



APSIG Newsletter

ALIA Asia Pacific Special Interest Group

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Spices, Magic and a Missing Mermaid: Old, Rare and Beautiful Books on Indonesia

Andrew Gosling will deliver the next APSIG lunchtime talk to be held on Wednesday 24 September 2014, 12 15 pm, Conference Room, National Library.

Andrew Gosling is always a very popular and interesting speaker and has written extensively about the Library's collection. There will also be a book display from the Library's rich Indonesian collections, ranging from palm leaf and bark books to finely illustrated European books published between 1550 and 1900. From early travellers' reports to pioneering scholarly studies, they feature Indonesia's beautiful flora and fauna, mountains and peoples.

Postcard from Laos: 'Living in teak mansions'



Buddhist monks practice their English playing Scrabble at Luang Prabang Library, Lao

Anya Dettman, East Timor and Southeast Asian Specialist in the National Library of Australia and a member of the APSIG Canberra Committee, journeyed to Laos earlier this year to work as a Red Cross volunteer assisting with developing library services provided by Luang Prabang Public Library. She arrived mid-year and will stay until April 2015.

Anya writes:

“Most of the other volunteers in our group of 10 have been great company and we've really bonded and supported each other. We're mostly similar ages, one couple have worked in refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border, so it's been good to talk about SE Asia interests with them. I was sad to leave them behind in Vientiane.”

Vientiane itself is a very pleasant city. I really enjoyed my time there. It's bustling, very liveable and easy to navigate. Lots of shady

boulevards, pavements you can actually walk on, charming old French buildings and golden temples, bakeries and markets. My last night there was spent watching the sunset over the Mekong River at a riverside street stall. The tuk-tuk tours the Red Cross arranged for us were more cultural than sight-seeing - we visited a rehabilitation centre for unexploded ordnance victims with a superb little museum (Laos was the most heavily bombed country on earth) and also spent a morning planting rice seedlings, collecting herbs and fishing next to the rice paddies. I made the only catch of the day, a catfish. then we cooked the results of our labours.

“I haven’t really seen that much of beautiful Luang Prabang, which is a UNESCO -listed World heritage site, as the first week was spent house-hunting. I ended up renting one of the very few places that we could find: a 5 bedroom, two story Lao style mansion that was formerly the residence of the Chinese consul. It is tastefully decorated with massive throne-like chair with carved elephants on their sides, a crystal chandelier, and the heads of various endangered species. It has a lovely view to the mountains from the terrace, and I was able to find another foreigner to share it with, so this luxury was relatively affordable. (And how many librarians do you know have the opportunity to live in teak mansions?).

“The Luang Prabang Library itself is busy as it's the school holidays, every room humming with activity, including computer classes, maths classes for monks, English lessons, puppetry and traditional dance classes. The library seems to be used as a free child-minding service, however the attitude seems to be that's fine as it's a safe place and encourages kids to see the library as welcoming and fun, even if they don't read much – that will come. The library aspect is rather neglected in favour of its use as a community space, and as a centre to run the donations of books out to the villages via tuk-tuks and book boats. There are computers which occasionally work and a rather strange collection of books in English and Lao, a mix of odd donations including a large collection called “The American Corner” from the US Embassy and a collection of Soviet-era socialist works in Russian. Perhaps there is something symbolic about representations of the old foes both now residing quietly in corners of the same library in

a country where their Cold War rivalry was played out with such devastation. None of it in any order and impossible to find anything if you want to read anything specific. And not much in English relating to Laos. I can see my work is cut out for me, which is good because I can see lots of things I may actually be able to help with. Not much at the moment however, as the summer activities consume all the space and staff resources. The staff have been very warm and welcoming, within our respective language limitations, and the manager Chantha is an absolute inspiration due to her dynamism and passionate commitment to children.

“Already I've been to a party with the staff, which was actually also a *ba si* (*baci*) traditional blessing ritual so central to Lao culture. (I think the Thai karaoke element of it is now also traditional). I've also observed the ceremonies for Buddhist Lent, seen what's left of the Royal Lao ballet, and been on a tuk-tuk library. But accounts of that need to wait until next time”.

Western Australia hosts Asian Studies Association Conference

Alex Philp, Director of Overseas Collections Management at the National Library, writes:

“The University of Western Australia hosted the 20th Asian Studies Association of Australia biennial conference in early July. The conference was an overall success and was well attended across the three days of sessions. I was impressed by the diversity of topics and the level of preparation by many of the presenters. From my point of view the most interesting presentations were on: social movements in Japan and Taiwan against the nuclear power industry; on gender issues in Japanese literature; and on strategic policies affecting China's continued rise as a world power.

