Serving Individuals from other Asian Countries in Your Library: Recommendations for Southeast Asian Libraries

John Hickok
Library Faculty/ International Outreach Librarian
California State University Fullerton
800 N. State College Blvd, Fullerton, California 92831 USA
jhickok@fullerton.edu

ABSTRACT

Cross-border travel and migration within Asia has dramatically increased in the past decade. Indonesian immigrants can be found in Malaysia, Philippine workers can be found in Singapore, Vietnamese students can be found in Thailand, and on & on. There has never been a more dynamic time of interaction between Asian cultures. However, one of the most frequent admissions of Southeast Asian libraries is that there is often little or no outreach to these various individuals, nor an understanding of their library awareness or home-country library conditions. This paper will directly address this matter, giving recommendations for Southeast Asian libraries to better serve these individuals.

This paper reflects a 10-year scholarly study comparing library conditions and services among all countries of Asia, especially Southeast Asia (study description here: http://users.library.fullerton.edu/jhickok/research.htm). This study addresses questions such as: Are Burmese students accustomed to "open shelves" found in Thailand? Are Indonesian library users familiar online catalogs found in Singapore? Do Vietnamese students demonstrate Information Literacy skills in Philippine libraries? Because of this decade-long investigation into different countries' library conditions, this paper will provide helpful insights for Southeast Asian librarians. Nearly all Southeast Asian librarians (whether school, public, academic, or national/government) have, at some point, interacted with a library user from another Asian country; thus, this paper has high relevance, and high usefulness.

First, the numbers of ASEAN visitors and students to *other* ASEAN countries will be provided. Then, individual country library conditions will be described. For example, what are the conditions of school libraries in Laos or Cambodia? What are public libraries like in Indonesia? What are some of the new library developments in Myanmar? Finally, user characteristics relevant for librarians will be discussed. For example, what understanding do Vietnamese students have of properly citing sources in a Malaysian academic library? What prior experience of borrowing library materials (quantity and duration) might Filipino workers at a Singapore public library have? Why might Indonesians in a Thai library not approach a librarian for help? These issues, and more, will be described.

Keywords: Asian libraries, outreach, cross-cultural service, international students, immigrants, comparative libraries

INTRODUCTION

In the past 2 decades, travel and educational exchange by Southeast Asians *within* Southeast Asia has greatly increased. Factors such as growing economies, the boom of low-cost air travel, and the rise of international programs at universities (Welch, 2011), have all contributed to this. Indonesian immigrants can be found in Malaysia, Philippine workers can be found in Singapore, Laotian students can be found in Thailand, and on & on. There has never been a more dynamic time of interaction between Southeast Asian cultures.

This surge in travel and interaction within Southeast Asia has relevance for librarians. What are the information needs of visiting (or exchange studying) Southeast Asians? What is their degree of familiarity or experience with libraries? How can they be outreached to? For example: are students from Myanmar accustomed to "open shelves" found in Thailand? Are Indonesian library users familiar with online catalogues in the Philippines? What library skills exist among Vietnamese students in Singapore? A frequent admission of Southeast Asian librarians is that there is often little or no outreach to these visiting library users, nor an understanding of their library experience or home-country library conditions.

This paper reflects part of a 10-year scholarly study comparing library conditions and services among all countries Southeast Asia (study description here: http://users.library.fullerton.edu/jhickok/research.htm). The format of this paper is: first, to note the statistics of Southeast Asian visitors and students arriving in *other* Southeast Asian countries. Second, to give an overview of the library conditions (public, school, and academic) in all 10 Southeast Asian (CONSAL) countries. And third, to note relevant suggestions for librarians serving other Southeast Asians.

In that nearly all Southeast Asian librarians (of any type library) have, at some point, interacted with a library user from another Southeast Asian country, this paper has high relevance for librarians.

BRUNEI

Statistics: **ASEAN visitors to Brunei** (ranked among all countries, 2012): 1. Malaysia (27%: 65,070), 3. Philippines (9%: 21,690), 3. Indonesia (9%: 21,690), 4. Singapore (8%: 19,280). (UNWTO, 2013). **ASEAN students studying in Brunei** (ranked among all countries, 2014): 1. Malaysia (102), 2. Indonesia (34), 3. Thailand (34), 4. Philippines (20), 10. Singapore (8), 12. Myanmar (6). (UNESCO UIS, 2014).

