

# **ASIAN LIBRARY RESOURCES IN AUSTRALIA**

by Andrew Gosling

At the initiative of the Australian National University (ANU) a survey of Asian library resources and research trends was undertaken during 1992. The aim of this survey was to update information obtained from a questionnaire distributed to libraries with Asian collections prior to the National Roundtable on Libraries and Asia, held at the National Library of Australia (NLA) in May 1991, and to look at the latest teaching and research trends in Asian studies in Australia as these trends related to library needs.

The survey was carried out during April and May 1992 by George Miller, Senior Librarian, Southeast Asian Studies, ANU, and Andrew Gosling, Chief Librarian, East Asia, NLA, who interviewed approximately 80 academics and librarians in Canberra, Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney, and Brisbane concerning Asian studies trends and priorities for improving Asian library resources nationally.

This report outlines the major library needs identified during the survey.

## **MAJOR NEEDS AND POSSIBLE PROJECTS**

### **Access to existing resources**

Probably the strongest wish of academic users and librarians was for improved access to Asian resources both in Australia and overseas. Several aspects were raised:

#### **Asian script materials**

There was strong support from academics and librarians for the current moves towards finding a suitable Asian script library system and for the implementation of a national shareable system, once identified. This was seen as a high priority for further funding.

#### **Access via AARNet**

Users emphasised the need for ready access, preferably from their offices, via AARNet to the complete Asian holdings of the major research collections. Such access is now available as most are, or should soon be, connected to AARNet. Some academics are already accessing US library catalogues for Asian language materials. Such academics are now able to benefit from having the online catalogues of libraries, including NLA and ANU, available through AARNet.

#### **Backlogs**

The backlogs of uncatalogued or partially catalogued Asian materials at the four large collections, namely, NLA, ANU, Sydney and Melbourne Universities, were seen as a priority for action. NLA's recent retrospective conversion of its older Japanese collections onto the national database, the Australian Bibliographic Network (ABN) was seen

by Japan scholars as an important step in the direction of enabling better access by the user to the large research collections. There was a strong desire to see ANU's Asian holdings added to ABN.

### **Asian Studies library grants**

There was virtually unanimous support from academics and librarians for a national system of Asian studies library grants for postgraduate students to use the major Asian research collections centred in Canberra at the National Library and ANU (or for some areas in Sydney or Melbourne). There is general agreement that while other centres are building Asian collections, postgraduates need to make substantial use of the large research collections, particularly for Asian vernacular material. While access is improving, for example, through ABN, there is still a need to spend a period of time at the research collections intensively evaluating materials for immediate or later interlibrary loan use. The fact that the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) is already offering awards for research in Asia was mentioned by several people.

### **Asian databases**

The question of databases for Asian studies was raised by many academics and librarians. Views varied from great enthusiasm for a major push into this area to concerns about cost, and the relationship between, and priorities of, data in traditional and electronic formats. However, one suggestion for a project which received wide support was for a study of databases from Asia as opposed to Asia-related databases from North America and Europe. The study could establish what is available what is already being used in Australia and what Australian libraries should obtain a coordinated basis. The prime example of current use in Australia is the Japanese Nikkei database, which is being promoted through the Australia-Japan Research Centre, ANU, and is in use in several other universities.

### **Asian journal and newspaper articles**

Various views were expressed on improving access to Asian journal and newspaper articles electronically or through more traditionally produced indexes or clippings. ANU Library is considering further the provision of electronic access to Asian journal articles.

### **Acquisitions**

There was wide discussion on the acquisition of Asian materials including acquisition through cooperative arrangements. In general, acquiring materials from the more developed countries of Northeast Asia, such as Japan and South Korea, is seen as much less problematic than acquisition from less developed areas, particularly in Southeast Asia, for example, Indonesia and the Indochina states. For the former, the difficulties relate mainly to the high cost of books and the need for specialist staff able to handle the script, while for the latter, there remain fundamental problems of finding out about publications and obtaining them.

There was strong support for the continuation and upgrading of the Indonesian Acquisition Project (IAP) managed by the National Library of Australia. Academics and librarians at institutions which are participants in the IAP project are reasonably happy with the coverage of material received, although they would prefer more flexibility in selection, rather than a standard package to participants.

A number of academics believed that, in addition to the IAP project, Australia should have further Asia-based acquisition offices or else carry out regular acquisition trips in East and Southeast Asia. One suggestion was that, following the example of the Bavarian State Library, which has a permanent office in Hong Kong, the National Library should use Hong Kong as a base for acquisitions from the whole of East Asia. Beijing and Tokyo were alternative sites for such a regional office. Other academics believed such offices would be too expensive but favoured acquisition visits to obtain important, but hard-to-acquire, regional publications in China and other countries.

An alternative view put forward by others and already discussed at earlier forums was that major collections such those of NLA and ANU could provide paid-for services in areas such as selection and cataloguing for other Australian libraries lacking specialised staff to carry out such activities. However, both NLA and ANU have indicated that they would prefer to concentrate on providing national access to their own collections, and have no plans to undertake contract acquisitions or cataloguing.

