Meetings and Conferences

Eugene D. Carvalho
I. Annual Meeting of the Midwest Conference on Asian Affairs.

The 27th annual meeting of the Midwest Conference on Asian Affairs held in Lincoln, Nebraska, on October 20-21, 1978, offered a library panel entitled, "Library Resources for Asian Scholars in the Midwest: Prospects for the Next Decade." Eugene Carvalho chaired the panel, composed of Byron Marshall of the University of Minnesota, Bill Wong of Illinois University, and Ernest Tsai of Washington University. (Weiying Wan of the University of Michigan was unable to attend as planned because of urgent business.)

This discussion panel hoped to identify and to explore issues concerning the future of East Asian collections in academic institutions in the midwest region, and in particular to gather the opinions and concerns of colleagues about current trends in the development of, and accessibility to, East Asian library resources. The loosely structured session considered five topics:

(1) The state of library resources and services; national resources and Midwest resources.

(2) The current trend in fund distribution and resource concentration, and the resultant developmental and access problems for smaller, more isolated East Asian libraries in the Midwest. The special concerns of scholars at these smaller institutions also received special attention.

(3) The concept of national library resources development versus regional cooperation and development...in relation to the problem of access in the Midwest region.


(5) The future prospects for East Asian scholars in the Midwest.

Each panelist presented a brief statement on one of the above topics specifically assigned to him. The ensuing discussions (open to the 15 scholars attending the session) brought out many concerns of area scholars, particularly those who work with smaller East Asian collections.

By far the most serious concern of these scholars was the recent national pattern of funding by which a handful of major libraries are being subsidized by the deliberate channeling of scarce financial resources to these institutions based on the justification that it is in the national interest to build on existing strength. This policy completely eliminates the medium- and smaller-sized collections from appropriate funding. The rhetoric about shared resources is not difficult to accept for those in smaller institutions, since they are painfully aware of the futility of pursuing the goal of building self-sufficient collections. The real issue raised was not the conflict between centralization of resources and service and the autonomy of local collections, but the fact that while resources are being centralized services are not. There was a general expression of profound doubt that, if left to their own devices, large institutions will provide equitable
service to all scholars scattered throughout the U.S., or that they will provide the leadership to forge durable links in a cooperative relationship involving all levels of East Asian library resources. Certainly the past record does not warrant such optimism.

Everyone seemed to agree that it is not productive to distribute scarce financial resources to provide subsidies for all libraries. Given the present inaccessibility of so-called national resources, however, the recent trend of resource concentration tends to serve fewer people and ultimately to limit and to restrict the use of potential resources. What is needed is a thorough reappraisal of the present practice, which frustrates and alienates people at smaller institutions. Some members spoke of their distinct impression that those at the major centers regard smaller centers as dependents whose contributions and efforts are of little or no value, and that they operate under the assumption that what is good for the major centers has to be good enough for the rest. It was felt that a workable plan must be based on dynamic partnership among all those involved in East Asian Studies to insure orderly growth of the field and to assure the availability of scholarly resources to those who need them when they need them.

The ACLS report on the problems of East Asian Libraries (East Asian Libraries: Problems and Prospects: A Report and Recommendations) recommends some basic guidelines for a national plan for the development of East Asian studies resources. Though many of the recommendations are encouraging to some members, other members are not particularly sanguine about their implications. Professor Byron Marshall's statement exemplifies the concerns of many who attended:

"...I was assigned the task of commenting on it (the report)...not because I was in any way involved in its formulation. Rather, like most, if indeed not all, of us here today, I came to learn of it only after it was completed. It was written with the support of Ford Foundation funds by an eight person committee consisting of four librarians (from the universities of Chicago, Columbia, and Harvard and the Library of Congress), two administrators (from Stanford and Yale), and one faculty member each from the universities of Michigan and Washington. Of the eight only one, who formerly taught at an institution with limited library resources in East Asian studies, would perhaps come close to sharing (at least during that stage in his career) my own perspective. I mention this at the outset because I believe that one's experience as a library user will very much shape one's perspective on the various issues raised by the report.

"...I would use the short time still available to turn to the question of what larger significance the report might have from my perspective as a consumer of library materials. In other words, what is at stake here? What would it mean to see the report become the basic guideline for future appeals for government or private funding agencies either within the United States or abroad (such as the Japan Foundation)? I believe that there is a real danger that this so-called "national system" may turn out in fact to merely supply the rationale for channeling all available aid into a small number of what one Midwest librarian aptly called the 'warehouses'--that is, depositories of only limited practical use to the overwhelming majority of East Asian scholars and teachers who do not happen to hold faculty positions at those 'major institutions.' In other words, such a plan could well reverse a two-decade-old trend toward intellectual pluralism in East Asian studies within the United States--two decades of progress toward establishing East Asian studies as an important (if not yet integral) part of the teaching and research mission of an increasingly large proportion of private and public colleges.
throughout the country.

"Because of that very real danger, I could support the recommendations in the report if and only if the following conditions were met:

(1) no priority for acquisitions be given to the existing 'major collections' until funds are found to implement the recommendations contained in the section on bibliographic control;

(2) no priority for acquisitions be given to the 'major collections' until funds are available for and the curators of such collections show tangible evidence of their willingness to place very high priority on facilitating the access to individual users at 'non-major institutions', both through an effective interlibrary loan system and through provisions for visits at an absolute minimum cost;

(3) all future studies of the problems and prospects of East Asian libraries include wider consultation with librarians and scholars from the so-called 'local institutions.' In the final analysis, it is those 'local institutions' which house the overwhelming majority of scholars engaged in East Asian studies and thus bear the greatest share of responsibility for disseminating knowledge about East Asia to the American student and to the public at large.

"Only if these conditions are met can a truly national system of shared resources emerge."

Concluding the session, the panel resolved, with the mandate of those present, to take measures to assure that the needs of non-major centers will be adequately met in any national plan that might be implemented. It was felt that unless the smaller institutions play more active roles in the current restructuring process, they cannot expect much more than cosmetic changes in existing practices. The panel finally decided to recommend to the MCAA Executive Board that it establish a committee to study the regional constituencies and their need for scholarly resources and services as well as to advise the Conference on these matters relating to library resources.

Post Script: Such a recommendation was made to the Executive Board of MCAA and its president has recently appointed an ad hoc Committee on East Asian Library Resources consisting of the following seven members: Eugene Carvalho, University of Kansas; Byron Marshall, Minnesota University; Samuel Chu, Ohio State University; Shizue Matsuda, Indiana University; Iwao Ishino, Michigan State University; Ernest Tsai, Washington University; and William Sheh Wong, Illinois University.

(Eugene Carvalho)

II. Annual Meeting of the Mid-Atlantic Region of the Association for Asian Studies

The Seventh Annual Meeting of the Mid-Atlantic Region of the Association for Asian Studies was held October 28-29, 1978, at the Cloyd Heck Marvin Center of the George Washington University, Washington, D. C. Of special interest to East Asian librarians was the panel, "Archival and Library Resources on East

III. Western Conference of the Association for Asian Studies

A panel focusing on libraries in Asia will be sponsored at the Western Conference of the AAS to be held next fall at Boise State University. The papers may be historical or contemporary in focus. Interested persons should contact Tony Ferguson, 1220 HBLL, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah 84602.