Library conditions: Brunei currently has no national library or central public library, so the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports' Department of Language & Literature Library (open to the public) serves as the *defacto* national library/central public library. The library also oversees 8 branch libraries in Brunei's different districts (and these also serve as *defacto* branch public libraries). The libraries are fully modern and internet connected, but since they are not truly public libraries, their breadth of collection is not wide enough to satisfy all subject area inquiries. Photos and descriptions of all libraries are at the central library's website: http://www.dbplibrary.gov.bn/. School libraries exist in all 154 schools of Brunei; they are run by a librarian or teacher-librarian, and overseen by the Ministry of Education (Nassar, 2014). They are all internet connected with access to e-resources (Goh, 2009). Likewise, Brunei's academic libraries are well e-connected. There are nearly 20 tertiary institutions (universities, polytechnics, colleges, institutes). Many are new within the past 2 decades, and as such have relied on newer e-resources than old, historic texts—particularly the MoE's Virtual Library System of Brunei.

Relevance for librarians: Visitors or students from Brunei are likely to have experience with modern library facilities and e-resources. However, due to the newness of Brunei's libraries, they may not have as much familiarity accessing older, historical book collections.

CAMBODIA

Statistics: **ASEAN visitors to Cambodia** (ranked among all countries, 2014): 1. Vietnam (20.1%: 803,591), 3. Laos (10.1%: 404,102), 5. Thailand (6.2%: 246,140), 8. Malaysia (3.2%: 128,097). (Cambodia Ministry of Tourism, 2014). **ASEAN students studying in Cambodia**: current totals unavailable, but in 2008 Cambodia's Royal University of Phnom Penh listed: 1. Vietnam (47), 2. Laos (22). (RUPP, 2008).

Library conditions: Cambodia's public library situation is still mostly nonexistent, which has contributed to a lack of a reading culture in Cambodia. However, NGO-built libraries (such as by Room to Read, or Sipar) have been popping up, and Cambodia's first library association was formed in 2013, which brings encouragement (ABDC, 2013). School libraries exist, but inconsistently—ranging from a closet of textbooks, to a converted classroom with a few shelves (though better at NGO-enhanced school libraries). Cambodia's top public university, RUPP, and top private university, PUC, are each headed by an MLIS librarian, and are both working to be model academic libraries for the country. As such, students from these two locations have experience using an organized library with online catalogs. However, other, smaller tertiary institutions (colleges or institutes) have minimal libraries—frequently just textbook repositories.

Relevance for librarians: librarians encountering Cambodians—other than students from the top universities—may want to offer extra orientation, as library exposure/experience in Cambodia is typically limited.

INDONESIA

Statistics: **ASEAN visitors to Indonesia** (ranked among all countries, 2013): 1. Singapore (18.5%: 1,634,149), 2. Malaysia (16.2%: 1,430,989), 7. Philippines (2%: 246,497), 16. Thailand (1%: 141,349). (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2013). **ASEAN students studying in Indonesia** (ranked among all countries, 2014): 1. East Timor (2,675), 2. Malaysia (2,516), 8. Thailand (57), 9. Vietnam (50). (UNESCO UIS, 2014).

Library conditions: Public libraries exist under the authorities of provincial, municipal, or district governments. However, there is wide inconsistency of funding, and therefore conditions. Provincial libraries tend to be better, and the National library has been making efforts at training and offering additional funding (plus book & wifi bus libraries). Neighborhood reading rooms, called "reading gardens" are libraries of sorts, but typically have small collections, no infusion of new materials/technology, and are run by volunteers. School libraries, likewise, vary dramatically. In many schools, they don't exist, and in others, they are only a few shelves or books in a classroom; however, in others, they *do* exist as an actual library with a librarian or teacher-librarian. Indonesia's top universities, like UI, ITB, GM, have large libraries with professional librarians. However, for smaller or more remote universities or colleges, library sizes and quality drops.

Relevance for librarians: The image of librarians is still evolving in Indonesia. Despite tremendous efforts by Indonesian library leaders to promote the profession, public perception is still low (i.e., librarians are mere clerks, not knowledge experts). Thus, librarians interacting with Indonesians may wish to promote the image/expertise of librarians.

LAO PDR

Statistics: **ASEAN visitors to Lao PDR** (ranked among all countries, 2013): 1. Thailand (54.5%: 2,059,434), 2. Vietnam (24%: 910,164), 10. Malaysia (<1%: 26,035), 12. Philippines (<1%: 16,318), 13. Cambodia (<1%: 12,180), 14. Singapore (<1%: 9,685). (Laos PDR Tourism Development Department, 2013). **ASEAN students studying in Indonesia** (ranked among all countries, 2014): 1. Vietnam (243), 3. Cambodia (34), (UNESCO UIS, 2014).

