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The Challenges and Opportunities of Regional Cooperation in LIS Education In East Asia.

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Abstract:

This paper looks at the challenges and opportunities of regional cooperation in LIS education in East Asia. Reports on the current situation of cooperation of LIS education in the region and makes recommendations for the establishment of such institution.

Introduction

There are several regional cooperation organizations in Asia such as Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC),¹ Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN),² and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).³ These organizations have long histories and foundations based on high rank administrative forms with regular meetings and communications. These organizations prioritized on regional cooperation in political, economic, trade, investment, and regional safety issues. They made tremendous efforts in promoting regional understandings, and then gradually moved into human development and information technology, further reducing illiteracy, poverty, and environmental problems. With more than one

¹ <http://www.apecsec.org.sg/>

² <http://www.aseansec.org/home.htm>

³ <http://www.southasia.net/>

third of world population and booming economic positions in the globe, the Asian countries are becoming one of the important regions in the world.

Librarianship is a profession that is part of the international information infrastructure. Library and Information Science (LIS) education also constitutes an important profession in the field of education and training. LIS educational institutions in East Asia should share responsibility participating in the regional cooperative forum. However, although there is some cooperation on national level there is not on a regional level as in North America and Europe. There is also a lack of literature and research in this area. Regional cooperation in East Asia can play an important role in the development of LIS education for the area.

This paper will focus on the challenges and opportunities of regional cooperation among LIS educational institutions in the East Asian countries of Japan, China, Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines and further recommends an immediate action to be taken by LIS educational institutions.

Definitions and examples of regional cooperation in LIS education

The term cooperation incorporates many different relationships between two or more individuals or organizations. It involves active partnerships with resources being shared or work being done by multiple partners in coordinated effort for the common good. It involves having a shared sense of a problem or challenges to an area. Often it is building on a concept that an area or region is unique, sometimes it is motivated by the same characteristic pressure for action and work towards shared goals. It includes network, collaboration and even consortium of the profession in similar disciplines. This helps related institutes to collaborate in order to form several institutes that work together, compose institutions, expect to have a formal or informal organizational structure, and enable members to do more things together than any could do effectively on their own.

For example, the Association of Library and Information Science Education (ALISE)⁴ seeks to achieve the following objectives: to promote an understanding of the values and ethos of library and information science; to support the professional and intellectual growth of individual members; and provide mechanisms for the exchange, dissemination, and receipt of information about issues, events, trends in such areas as curriculum, research and funding. However, the European Association for Library and Information Education and Research (EUCLID)⁵ seeks to facilitate exchange of staff and students among members, to develop cooperation on research projects, to encourage support from stronger to weaker members, and to encourage mutual recognition of curricula or parts of curricula.

Both ALISE and EUCLID provide models of practicing regional cooperation in LIS education, especially in seeking understanding, exchanging information in curriculum planning, and facilitating the possibilities of mutual recognition of expertise of multi-countries.

⁴ <http://www.alise.org/>

⁵ <http://www.jbi.hio.no/bibin/euclid/>

In the last several years we have witnessed a lack of both interest and activity in regional cooperation in LIS education in East Asia. There is a need to develop regional cooperation (as well as sub-regional cooperation). Currently, some LIS educational institutions are more involved in international cooperation such as IFLA,⁶ than in regional cooperation. In North America and Europe, regional cooperation is more strengthened by international cooperation. International cooperation is more effectively strengthened when regional cooperation exists. The creation of new cooperative schemes evidenced by scholarly studies and regional and international seminar discussions such as this workshop forum, coupled with advances of electronic technology, serve as an added propelling force toward establishing a plan for effective regional cooperation in LIS education in East Asia.

Current situations of regional cooperation in LIS education in East Asia

Librarianship in South Korea is a profession that has developed simultaneously with the general cultural changes of the country libraries in South Korea resulted from cultures that emerged, continued development inhibited and stimulated by the state, education, and religion that responded to human needs and adopted new technologies in order to cope with the government's policy on information services. With the growth of Ph.D. programs and student numbers, Japanese LIS education has moved successfully into being in information oriented profession while curriculum reform has encouraged graduates of LIS schools to seek job in business firms and industries as well as in libraries.

