



APSIG Newsletter

ALIA Asia Pacific Special Interest Group

No. 90, March 2016

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Asian studies under threat



Be sure to read our colleague Amy Chan's provocative article on page 4 about how Asian studies research in Australia is being hampered by the loss of library expertise and poor access to resources.

Unfortunately, Asian studies research is now under threat from another direction: Amy's article went to press just as the Australian National University announced a dispute with the National Tertiary Education Union over changed working conditions for senior Asian studies teaching and research posts at

the ANU. The changes were first flagged in November last year following the cessation of Javanese and Tibetan language programs.

A sympathetic eye for Chinese life :photographs of 1930s China by Stanley O. Gregory



Stanley Gregory in 1929 at Repulse Bay, Hong Kong after a typhoon

In conjunction with the National Library's "Celestial Empire : Life in China 1644-1911" exhibition, the Australian Centre on China in the World (ANU) presented "Photographs of 1930s China by Stanley O. Gregory" earlier this year, which featured a selection of rarely seen images from the National Library of Australia collection.

Gregory worked for the eminent publishers Kelly & Walsh in Hong Kong and Shanghai during the 1920s and 1930s, and was

interned by the Japanese during World War II. He and his family then moved to Sydney, where he became a departmental head at the booksellers Angus and Robertson, and edited the Quaker publication "Australian Friend."



1930s street peep show box

Gregory died in 1955. He was an experienced amateur photographer with a sympathetic eye for Chinese life on travels in Beijing and the picturesque river towns surrounding Shanghai. The exhibition features a set of large-format archival prints, specially produced from the original negatives for this occasion.

In opening the exhibition, Margy Burn, Assistant Director-General, Australian Collections and Reader Services at the National Library hoped that this exhibition would make the extraordinary life and Chinese photographs of this little known Australian better known. She also drew attention to his fascinating letters and diaries about life under the Japanese occupation in China, which are held by the Library.
Andrew Gosling

Australian Asian librarians report

Darrell Dorrington announced recently the latest ALRA Newsletter no. 67 January 2016 is now available for viewing at <http://www.alra.org.au/newsletter.html> He thanked all the contributors with a special thanks to Jung-Sim Kim of Monash University for sacrificing part of her Christmas vacation to get the newsletter up on the web.

A wide variety of languages and topics and visits to libraries is included showing the wide interests of local Asian librarians. Congratulations to the Asian Library Resources of Association.

Celestial Empire: Life in China, 1644–1911 : from Dr Nathan Woolley, Curator

The National Library of Australia, Canberra, is currently displaying the exhibition *Celestial Empire: Life in China, 1644–1911*. This exhibition is a collaboration between the National Library of Australia and the National Library of China and engages with diverse material drawn from the collections of both libraries. It is the largest exhibition that the National Library of China has ever mounted overseas. Many of the items have not been outside China previously and some are on display for the first time.



Anne-Marie Schwirtlich, Director General of the National Library of Australia, and Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull at the official launch of *Celestial Empire*, 5 February 2016
Photo: David Hemenstall

Celestial Empire presents a unique selection of works from the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), taking advantage of the visual elements in Chinese works to introduce audiences to materials rarely presented outside East Asia. These items are drawn from different levels of society and constitute a series of vignettes that act as markers in a tour of society in China over the last centuries of imperial rule, presenting a holistic view of life under the Qing.

Included in the exhibition are: rare books demonstrating a range of purposes, interests and styles; maps of provinces, sacred sites, rivers and coastlines; plans of imperial sites; various rubbings taken from bronze and stone; and folk art in the form of New Year's pictures. Together they address various facets of lived experience, including the imperial court, the administration, agriculture, family life, religion, divination, science, theatre, fiction, and popular entertainment.

The National Library of China is one of the largest libraries in the world and is a significant repository of Chinese culture. Notable among the exhibits from the National Library of China are items drawn from the archives of the Lei family, whose members served as architects for the imperial court of the Qing dynasty for seven generations. They designed many iconic sites associated with achievements of the Qing court. The archive consists of thousands of documents, including architectural plans, reports and work diaries. Due to its historical and cultural significance, this archive was listed on UNESCO's Memory of the World Register in 2007.

