

PART 2

ASIA:

INTRODUCTION

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A great deal of diversity prevails in Asia, home of ancient civilization and focus of future socio-economic developments. This diversity is prevalent in area and population, languages and cultures, and levels of development. This perspective makes Asia more of a cultural concept incorporating a number of regions and people than a homogenous physical entity. While in the East, main countries, such as China, Japan, and Korea, are clearly considered part of the Asian region, on the Western side there seems to be quite a bit of overlap with the Middle East region. In the South, component parts of the region are better known by memberships of SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation – Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka,) and ASEAN (Association of South-east Asian Nations – Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam). The Central Asian region also overlaps with countries of the old Soviet block and Iran. For the purpose of this book, a more inclusive approach has been used.

While exhaustive coverage of all geographic territories of Asia is not the focus, peculiarities of sub-regions and unique LIS services and sectors in major Asian countries have been covered except the Arabic speaking nations. Chapters 4-7 cover academic, public, and special libraries and library and information science (LIS) education in Asian countries. Within the constraints of size, authors have tried to provide an overview of history and development and the current status of libraries in their respective areas of coverage and pointed to references and sources of information for further details. As a result of the diversity highlighted above, coverage for individual countries and sub-regions vary a great deal in terms of detail and style of presentation. But, the details given provide a good overview of the status of library and information services in the region of Asia.

ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

The Asian region is well known for old seats of learning such as Taxila and Nalanda Universities in India; Nanjing University in China; the Academy of Gundishpur in Persia; and Quoc Tu Giam University in Vietnam. The region is also well known for its world-class modern universities such as Peking and Jiao Tong universities in China, National University of Singapore, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, and Indian Institutes of Technology, just to quote a few examples. These institutions of higher education are equipped with state-of-the-art

libraries. In Chapter 6, Trishanjit Kaur has provided a good overview of academic libraries in more than 20 countries in different sub-regions of Asia. She highlighted recent developments in academic libraries in China and India that resulted in development of comprehensive automated library systems and provided glimpses of modern academic libraries in Hong Kong, Japan, Korean, Singapore, and Taiwan. While the well-known libraries are equipped with the state-of-the art technology and generous financial support, Kaur's overall conclusions indicate that the region's academic libraries in general face challenges of inadequate financial and other support and need to take steps to take full advantage of the treasures of information owned by their parent institutions.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Public libraries in Asia have developed along particular individuality of countries in different sub-regions. In Chapter 7, Mei-Hwa Yang has highlighted well-known libraries as examples of the public library scene and provided references for additional information on public libraries in different Asian countries. She pointed out that public libraries are very crucial for Asian countries as they play an important role in promoting literacy, economic development, life-long learning, and cross-functional approach to social inclusion. A unique feature of public libraries in Asia is that in some Asian countries the National Library plays a leading role in public library development. Public libraries in Asia are confronted with unprecedented challenges in terms of operations and management, such as the following: limited resources, expanding user demands, growing competition in the provision of information services and social networking, an enhanced focus on accountability for public sector organizations. But, it is encouraging to see that many innovative projects are being implemented in the Asian countries. Several countries have undertaken a variety of digital projects, such as China, Taiwan, Japan and South Korea. New devices include: RFID, which was first introduced in Singapore, and Palm Veins technology, which was first used for library-card holders in Japan. In addition, many e-learning practices are being implemented in Taiwan and some other countries. Yang concludes that a more pro-active approach in seeking out opportunities to deploy their unique skills, expertise, and resources public libraries can gain more support from the governments as well citizenry in Asian countries.

SPECIAL LIBRARIES

Like in other countries, special libraries in Asia differ from public, school, and academic libraries. They serve a fairly narrow clientele and emphasize on providing information that can help answer questions ("putting knowledge to work") instead of educating patrons on how to find information. In Chapter 9, Ferguson and

Lin, considering the diversity of special libraries, have taken a different approach. They have surveyed special libraries of Hong Kong and Taiwan, and used these as case studies to highlight the peculiarities of special libraries in Asia. They describe the similarities and differences where possible and guide the reader to look at the other materials in the bibliography to learn more about the situation in each country. Case studies from Hong Kong and Taiwan indicate that special librarians in Asian countries have many hats to wear all at the same time to get their collecting, acquisitions, cataloguing, public service, and collection management work completed and they have to do this rather fast, especially for influential clients upon whose success the overall organization depends. These libraries were applying both “just in case” collecting strategies and the “just in time” collecting patterns. The need to collect and “mine” the work sponsoring organization was especially apparent within the more corporate libraries examined in the case studies. The authors conclude that special libraries in Asia face the challenges of lack of sufficient staff and funds, time to get all the work done, facilities in which to work, and opportunities to improve skills. Yet, most if not all of the special librarians interviewed seemed to be imbued with a passion for their jobs, putting knowledge to work.

LIS EDUCATION

Depending on the status of higher education and economies of individual countries in the region, Library and Information Science (LIS) education in Asia is at different levels of development. In Chapter 10 Khoo, Majid, and Lin trace the history of start of LIS education programs, provide a detailed list of sources of information on LIS education, and review the status of LIS education in Asia. While the earliest LIS education programs are traced back as early as 1915 in Pakistan and 1920 in China, authors report that most LIS programs in Asia began after the First World War. They also report that while some countries still do not have any LIS education programs (e.g., Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar); some Asian countries are currently operating a large number of LIS programs (e.g., India, 167; Philippines, 69; China, 41; Thailand, 16; and Taiwan, 13). The authors conclude that as a result of globalization and other relevant developments, the trends in LIS education are similar to that of USA, UK, and Australia, while there is a deliberate effort to adopt the LIS education to local needs and culture. Currently, there is no formal accreditation program in place but some countries are governed by the guidelines set by the respective ministries of education and the various quality assurance programs introduced by higher education forums. Regional professional associations and conferences initiated as a result of collaboration among LIS programs in several Asia-Pacific countries are promoting quality improvement in-

cluding a possible regional scheme of accreditation. As a result, an Asian brand of LIS is expected to emerge that, among other things, may also include an initiative of introducing 'I' Schools in Asia.