“Transcultural Metadata”
An exploration of the way our metadata is culturally limited

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Introduction
In the cultural heritage community, metadata schemes for documenting non-textual objects such as LIDO and VRA Core 4.0 are becoming increasingly important. Meta-aggregators like the Deutsche Digitalen Bibliothek and Europeana allow the public to discover works from the comfort of their screens, while research infrastructures like the DARIAH-DE Data Federation Architecture support researchers. These schemes are envisioned to be flexible enough to record the diverse collections of Europe, but if we wish to include collections and researchers from areas of study that do not deal exclusively with objects from the western cultural sphere, they must be suitable to different types of information, lest they be omitted. That is, careful consideration must be given to the metadata schemes themselves, and how they shape our understandings through the availability and correct labeling of data.

Main Objectives and Issues
The work "Cataloging Cultural Objects - a Guide to Describing Cultural Works and Their Images" (CCO) [1] provides a data content standard for cataloging of cultural heritage, and is further supported by the online examples provided on CCO Commons [2]. A completed project of the Heidelberg Research Architecture at Universität Heidelberg has focused on providing the CCO Commons examples encoded in the VRA Core 4.0 XML metadata schema. This was done with the aim of understanding comprehensive examples in XML, later to be published on the CCO website itself, in the university’s institutional repository for research data, HeiDATA [3], and on GitHub [4].

During this, several ways were noted in which metadata schemes for documenting non-textual objects such as LIDO and VRA Core 4.0 need further elements when it comes to non-Western objects. I will demonstrate in this poster through an example how these problems were solved through the Cluster extension. My wider aim is to raise awareness of how single metadata standards are limited, and how data may be lost through the cracks.

Conclusions
• Current schemes utilize an xml:lang for recording foreign language variations, but this is unsuitable for languages not using the Latin script, as it cannot encode script or transliteration.
• For the project using the VRA Core 4.0 XML, an extension was developed to allow us to record the language (lang, following ISO 639-2B), the precise writing system (script, following ISO 15924) and the transcription scheme (transcription).
• Non-Gregorian calendar dates currently cannot be encoded. In the extension, we separated the dates into an alternativeNotation tag and a simple date tag, allowing us to record these freely.
• Data from inscriptions are varied, and bring up several problems in encoding:
  – the agent can differ from the object’s;
  – there may be several different agents;
  – a signature may be a seal;
  – calligraphic style;
  – issue of language and original script.

References
[3] https://heidata.uni-heidelberg.de/

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Transliteration

Alternative calendrical dates

Inscriptions

1830

1832

1833

1849

Katsushika Hokusai (Japanese, Tokyo (Edo) 1760–1849 Tokyo (Edo)); Polychrome woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 25.7 x 37.9 cm; JP1847.

Credit: The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, USA). Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji Under the Wave off Kanagawa (Kanagawa oki nami ura), also known as The Great Wave, from the series Thirty-three Views of Mount Fuji (Fugaku sanjūrokkei) ca. 1830–32 Katsushika Hokusai (Japanese, Tokyo (Edo) 1760–1849 Tokyo (Edo)). Polychrome woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 25.7 x 37.9 cm; JP1847.