The National Library of Australia presented a well-attended pre-conference workshop session for postgraduates on the NLA's rich Asian collections. This is a great way for the NLA to make contact with new researchers in the field of Asian studies and introduce them to collection resources available for their studies that they may not know exist.



“Speakers from the National Library of Australia, University of Melbourne, the Australian National University and Monash University joined forces to present a panel session titled *Technology: Issues in Australian Asian library collections: a national view of borders and spaces in global reality*. The session generated a stimulating discussion about the way libraries supporting Asian studies work to provide access to resources and how this could be improved, particularly in the context of declining resources.

During the conference a teleconference was held by members of the East Asian Research Libraries Group of Australia (EARLGA) and despite some early technical issues it was an interesting and useful discussion. There was a good discussion on the recent survey conducted about the location and activities of Asian studies libraries and details of their collections, and about whether it may be beneficial to broaden the group’s focus on the whole of Asia.

There was a very positive esprit de corps among delegates at the conference and I’m sure that everyone left Perth with a sense that much good work is being done across the country in Asian studies.

“Many ALIA APSIG members may already know that the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS) will be held in Adelaide in early July 2015. This is the premier international body of Asian studies and the 2015 conference will be the first time it will be held in Australia. Organisers are anticipating 3,500 delegates and more information is available at www.icas9.com.

Alex Philp
 Director, Overseas Collections Management
 National Library of Australia

The well-intentioned book gift: a view from Dili

It was good to hear from volunteer Del Bovill about her work at the Xanana Gusmao Cultural Centre, which incorporates the Xanana Gusmao Reading Room, Dili’s only public access library. Del’s report also highlights the dilemma faced by libraries receiving well-intentioned book gifts from overseas countries. Nothing is ever thrown away, but is it useful?



Del Bovill, Volunteer Adviser

Del writes:

“Six months into my role as Volunteer Adviser with the Sentru Kultural Xanana, I got to finally unpack the remaining book stock to assess it for inclusion in the collection. All of the stock had been boxed up for almost two years while the new library was being constructed and was in poor condition, very dusty, dirty, with some water damage. It was a challenging and grimy task, but we couldn't wait to see what gems the boxes held!!

Our deadline was the May Literature conference (Conferências de Maio), Timor's first literature festival. The Sentru Kultural Xanana was one of the major venues. We had author talks, mother tongue language workshops and nightly music and poetry readings.

We had invited a number of organisations to set up book stalls in the grounds to sell their publications and local craft. Our plan was to sell the discarded stock from our stall as well as new publications from our bookshop.

The Reading Room collection has developed from donations over the past 10 years, the initial collection was set up by our Patron Kirsty Sword Gusmao who started the Reading Room in 2000 with books from her husband, the current Prime Minister, Xanana Gusmao's collection.

Over the years stock has been gifted from many countries, most of it academic or public library discards. By the time it arrives in Dili it is usually well out of date and its relevance questionable. So the decision to cull was necessary to keep the collection relevant to local users.

Culling the stock, given it was in four languages was time consuming. The English I could handle, the Tetum also. We kept everything in the Tetum language, as there is so little published. Bahasa Indonesia and Portuguese I left to library assistant Margarida to do the final cut after my initial cull based on condition and age.

I wondered if the Reading Room had become a bit of a dumping ground when I unpacked the following titles.....

"Discrepancy of signed measures and polynomial approximation". 2001.

"Psychoneuroimmunology: hypotheses and current research", 2002.

"Beef palatability in the republic of South Africa"2010

and my favourite...

"On comparing the behaviour of zoo housed animals with wild conspecifics as a welfare indicator, using the Giraffe (*Giraffa Camelopardalis*) as a model. 1996.

What was the donor thinking? We would much prefer to open boxes full of general English language books in the areas of science, maths, literacy, geography, health and Information technology!!

We kept quite a few titles that we will add to the Reading Room shelves in the future. Recently we have taken a big step and installed the open source 'Koha' Library Management System.

Time will now be spent translating it to Tetum and setting it up to our requirements.

More on 'Koha' in later updates. To'o tempu oin (Till next time)!"

Music in Southeast Asia: aspects of current research

Librarians attending the APSIG meeting in the National Library on 7 May 2014 on the subject of "Eastern Music, Western Notes: Researching Southeast Asian music in Western Archives and libraries" learned at least one very important thing: Never throw anything out! Among other things, we heard from the researcher speakers how a scrap of paper which fell out of an 18th century Spanish book while being read in the National Library in Madrid proved to be a gem for the study of music in Manila in the early modern period. Dr. David Irving of the School of Music at the ANU led us through his varied experiences in researching his subject, touching on a wide variety of institutions, sources, languages and places.



