

## **KOREAN LIBRARIES: PROSPECTS FOR INCREASING AUSTRALIAN CONTACTS**

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Following a conference I attended on Internet in Japan, I visited Seoul from 18 to 22 June 1992 to see what potential exists in Korea for increased contacts with Australian libraries and to make direct contact with our exchange partners.

Korea, in my view, represents a major opportunity for Australia; it is growing rapidly and has a strong technological and economic base. To some extent, this has been recognised in the report of the Korea-Australia Forum "Agenda for Korea-Australia Cooperation Towards the Twenty First Century" (April 1991) and the establishment of the Korea-Australia and Australia-Korea Foundations. Unfortunately, all Australia seems to export at present are raw materials such as iron, coal and uranium. Australian strengths in areas such as medicine, computer software and information services could, with appropriate support and direction, be matched to the Korean ability to manufacture efficiently. As far as library services are concerned, there is a real possibility of providing both information retrieval and document supply services into Korea in future. I believe that the emerging national educational networks in Korea, run through the Seoul National University Education Network Division, the Korean Advanced Institute of Science and Technology and the System Engineering Institute, and with resulting links to the Internet, offer a possibility for the delivery of library services, for example, for CSIRO, the National Library of Australia and the universities, to be promoted into Korea in the next two or three years. We need to find ways to encourage connection of the Korean major libraries - the National Central Library, the KIST Library, the National Assembly Library and those of the universities - to the Internet.

All the institutions I visited were keen to send library staff to the National Library of Australia (NLA) and other appropriate Australian libraries for training and experience. Another possibility would be for one of our library schools to show a strong interest in receiving Korean students at the postgraduate level. This may be achievable, particularly with the assistance of the new Australia-Korea Foundation. NLA already has reasonably active materials exchange programs with the major libraries and I doubt whether these need more than fine tuning at this stage. There appear to be adequate commercial suppliers of Korean materials, and again, I saw no reason for any special new arrangements having to be made for collecting purposes.

In general, I believe that NLA's interaction with Korean institutions should be put on a somewhat higher basis than has occurred in recent years. I rate interconnection through the Internet as the highest priority for the medium term. The Korean libraries I visited are quite separated from this development because the networking developments in Korea have occurred within the higher education and scientific research institute sectors. We need to seek advice from AARNet on the developing Korean networking situation and how Australian libraries might develop links to Korean institutions.

### **Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

I made a brief visit to the Cultural Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and met Mr Lee Hae-soon, the Director-General of the Bureau. This was largely a

courtesy visit following the visit to Canberra by him as the head of Korean cultural delegation earlier in 1992. The visit to the Bureau was followed by a lunch which involved myself, Mr Lee, his Deputy, Mr Sae Dong Chang and Mr Jong-hwan Suh, Director-General for Cultural Exchange of the Korean Overseas Information Service, together with Mr Andrew Mullin, Chargé d'Affaires of the Australian Embassy in Seoul. Discussions covered the possibility of more travelling exhibitions between the two countries, staff placements in institutions, and the possibilities of linking access to databases through developing international communications such the Internet. Possibilities arising through the formation of the new Australia-Korean Foundation in Australia and the corresponding Korea-Australia Foundation in Korea were also covered.

### **National Central Library**

I spent about two hours at the National Central Library (NCL). It is housed in a very substantial building in the south of the City. Most of the time was spent with the new Director, Mr Chung Hee-chun and his two reporting Directors, Mr An Jin Soo, Director of the Library Management department and Mr Cho Wan Ho, Director of the Library Service Department. The new Director is not a librarian and has come from elsewhere in the bureaucracy, and I understand the Director's position was upgraded at the same time. Matters discussed generally included:

- \* Staffing in the Library continued to expand slowly. However, the Library is taking steps to limit access to those over 20 years old (previously over 18) because it has been unable to cope with rapidly increasing demands by undergraduate students - it sees itself as a library of second resort to those of schools and universities - perhaps an interesting parallel to the situation with the National Library of Australia.
- \* Its automation program continues to develop. It has currently developed inhouse acquisitions, cataloguing, circulation and Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). All Korean cataloguing is done inhouse, but it uses downloading from the UTLAS compact disc for Western language materials. The OPAC was launched to the public with about six terminals in February 1992, and appears from a quick demonstration to have author, title, call number and subject retrieval capabilities. It locates items not only by call number, but by floor and reading room - as the Library has several reading rooms for the public - including ones for Korean genealogy and newspapers. The system runs on a Tandem machine and the Library has no local area network. The Head of the Library automation office, Mr Choi Young-Bok, said that output in KORMARC could be supplied to the National Library of Australia if required - this possibility should be investigated once the National Library's CJK development path is known.
- \* Staff exchange: the NCL does not believe it is currently in the position to have an NLA staff member on exchange, but it is very enthusiastic about the possibility of NCL staff coming to the NLA for a period.

### **National Assembly Library**

I spent about three hours at the National Assembly Library. It occupies a large, relatively new building in the Parliamentary complex, one of three buildings around a square, the others being the Assembly itself, and the building for Parliamentary Secretariat. The Library is in the south of the city, situated very near the River Han. It has a staff of about 260.