The National Library of Australia is a key resource for Sinological study in Australia. Among its holdings is the Chinese collection of the London Missionary Society. Works preserved in this collection provide a detailed look at the concerns of the common people in everyday life in Qing society. They include numerous religious works, morality books and popular almanacs. Many books also reflect the lively cultural exchange that occurred in the nineteenth century following the opening of the treaty ports. Rare items produced under the Taiping's Heavenly Kingdom taken from this collection are also on display.

The Qing dynasty's achievements are fundamental to the nature of modern China. The events of its rule led to the various political and cultural tides that swept through

China in the twentieth century. Their effects continue to this day. This exhibition presents a timely look back at China's recent dynastic past in order to provide a means of better understanding the nation's position in the world today.

The exhibition ends on 22 May 2016. Entry is free, but bookings for timed entry are recommended.

<http://www.nla.gov.au/exhibitions/celestial-empire>

[The book](#) produced to accompany the exhibition is available through the NLA shop:

Behind the scenes with Celestial Empire: conservators sharing knowledge

Three National Library of China staff travelled with the NLC materials intended for display in the NLA's celestial Empire exhibition. They spent two weeks working with NLA conservators and exhibitions staff preparing and installing the precious items.



L to R National Library of China conservators Mr Zhu Zhenbin, Ms Peng Fuying and Ms Li Jian

This was a wonderful opportunity for the NLA preservation team to share preservation techniques with Chinese colleagues and learn about the preservation of threadbound books and other uniquely Chinese book production processes and techniques.

In March, two of the conservators returned to again work with the NLA Preservation

team to conduct condition checks and page turns for selected works in the exhibition. This is standard practice for any major exhibition, where page turns maintain interest for the public and also minimise the object's exposure to light. As always all possible care is taken to preserve the condition of items and prevent any risk of damage.



The Chinese team took detailed photographs and conducted a mid-exhibition condition check. The work was finished over two early morning sessions before exhibition opening hours and was conducted smoothly and cooperatively.



National approach to Asia-related collections needed

By Amy Chan

Asian studies research in Australia is being hampered by loss of library expertise and poor access to resources

Asian Studies is a burgeoning topic in Australian librarianship. The Asian collection in Australia is obscure, tucked-away under 'Arts', categorised as 'special'—and therefore remains unseen.

Asian studies is regarded as a field for the 'specialist' who has the specific languages, and therefore remains inaccessible and foreign to mainstream librarianship.

Arguably, this is the same generally for Asian studies in Australia. Except this is the 'Asian century'. Interest in the region is growing, as is the number of students from Asia studying in Australia. And there is a limit to how much reliable information one can get from Google!

Three main issues relate specifically to Asian studies library resources, and each has significant implications for Asian studies, its teaching and research in Australia.

Asian studies scholars in Canberra are well served by collections at the National Library of Australia (NLA) and the Menzies Library at the Australian National University (ANU), and in Melbourne by the Melbourne and Monash university libraries. These institutions carry substantial and established Asia-Pacific collections with attendant specialists. Scholars elsewhere, however, either have to rely on smaller collections, travel to Canberra or Melbourne, or rely on interlibrary loans.

These measures may suffice to a degree, but they are never the preferred option and place hurdles in the way of research. But more importantly, how do we encourage in our universities an understanding and appreciation of our Asian neighbours when we set limits on what and how much our students can discover?

While many of us are thankful for the NLA's Asian collections, they are not without issues. Like all other institutional collections they remain subject to the whims of funding authorities and to the decisions of the NLA's own executive board.

Despite its best efforts, the library's capacity to provide adequate, timely resources to its nationwide constituency is not limitless.

Limited delivery

Following a panel presentation at the 2014 Asian Studies Association of Australia's Conference in Perth, it was obvious in the ensuing discussion that, while an NLA project to archive political websites of various Southeast Asian countries is to be applauded, it can only deliver on a few selected countries such as Indonesia, Myanmar and Thailand. Many other countries in the region are not represented simply because the NLA does not have enough staff.

The discussion agreed that responsibility for archiving the websites could be shared among Australian university libraries. And that was that! Without a mechanism for collaborative projects nationwide such aspirations die a natural death.