Taiwan's LIS education institutions formed a formal organization called "Chinese Association of Library and Information Science Education (CALISE)" in 1992. The Association exchanged experiences and information of the curriculum of LIS schools domestically and also enlarged the discussion with Mainland China's LIS education programs on a regular basis. The "First LIS Educational Conference of Cross-Strait and Hong Kong Area" was held in 1993 in Taipei and topics included: 1) LIS professional development; 2) LIS education; 3) Library Management and Utilization; 4) Library Information Classification and Cataloging; and 5) Issues in Library Automation, Information Networking, and Information retrieval. The conferences which were held by China and Taiwan on regular basis have set a successful model for a regional cooperation and it could be expanded for further cooperation of the region. LIS schools in Taiwan also were engaged with China's LIS educational institution regarding exchange programs and related exchange activities. Conferences and meetings on more specific topics were held on many occasions, such as the International Conference of Asian Digital Libraries (ICADL) has its 7th annual meeting with the theme of "Digital Libraries – International Collaboration and Cross-Fertilization" on topics of "Service and Management", "Collaboration and Localization", and "Technology" to be discussed in Shanghai, December of 2004.

Further, the first "Hong Kong Libraries & ARL Leadership Institute 2003" was held in Hong Kong and "The Second Annual Library Leadership Institute"⁷ will be held in May of 2004 in Shenzhen, China. Participants will include librarians and, LIS educators from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Japan and other Asian countries. This is another example of regional

⁶ <http://www.ifla.org/>

⁷ <http://icad/2004.sjtu.edu.cn>

cooperation of LIS education, especially in continuing education for professional development. There are many regional cooperation such as these that are held in East Asia in the form of conferences, meetings and exchange programs.

Recently, I conducted a brief survey, telephone conversations, and electronic mail correspondences with some of the LIS education institutions in East Asian countries. Many programs indicated that their major student body is undergraduate, with increasing growth of the graduate level, especially in Master's programs. Most of the institutions' names remain as "Library and Information Science (Studies)", while students' career plans are divided into libraries, business firms and computing industries. Most LIS educational institutions do have cooperation activities; but most of them are local or domestic based, not regional based. Many LIS schools responded that even though they currently do not participate in a regional LIS education cooperation, they would like to participate in the future if such initiative is undertaken.

The Challenges and opportunities of regional cooperation

The idea of regional cooperation will offer useful insights for LIS educators and the general audience of LIS institutions in East Asia. It will also provide an invitation for input and emphasis on participation and serves to enhance collaborative ties in LIS education as well as academic exchange on regional and sub-regional levels. A current issue of "The Commonwealth" stated that the cooperation of Taiwan's business intelligence and Japanese technology as the pioneering market in China is a typical example of regional cooperation for the benefit of the trio-party, or, to combine Japanese products with Taiwan's market planning and promoting in the Chinese mainland which now is the major consideration. Similarly, we are in search of the promotion of LIS education in Asia through education, training, and the values that this paper highlights which is something that we must bear in mind for an effective regional cooperation to strengthen LIS education in East Asia. It is an essential ingredient for achieving our goal of a cohesive and progressive LIS education in Asia that everyone could benefit from.

For newly emerging nations of Asia, a strong information infrastructure is the lifeline of communication in business, industry, research, education, and culture just to name few. Without a viable means through which the exchange of information can take place, the Asian countries are nothing more than disconnected pools of unintegrated information systems serving only those in a small geographic region. With the disappearance of national boundaries, distant sources of data are now accessible, bringing new hope into the creation of regional and global interconnectivity. Regional cooperation will open new opportunities for curriculum development, teaching, faculty research students and faculty exchange, and if sub-regional blocs succeed it will stimulate the growth of their members to a wider region of the continent. A good example could be drawn from the experience of the Nordic Countries as stated by Pors in Education for Librarianship in the Nordic Countries,

"Every Nordic library school participates in various cooperative programs. In the Nordic countries there exists a program called NORDPLUS,⁸ started in 1989. Under it, it is possible to exchange students and staff, as well as organizing courses and seminars. It should be pointed out that, even if the education of librarians and information workers is to some extent different

⁸ www/3.siu.no/vev.nsf/start/nordplusen

in the countries concerned, it is generally agreed that each school recognized the work carried out by students on exchange as if done by a student at home. In short, the relative standards and comparability of the various curricula are what interest us, not any rigid match between elements in the teaching.”⁹

In discussing the challenges of curricula in various European countries, Pors¹⁰ emphasizes cooperation as a highly desirable mechanism to solve the various differences that exist in the area of content and scope. Many developments in the curricula point in a very much the same direction. To further create an international cooperation according to Pors,¹¹ the European countries established a cooperative organization called EUCLID with the main objective being to facilitate cooperation in the LIS world by organizing meetings and encouraging institutional collaboration.

