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WORLD DIGITAL LIBRARY AND E-RESOURCES
IN THE ASIAN DIVISION, LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

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On November 22, 2005, in an article in the Washington Post, the Librarian of Congress, Dr. James H. Billington, announced a great initiative, proposing the cooperative building of a World Digital Library, which would offer “the promise of bringing people closer together by celebrating the depth and uniqueness of different cultures in a single global understanding.” The Library has had fifteen years of experience with digital activity and in the past five years has launched various digitization projects with other countries. Within the framework of the Library, the Asian Division has also made great strides in its efforts, illuminated by three recent successful cooperative agreements.

On October 1, 2004, the Library and Academia Sinica (Taipei, Taiwan) signed an agreement for the digitization of China-related maps. The digital experts from Academia Sinica Computing Center paid two working visits in 2004 and 2005, created digital images of 21,000 maps and 840 aerial photographs, and took them back to Taiwan for post-digitization processing. This digital file will be incorporated into the Chinese Civilizations in Time and Space (CCTS) database and supported by a historical geographic information system with spatial-temporal applications.

Prior to the Library-Academia Sinica collaboration, the Asian Division invited Prof. Li Xiaocong of Beijing University to review and provide descriptions for three hundred pre-1900 Chinese maps, most of which were brought to the Library by Dr. Arthur W. Hummel, the first Chief of the Asian Division (then named the Department of Chinese Literature). During his four-month stay in 2002, Prof. Li examined in detail Chinese manuscripts and woodblock printed maps, including those in scrolls, on fans, and rubbings of maps on stone, dating from the 12th century. Professor Li’s work resulted in the publication of a bilingual edition (Chinese and English), with illustrations, entitled Descriptive Catalogue of the Traditional Chinese Maps in the Library of Congress (Beijing, Wen wu Publishing Co., 2004).

Another achievement was the international cooperation between the Library and National Central Library (Taipei, Taiwan) in the digitization of the Library’s most valuable Chinese rare books. The origins of the Chinese collection go back to 1869, when the Library received ten works in 905 volumes from the Tongzhi Emperor of China (reigned 1856-1875), as part of an exchange authorized by the Congress two years earlier. During the decade after these books arrived in Washington, the Library acquired another 237 titles from Caleb Cushing (1800-1879), the first U.S. minister to China, who purchased Chinese books in 1844 when he negotiated the first U.S. treaty with China. The collection quickly grew in the early twentieth century with the acquisition of some 6,000 volumes in 1901-1902 from William W. Rockhill (1854-1914), the American diplomat and China specialist, and a gift of 198 works in 1,965 volumes from the Chinese government at the conclusion of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in 1904. The Library also purchased collections from Dr. Feng Jinggui in 1913, Rockhill again in 1915, and Berthold Laufer (1874-1934) in 1928. Returning after thirteen years as a missionary teacher in China, Arthur Hummel (1884-1975), as the first Chief of the Asian Division, made major efforts during his tenure of twenty-six years (1928-1954) to acquire rare Chinese books and presided over the growth of Chinese collection to its world-class status.

The agreement between the Division and the National Central Library (Taipei, Taiwan) on the digitization of the Division’s Chinese rare books was signed in May 2005. Since then a team of technical specialists from Taiwan has been working on site to digitize selected titles, which are being reviewed by two Chinese rare book experts, Dr. Poon Ming-sun and Mr. Fan Bangjin, for authentication and annotation regarding the condition of these rare books. Funded by Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation and by the Library’s Conservation
Division, the goal of this collaborative project is for the two libraries to share each other’s digitized databases of Chinese rare books and make them easily and freely accessible to researchers worldwide.

Most recently, in December 2005, the Asian Division acquired exclusive use of the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) of Chinese Civilization in Time and Space (CCTS) and Taiwan History and Culture in Time and Space (THCTS), which will give researchers a tremendously useful online tool in locating geographic areas of China and their related local histories and links to other databases. The Division has requested permission to gain access to some twenty-two other databases created by Academia Sinica, mostly in the humanities and social sciences.

The Asian Division has also participated in digital activity within the Library. In June 2004 the Naxi Manuscript Collection website, the first Area Studies LC-only Global Gateway collection, was released. Dr. Mi Chu Wiens of the Asian Division started the project in 1998 with a grant from the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for three years (1998-2001.) The collection is made up of documents written by Naxi shamanistic priests in what is known as the only living pictographic language in the world These manuscripts, which detail the unique cosmology of the Naxi people of the Yunnan Province, China, illustrate a wide range of Naxi myths and legends, such as the creation of the world, sacrifice to the serpent king and other principle gods, accounts of Naxi warriors and other people of high social standing ascending to the realm of deities, and love-suicide stories. An annotated catalog of the Library’s entire Naxi collection, a 39½-foot scroll used in funerary ceremonies, and translations by Joseph Rock of two of the manuscripts are also found on the Naxi Manuscript Collection website.

In close collaboration with the International Research Center of Japanese Studies (Nichibunken), the Asian Division digitized the Library’s Nara Ehon collection of four titles (Shizuka, Homyo Doji, Shigure and Soga Monogatari) and made available over 2,000 digital images, including 173 color illustrations, on the Library’s OPAC. Nara Ehon, a type of colorfully illustrated manuscript book of stories and tales, were produced during the Muromachi period (1333-1573) up to the middle of the Edo period (1615-1868.) The Nara Ehon books are considered to be the earliest popular illustrated books in Japan.