### **Basic core collection for Asian studies**

A number of users believed that funding should be provided to ensure that each university with Asian studies should have at least a basic minimal library collection. Others believed it was the responsibility of individual institutions to develop such collections, and not a matter for special DEET funding, while, realistically, institutions with minimal Asian collections would have to rely on other more developed libraries.

### **Newspapers from Asia**

There was widespread concern at the poor holdings of Asian newspapers in many parts of Australia. While NLA and some other libraries do have extensive holdings, it was said, for example, even in Sydney and Melbourne coverage of Asian and English language newspapers from Asian countries was inadequate. In particular, several academics believed the major English language newspapers from Asia should be much more widely held in all cities, not only for researchers and students, but as part of efforts to make Asia more accessible to Australians in general.

### **Audio-visual materials from Asia**

It was suggested that Australian libraries should become much more active in collecting Asian film, video and appropriate television news broadcasts and documentaries. NLA, ANU and some other libraries are already involved in this area to an extent. There was some support for a

push in this field, but others did not see it as a major priority compared with other tasks.

### **Staffing Asian collections**

Many academics and librarians raised the continuing difficulties experienced in obtaining expert library staff with both Asian language and library skills. This is partly a problem of finding suitable people and partly a funding problem. In several centres, various *ad hoc* arrangements are used, including employing students with language skills or asking for assistance from academics. This is seen to lead to uneven or poorly controlled collections. Apart from NLA, ANU, and now Monash (which has established resource librarian positions for Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Southeast Asian materials), even the large collections are usually relying on just one or two staff able to handle more than one Asian language. Specialist Asian librarianship courses have been recommended in the past. It was mentioned that the School of Information, Library and Archive Studies (SILAS) at the University of New South Wales had been unable to obtain funding for such a course, although they do offer Information Technology in Asia as part of their masters program.

### **Mechanism for Asian studies library matters**

The need for a continuing mechanism for dealing with Asian studies library matters nationally was discussed. For example, a number of issues raised during the visits were seen to need further consideration at a high level. A number of interviewees favoured this being carried out either by a formal or informal sub-committee of the Committee of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) with NLA involvement or else the Australian Council of Libraries and Information Services (ACLIS) covering this matter. The idea of greater involvement by the Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) was also raised, and received support from the President of ASAA, Professor Ingleson.

### **Research grants and library resources**

A matter of concern to some scholars was that Australian academics in Asian studies were not including library resources in their applications for research grants. This was contrasted with the physical sciences, where laboratory equipment is regularly included in research grants, and was also contrasted with the United States, where library resources are routinely included in research grants for Asian studies and other areas.

### **Australian Bibliographic Network**

While some users were very familiar with the role of the Australian Bibliographic Network (ABN), many academics and librarians appeared not to be very aware of the extent of Asian language cataloguing on ABN. Libraries visited did not seem to be making much use of such data on ABN for their cataloguing. In the case of Chinese, for libraries such as the Universities of Adelaide, Monash, Murdoch and Griffith, this is related to their use of Pinyin romanisation. Macquarie University Library staff paid tribute to the ABN Office

at the National Library for work towards a satisfactory way of accommodating Pinyin on ABN.

### **Korean studies and library collections**

The rapid development of Korean studies in Australian universities has implications for libraries. Until now, NLA has had the only developing Korean vernacular research collection, although ANU and the University of Sydney have had small more or less static collections.

Monash University is now establishing a Korean research collection as part of the National Korean Studies Centre (NKSC) which links Victorian universities with a focus on Korea. A specialist Korean librarian has recently been appointed. During discussions, academics associated with the NKSC stressed that they would develop the collection in conjunction with the NLA collection.

Griffith University is also becoming active in Korean studies, and is currently seeking a tenured position for Korean. Their Korean teaching program includes a video teleconferencing scheme for lectures to and from Korea. By agreement, any Korean material acquired by the University of Queensland which, together with Griffith, forms the Key Centre for Asian Studies, is sent to Griffith for cataloguing.

### **FOLLOW-UP TO THE ASIAN SURVEY**

Following the visits undertaken in April and May 1992, George Miller and Andrew Gosling reported their findings to the National Library of Australia and the Australian National University. George Miller is currently completing the final report of the survey. Meanwhile, action is being taken on some of the issues raised, while others require further consideration.

On the matter of Asian scripts, a submission has been made to the Australian Research Council for a Mechanism C grant for an Australian nationally-shared Chinese, Japanese and Korean Languages Automated Library System. This is a cooperative proposal by five universities and the National Library. The proposal involves the issue of a Request for Tender (RFT) in early 1993 with a final choice made from a number of possible automated systems in mid-1993 and implementation in 1994.

On the Asian studies library grants for postgraduates, NLA and ANU are jointly writing to the President of ASAA urging that ASAA play the leading role in furthering this proposal which had such strong support among academics interviewed during the survey.

