponding physical volumes for withdrawal based on a specific usage threshold—defined as fewer than five total loans and house uses. By the conclusion of the pilot period, the team had successfully enhanced **350 records** and withdrew **257 physical volumes**.

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Correspondence to
Donghyun Kim
kimdongh@hawaii.edu



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3. Purpose

This project explores efficient ways to improve metadata under the constraints of limited staffing and tight budgets. By utilizing **OCLC WorldCat** records, MARC 21 fields **100 (Author)**, **245 (Title)**, **264 (Publication)**, and **490 (Series)** were enhanced.

Initially, the team noted low usability of Kyobo e-books, likely due to poor discoverability. We anticipated that metadata enhancement would increase user engagement. Despite concerns regarding the digital reading experience, the platform's user-friendly interface and accessibility made it a viable primary resource, allowing the library to confidently transition away from certain physical copies.

4. Methods

The project was managed via a comprehensive Google Sheet containing titles, ISBNs, MMS IDs, OneSearch links (University of Hawai'i cataloging system), portfolio IDs, OCLC numbers, and circulation statistics.

4.1. Metadata Enhancement

Using the **Alma Metadata Editor (MDE)**, the intern retrieved records using Korean titles rather than romanized ones to ensure accuracy, as transliteration styles often vary. After identifying the corresponding physical copy records, the intern overlaid existing e-book metadata with high-quality OCLC WorldCat records. Fields were then modified to include appropriate medium indicators and polished according to standard cataloging principles.

4.2. Withdrawal Process

To determine candidacy for withdrawal, the intern analyzed usage data in Alma. Books with fewer than five combined loans and "house uses" were selected. These items were marked as "unavailable" in the catalog during the process to prevent patron confusion. While the intern explored donating these volumes to local public libraries, current institutional policy required the disposal of withdrawn materials.

5. Outcomes

Between June and August 2025, the project successfully enhanced **350 e-book records** and facilitated the removal of **257 physical books**, significantly improving both digital discoverability and shelf capacity.

6. Challenges

- **Transliteration Complexity:** Academic Libraries in North America currently transliterate Korean materials using the ALA-LC romanization for Korean. "It was promulgated by and named for the American Library Association (ALA) and Library of Congress (LC). It was first published in 1997. It was significantly revised in 2009 and received a minor revision in 2025. It is based on the McCune-Reischauer romanization system, which was published in 1939" [1]. It requires

spacing between each word or lexical unit, including particles. For example, the book title *Tasi Han'guk yŏnghwa rŭl mal hada* (다시 한국 영화를 말하다) is separated into lexical units. As user can find a formation in this example, a compound word is divided into binary components: 한국 영화/ Han'guk yŏnghwa.

However, the original title in this example is 다시 한국영화를 말하다. Korean-speaking readers may feel awkward to read the transliterated title because it places spaces between nouns and postpositional particles.

- **Record Depth:** While WorldCat provided basic bibliographic data, many records still lacked advanced metadata such as subject terms, detailed descriptions, and genre classifications.
- **Preservation vs. Space:** Deciding to withdraw items of potential cultural or historical value is difficult. After consultation with the Korean Collection Librarian, the team prioritized the e-book format due to its superior accessibility.

7. Future Development

- **Translation vs. Transliteration:** Current records use English transliteration. To assist non-Korean speakers, future iterations should include English translations of titles and summaries.

Association for Library Collection & Technical Services (ALCTS), a division of the American Library Association, created a whitepaper, *Core Competencies for Cataloging and Metadata Professional Librarians* (2017) [2]. It includes "Human beings unavoidably assign value judgments when making assertions about a resource and in defining (via metadata standards and vocabularies) the assertions that can be made about a resource. Metadata creators must possess awareness of their own historical, cultural, racial, gendered, and religious worldviews, and work at identifying where those views exclude other human experiences. Understanding inherent bias in metadata standards is considered a core competency for all metadata work." Including both translation and transliteration may cover inherent bias caused by one language usage.

- **Multilingual Metadata Practices:** Developing and implementing multilingual metadata practices may also improve user accessibility. Matusiak et al. clarify how it works: multilingual searching of metadata records requires that either the metadata are provided in multiple languages that users are able to search or that the user query is translated into the language of the metadata [3]. Translation techniques can be divided into two methods: machine translation (MT) and Human translation. "Translation of metadata records can be conducted by using freely available translation applications on the Web, like Google Translate or Bing Translator [4], [5]. "MT offers the advantage of translating large amounts of text instantly and at a low cost, but the accuracy of translation is limited. In contrast to automated methods, human translation renders more accurate metadata and captures the cultural nuances, but it is resource- and cost-intensive" [3].

Van Oudenaren introduces one of the most notable examples of multilingual metadata practice: the World Digital Library (WDL). It is a collaborative project undertaken by UNESCO, Library of Congress and a significant number of libraries worldwide [6]. It offers not only metadata records translated into seven languages but also a collection interface available in seven languages. These practices may go beyond conventional translation services by promoting interaction among users worldwide.

- **Project Continuity:** Following the success of the interim project, the Acquisitions Department has resumed the initiative with a new LIS intern to process the remaining e-book records and monitor the long-term impact on Kyobo e-book usage.

To effectively enhance metadata, the department may consider batch cataloging. Young, P. illustrates "The term 'batch cataloging' refers to obtaining (or creating), transferring, manipulating, and editing groups of MARC bibliography records" [7]. According to French, R. B.'s recommendation, who elaborates a framework for metadata workflows, "another possible record enhancement workflow incorporating batch processing uses the same components as the basic copy cataloging workflow (Search, Import), but with different Import parameters so that only selected fields are added to the existing records" [8].

8. Conclusion

The project successfully demonstrated a streamlined workflow for metadata enhancement using Alma and OCLC WorldCat. By improving the quality of digital records, the library not only increased the discoverability of its e-book collection but also created a data-driven strategy for physical collection management. These efforts contribute to a more sustainable library environment by reducing paper dependency and optimizing physical storage for the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa community. To further develop this project, the team may consider implementing both transliteration and translation for key bibliographic elements to support non-Korean speakers, as well as automated or semi-automated workflows such as batch cataloging.

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