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**ASIAN DIVISION FRIENDS SOCIETY -  
A CASE STUDY FOR BRIDGING SCHOLARS, COMMUNITIES, AND COLLECTIONS**

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The advantages of having a friends group have always been widely accepted among libraries. Such groups serve multiple functions. First and foremost, such groups offer opportunities for the community to get involved in the entire process of library events and programs, from planning and coordinating, to their taking place. As a result, this type of interaction helps strengthen the relationship between a library and its users and in turn promotes the usage of the library collection. Second, friends groups often play an important role in libraries' fund-raising activities since many of the members are also active in communities and are resourceful as well as having the will to advocate for libraries.

Now the support of library friends groups becomes even more pivotal than ever because of a new challenge the digital era has brought about: while more information is made available online, the overall physical visit of libraries' print materials has been somewhat affected. It should also be noted that this phenomenon is across the board, regardless of the types of libraries. Thus, the need to develop more effective outreach programs for print collections has been identified by the library community. For instance, the Library of Congress outlines two specific strategic objectives, which may very well be implemented with the support of friends groups. First, in terms of presenting collections to a new and broader audience, it is important to "promote on-site research and scholarship, through... initiatives that use the collections to produce works to further the advancement of knowledge and public policy." Second, in terms of presenting a rewarding visitor experience, the focus should be to "bring the Library's collections to visitors in an educational and compelling manner through on-site exhibitions, public programs, and services."<sup>1</sup>

In light of the aforementioned strategic objectives and performing goals, the Asian Division is one of the few at the Library of Congress that have formed a friends group in helping them cope with the overall challenges accompanied by the advent of the digital era. This article offers a glimpse of the formation, development, current activities, achievements, and expectations of such a group as a case study.

#### **Formative Phase, Mission, and Current Status**

The Asian Division Friends Society (ADFS) was formed in January 2004, under the guidance of the then new Division Chief, Dr. Hwa-Wei Lee. As one of the best-known Asian American librarians, Lee farsightedly believed that forming a friends group would not only help promote the Library's Asian Division and its treasured collections and establish and strengthen the Division's relationship with its users, but also, most importantly, would help discover and cultivate new interests in communities, which, as a revitalization process, has been very much needed for a historical institution such as the Library of Congress. Not surprisingly, this vision immediately received a warm welcome from the Division staff members as well as the upper-level management.

The next important questions to be asked are: how is ADFS related to the Asian Division? And what is ADFS expected to achieve for the Asian Division? ADFS is defined as an essential integral part of the Asian Division and serves as the outreach mechanism for the Division. Its purposes and missions are clearly spelled out below:

- "To assist the Asian Division in strengthening its services, enhancing the library's collections, promoting their use, and preserving the knowledge and accomplishments of the people and civilizations of Asia, both past and present, as well as America's historic and contemporary involvement with Asia.

- To help the Asian Division in its outreach programs and fund-raising activities.
- To serve as an advisory organization to the Chief of the Asian Division.”<sup>2</sup>

Currently, the ADFS Board of Directors consists of over 30 prominent figures in academia, journalism, government, and the private sector. The 13 members on the Executive Committee, consisting of the Asian Division staff members as well as volunteers, are in charge of the smooth operation of the Society in the areas of membership, program planning, communications, social activities, as well as publicity. As of June 2006, ADFS has approximately 250 members locally and across the country, including individuals and corporate members from the private sector such as Hitachi and Mitsui.

### **Outreach Efforts**

ADFS's current outreach program includes the following major activities:

- (1) Highlight tours of the collections. The goal of the tour is to familiarize more people with the Asian collections at the Library of Congress and expand readership. Five area teams within the Asian Division - China & Mongolia, Japan, Korea, South Asia, and Southeast Asia - usually take turns in organizing such tours for interested groups, the general public, as well as special guests. They may be offered on a regular or on-demand basis. This guided tour offers participants a great opportunity to view and learn more about the Asian collections by visiting various custodial divisions in addition to the Asian Division, such as Prints and Photographs Division, Geography and Map Division, etc. In order to achieve the best effect, each tour is limited to 15-18 people and is guided by a reference librarian/specialist who has profound knowledge about the collections in his or her geographic region or country. Many research/educational institutions and community organizations have benefited from such tours, including the World Bank, the Embassy of the Republic of the Philippines, and an MIT alumni group.
- (2) Cultural performances and scholarly presentations. As part of its outreach effort in promoting the usage of the Library's Asian collections, ADFS often coordinates with other divisions of the Library, embassies, educational institutions, as well as other organizations in the community to organize scholarly and cultural programs. So far ADFS has organized documentary film screening, lectures, and cultural performances. In addition, noteworthy are the international symposiums along with book displays, which have brought about high visibility for the Asian Division and its precious collections. To name a few examples, in May 2005, together with the U.S. Zheng He's Voyages Celebration Council, the Chinese American Librarians Association, Greater Mid-Atlantic Chapter, and the International Publishing House for China's Culture, ADFS co-organized an international symposium titled "The Significance of Admiral Zheng He's Voyages (1405-1433)," in commemoration of the 600<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of his first voyage. In March 2006, ADFS collaborated with the Embassy of Italy, Italian Culture Institute, and the National Italian American Foundation on another successful program, "In the Footsteps of Marco Polo: An International Symposium and A Special Book Exhibit on Italy-China Cultural Exchange in the 13<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> Centuries." This was immediately followed by another symposium titled "America is in the Heart for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: the Carlos Bulosan Symposium." A commemoration of the centennial of the First Wave migration to Hawaii by Filipino Nationals, this symposium received overwhelming support from the Filipino American community. All three symposia witnessed excellent presentations from prominent scholars from various parts of the world, from Italy to the Philippines. Each was accompanied by a book display, showcasing the richness of the Asian collections. Needless to say, these symposia helped expand the Division's contacts and readership.  
In addition, ADFS continues to offer its monthly programs for the general public. For the latest event announcements, please visit: <http://www.lcasianfriends.org/>.
- (3) Asian Literature Club. The Club offers a great opportunity for Asian literature lovers to meet and mingle. Small group discussions are usually led by scholars or specialists familiar with the selected book or author. On some occasions, some authors also participate in the meetings.

- (4) Research orientations. The Library of Congress is adjacent to a good number of universities and many research institutions. To better meet the research needs of the students, researchers, and scholars, ADFS works with the Asian Division staff to organize regular research orientations, introducing the print and electronic resources available at the Library. University professors and librarians also coordinate with ADFS in offering this orientation onsite or offsite as part of the educational curriculum.
- (5) Florence Tan Moeson Fellowship program. Thanks to the generous donation of Mrs. Florence Tan Moeson, who retired from the Library after 45 years of service, this fellowship program was established in 2005 and provides individuals with the opportunity to pursue research on East, Southeast, or South Asia (including the overseas Asian communities), using the Asian collections of the Library.  
The grants are for a minimum of five business days of research and are to be used to cover travel to and from Washington, overnight accommodations, and photocopying; or, to cover expenses incurred while traveling to the Library of Congress to engage in scholastic research in the area of Asian studies. Up to 15 awards are available from \$300 to \$2,500. Graduate students, independent scholars, community college teachers, researchers without regular teaching appointments, and librarians with a need for fellowship support are especially encouraged to apply. Awards are announced in December.<sup>3</sup>

### **Fundraising Efforts and Challenges**

All outreach programs are considered great fundraising opportunities. Through these programs, the Asian Division's contacts are widened and its collections become more known. An excellent example is the Carlos Bulosan symposium which was held at the end of April 2006, commemorating the First Wave Migration Movement made by the Filipino nationals to Hawaii.<sup>4</sup> By expanding and strengthening its ties with the Filipino American community, ADFS received a great deal of support, which not only helped make the symposium a great success but also facilitated the establishment of the Carlos Bulosan Archive at the Asian Division.

Another significant fundraising activity is the annual membership meeting, which also serves as an excellent membership drive. In the previous three years, the cultural performance section of the meeting was the highlight of the event, showcasing art and culture of a particular Asian country or region.

This is not to say that there is no challenge in the outreach endeavors. One question frequently raised is why does the Asian Division and ADFS need to raise funds when it receives appropriations from the Congress? The appropriations are assigned mostly for collection acquisitions. However, the funds for organizing programs or establishing research fellowships to promote the usage of the Library's collections are very limited. Therefore, seeking public support becomes an extremely important task.

Due to the support of the ADFS membership and the diligence of the Division staff, ADFS has made impressive progress in the first three years. The ADFS Board of Directors and Executive Committee are constantly seeking innovative ways to promote the Asian collections at the Library and to strengthen the Division's relationship with its communities. Such dedicated and frequent interactions between a library and its community are mutually beneficial to both parties.

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<sup>1</sup> Library Services, The Library of Congress, *Strategic Plan, FY2008-2013*. Draft 4.0, June 2006, pp. 10-13.

<sup>2</sup> *Library of Congress Asian Division Friends Society*: <http://www.lcasianfriends.org/taxonomy/menu/1/11>.

<sup>3</sup> For more information, visit <http://www.loc.gov/rr/asian/>. In 2006, seven Moeson Fellows were appointed. These scholars came from different parts of the world and dealt with a wider variety of subjects in Asian studies. See <http://www.loc.gov/today/pr/2006/06-124.html>.

<sup>4</sup> See Hoh, Anchi, "Bulosan and Filipino Migration: Literary Icon Is the Subject of Library Symposium," *The Library of Congress Information Bulletin*, v. 65, no. 6, June 2006, pp. 148-9.