Rencana-Rencana/*Articles*

The BISA Experience Down Under

Mukhtiar Kaur*

Abstrak: *Laporan ini ialah rakaman pengalaman penulis semasa menjalani latihan di Australia dari April hingga Oktober 1986 di bawah Rancangan Latihan BISA. Sebagai satu projek khas, beliau menyediakan sebuah bibliografi dengan judul 'Portuguese Eurasians in Malaysia: a subject approach'. Bibliografi ini diterbitkan dalam bentuk mikrofis dalam siri projek khas BISA bernombor 26. Bahan ini boleh didapati di Perpustakaan Universiti Malaya.*

Abstract: *The writer recounts the training and her experiences as a trainee librarian in Australia from April to October 1986 under the BISA Traineeship Program. A bibliography entitled 'Portuguese Eurasians in Malaysia: a subject approach', submitted as the special project related to the writer's own interest has been issued in microfiche format as BISA Special Projects Series no. 26 and is available in the University of Malaya Library.*

The writer was the second librarian from the University of Malaya Library to benefit from the traineeship program in database creation and information retrieval for librarians from Southeast Asia implemented under the Bibliographic Information on Southeast Asia Project (BISA).[1] Training was conducted at the University of Sydney Library over a seven month period from April to October 1986.

The BISA database contains bibliographic citations of materials on any subject field about Southeast Asia in general with emphasis on works emanating from, by, or about Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. It is an online file available to the Australian public on AUSINET (Australian Information Network) which is accessible throughout the world via TELENET and TYMNET. Moreover BISA records for books and serials have now been loaded into ABN (Australian Bibliographic Network) which provides full holdings information for Australian libraries and is used as a shared cataloguing system as well as for inquiries from terminals located in many Australian libraries.

From the foregoing, it is plain what a golden opportunity is afforded to the trainee librarian to gain invaluable experience and knowledge by working on a sophisticated online database as yet to be implemented in any Malaysian library. The University of Malaya Librarian and the authorities are to be lauded

for their foresight in appreciating the benefits accruing from the exposure of staff to new technological developments and enrichment of professional expertise and in releasing the writer from a then short-staffed Cataloguing Division on study leave for the duration of the seven month stint.

The program was an intensive in-service course and apart from the routine training in indexing and abstracting, it also covered various aspects of computer applications in libraries, particularly data entry for online file creation, conversion of bibliographic records from card to machine-readable form, information retrieval via 'hands on' training in the online interrogation of BISA and other AUSINET files, as well as supplementary training in DIALOG. However the writer benefitted most from the training in database creation which embodied general considerations involved in creating and maintaining a bibliographic database, its structure and possible outputs.

Currently the University of Malaya Library is subscribing to the MALMARC database located at Universiti Sains Malaysia. Apart from sending up our data for input into the institutional file the cataloguers here have very little knowledge of how this database is maintained. Hence the writer gained immeasurably from actually participating in database creation through cataloguing of Southeast Asian materials on

---

*Cataloguing Division, University of Malaya Library.

[1] The first librarian to be trained under this project was Mrs. Tan Siew Eng. See 'Latihan di bawah projek BISA', *Kekal Abadi*, jil. 1, bil. 3 (September 1982) p. 2.

the ABN which is an online network. In particular, the procedures adopted to maintain authority control in entries input into ABN and to standardize and vet the quality of the cataloguing processes of the various institutions subscribing to ABN are worth describing in detail. More so as the National Library of Malaysia is gearing towards the taking over of the MALMARC system as a prelude to the setting up of a national network, it will be useful to learn how other libraries cope with the knotty problem of maintaining uniformity of entries and cataloguing quality and standards.

The ABN[2] is a national online bibliographic system based on co-operative participation. The primary function of ABN is shared cataloguing: to eliminate the duplication of original cataloguing by allowing the cataloguing of any participant to be shared immediately with and copied by other participants. The cataloguing module includes linked files termed Bibliographic File, Vocabulary File, Holdings File and Working File. The scope of these files needs to be explained prior to elaborating on data input procedure.

