A Window on Library Collaboration in Southeast Asia: Insights and Perspectives of Lourdes T. David

Lourdes T. David
Director, Rizal Library, Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines

Interviewed by Janet Lee (jlee@regis.edu)
Editor and Contributor, *Collaborative Librarianship*

Abstract

Collaborative Librarianship Advisory Board Member, Lourdes T. David, provides an overview of library collaboration in the Philippines and in other countries in Southeast Asia.

Keywords: Southeast Asia; Rizal Library; Ateneo de Manila University

In November 2012, Lourdes David joined the Advisory Board of *Collaborative Librarianship*. She is Director of the Rizal Library, Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines. The library is named in honor of Dr. José Rizal, a national hero of the Philippines. As part of a series of interviews with members of the Advisory Board, Ms David was asked to reflect on her experience as a librarian and, in particular, aspects of library collaboration in the Philippines and Southeast Asia. She brings to the Journal an extensive resume of library work covering several decades reaching across the Philippines and many other countries including Myanmar, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Nepal, Laos, Sri Lanka and Vietnam. Conference engagements have ranged widely, too, including those in Canada and the USA, the United Kingdom, Australia, China, Korea, and Greece.

Ms Lourdes has served as a library consultant on many research initiatives, literacy programs and humanitarian projects sponsored by such organizations as Save the Children, the World Health Organization, and UNESCO, among others.

***

CL: How did you become involved in library work?

David: I became involved in library work by choice. This was in 1973. I was a faculty member of the University of the Philippines teaching general chemistry subjects when I suddenly decided that I would join the library staff at the main campus and move from research in the laboratory to research in the library.

CL: Do you have an early memory of a library experience?

David: Yes, I worked as a library student assistant when I was in college.

CL: Did you have a mentor who guided you early in your career.

David: Not really, but I was inspired by one of my professors in library school.

CL: The Rizal Library at the Ateneo de Manila sponsored the Rizal Library 5th International Conference in October 2012. It drew librarians from thirteen different countries. What was the inspiration and need for conferences of this type?

David: When I first became the director of the Rizal Library, I observed the conferences and seminars being offered by the library associations. They were all good seminars but the speakers and attendees were all local. I thought of bringing in foreign speakers and participants to expose the Filipino librarians to wider current issues and trends in library practice. That dream became a reality at the first Rizal Library Inter-

CC BY NC ND

national Conference. We received very good feedback so we continued to sponsor such conferences.

CL: What are some of the biggest differences in library development and cooperation in the Philippines/southeast Asia and North America?

David: I think that in the Philippines, where there are more than a 1,000 academic institutions, only a handful have substantial library budgets that enable the library to keep abreast of developments in libraries in other parts of the world. This disparity in library budgets makes networking difficult because although libraries are aware of the advantages of consortium buying power, many of the libraries do not have the budget to purchase resources even at consortium prices. To make matters worse, private and public institutions find it difficult to work together because of the strict regulations of the "Commission on Audit," an arm of the Philippine government that closely monitors and controls expenditures of public funds.

The other reason perhaps lies in the very low research output of the country. This implies a very low use of libraries. Consequently, libraries are not given the importance they should have. Cooperation among Southeast Asian libraries is also difficult for the same reasons. For example, libraries in Singapore, Hong Kong and Malaysia are very well developed but in other countries in the region, the picture is just like in the Philippines where there are libraries that are very well developed and resourced but there are many more with very few collections and limited access to technology.

CL: What are some interesting and promising innovations or developments in library collaboration in the Philippines and/or Southeast Asia?

David: In the Philippines, libraries are beginning to collaborate. For example, the libraries of the Jesuit higher education institutions have recently formed a consortium to take advantage of discounts for group purchase and to share resources and expertise. The engineering libraries recently have had an organizational meeting to form a consortium. The members of the Catholic Education Association of the Philippines have agreed to allow reciprocal access to their libraries. The Philippine Association of Academic and Research Librarians has invited institutions to become members and to enter into interlibrary loan agreements.

There are other examples of collaboration such as the work of Academic Libraries Book Acquisition Systems Association, Inc. (ALBASA) that supports joint purchasing, professional development and continuing education, and other cooperative activities. Libraries of the Philippines provide entries in the Filipiniana catalog (Library Link). Interlibrary loans and document delivery services continue to expand.

In Southeast Asia, more broadly, an example of collaboration is the ASEAN University Network (AUN) with a vigorous library sector that has developed the AUN Interlibrary Online to support educational programming and online resource sharing among its members from thirteen countries.

Other examples include the successful Network of Aquaculture Centers in Asia, an organization strongly supported by the governments of the countries involved. Although not limited to libraries, it does include capacity building through staff education and training and collaborative research and development of ICT. The Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC) is another successful partnership with strong government support. The Health Literature Libraries and Information Services (HeLLIS) produces Index Medicus for the South-East Asia Region (IMSEAR) and is an exemplar in providing access to health care information through libraries in the region.

CL: What are some of the challenges or obstacles to libraries working together or partnering in formal or informal ways?

David: Partnership between public and private institutions is difficult, as noted, because of Commission on Audit regulations governing public institutions. Among private institutions, Presidents sometime do not want to partner with smaller institutions because they feel that they will be only at the giving and not on the receiving end. Informal partnership systems are

CC BY NC ND

easier to create and maintain, but they are usually limited to ILL, document delivery and onsite access. Attitude of librarians also sometimes hinder cooperation.

CL: Are there formal international library partnerships in Southeast Asia, and if so, what are some examples of these partnerships? What are the factors that make such partnerships successful, and what factors mitigate their success?

David: There are some notable examples in addition to the ones described above. The Southeast Asian Digital Library is a consortium of institutions represented by librarians and faculty of participating institutions, and in particular its Committee on Research Materials on Southeast Asia (CORMOSEA). The International Association of Aquatic and Marine Science Libraries and Information Centers (IAMSLIC) is a network that provides continuing education programs and sponsors an annual conference for its members. It also aims to promote sharing of resources and other types of collaboration among the member libraries. The Agricultural Libraries Network (AGLINET) is a worldwide network of agricultural libraries active in Southeast Asia. These networks have been successful because they have external funding and their establishments were initiated not by the libraries but by a body or bodies that needed access to shared resources. They are, however, limited in focus to specialized areas.

CL: Are there ways for libraries or library organizations in North America (or other parts of the world) to work together with libraries in Southeast Asia?

David: Yes! Some ways where partnerships could be established are:

- Benchmarking
- Staff exchange (inbound and outbound)
- On the job training
- Sharing of resources through Document delivery or ILL
- Conferences, speaking engagements or consultancies inbound and outbound
- Working with library associations.
- Teaching onsite and/or via distance education. (double degree or single degree agreements)

CL: Thank you. Perhaps *Collaborative Librarianship* might be able to help promote these types of partnerships in the future.

CC BY NC ND