

WASHINGTON AND LONDON IN THE SPRING

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Taking the opportunity for a second time to attend the Association of Asian Studies (AAS) Conference in North America, I included visits to colleagues in the Library of Congress and, in London, to the British Library and the School of Oriental and African Studies. For the benefit of readers of the *EALRGA Newsletter*, I am commenting from an Australian and National Library of Australia perspective. Another of my orientations is from the management perspective rather than that of a language specialist.

The chance to compare both Australia and the National Library of Australia (NLA) with the major international Asian collections was very attractive. This was especially valuable as the three institutions I visited are, like the National Library of Australia, in English-speaking countries and having multilingual, multiscript collections and a variety of clientele from many countries. NLA has been compared to the Library of Congress for many decades, and the opportunity of the Association of Asian Studies being in Washington, DC, led me to anticipate good opportunities to meet their staff and to hear of their activities.

I was especially interested to visit the Asian Division at the **Library of Congress**. In pursuance of my theme in comparing these institutions with the National Library of Australia, I was interested to see the impact which the functional organisation of the Library of Congress has upon them. The Library of Congress has separate acquisitions, cataloguing and public service areas. I was delighted to meet Mrs Mya Thanda Helen Poe, who was appointed as Division Chief in July 1994. Mrs Poe has had substantial experience in the Library of Congress's Overseas Acquisition Offices in New Delhi and Karachi. Among staff I met, I was pleased to meet again Kohar Rony, their renowned Southeast Asian Specialist. Ms Ichiko Morita, Head of the Japan Documentation Center, gave me an update on their operations which are designed to meet the needs of the members of Congress for strategic information from Japan.

Mrs Poe told me of the Library of Congress' plans to move the Asian Division reading room and staff from the somewhat dated Madison Building to the refurbished Jefferson Building when that is ready for re-occupation. Later on, I took the public tour around the Jefferson Building which still continues to offer public service in its domed reading room, although the rest of it is being gutted and restored. We entered the building through one of the long tunnels which cross-cross the site.

I was interested to hear from the various Library of Congress administrators and specialists who spoke at the meetings of the Committee of East Asian Librarians (CEAL). One important theme for me is that the Library of

Congress is giving some consideration to its future collecting role. It was clear that they are considering the possibilities of greater collaboration with other major United States libraries in future, and also to the depth of their collecting. For example, there was an announcement that the Library of Congress proposes to collect at the national level only for Japan and India in future. One matter which was often referred to in these talks was the impact of resignations and retirements upon the specialist cataloguing teams with the Library of Congress. The move to whole book cataloguing has also meant that there has been a need for a great deal of training as staff learned new skills. It was clear that those attending the CEAL meetings, in particular, were anxious about the impact of these changes.

The Library of Congress has a very complex automated system which they are working to improve over the next couple of years. This has affected the way that they have been able to organise their work. I compared their functional structure to the integrated approach which we have in the National Library of Australia for the major Asian languages. I could see that the complexity of the Library of Congress's automated systems and staff groupings could create the need for a significant amount of consultation and information seeking; within an integrated staffing system, such as that of the National Library of Australia, we can deal with matters more easily. In the National Library of Australia, there are language specialist groups for Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean and Thai who out all functions.

However, considering the size of operations at the Library of Congress, the functional approach probably allows for an economy of scale of operations.

Following the AAS, I visited the Oriental and **British Library's** India Office Collections in Blackfriars Road, London SE1. The two separate collections have been brought together in one building as their final move (there have been others) before they transfer to the new British Library building several miles north of their present site and across the Thames at St. Pancras, in a couple of years. They are housed on a number of floors of a former Department of Defence office building on a busy road. They are at present quite separate from all other areas of the British Library.

Graham Shaw, Deputy Director, showed me around and I met a number of their specialists for East and Southeast Asia. I met Dr Frances Wood (China), Patricia Herbert (Indonesia), Dr Henry Ginsburg (Thai) and Hamish Todd (Japanese).

A very strong orientation of the British Library towards the Middle East was clear. It was apparent to the visitor that there was a great variety of automated systems used for bibliographical control; in fact, the system was so complex, with the East Asian languages each using a different system, that it could be a test for a visitor to keep a perfect record of what each does. The Japanese area staff access the National Center for Science Information Systems (NACSIS) system from Japan and the Chinese staff use Allegro C, as do the Bodleian Library and Leeds University Library. Their online public access catalogue (OPAC) does not, at present, display any non-Roman script

characters except for Hebrew which was part of the catalogue at the time of the building of the database. The input of Hebrew has not been continued due to system constraints.

The clientele is very specialised and, of course, limited by readers' tickets. The British Library staff give intensive reader assistance to their clients. There seemed to be a strong humanities and arts orientation in the clientele and current collecting, which is focused on supporting their historical collections. The world-famous collections of ancient books and records from the world's ancient civilisations are now used by readers from all over the world. With such an incomparable collection, security was clearly an important issue and there were many restrictions on access and use of materials in their reading room.

The British Library is the library of absolute last resort and is, in effect, only to be consulted when the resources of other libraries are exhausted.

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Mary Auckland, the Librarian, showed me around the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) of the University of London. I found that Mary had a background in automation rather than in Asian Studies. SOAS Library was thronged with undergraduates as it was just before the Easter break. Clearly, their students are from all the countries of Asia and Africa. The Library is built around a rather square building with a void in the centre and a number of mezzanine floors which house book stacks and offices. It contains 800,000 volumes and is the largest Asian and African collection in the United Kingdom. It has extensive vernacular collections from the Near and Middle East, as well as East, Southeast and Asian collections.

SOAS Library is given national funding to perform as a national centre for Asian studies. Mary told me that "minority" languages which include Thai and Vietnamese receive special extra government funding as the level of demand is not high, and they would otherwise be supported. Staff who perform cataloguing are being given the opportunity of being involved in public service areas to give them more opportunity for staff development as there little movement between functional areas is possible. I was interested to obtain a copy of their February 1995 Collection Development Policy (6 pages).

A comment frequently made to me during my trip concerned the advantage that Australia has through its geographic relationship to the region. As well, the Australian advantage of having migrant communities to call upon for staff expertise was recognised. The fact that Australian libraries have a marked interest in Asia was considered to be perfectly reasonable under the circumstances.