On the whole, there is a great need for coordination of activities of LIS education in Asia and further, there is a great need for the creation of an organization similar to ALISE and EUCLID by LIS educators in Asia. Such an organization will convey the positive and valuable image or a diverse network of relationships that must be fostered across a geographical area in order to design and promote an effective and well-integrated LIS education program for the region. Building and maintaining these type of organization and relationships takes time and great effort, but it can pay off in many ways. As the former president of the International Cooperative Alliance, W.P. Watkins said when he addressed a conference of cooperators from Middle Eastern and Asian countries, 12 “ Cooperation is a movement that ties its members together by their common will to combine individual forces in one enterprise, to develop a self sustaining body, and so to promote the community’s economic social and individual standards.”

Conclusions

Regional or sub-regional cooperation takes place in the framework of interregional organizations that include regions of East Asia and the continent of Asia. An intense cooperation program has a decisive importance for LIS program integration, for establishing standards, for curriculum development and for overcoming underdevelopment of national information infrastructure. It will further assist in overcoming gaps that exist in the development of LIS programs in different countries of East Asia, thus leading the regional countries in establishing mutually advantageous relations in the region. Learning from the Nordic and European countries, in their turn, the higher developed countries of the region can provide mutual assistance, since they realize that support and assistance to less developed countries in their region will strengthen their own region. This regional collaboration in the future could be linked to similar organizations such as ALISE, EUCLID and IFLA. It will also enhance the current dialogue between the continents of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, thus improving mutual understanding and working for the common good.

In promoting regional cooperation in LIS education for East Asia, I present the following recommendations for consideration:

⁹ Pors, Niels Ole “The Changing Labour Market for Information Professionals and Challenges for Nordic Library Education” In *Education for Librarianship in the Nordic Countries..* Editors Ole Harbo and Niels Ole Pors. Mansell, London and Washington, 1998. pp. 164-188.

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ *ibid*.

I. Recommendation:

1. Adaptation of the strategy to create a regional cooperation in LIS education for East Asian countries.
2. Establishment of an ad-hoc group made up of different countries and establishment of concrete objectives and action plans.
3. The importance of LIS educational cooperation should be recognized an essential element for national and regional LIS-education development.
4. All internal as well as external barriers to such cooperation should be identified and every effort should be made to remove them.
5. An effective communication system should be established among LIS educational institutions in East Asia through the establishment of regional cooperation.
6. To set up a regional cooperation program with the developing world of Africa and Latin America.

Recommendations for immediate consideration

1. Establishment of Regional LIS education discussion Group.
2. To assign a convener or coordinator to conduct the process of communication.
3. Establishment of a Listserve and LIS Education Website.

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Important Websites of Asia-Pacific International Organizations

<<http://www.apecsec.org.sg/>>Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation, APEC

<<http://www.apec.org.au/>>Australia APEC Study Center

<<http://usinfo.state.gov/regional/ea/apec/>>U.S. Dept. of State and APEC,

USIA-APEC

<<http://www.pecc.net/>> Pacific Economic Cooperation Council, PECC

<<http://www.pbec.org/Pacific>> Basin Economic Council, PBEC

<<http://www.asean.or.id>>Association of Southeast Asian Nations, ASEAN

<<http://www.stimson.org>> Confidence-Building Measures in the Asia-Pacific/China,

Henry Stimson Center

<<http://www.dfat.gov.au/aft/index.html>>ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)

<<http://www.cscap.org>> Australian member Committee of the Council for Security

Cooperation in the Asia Pacific, AUS-CSCAO

<<http://www.cscaptaiwan.org/index.html/>>Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia

Pacific, Taiwan

<<http://www.csis.org/pacfor/>> Pacific Forum CSIS, Center for Strategic &

International Studies (CSIS)

<<http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/index.html/>> Northeast Asia Peace and Security

Network, The Nautilus Institute

<<http://aus-cscap.anu.edu.au/Calendar1.html>> Regional Security Dialogue: A Calendar

of Asia Pacific Events

<<http://www.state.gov/p/eap/>> East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Dept. of State

<<http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/index.html>> Foreign Policy, Japan Ministry of Foreign

Affairs

<<http://members.aol.com/mehanpton/chinesesec.html/>> China Security Homepage

<<http://coombs.anu.edu.au/WWWVL-AsianStudies.html>> Australian national University:

Asian Studies

< <http://www.sois.uwm.edu/jeong/ceal/> > Council on East Asia Libraries

<<http://dir.yahoo.com/regional/countries/>> Country Profiles by Yahoo