A similar journey was described by the other speaker, Mr. Le-Tuyen Nguyen, also attached to the School of Music, who has researched and recreated a form of popular Vietnamese music presented in Paris at a number of expositions and exhibitions at the turn of the 19th century. He has even located the original musical instruments used in the performances, and has as a goal their restoration to playing condition. Debussy, who heard the performances and whose music was influenced by them, would be delighted!

The talks were illustrated by music and videos and while most enjoyable, at the same time

stimulated those librarians working in research libraries to reflect on the magnitude and diversity of the material which they are responsible for.
George Miller

National Libraries Asia Pacific

The CDNLAO Newsletter no. 80, July 2014 has an update on progress with the National Libraries Asia Pacific platform which will aggregate access to digitised content from ASEAN nation libraries. Read the details at:

<http://www.ndl.go.jp/en/cdnlao/newsletter/080/07.html>

Pacific Roundtable March 2015, Los Angeles – call for papers

Jacqui Grainger of the University of Sydney is a joint convener of "New Approaches to Trans-Pacific Studies" (Roundtable) with Danielle Spratt, California State U., Northridge: Dept. of English, to be held as part of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies next year in Los Angeles.

From the French and English travel accounts of China during the late 17th century, to the founding of the California Missions in the 1740s, to Captain James Cook's memorable travels to Australia, New Zealand, and his ultimate death in Hawaii in the 1770s, the eighteenth century saw increased scientific, colonial, artistic and commercial activity across the continents and islands that frame the Pacific, causing a proliferation of both cultural and imaginative textual productions.

In recognition of the conference location this year, this roundtable panel seeks talks that address innovative cross-disciplinary approaches to the literary, textual, visual, and/or cultural productions of the trans-pacific eighteenth century; these approaches might offer new arguments to seminal texts, or they might consider new scholarly, methodological, pedagogical, and/or archival techniques or discoveries. How did the cultural output from the period define a distinctive trans-pacific eighteenth-century identity? We are especially interested in presentations from fields within and beyond literary studies, particularly those that consider interdisciplinary fields such as art

history, history of science/medicine, or bibliographic/archive studies.

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Atua: sacred gods of Polynesia: an NGA exhibition May-August 2014



The National Gallery of Australia negotiated loans from more than 30 institutions throughout the world for Atua, which explored the relationship between atua and art, between spirits and sculpture, between gods and priests, between women and men. It looked at some of the most unique works of art in the Polynesian world and tries to make sense of an enduring mystery surrounding religious objects and their association with belief in gods.

A 156-page catalogue has been published to mark the exhibition and is available from the NGA for \$49.95.

Australia-Indonesia Centre

Here is more about the Australia-Indonesia Centre which was announced by Prime Minister Tony Abbott during his visit to Jakarta in October 2013.

It now has a website:

<http://australiaindonesiacentre.org> which states that the Australia Indonesia Centre (AIC) is charged by the Australian Government to assist in providing solutions to Australia and Indonesia's shared national challenges. With our partners and participating institutions, the AIC forms contemporary partnerships among cross-border research partners and develops collaborative research projects. The AIC offers opportunities for all sectors of the community to get involved in activities and events that increase mutual understanding of our nations and facilitate positive intercultural engagement.

So if you have any Indonesia-related projects, check it out.

George Miller

Books and Things: Collections for Pacific Studies curated by Erna Lilje :24 April to 19 December 2014

This exhibition illustrates the wealth of the University of Sydney Library's holdings related to Pacific Studies. It includes early printed books, maps and charts, works of natural history and fiction. The books and documents on display are complemented by artefacts from the Macleay Museum's holdings and together they celebrate the wealth of the University of Sydney's heritage collections.

Exhibition Space, Level 2, Fisher Library, and open daily to the public. Closed Public Holidays. Opening times vary, please check the [website](#)

Stars of the Tokyo stage

A new exhibition at the National Gallery of Australia, *Stars of the Tokyo stage: Natori Shunsen's kabuki actor prints*, reveals the dynamic world of Japan's kabuki theatre through superb actor portraits created by artist Natori Shunsen (1886–1960) in the 1920s and 30s. A selection of spectacular kabuki robes further illustrates the extravagance of the theatrical form. The exhibition will be open at the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra until October. An illustrated 144 page catalogue is available for \$39.95 from the NGA.



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