Specialist v. non-specialist

There are two types of Asian studies librarians in Australia: the specialist who is responsible for collection development and user education specific to a region, and the non-specialist who is not necessarily required to develop the collection but has overall responsibility for user education and academic liaison for Asian studies within the humanities. Understandably, the second model is less expensive and more cost-effective.

Loss of expertise

However, the successful development of a collection on any topic or subject requires dedicated staff with specific knowledge, an appreciation of the publishing industry regionally, adequate language skills to create catalogues, and more hands-on-deck to

process material. This is expensive to sustain, so many libraries opt for the less costly route.

In fact, some libraries that had specialists for specific geographical areas have begun to lose this expertise. The ANU, for example, has lost expertise and staff through staff cuts and early voluntary retirement. The university now has a combined position of China-Japan-Korea librarian, which has meant a loss of specialisation mainly in Japanese language and Japan.

The ANU has also lost its Vietnam specialist. Vietnam is now part of the Southeast Asia, South Asia and Middle East portfolio—an amalgamation of three former positions. Similar developments are occurring at the Melbourne and Monash university libraries.

What loses out? Indigenous language material is passed over and not collected. Without the expertise and language capacity, libraries rely on acquisition models and agents. This leads to libraries losing control of the quality of publications they receive and their pertinence to research and teaching. In many cases, libraries pass on the responsibility for book selection to academics who are already overloaded with teaching and research pressures. Further, as libraries around the country use the same vendors, there will be an increasing homogeneity in collections, which is detrimental to the development of new ideas.

Changing technology

All libraries—university, research, public, large or small—face a fast-changing publishing world where modern technology has transformed how we read, use and access information. How we do research has changed as a result of this. The availability of the British Foreign Office files on East Asia, Southeast Asia and South Asia, for example, allows one to search a topic cross-regionally. With the increased availability of e-books and other electronic resources, particularly from China, Japan and Korea, digital technology is becoming a force all

Asian library collection managers have to contend with.

In the interest of library space, staff time and resources (for reshelving etc.) and ease of access for users, libraries around the world have shifted their purchasing and subscription strategies to e-preferred. Publishers and commercial aggregators, such as Proquest and Elsevier mainly in the Euro-American centres, have taken advantage of this development. They have pushed to develop and sell e-products and, in the last 15 years, have repackaged new and old products in ingenious ways to increase profit margins.

This trend, however, has resulted in an increasing concentration of the market share in the hands of a few major commercial aggregators and publishers. Consequently, they have been able to raise subscription prices for journals and, increasingly, e-books, effectively pricing out the larger e-journal packages and contemporary e-resources for many smaller libraries.

Another area of concern is, while libraries globally opt for e-books and e-resources, Asian publishers are not making them available evenly across the region. At one end of the spectrum, commercial companies and libraries in China, such as CNKI, are making e-journals and e-books available online in large databases. At the other end, while India's print publications flourish, its e-publications are held back by an inadequate legal environment. Thus when Australian libraries impose an e-preferred or e-only policy on new purchases, Asian collections suffer.

Asian studies librarians argue that the only way to counter some of these issues in Australia is to forge a national approach to Asia-related collection development. We envision a shared-collection development plan and strategy across various university and research libraries. This, however, is not easily realised as the area of focus slips through the cracks of existing consortiums and we lack an external impetus to focus library administrators on these issues.

Nonetheless, as a group, and as part of the Asia Library Resources of Australia, we are in the process of establishing a national register of Asian studies librarians and specialists, as well as a national database of e-resources and a communication network to share information and knowledge. We believe we're louder when we stand together. We also hope for many more opportunities to continue our dialogue with Asian studies scholars, researchers, lecturers and students in order to improve access to resources on Asia and help position Australia to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the 'Asian century'.

Dr Amy Chan is the library representative on the ASAA Council and president of Asia Library Resources of Australia. She is a librarian at the Menzies Library at the Australian National University.

Reprinted with thanks to Allan Sharp, Editor, Asian Currents

Call for papers: IFLA Conference 2016, Columbus, Ohio

The IFLA Regional Standing Committee for Asia and Oceania has distributed a Revised Call for Presentations: Satellite Meeting of the Regional Standing Committee for Asia and Oceania (RSCAO) to be held in Columbus, Ohio, on 12 August at the IFLA Conference.



