The International Outreach of American Librarianship: Historical Notes on Some Initiatives in Asia

Warren M. Tsuneishi

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It has been my experience that librarians tend to be universalist in outlook, perhaps because they live immersed in books created by, and illustrative of, all civilizations. Academic librarians especially are attuned to the whole world of knowledge, regardless of subject, linguistic, temporal, or geographic boundaries, as a visit to any great university or national library will attest. And American academic librarians have been in the forefront of movements to internationalize the profession during the past century, and especially during the post-World War II period. I propose in this brief essay to introduce four activities relating generally to the outreach of American librarians to colleagues in Asia during the past quarter of a century as examples of this international perspective. These relate to the organization of the International Association of Orientalist Librarians (IAOL) and to binational or multinational relations with libraries in China, Korea, and Japan.

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ORIENTALIST LIBRARIANS

The International Association of Orientalist Librarians was provisionally established at the 27th International Congress of Orientalists (ICO) meeting in Ann Arbor in August 1967 by librarians who had organized the first ever library panels for the congress. The inspiration to establish the forum for librarians in ICO (itself formed in 1873 in Paris) came in fact from members of the Association for Asian Studies Committee on American Library Resources on the Far East (CALFRE), the predecessor of the Committee on East Asian Libraries. At its 1966 annual meeting held in New York, CALFRE members unanimously recommended that library sessions be organized for the congress, with the consequence that the chair, Edwin G. Beal, Jr. of the Library of Congress, appointed Yukihisa Suzuki, then Head of the Asia Library, University of Michigan, and Eugene Wu, Librarian of the Chinese-Japanese Library, Harvard University, to plan and organize a library panel. One year later, Suzuki as chair of the CALFRE International Relations Subcommittee reported on progress at the March 1967 annual meeting in Chicago, presided over by Tsuen-hsuin Tsien, the newly elected chairman of CALFRE.

The Ann Arbor conference of 27 ICO held later that year thus included a series of library seminars under the general theme of "Library Resources in Oriental Studies," with at least four of the specific topics characteristically devoted to cooperative projects, e.g., ways and means to improve international library communications and exchange. The participating librarians, representing collections in Asia, North America, and Europe, agreed to establish an ongoing association — IAOL — and elected James D. Pearson, Librarian of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, as president.
Pearson chaired the library seminars of 28 ICO, convened four years later in 1971 in Canberra. Among librarians from the United States presenting papers at this congress were Yukihisa Suzuki, assessing the first Japan-U.S. Conference on Libraries; T. H. Tsien, describing programs for education for Far Eastern librarianship in the U.S.; P. K. Yu, Director of the Center for Chinese Research Materials, describing international efforts in bibliographic control of Chinese periodicals; Louis Jacob, then Director of the Asian Reference Department, University of Pennsylvania, discussing the impact on American libraries of area studies; and Gordon Williams, Director of the Center for Research Libraries, analyzing uses of collections and their effect on interlibrary cooperation. Echoing Jacob's paper, I read a report on the impact on American libraries of oriental area studies programs in academia. Papers with similar themes have characterized presentations in subsequent congresses, all of which have included library panels planned and organized by IAOL. (Following the centennial congress of 1973 held in Paris, ICO changed its name, first to the International Congress of Human Sciences in Asia and North Africa, and then to the International Congress of Asian and North African Studies.)

American librarians serving as president of IAOL over the years have included G. Raymond Nunn, formerly chair of CALFRE, and myself. The incoming president taking office at the end of the congress being convened in Hong Kong in August 1993 is William Sheh Wong of the University of California, Irvine. He will be assisted by Kenneth Klein of the University of Southern California and Ray Lum of the Harvard-Yenching Library as the new officers of the Association responsible, inter alia, for continuing the work of the association, especially publishing the IAOL Bulletin.

RELATIONS WITH LIBRARIES IN CHINA, KOREA, AND JAPAN

This account of initiatives in binational or multinational library relations with China, Korea, and Japan during the past quarter century must necessarily by episodic, idiosyncratic, and almost entirely personal. A full formal history must await the labors of other researchers.

CHINA

The Nixon-Kissinger visit to China in February 1972 almost immediately raised the possibility of an opening in relations with libraries and librarians in China. When Chi Wang, head of the Chinese Section, Orientalia Division, Library of Congress (LC), who was on leave from LC and serving as director of the Chinese University of Hong Kong Library at the time, received an invitation to visit China, he accepted and made the trip on June 1 to June 18, 1972. In Beijing, he discussed with various officials the possibility of an exchange of publications program between the National Library of China and the Library of Congress and the possibility of a visit of American librarians to China. He carried a letter addressed to Chinese officials requesting such a visit signed by Foster E. Mohrhardt of the Council on Library Resources, a committed internationalist and former director of the National Agricultural Library as well as a former president of the American Library Association (ALA). The response was positive, but it would be seven years before the first
delegation of American librarians would ever set foot on Chinese soil. In the interim, the first delegation of Chinese librarians toured American libraries in 1973; and various efforts were independently mounted to enter China by, among others, the Committee on East Asian Libraries (CEAL) under the leadership of Tao-t’ai Hsia, Chief of the Far Eastern Law Division of the Library of Congress and chair of the CEAL Subcommittee on Liaison with Chinese Libraries; the American Library Association; the Association of Research Libraries; and the Library of Congress.