The Director, Mr Joo Bong Kim, is active internationally in the area of parliamentary librarianship, being currently President of the Association of Parliamentary Librarians of Asia and the Pacific. The significance of the Assembly Library is that it undertakes many functions of a national library. It is the major collector of materials from overseas in the fields of the social sciences and humanities, and NLA's largest exchange partner in Korea. Exchanges appear to be working well. The Library is a major player in relation to Korean bibliography, compiling an index to Korean language periodicals, the annual list of doctoral and masters theses (over 25,000 per year!), and an index of both Korean and foreign language articles of interest to the Assembly. It is also a depository library, although the Director bemoaned the ineffectiveness of the Copyright Act as a source of legal deposit, and in practice the Library purchases much of its Korean material.

The Library is fairly well developed in system terms, and has a systems staff of about 30. It has its own IBM main frame (4381) with about 100 terminals connected from the Library and the Assembly Secretariat. Extension to Members' offices is going ahead currently. I would judge the Library as capable of connecting to the National Library of Australia, either through the Internet, or otherwise, without too much difficulty if it was thought to be worthwhile.

It is probable that, of the libraries I saw, the Assembly Library is the most likely to be seriously interested in the possibility of sending staff members to NLA for training and development, and currently the most likely to be able to derive practical benefits from such a visit. Mr Kim showed interest in the possibility, if external funding could be achieved. I noted that he was personally involved in the US/Korea libraries' meeting at the Library of Congress in January 1992, and was working with United States librarians towards a major conference in October 1992, which would bring together specialists from South Korea and the United States to "design action plans to improve libraries, communications, data retrieval and scholarship on Korea." This exercise was funded under a US\$1 million grant from the Korea Foundation. Although I brought Mr Kim up-to-date with the progress of Korean studies in Australia, with the very large Korean population now in the United States (over one million) it is clear that for English language services, the natural direction for Korean libraries to look is to the United States at present.

Mr Kim also told me that UTLAS from Canada had just signed a contract with the Korean Computer Corporation to provide "database services" to Korean libraries. Mr Kim did not have any details, but believed that the UTLAS initiative was expected to mount a substantial database locally which would provide shared cataloguing and other services.

### **Korean Institute of Science and Technology Library**

I spent about two hours with the Librarian of the Korean Institute of Science and Technology (KIST) Library, Mr Ke Hong Park, who is also currently President of the Korean Library Association. (As well as representing the National Library of Australia, I also had some discussions on behalf of the Executive Director of the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), aimed at closer relations between the two library associations.)

KIST is in a very attractive north eastern suburb of Seoul, about 10 kilometres from the centre, and appears to have had something of chequered history over recent years. Established as a research institute in 1966, it merged with the Korea Advanced Institute of Science to form the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and

Technology in 1981, but reverted in 1989 to its original role, when KAIST was split off as a separate under-graduate and post-graduate education institution. Its current activities are concentrated in materials, process technologies, engineering, environmental technology and electronics, with two affiliated institutes - the Genetic Engineering Research Institute and the Systems Engineering Research Institute (SERI) - the latter being of interest because it manages KREONET, one of Korea's research networks connected to the Internet. It is funded by the Minister of Science and Technology.

The Library appears to be operating a straightforward medium-sized special library operation. Its systems development is largely based on 386/486 PCs and CD-ROMs, with online access through KIETLINE to Korea's main science database services, which are located at the Korean Institute of Engineering and Technology (KIET). The Library uses OCLC CD-450 CAT for overseas cataloguing records. The Library's catalogue is accessible over the Institute's local area network. Unfortunately, because the appropriate staff member was not available that day, I was unable to investigate KIST's broader information retrieval and database services role in more detail. It appears, however, that information retrieval services in science and technology are now concentrated at KIET, which I was not able to visit. However, the KIST Library provides a contents listing service for other libraries based on the journals it receives.

Mr Park's view was that science and technology information in Korea was not particularly satisfactory (sounds familiar!) in that the effort was currently split between KIST, KIET, KAIST (which hosts the union list of science and technology books), the new science park at Taedok and the universities (for example, Yonsei University School of Medicine hosts the MEDLINE service), and coordination was less than ideal as the institutions were funded through different ministries. For the same reason, the emerging research networks are not developing in a fully coordinated way. He commented that while most university libraries now had relatively new and good buildings, their collections were often still very weak. For document supply, KIST mainly uses the British Library Document Supply Centre (BLDSC) direct. Access to BLDSC is made easy as vouchers are obtained in local currency through the local British Council office.

On library education matters, the recent move of public libraries to the Ministry of Culture is resulting in changes of philosophy and some experimentation in programs. A recent law states that within five years all public libraries must be headed by a professional, and this is expected to have effects on library education and the quality of public library services, which to date have been very variable because of the fragmented nature of Korean local government, and the low salaries paid in comparison with universities and research institutes. There are currently library science departments in several universities operating under-graduate programs, a few providing post-graduate programs, and six junior colleges providing two year technician programs. However, a few students go to the United States and, to a lesser extent, Britain, for masters level courses. The Korean Library Association holds an annual congress each October and typically has about 1000 delegates.

Although Australia seems to be virtually invisible in Korea, all I met were hospitable and demonstrated a friendly attitude towards Australia. There are certainly opportunities for increased contacts with Korean libraries.