

EAST ASIAN LIBRARY RESOURCES GROUP OF AUSTRALIA

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Asian Studies Association of Australia, 18th Biennial Conference, University of Adelaide, 5-8 July 2010

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**South/Southeast Asia and Middle East Collection
ANU Menzies Library**



Asian Studies librarians at ASAA

Photo courtesy of Di Pin Ouyang. Left to right: Anya Dettman (NLA), Mayumi Shinozaki (NLA), Di Pin Ouyang (NLA), Michelle Hall (Melbourne), Amy Chan (ANU)

The 18th Biennial ASAA Conference was my first Asian Studies conference, and attended in my position as ANU's Southeast Asian/South Asian/Middle East librarian. The papers and sessions of this conference focused on contemporary and very current socio-political-economical issues relating mainly to China, Japan, Southeast and South Asia. There seems to be a move away from the traditional topics of classical studies and languages. Some of the papers were quite illuminating and thought-provoking.

The librarians were invited to present at the Postgraduate Forum held a day before the Conference officially started. There were four sessions during the course of the afternoon. Ours was titled "Researching your PhD: Making the most of Asia specialist librarians". Michelle Hall and I spoke on our respective libraries, specialists and collections, while Anya Dettman, Mayumi Shinozaka and Di Ouyang spoke on the NLA's Southeast Asian, Japanese and Chinese collections respectively. Both Michelle and I took the opportunity to emphasise to the students the importance of meeting with their librarians regarding research resources for their projects, and invited them to approach us with questions during the course of the

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following days. I'm pleased to report I did receive some such questions from postgraduate students from a variety of universities.

I attended the "India's Look East Policy" roundtable by researchers from Institute of South Asian Studies. I went to the first session, and similarly found it lively and informative. In his introduction, Tan Tai Yong, the chair of the roundtable, told the group this institute was started as an initiative of the National University of Singapore to fill a gap in regional research. The institute was established in 2005 and focuses its research on economics, politics, International Relations and other issues relating to contemporary South Asian and specifically to India. As a South Asian librarian, I was delighted by the establishment of the Institute, and wait anxiously for its publications and research papers.

This session focused on India's relation with ASEAN countries, and started with S.D. Murni's paper on how India's Look East Policy came about. This was followed by Singapore's former ambassador to India, See Chak Mun, on ASEAN's perspectives on this policy. He reported that ASEAN's response has been generally positive and perceive India's rise as a balancing power to China's emergence in the region. The following two papers were on the economic perspectives of this relation: S. Narayan's paper gave a general overview of the various aspects of the relation (consumer goods, manufacturing, energy and dairy industry) and touched on Australia's relation with India, and the last paper of the session by Amitendu Palit, took a more detailed examination: touching on issues of trade agreements, China's trade interactions, regional production networks and remittances.

I also made a point to attend as many sessions on Indonesia, Malaysia and other parts of Southeast Asia, and did find many of the papers interesting if not stimulating. Many of the papers were on media, modernity and identity. For a librarian, some of these papers were an eye-opener. It was good to learn the current topics of research and their resources used or required. These ranged from old manuscripts of martial arts manuals in postcolonial Laos to women's magazines from Malaysia dating back to the last 30 years. There was also much focus on social media networks, internet sites and television dramas.

The only East Asian focused session I was able to attend was the Keynote Speech by Professor Wang Hui titled "The Tibetan Question: Between East and West". I was curious as to how he would address this very controversial issue. He approached it in two parts by conceptualising the problem as, firstly, remnants of Western orientalism and, secondly, product and concern of China's nationalism. Prof. Wang was very thorough in his analysis albeit rushed and dense. Hence, it was rather much for the audience to digest. I was very interested in the Q and A session after, and how he would address questions that I was sure would be raised regarding China's suppressive treatment of the people in that region. He managed to circumvent many of the rather prickly questions raised by focusing his answers on matters he had raised in his speech.

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Similarly, I found the conference well organized and Bonython Hall an excellent venue. It has been an educational experience and a good introduction into Asian studies and librarianship in Australia. I have enjoyed meeting with my fellow Asian librarians and it has been a pleasure sharing duties with them.

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