The *Bibliographic File* contains the basic bibliographic description for each item catalogued. The headings, be it author, subject, cross references, notes relating to headings or series are stored in the *Vocabulary File*. Each such heading is stored only once with links to each of the bibliographic records for which it is used. Within the Vocabulary File the ABN Authority File comprises all those vocabulary records flagged as conforming to ABN standards. The *Holdings File* contains the holdings information of participant libraries including their call numbers and library identification symbols. The *Working File* is the basis of all cataloguing activity. Original cataloguing is encouraged and the participant library controls its cataloguing through its part of the Working File, data being available to the institution only through its signon. The level at which each record is input i.e. minimal or full bibliographic details, is a matter for the participant but participants accept a responsibility to undertake a measure of authority control work as part of their cataloguing activity.

In the early stages, when a participant institution's records created in its part of the Working File are ready for adding to the database, they are subjected to Network review by the ABN Office to ensure that they conform with ABN standards. Once they pass the Network review they are added to the database in overnight batch up dates. Once a participant library

has gained sufficient experience on the system it will become a 'review centre' and its cataloguing will be subject only to sampling checks. Thus the ABN Network Committee exerts full control over the database and monitors the cataloguing standards of participant libraries. This in turn ensures uniformity of entries and collocation of publications of corporate and personal authors and obviates duplicate entries for one record due to differing main entry headings supplied by the contributing libraries.

Training in indexing and abstracting was conducted under the expert guidance of Linda Shboul, Deputy Director of BISA. The *Unesco Thesaurus* was used to index conference papers from the International Association of Historians of Asia. Some guidelines for the establishment and development of monolingual thesauri were also studied.

Very closely related to indexing and abstracting is information retrieval. A study of information retrieval on AUSINET databases included APAIS (Australian Public Affairs Information Service), ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center), SSCI (Social Science Citation Index) and AEI (Australian Education Index). All Australian databases are converted to a common STAIRS (Storage Information Retrieval Systems) format to facilitate searching.

Trainee librarians in this program leave a lasting record in the BISA database by the completion of a special project related to their own interest, often leading to a publication in the BISA Special Projects Series. This proved the most rewarding part of the program to the writer when she completed her personal project, in this instance a bibliography entitled 'Portuguese Eurasians in Malaysia: a subject approach'. This bibliography contains about 290 citations on the topic arranged in alphabetical sequence with title, author and subject accessibility. Subject headings from the *Unesco Thesaurus* (Paris, 1970) have been used and the writer had the opportunity of utilising the A–Z Text Word Processing System using Australian MARC tags.

Initial search for this bibliography was done in the catalogues of the University of Malaya Library, National Archives of Malaysia, Straits Times Library and the scanning of various indexes and annuals. Subsequently in Australia, the collections at the State Library of New South Wales were searched in addition to those of the Australian National University Library and the National Library of Australia. This was a golden opportunity for working independently putting into use the knowledge acquired from the course.

[2]*Australian Bibliographic Network.* Canberra: ABN Office, National Library of Australia, n.d.

This bibliography has been published in microfiche as BISA Special Projects Series no. 26.[3]

Amongst the libraries visited during the program were the National Library of Australia, Australian National University Library, Armed Forces Defence Academy Library, Fisher Library of the University of Sydney, New South Wales Institute of Technology and CSIRO Black Mountain Library. An insight into the various collections and their development, organization and control was indeed enlightening, especially the aspects of maintaining and coping with automation and closure of card catalogues, use of the fiche catalogues, OPAC (Online Public Access Catalogues), reader education, organization and storage of book and non-book material.

The writer greatly enjoyed and benefited from her experience. The knowledge gained can only be tested through application and output as the opportunity arises but the friendship and rapport established with librarians abroad has been immediate and rewarding. The special project on the Portuguese Eurasians is a permanent record of the writer's contribution to the growth of the BISA database and to the dissemination of one aspect of Malaysia's rich history and heritage.

[3]University of Malaya Library microfiche no. 9696.