Library conditions: Public libraries are still evolving in Laos. In the past decade, Laos' National Library has taken on the challenge of growing more provincial libraries (6 now, all viewable at www.nationallibraryoflaos.org. The addition of Vientiane's first municipal library in 2006 was another positive achievement. While still not enough, nor with large enough collections or services, the efforts underway are encouraging. School libraries, likewise, have been emerging more in the past decade. Most are still inadequate, with too few, or too old, of books. NGOs have been a notable help, such as Room to Read, which has added or upgraded over 1,000 libraries (varying sizes) to schools since 2005 (Room to Read, 2013). Regarding academic libraries, the National University of Laos received a long-awaited new library building in 2013 with new collections and technology. However, for Laos' other tertiary options— smaller universities or colleges—many of the libraries are still underdeveloped (lacking sufficient trained staff or organization, lacking sufficient automation or e-resources, etc.)

Relevance for librarians: Laotian visitors or students in other ASEAN libraries may have some familiarity with library surroundings, but due to limited e-resources in Laos, would be well-served in receiving outreach/training in OPACs and databases.

MALAYSIA

Statistics: **ASEAN visitors to Malaysia** (ranked among all countries, 2014): 1. Singapore (50%: 11,583,654), 2. Indonesia (10%: 2,321,027), 3. Thailand (4.8%: 1,102,146), 5. Brunei (4.3%: 985,111), 7. Philippines (2.2%: 513,313), 12. Vietnam (1%: 245,501), 19. Myanmar (<1%: 74,830), 24. Cambodia (<1%: 60,845), 41. Laos (<1%: 23,343). (Tourism Malaysia, 2014). **ASEAN students studying in Malaysia** (ranked among all countries, 2014): 2. Indonesia (6,222), 14. Thailand (946), 15. Singapore (796), 24. Vietnam (412), 29. Myanmar (346), 31. Brunei (309), 33. Philippines (291), 59. Cambodia (72), 88. Laos (18). (UNESCO UIS, 2014).

Library conditions: Due to Malaysia's push for technology for over two decades, most of Malaysia's public libraries are well developed. For example, the Penang State Library equipped its entire collection with RFID technology, and the Sarawak State Library features a resource-rich website (www.pustaka-sarawak.com). School libraries, also, have benefited from Malaysia's technology push, with many school libraries reporting internet access (and therefore access to the e-resources of Malaysia's national library portal, http://www.u-library.gov.my). As of 2012, there were some 9,000+ school libraries (Bakar, 2012). However, numbers of trained librarians, or teacher-librarians with acceptable release time for the library, are still not ideal. And most libraries do not meet the prescribed ratio (from the Ministry of Education) of book collections to students. Academic libraries in Malaysia are well developed. Benefitting from high technology (robust automation and e-resources) and trained library professionals, conditions among top universities meet most international standards. Smaller and college universities may have smaller collections, but often still employ technology and trained librarians.

Relevance for librarians: Malaysian visitors or students in other ASEAN libraries will likely already have experience with library e-resources and technology, and may not need as great of assistance in using these. However, that is not to imply that their Information Literacy

is mastered; as all librarians know, mere computer savvy-ness is not the same as Information Literacy.

MYANMAR

Statistics: **ASEAN visitors to Myanmar** (ranked among all countries, 2014): 1. Thailand (17.5%: 198,229), 5. Singapore (4.2%: 47,692), 6. Malaysia (4.1%: 46,534), (Myanmar Ministry of Hotels & Tourism, 2014). **ASEAN students studying in Myanmar** (ranked among all countries, 2014): 2. Vietnam (8), 4. Thailand (<5), 7. Malaysia (<5). (UNESCO UIS, 2014).

Library conditions: Myanmar is just now emerging from a period of isolation, and so public library developments are new. Typical full-service libraries have not existed, but rather only community reading rooms, created by the Ministry of Information's IPRD—Information & Public Relations Department. Consequently, grass-root efforts have arisen among book advocates to launch newer/revamped libraries. Political leader Aung San Suu Kyi has joined this effort, launching a new public library at the location of a former IPRD reading room in 2013. (Daw Khin Kyi, 2013). School libraries (public/government schools) have essentially been nonexistent, and are just now beginning to appear with NGO and book advocates' support. Similarly, academic libraries are on the dawn of re-emerging. Following the late 1980s breakup of universities, academic libraries were relegated to mere study halls for over 2 decades. An exception was the Universities Central Library which continued, as best as possible, collecting and organizing materials. Today, NGOs and outside delegations are offering support to re-engage academic libraries.

