

## ASSOCIATION FOR ASIAN STUDIES CONFERENCE

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I travelled to Hawaii to attend the 48th Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) which was held in the very pleasant surroundings of the Hilton Hawaiian Village in Honolulu, Thursday 11 - Sunday 14 April 1996. My primary objective was to contribute to the Workshop on the Global Information Infrastructure for Asian Studies organised by the Council on East-Asian Libraries (CEAL) as well as other sessions and activities organised by CEAL in conjunction with AAS. CEAL meets annually in conjunction with AAS and their joint conference is important particularly for those involved in East-Asian Studies. This was both my first visit to Hawaii and my first opportunity to attend an AAS/CEAL conference.

The conference was well attended with approximately 2500 registered delegates participating in a varied and interesting programme of 232 panels. Attendance levels at the sessions on library resources and information technology was very encouraging particularly for one used to the numbers which panels on similar issues attract at Asian Studies Association of Australia conferences in Australia.

The main aim of the 'Workshop on the Global Information Infrastructure for Asian Studies' which was held on Thursday 11 April was to bring together scholars and librarians involved in improving access to research resources for Asian Studies. Underlying this major aim, the workshop sought to explore how the Association for Asian Studies, as a scholarly organisation, might become more involved in the future in promoting and encouraging such efforts by for instance 'facilitating training in such work or otherwise undertaking initiatives regarding electronic resources'.

The workshop focused on cooperative projects particularly those involving international collaboration and comprised three sessions two of which were incorporated under an umbrella title 'Electronic Resources and Information Services'. Speakers in the first session included Lewis Lancaster from University of California, Berkeley, on the Electronic Buddhist Text Initiative; David Magier from Columbia University on South Asia Gopher and the World Wide Web; Ichiko Morita from the Library of Congress (LC) on their Japan Documentation Center and Susan Whitfield from the British Library on the International Dunhuang Project.

The speakers described the progress to date on their projects, outlining the challenges encountered and the need for increased cooperation on an international basis to maximise the usefulness of the various projects to the international user community. Issues identified during this session included the lack of uniformity in East-Asian character sets; the

inadequacy of Unicode; the need to tag and mark up texts in categories such as names of rivers, provinces etc; the information provider rather than information user orientation of information on the Internet; the lack of subject access to Internet information; the need for librarians to take on the role of consumers' agent; the difficulties of acquiring and disseminating 'grey literature' or current information about Asian cultures which hold information closely and tightly and inevitably the need for funding to support such initiatives. Duplication of effort and the lack of coordination in relation to electronic projects was also raised with the suggestion that the AAS fulfil a centralising and coordinating role and assist with human resources for new information/content on the Internet.

Part Two of the sessions on Electronic Resources and Information Services, which continued in the afternoon, also kept the international focus and featured speakers from Japan, Korea and Australia. Speakers in the session included Izume Koide from the International House of Japan who gave a paper which addressed the issue of the changing role of the area librarian entitled 'Bridging Shores: The changing role of the Area Studies Librarian' and Han-gon Song from the National Assembly Library in Seoul whose paper was entitled 'The Current Status of the Digital Library Program of the National Assembly Library (Korea)'. My own contribution on the Chinese Serials Database which is being created on the Web by the Australian National University Library in cooperation with the National Library of China was also included in this session and attracted considerable comment and interest, putting me in touch with North American colleagues dealing with similar issues.

The second session was entitled 'Association of Research Libraries' Foreign Acquisitions Study and Strategic Plan for improving access to Global Information Resources: Implications for Asian Studies in North American Research Libraries'. As the title of the session suggests, the speakers dealt with various aspects of the American Research Libraries (ARL) study and strategic plan with Maureen Donovan from Ohio State University and Jutta Reed-Scott from the Association of Research Libraries jointly responsible for the Overview and East-Asia related issues; Judith Henchy from the University of Washington for Southeast Asia related issues and James Nye from the University of Chicago for South-Asia related issues.

In her presentation 'East-Asian Collections and the ARL Project', Maureen Donovan described the environment common to all East-Asian Collections against which the project was conducted. The environment portrayed is familiar to all those involved in East-Asian Collections and included the coincidence of the funding crisis facing funding agencies, particularly those which are Japan-related; the impact of 'the loss of irrelevance in Asian Studies'; the publishing boom in East-Asia and the explosion of electronic resources published in East-Asian languages with many more in production.

Judith Henchy speaking on Southeast Asia described a context in which Southeast Asian studies covering a region of diverse countries with enormous economic disparities and using collectively thirty non-roman scripts is still very much dependent on the book. While referring to an enormous increase in web sites in Southeast Asia, she also raised the issue of censorship and control of information in an area in which in general governments make information available largely on a 'need to know' basis and questioned the relevance of much electronic information to the vast majority of the primary research clientele. In his contribution on South Asian Studies, James Nye described demoralised, underfunded, deteriorating collections of material in languages which very few people are qualified even to catalogue. He stressed the importance of trans-national studies and the need to define which materials should have priority for distribution in machine form, as well as the need to ensure that the resources that are currently available in North America do not disappear.

In addition to the Workshop, I was also able to attend other sessions in the conference programme of particular interest to EALRGA members. These included the OCLC CJK Users Group meeting and the CEAL Committee on Chinese materials meeting, both of which I personally found very informative. The Committee on Chinese Materials Meeting included presentations by speakers from China: Du Ke, Head of the Library Bureau in the Ministry of Culture and Dai Longji, Deputy Director of Peking University Library. As part of the main stream conference programme a round table on Asian Libraries in the Digital Age, comprised of speakers from various National Libraries in Asia, addressed issues of concern to everybody involved in the study of Asian societies and cultures as we approach the 21st century. I will be happy to report on both this and the two meetings referred to above in a later issue of the EALRGA newsletter if this is of interest to readers.

The conference was accompanied by a Trade Exhibition which incorporated representation and exhibits from the major suppliers and institutions involved in Asian Studies, including a display from the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at the Australian National University.

I saw this as a very important meeting which offered the chance for me for the first time to observe the similarities and differences between the Asian Studies Association of Australia and the East-Asian Library Resources Group of Australia on the one hand and the Association for Asian Studies and the Council of East-Asian Libraries on the other. The beauty of the surroundings and the warmth of the welcome I received from our CEAL colleagues were of course added attractions and I would particularly like to take this opportunity to thank Maureen Donovan whose encouragement was instrumental in my decision to attend.