The Asian Division is also currently digitizing The Tale of Genji, a set of sixty-volumes. This is the second collection in the Asian Division to be digitized in collaboration with Nichibunken. The Library’s holding is a rare and complete set of the 1654 edition including not only the main text of 54 volumes of Genji Monogatari [Tale of Genji], but also Meyasu (a commentary on keywords and phrases in the main text) in three volumes, Keizu (genealogy) in one volume, Yamaji no Tsuyu (a sequel to the main text) in one volume and Hikiuta (index) in one volume.

The Japanese Ukiyo-e collection in the Prints and Photographs Division also benefited from the collaboration with Nichibunken. Under the agreement signed by the Library and Nichibunken in February 2005, a multi-institutional team of Japanese art historians consisting of Professor Shugo Asano (Chiba City Museum of Art), Professor Monta Hayakawa (Nichibunken), Ms. Shuko Koyama (Edo-Tokyo Museum), and Professor Juliann Wolfgram (California Technological Institute) led by Professor Atsushi Aiba (Nichibunken) visited the Library to study 2,331 Japanese prints mainly from the Edo-period. The team identified the prints by artist, date, title, series title for sets of prints, format, size, and other descriptive details of all these Japanese prints during their three-week stay. The Library has already finished the scanning of the Ukiyo-e prints collection with the financial support from Nichibunken. The product of this large-scale collaboration between Nichibunken and its multi-institutional scholarly team and the Library will be made fully available to the international research community through the Library of Congress and Nichibunken websites in 2006.

June 2005 in cooperation with the Japan Map Center of the Geographical Survey Institute in Japan, the Geography and Map Division digitized and made available a collection of large-scale Japanese maps (1816-1819) by Inoh Tadataka via the Library’s webpage http://www.loc.gov/rr/geogmap/. This collection is the largest and most complete holdings of Inoh maps (207 out of 214) in the world, including Japan.
The rapid transformation of the digital environment and the ever-increasing number of electronic resources available have given great impetus to the Division and its staff to strive for identifying and acquiring e-resources on Asia as part of their standard responsibilities for collection development.

At present forty-five of the Library’s 219 subscription databases deal with Asian studies. These databases, such as Aardvark (Asian resources for librarians), Asian Development Bank Economics & Statistics (issued by the Economics and Research Department Asian Development Bank), Asian Law Bibliographic Database (from the University of Melbourne), Bibliography of Asian Studies (from Association for Asian Studies), Country Studies (produced by Federal Research Division, the Library of Congress), and Treaties and International Agreements (by Oceana Publications), are all accessible in the Library’s reading rooms. The Library also has a number of electronic databases in various divisions and departments provided free-of-charge.

In recent years Asian Division has made great strides in acquiring databases on Asia from outside of the Library. In the China area we have acquired Ren min ri biao dian zi ban 人民日报电子版 = The People’s Daily Electronic Version, 1946-2004, China Data Online, China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI)’s CAJ and CCND databases, and most recently we gained access to a 100,000-title monograph database from Superstar Digital Library. We have also acquired Si ku quan shu (Wen yuan ge edition) and Encyclopedia of Taiwan.

The Library has also acquired two important subscription databases for the Japanese collection: Directory of Japanese Scientific Periodicals (from the National Diet Library, covering 13,875 serial titles on science and technology published in Japan) and Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan (based on the 1993 publication entitled Japan: an Illustrated Encyclopedia, with 11,000 entries). In addition, the Library currently subscribes to full-text databases of five major Japanese newspapers including Mainichi, Sankei, Chunichi, Nihon Keizai Shinbun, and Yomiuri newspapers through a U.S. based commercial aggregator/vendor, Factive.com.

In the Korea area recent acquisitions were Chosun Ilbo Archive (covering articles from the Chosun Ilbo, the most widely read newspaper in South Korea), Korean Studies Database (by KRPJA, covering history, literature and traditional medicines), Korean Studies Information Service System (KISS, a database of full-text articles from 6000 journals published by 1200 Korean academic institutions), and Law n B-Korean Law Database (Law and business, available in Law Library reading room only).

A recent addition is Library of Congress Asian Collections: an Illustrated Guide, the electronic version of a 2000 publication. Other databases include Korean Bibliography, which contains approximately 4,800 records of books about Korea in English up to 1995 held by the Library of Congress, and Korean Serials, which includes 6,325 periodical titles, including 177 titles from North Korea. Within the framework of the Library’s Portals to the World, Asian Division provides Asian Portals with links to electronic resources from forty countries and areas of Asia.

Other divisions of the Library, such as the Federal Research Division, Geography & Map Division, Prints & Photographs Division, and Manuscript Division also provide access to databases that contain information related to China, Japan, Korea, and other Asian countries. Noteworthy are Country Studies, Library of Congress Geography and Maps: an Illustrated Guide, Global Legal Information Network (GLIN), the Guide to Law Online, an annotated guide prepared by the Law Library of Congress Public Services Division, and The Floating World of Ukiyo-e: Shadow, Dreams and Substance, an online exhibition catalog. There are also various online finding aids in Manuscript Division for personal papers of eminent personages, such as Caleb Cushing, Henry R. Luce, and Owen Lattimore, that contain Asia-related documents and records.

(With contributions from Lily Kecskes and Eiichi Ito)

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1 Washington Post, Tuesday, November 22, 2005: A29
2 http://international.loc.gov/intldl/naxihtml/naxhome.html
4 Korean Bibliography: http://lcweb2.loc.gov/misc/korhtml/korbibhome.html

5 Korean Serials: http://www.loc.gov/rr/asian/koreanserials

6 Asian Portals: http://www.loc.gov/rr/asian/area_AD.html

7 Country Studies: http://memory.loc.gov/frd/cs/


12 Manuscript Division: http://www.loc.gov/rr/mss/f-aids/mssfa.html#c