Relevance for librarians: Visitors or students from Myanmar who use ASEAN libraries may benefit from extra library orientation or training on e-resources. In that both of these are still emerging in Myanmar, knowledge of common library features (like even "open stacks") may not always be present.

PHILIPPINES

Statistics: **ASEAN visitors to Philippines** (ranked among all countries, 2012): 6. Singapore (132,430), 10. Malaysia (87,428), 18. Thailand (38,534), 29. Vietnam (13,618). (Philippines Department of Tourism, 2012). **ASEAN students studying in the Philippines** (ranked among all countries, 2012): 7. Indonesian (4.55%: 353), 9: Thai (1.8%: 140), 11. Vietnamese (1.4%: 112). (Philippines Council on Higher Education, 2012).

Library conditions: The Philippines was pioneering in legally professionalizing librarians' status in 1990. This created a much greater prevalence of trained librarians in public libraries. However, other challenges have remained. Library funding comes from respective government levels (neighborhood, municipal, provincial), and is often inconsistent—subject to competing demands/interests of governing officials. Thus, some libraries receive strong support, for example the Quezon City Public Library, while others around the country run with deficiencies (no website, little or no automation, limited funds, etc.) Similarly, school libraries can vary dramatically. Schools with directors who are keen on reading hire proactive librarians, fund books and computers, and make their libraries showpieces. In other schools with different priorities, libraries are merely reading rooms with some books. Laws and advocacy for school libraries have increased in recent years (Gagatiga, 2015), but putting such into practice remains inconsistent, subject to school or district directors. Academic libraries in the Philippines run a spectrum of well-to-minimally developed. The country's top libraries are impressive: large collections, robust cataloging, international databases, OPACs and websites,

and much more. These features decline with smaller universities, and decline even further with small colleges/institutes.

Relevance for librarians: A Filipino/a's experience with libraries can vary widely depending on their educational experience. Highly-educated urban students/citizens will be familiar with library practices (book loans, etc.) and e-resources (databases, OPACs), while those with less education or from more remote areas will be less familiar.

SINGAPORE

Statistics: **ASEAN visitors to Singapore** (ranked among all countries, 2014): 1. Indonesia (20%: 3,023,094), 2. Malaysia (8%: 1,232,577), 7. Philippines (4%: 676,060), 10. Thailand (3%: 506,332), 13. Vietnam (2.8%: 424,070). (Singapore Tourism Board, 2015). **ASEAN students studying in Singapore**: data is not available, but secondary reports note that, "Singapore has long attracted students from Malaysia and Indonesia." (Yeoh and Lin, 2012).

Library conditions: Singapore's public library system is essentially a gold standard for Southeast Asia, if not all of Asia. It is unfair to compare Singapore's small, high-income population with still-developing countries' immense populations. Still, as a model, Singapore's public libraries have all the ideal elements: strong funding, government/public support, trained professionals, modern facilities/technology, and more. Singapore's school library conditions are mostly acceptable, though not without criticism. In 2006 Singapore's government launched a large-scale outsourcing of school libraries to a private management service, Civica. While Civica has brought innovations such as a uniform automation system and an efficient book purchasing system, its employees—caretaking the libraries—are not necessarily trained librarians, which has raised questions about the long-term quality invested. Singapore's academic libraries, like its public libraries, reflect outstanding conditions and support. While harnessing the opportunities of new technologies—everything from RFID to virtual book shelf OPACS—(Loh, 2014), Singapore's academic libraries value their human capital as well: librarian professionals

Relevance for librarians: Most Singapore citizens/students visiting other ASEAN libraries will likely be familiar with aspects of libraries, though not necessarily specifics (different loan policies, different e-resource elements, different language fonts, etc.) Assumptions should never be made, however; not every Singaporean is a library-goer.

THAILAND

Statistics: **ASEAN visitors to Thailand** (ranked among all countries, 2014): 2. Malaysia (10.7%: 2,644,052), 7. Lao PDR (3.7%: 934,253), 9. Singapore (3.5%: 864,681), 14. Vietnam (2.25%: 557,135), 15. Cambodia (2.2%: 553,809), 16. Indonesia (2%: 508,171), 20. Philippines (1.3%: 338,055). (Thailand Department of Tourism, 2015). **ASEAN students studying in Thailand** (ranked among all countries, 2014): 2. Myanmar (1,481), 3. Lao PDR (1,344), 4. Vietnam (1,290), 5. Cambodia (955), 13. Indonesia (323), 16. Philippines (196), 21. Malaysia (148), 31. Singapore (50). (UNESCO UIS, 2014).

