

Building links with libraries in Asia

Ann Huthwaite, chair, Joint Steering Committee for Revision of AACR

In a column in *The Australian* newspaper on 13 November 2002, Paul Kelly, editor-at-large, presented a compelling argument for Australia to increase its engagement with Asia to ensure that we survive and thrive in a post-Bali era. He expanded on the implications of this principle:

The word engagement implies a dynamic process; it is a personal matter; it is about the heart, not just the head; it implies a relationship that leads to deeper rapport and it demands serious commitment.

The opportunities for the library community to participate and even lead in this process are many and varied. Libraries are by nature co-operative and the issues that they face are similar the world over. In no area is this more evident than in standards for bibliographic description. Wherever I go in the world and talk with cataloguers I find that we are speaking a common language, and that we understand each others' needs and problems in trying to organise information effectively for our users.

In September 2002 I visited Singapore on the way to a meeting of the Joint Steering Committee for Revision of AACR in England. My primary objective was to meet Philip Hider, the bibliographic manager of the Singapore Integrated Library Automation Services of the National Library Board of Singapore. The Australian Committee on Cataloguing (ACOC) had been working with Philip on changes to the rules for Malay names in AACR to bring them into line with

the cultural expectations of Malay communities. I also met with Mr Choy Fatt-Cheong, the president of the Library Association of Singapore, and with a representative of the Congress of Southeast Asian Librarians (CONSAL). In addition, Philip Hider organised for me a program of visits to a range of public and university libraries. I was impressed by the quality of their libraries and the emphasis that their government is placing on the development of library services. I wondered why we are not closer to our colleagues in Singapore; the two countries have many things in common and there would be much to gain from a deeper level of co-operation.

Later that month I participated in a workshop at the National Library of Vietnam in Hanoi on the translation of Dewey and AACR into Vietnamese. The workshop was managed by RMIT International University Vietnam on behalf of the National Library of Vietnam and the Atlantic Philanthropies Foundation, the philanthropic body financially supporting the event. It was facilitated by Bob Stueart, the former dean of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at Simmons College in Boston, Massachusetts. Once again I felt an instant rapport with colleagues in an Asian country, despite language and cultural differences, because of the universal language of cataloguing and librarianship. I struggled with some reservations about imposing an Anglo-American standard on the Vietnamese, as in many ways they are managing very well with their own standards and internal processes. However, with the spread of globalisation it is critical that developing

countries are given the opportunity to be part of the global community. Standards like AACR are an enabling force; once the standards are adopted many things become possible, such as record-sharing and consequent cost savings. RMIT Vietnam should be congratulated for its leadership in this area. Australian libraries and librarians should be looking for more opportunities for advising and assisting our fellow librarians in countries like Vietnam.

I challenge Australian librarians to seek out opportunities to build relationships with their Asian colleagues. For example, are there possibilities at the forthcoming ALIA biennial conference in Queensland for sessions on building links with libraries in Asia? Our success in the region depends on such initiatives. ■



Ann Huthwaite, chair of the Joint Steering Committee for Revision of AACR (JSC), and Barbara Tillett, Library of Congress representative on JSC, presenting a copy of the 2002 revision of AACR to Mr Pham The Khang, Director, National Library of Vietnam