

Ministering Asian faith and wisdom: theological libraries in Asia

Abstract

For many years there have been discussions about the necessity for librarianship training for Asian theological librarians. Some months ago John and Rita England (Christchurch, New Zealand) visited Hong Kong to assist with a course piloted by Mr Tang Sui-tung, the librarian of the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Hong Kong. Mr Tang is keen to work with the Forum of Asian Theological Librarians (ForATL) who welcome this provision.

The full course lasted for an academic year, the earlier parts covering theological understanding and basic library science. The last section, for which Rita and John were responsible, placed theological librarianship with the Asian context. Rita has sent us this report which outlines the latter section of the course, together with the text of one of the lectures delivered by John and Rita during the course.

The President of Lutheran Theological Seminary, Dr Lam Tak Ho, and his staff, and in particular the librarian, Mr Tang Sui-tung, made us (Rita and John England) very welcome and assisted in every way possible. Mr Tang had been responsible for the full year's course while we taught the part concerning Asian resources.

This first class of the Asian theological librarians' course consisted of 11 participants – 1 from Falam, Chin State, Burma, 1 from Jakarta, 2 from Sabah, 1 from Cebu, Central Philippines, 1 (originally from Scotland, but now New Zealand) working with the CCA library, and the rest from a wide range of Hong Kong institutions.

In our 30 hours teaching we covered the various topics as set out below, including two very useful afternoons of visits to special libraries and archival collections. Apart from having to telescope some of the teaching because of a typhoon closing Hong Kong down for two days, the teaching plan worked well.

It took some time to clarify what we mean by *Asian* resource materials and to turn the students around to see the importance of the writing from local writers and publishers (rather than the glossy imposing overseas publications), but it was well worth the effort to do this.

We are thinking of putting the material from our lectures into some booklet form so that others can make use of them also. In 1991 we prepared a Mini-Manual (PTCA Bulletin Special issue, Nov. 1991) which could now be expanded.

Mr Tang Sui-tung plans to repeat the course again in two years' time, as it has been so well received and already there are enquiries from prospective students.

Course Outline:

Day 1

- 1) **Our place in God's mission** : Process, where we are, "Feet", motivation, context
- 2) **The tradition in which we stand** : History of Asian Christian libraries

Day 2

- 1) **Steps for librarians in theology** : Theological assumptions : what is theology in Asia?
- 2) **What are our Christian resources?** : Long history, vast libraries, periodization, charting

Day 3

- 1) **What we already have for our work** : Reorientation, the college library, our personal library
- 2) **The Asian resources themselves** : Bibliographies, other libraries, relationships and union listings

Preparation for Visit I

Day 4

- 1) **Acquisition** : Report back from visit. How, what, where – to obtain
- 2) **Cataloguing, Promotion** : With an Asian focus. Publicising the Asian collection

Day 5

- 1) **Wider issues** : Who uses the library? Bottlenecks and strategies.
- 2) **Taking compass bearings** : Where have we come?

Day 6

- 1) **Different formats** : Periodicals, documentation, ephemera, booklets, artifacts, non-book materials.
- 2) **Archives** : Faith and history. Legacy in our minds.

Preparation for Visit II

Day 7

- 1) **Preservation and disaster control** : External and internal damage. Prevention and cure.
- 2) **Role and relationships in college community** : Committee, faculty, support groups. Act of commissioning.

*Rita England
13 Hilldale Place
Christchurch 2,
New Zealand*

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