Library conditions: Thailand has a variety of public libraries by size: provincial libraries, municipal libraries, and small district libraries. Each falls under the authority of it respective governance, so conditions can vary—some well-funded, others minimally funded. Of particular note are 90 "Charlerm Rajkumari" libraries—well-organized libraries distributed around country, inaugurated by Thailand's greatly-esteemed princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, a longstanding advocate of books. In Bangkok and elsewhere (20 locations country-wide), the "TKpark" public library has grown in popularity, as a multimedia high-tech library, mixing

book collections with audio stations, video booths, mini-theaters, and computer e-resources in a modern, youth-oriented atmosphere (TKpark, 2015). School libraries are definitely present in Thailand. Legislation outlining school library standards dates back to 1990. The conditions of school library vary due to their funding; large urban schools often have larger collections (and each district is supposed to have at least one "model" school and library), while smaller and rural schools may have minimal library conditions. Sufficient numbers of trained librarians for school libraries poses a challenge. Thailand's academic libraries are well-developed. At top universities, resources abound: large collections, robust collections of international databases, high-tech automation, professional librarians (from cataloging to reference), and spacious, modern facilities. At smaller universities or colleges/institutes, the libraries are correspondingly smaller, and services (such as Information Literacy instruction) may be absent. But with the nationwide TKpark e-resource portal, even these smaller libraries can host e-resources. The shared Thai Library Integrated System (www.thailis.or.th) is also available (to participating institutions), offering a wealth of e-resources.

Relevance for librarians: Thai visitors or students in other ASEAN libraries will likely already have some degree of library experience. And, particularly for students, experience with computers and searching. However, Information Literacy skills (search strategies, knowledge of sources) may not always be present, so additional IL outreach can be helpful.

VIETNAM

Statistics: **ASEAN visitors to Vietnam** (ranked among all countries, 2014): 6. Cambodia (5%: 404,159), 9. Malaysia (4%: 332,994), 11. Thailand (3%: 246,874), 13. Singapore (2.5%: 202,436), 16. Laos (1.7%: 136,636), 18. Philippines (1.3%: 103,403), 19. Indonesia (<1%: 68,628). (Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, 2014). **ASEAN students studying in Vietnam** (ranked among all countries, 2014): 1. Lao PDR (1,832), 2. Cambodia (422), 21. Thailand (5). (UNESCO UIS, 2014).

Library conditions: Vietnam's public libraries are growing, but reflect a mix of developed vs. underdeveloped. In large provinces/urban areas, libraries are large—like Ho Chi Min City's General Science library or Hanoi's new 2008 9-story public library. In other provinces or smaller areas, collections are smaller and technology/services may not be present. This is even more the case in district libraries, commune libraries, and neighborhood or village reading rooms: small collections, few services, and no trained librarians (in the case of reading rooms, not staff at all). However, government and NGO efforts to bring ICT connectivity to these locations has shown promise; internet stations have been installed in hundreds of libraries countrywide. School libraries certainly exist in Vietnam, but like public libraries, vary according to location. A 2012 report noted that of the country's nearly 25,000 school libraries, just over half met the minimum standards to be a library (instead just a corner or shelf of books in a classroom) (Dang, 2012). Even libraries meeting minimum standards, limited books (or old books, locked in cupboards) is a frequent occurrence. However, new improvements—by both government and NGO efforts—are underway. For Vietnam's academic libraries, the same gap of developed/underdeveloped exists. Top universities in Hanoi or HCMC have sizeable collections and access to automation and international databases (consortium collections). But libraries of smaller/remote universities, or colleges/institutes, have much less (in terms of not only collections, but facilities/services/trained librarians). The National Library has been active in the pas many years in hosting professional training (and even hosted CONSAL XV in 2009!), so that offers encouragement.

Relevance for librarians: Vietnamese visitors or students in other ASEAN libraries may have some familiarity with library surroundings, but this will largely depend on their location:

large urban area and university, or not. Routine library conditions in Vietnam (like locked-up books, rather than open shelves) may create unawareness of differing conditions elsewhere. Thus, extra outreach/orientation can be very helpful.

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