RSCAO Chair, Jayshree Mamtora

The theme remains : Access to Information in Small Island Developing States. The

organisers are the IFLA Regional Standing Committee for Asia and Oceania in collaboration with ALA International Relations Round Table (IRRT) and the local Organising Committee with representatives from the Columbus College of Art and Design and the Columbus Metropolitan Library.

The organisers invited participation in this event, through attending, or also by presenting a case study or introducing a topic. The satellite pre-conference theme is closely linked to the theme of the RSCAO open session during the programme of the main Congress (WLIC) of 'Access to Information for Sustainable Communities'. There is also close alignment with the recently released Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations, and IFLA's Strategic Directions and Key Initiatives of 'Libraries in Society' and 'Capacity Building'.

It is expected that the satellite meeting will provide a forum for discussion, learning and exchange of ideas in relation to developing and promoting access to information in SIDS (Small Island Developing States). It would be particularly relevant to those individuals who have an interest in engaging with the wider discussion on sustainable development and the role of libraries.

Target audience & participants:

-- Librarians, information professionals, educators and policy-makers especially from SIDS the world over and in particular in the Asia-Oceania region.

-- Representatives of relevant sector bodies and inter-governmental agencies active in supporting libraries and access to information in the Asia-Oceania region.

-- Participants will also include representatives of the IFLA RSCAO, the ALA IRRT, and agencies in the host country.

-- Members of other IFLA sections with an interest in the regional issues to be discussed at this satellite meeting.

The event will comprise an opening session with an overview of intended outcomes, followed by four sessions of one and half hours each in duration. There will be short presentations, five to eight minutes in length, at the beginning of each session to present the topic, relate experiences, and highlight issues. Around 45 minutes will be used for discussion in groups related to the session topic. Half an hour will be available for participants to share their group findings and see if it is possible to arrive at a consensus as to approaches, methodologies and experiences. The focus is on the practical.

Topics

We are particularly interested in the following topics:

Advocacy – how you and your library can advocate for a role in implementing national and sectorial strategic plans/initiatives. This session will present the IFLA Advocacy Kit and talk about the Sustainable Development Goals.

Strategy development – what comprises a strategic plan? Do you have to have one? This session looks at the elements that make up a strategic plan, and presents the steps that have to be taken in its development. This will provide a useful theoretical background to strategic planning and help you find your way.

Sustainable development – can you and your library muscle your way in to partnering with other entities (e.g. government departments, universities, schools) to achieve national and sectorial strategic objectives? For example, a ministry of health has as one of its strategic goals the improvement in maternal health; can (and how can) a public library contribute to achieving this objective?

Networking and partnerships – the key to the involvement of you and your library in national and sectorial development is successful partnerships and networking. This session looks at some successful networks and partnerships to demonstrate why they are successful.

A short ‘summary of summaries’ will be presented at the RSCAO Open Session. We hope you many of you will be able to join us in Columbus, Ohio.

Ms Jayshree Mamtora, (pictured) RSCAO Chair

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ASAA Conference in Canberra

The 21st Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) will be held in Canberra at the ANU College of Asia and the Pacific from Tuesday 5 to Thursday 7 July with a post-graduate workshop on Monday 4 July.

The organisers, Professor Edward Aspinall and Professor Robert Cribb, are seeking a wide diversity of views and topics addressing shifts, continuities, innovations and tensions in Asia.

As at previous ASAA conferences, it is hoped to have library information provided to the attendees via handouts and possibly panels.

See <http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/asiapacific-region/asian-studies-association-australia>

APSIG Newsletter

Published three times a year : March, July and November. Address : PO Box 5051, Lyneham, A.C.T. 2602, Australia. ISSN 1327 1024

Copy deadline for July 2016 is Friday 10 June. Contributions very welcome especially from the Asia/Pacific region. Contact : Marie Sexton, Editor

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Issues are mounted on the APSIG homepage at : <https://www.alia.org.au/groups/alia-asia-pacific-special-interest-group>