It was the LC effort that was eventually successful, although the first attempt in 1973-1974 to form a delegation was roundly criticized by, among others, CEAL representatives who had been left out of the planning. For several years, negotiations were stalemated, but problems of timing, scheduling, and composition of the delegation were eventually resolved, perhaps in part through a letter sent by T. H. Tsien to Chen Hung-sun, a Columbia graduate and professor of library science in Beijing University. There were as well extensive discussions between the Library of Congress and the cultural counselor of the Chinese Liaison Officer in Washington, D.C. addressing outstanding issues.

The twelve-member delegation, led by William J. Welsh, the Deputy Librarian of Congress, included three representatives each from LC (Hsia and myself in addition to Welsh), CEAL (T. H. Tsien, Eugene Wu, and P. K. Yu), the American Library Association, and the Association of Research Libraries. The delegation visited libraries in Beijing, Xi’an, Shanghai, Nanjing, and Guangzhou from September 10 to 30, 1979. At universities and research institutes in each city, the American visitors described in formal presentations basic issues in contemporary American librarianship — library automation and networking; preservation (in Chinese by Yu); library education; East Asian libraries (in Chinese, by Tsien and Wu); and law libraries (in Chinese by Hsia). Mr. Welsh was to characterize the visit as the “most exhilarating” of his professional life. By all accounts, it was a mutually rewarding trip, both for the guests and for the hosts.

KOREA

Internationally-minded Korean librarians have long been active in the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and, in 1975, extended an invitation to IFLA to hold its annual General Council meeting in Seoul. This was not possible but, instead, the first IFLA Worldwide Seminar to be convened outside of Europe and North America was scheduled for the first week of June 1976. Organized by the Korean Library Association under the leadership of such American-influenced stalwarts as Pongsoon Lee, Director of the Ewha Womens University Library and Ko Hong Park, Librarian of the Korean Institute of Science and Technology Library, the seminar attracted participants from virtually all Pacific Rim countries, including a goodly number from the U.S.

The seminars provided general sessions on the role of libraries in national development and comparative studies of publications and publishing, east and west. Included also were
technical sessions on bibliographic control and national bibliographies, comparative studies of library use, and issues of transliteration and romanization. Yukihisa Suzuki, then at the Graduate School of Library Studies, University of Hawaii, presented a paper on education of librarians in a multilingual, multiethnic environment, and Karl Lo, then at the University of Washington, analyzed the rationale for the use of romanization systems in American libraries. I spoke on the cooperative acquisition of Asian and Middle Eastern materials by American libraries, and J. McRee Elrod, University of British Columbia, stated the case for the use of international cataloging standards for Asian material.

Postseminar visits to cultural sites were extraordinarily illuminating, especially the tour to Pulguksa in Kyongju where a recent restoration of the temple dedicated in 751 C.E. had uncovered a printed dharani sutra, making it the oldest extant sample of printing in the world — twenty years earlier than the famed “hyakumanto dharani” printings in Japan of 771. Another highlight was the trip to Haeinsa, where woodblocks used to print the Korean Tripitaka in the thirteenth century are still preserved. These reminders of the key importance of Korea in the history of printing were especially instructive to librarians from the West.

More recently, K. P. Yang, founding head of the Korean Section of the Library of Congress, working with colleagues at Harvard, Columbia, Washington, and other centers of Korean studies, reached out to colleagues in Korea seeking their assistance in convening a conference in Washington in 1992 aimed at improving library resources for the support of Korean studies in the U.S.

JAPAN

The influence of American librarianship on Japan has been extraordinary, particularly in the aftermath of the educational reforms carried out during the Occupation. Several American library leaders participated in the modernization of library services in Japan, among them Douglas W. Bryant, the university librarian of Harvard University, who in 1963 recommended that the American Library Association (ALA) establish a program of professional liaison with Japanese libraries. A similar call was made to ALA in 1966 in the final communiqué of the third (Official) Japan-U.S. Conference on Cultural and Educational Interchange. Yukihisa Suzuki and I as ALA members, upon finding Bryant’s recommendation published in the *New York Times*, asked the ALA International Relations Office about the possibility of organizing a binational effort and met with a positive response. The upshot was the establishment of the ALA Advisory Committee for Liaison with Japanese Libraries (technically an ad hoc subcommittee of the International Relations Committee) under the chairmanship of Bryant and including Thomas R. Buckman (then Director of the ALA International Relations Office), Dean Raynard Swank, University of California, Berkeley, Suzuki, and myself as members. The mission of the Advisory Committee became in time the organization of the Japan-U.S. Conference on Libraries and Information Science in Higher Education.
The first binational library conference organized by this group in collaboration with an ad hoc counterpart group headed by the director of the University of Tokyo Library convened in Tokyo in May 1969. Including progress reports, some forty-three papers were presented, and, as might be expected they covered the waterfront, from analyses of the role of university libraries in higher education, to evaluating university libraries, to professional education, to collection development, to exchange of personnel, to national bibliographic controls, to computers, and finally to library associations and national centers.

Subsequent conferences have narrowed the focus considerably, but the fifth and latest, held in Tokyo in October 1993 on the theme of Japan-U.S. Collaboration in Enhancing Scholarly Access to Information: Looking Toward the 21st Century, nevertheless still included presentations on library and information science education and national and international bibliographic controls, as well as papers on the evolving electronic campus. The binational relationship has slowly evolved from one characterized by teacher-student relations to something approaching a partnership of equals.

Let me close by noting that librarians have long been aware that the libraries they serve are interdependent entities comprising an organic network of institutions scattered throughout the world and requiring a cooperative environment in order to function efficiently. Linking American and Asian libraries together in a computerized network will be a task that will carry us well into the twenty-first century. Initiatives taken during the past few decades have laid the foundation for cooperative action toward that end.

NOTES


