

ASSOCIATION OF ASIAN STUDIES:
Chicago in cold cold March and on to the United Kingdom:
Holiday Travels of a Librarian

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The Association of Asian Studies (AAS) annual meeting is the largest international gathering of academics, researchers and librarians. Several thousand attend each year. The number of panels running concurrently for three days is staggering with attendees scrambling around the great conference hotel to find their meeting place, grab a cup of coffee and a muffin and rush on. This was the third that I have attended, having been at Boston and Washington, DC, meetings in previous years. Prior to the academic conference, there are almost three days (and nights) of library interest group meetings. There are special meetings for Japanese, Korean and Chinese librarians, East Asian committees, South Asianists and Southeast Asia. Being from the National Library, I had to be rather schizophrenic and mix up my attendance in order to cover our wide interests. AAS is a grand opportunity, either to meet old colleagues, or see in the flesh people you know only through the listserves. The meetings are very friendly and open with everyone willing to speak to one another (or be quiet if they are tired). One old friend who will be known to readers of this Newsletter was Eiko Sakaguchi, formerly of Monash, now at the University of Maryland. She is now the Curator of the East Asia Collection and Gordon W. Prange Collection at the University at College Park. Eiko's email is: <se66@umail.umd.edu>. Eiko had found her first US winter to be very harsh but enjoyed the first tentative signs of spring appearing. I also met a number of Library of Congress (LC) staff; over a dozen were present both from the Asian Branch and from Overseas Operations Division as LC controls the various overseas acquisition offices throughout the world.

Three innovative new digital projects which are attracting wide interest are :

- **EASyHelp (East Asian Scholars Help Desk):**
website: <<http://askvrd.org/EASyHelp/mainpage.asp>>

This is a very new digital reference project set up by the US-based Committee of East Asian Librarians. It is aimed at the isolated scholar with Chinese, Japanese and Korean research interests at an institution with limited resources of books and staff. The registration form accepts non-US based addresses. It is already also receiving more complex queries also which cannot be answered by the bigger libraries in North America. The website is being hosted by the University of Massachusetts. The AskERIC software is used. An interesting inclusion on the website is information on the use of various types of East Asian script software, since that is often a problem for both academics and librarians.

- **Digital South Asian Library (DSAL):**
website <<http://dsal.uchicago.edu/>>

Hosted by the University of Chicago, DSAL is exploring the provision of electronic texts and sources as copyright allows. These are still very limited in number and most included are out of copyright. The organisers have developed close co-operation with the British Library with its rich resources in the India Office collections. DSAL is seen as a working model for the sharing of access to electronic resources which are available to the public.

- **Electronic Cultural Atlas Initiative (ECAI):**
website <<http://ecai.org>>

Australian GIS specialists from Griffith and Sydney Universities have developed innovative software to store historical data within a GIS framework. It allows for layering of information by periods. This software is provided to users via the Electronic Cultural Atlas Initiative website. ECAI has a particular interest in historical Asian data, although the projects using the software range from the history of the Salem Witch Trials to malaria research. ECAI means that academic research can be based upon a common standard and be interchangeable with others. A meeting on ECAI will be held in Sydney in June which Maura O'Connor, the National Library's Map Curator, will attend.

These three projects seemed to me to be particularly interesting as they are based upon a strong collaborative effort involving a number of libraries and academics. They still require a committed core group who have institutional support to enable them to devote the time needed to make them work. Each project is still being developed.

I would certainly recommend attending at least one AAS meeting. The next one will be in Washington, DC (AAS meets in Washington every third year). Attendance there provides an opportunity to visit the Library of Congress. The meeting will be held from April 4 to 7, 2002 and if you are lucky, the cherry blossoms will be out. The AAS website, <<http://www.aasianst.org/>>, has the details. The Registration Fee is not high but you do not get any teas, lunches, etc. Just a badge so you can enter the meeting rooms and a program.

The Trade Exhibition would be of great interest to Australians. Although we have a good supply of catalogues sent to us, it is good meeting specialist publishers. Also, there is a wide variety of audio-visual and teaching materials on display.

Research Libraries Group

I attended a day session during the conference at the University of Chicago campus organised by the Research Libraries Group (RLG) and led with great gusto by Karen Smith-Yoshimura. One major topic was their plan for an East Asian digitisation project to add new texts to RLG's Cultural Materials Initiative. I was interested to hear the discussion on the their Pinyin transfer project. The RLIN database contains a number of versions of the same bibliographic item which must be dealt with in the conversion. As part of the day, we visited the Center for Research Libraries (CRL), a co-operative store for a number of US academic libraries, which is located on the University grounds. One issue they are being forced to face is the need to create bibliographical records for their holdings. When the number of participating libraries was small, each of them could be relied upon to know what was held at CRL. Now that the number of contributing libraries is much higher, the need for catalogue records is an issue.

British Library

I was given a very warm welcome by Graham Shaw, head of the Asian and India Office Collections. The Asian collections are now very comfortably settled into the St Pancras site, having been formerly located separately for a number of years in Blackfriars in South London. The building is huge although it is said to be only one third of its proposed final size.

School of Oriental and African Studies Library

My particular focus was to meet Ms Lesley Price who is their archivist and see the London Missionary Society archives which are now housed at SOAS. I was able to give her a copy of our newly produced catalogue of the Chinese, Japanese and Korean books in the London Missionary Society (LMS) collection. We purchased this from the LMS many years ago.

