

The Birth of CORMOSEA¹

The growth of Southeast Asia area and language studies as a discipline in the United States was due to the emerging interests of American scholars in the region after World War II. To enhance the knowledge and understanding of Southeast Asia in various disciplinary areas, libraries started to collect Southeast Asia materials in response to the need of scholarly research and teaching. Due to the multiplicity and complexity of Southeast Asian languages as a whole and the lack of standard reference tools and guidelines to handle the Southeast Asia materials in non-roman script, Southeast Asia librarians in American libraries had to settle the problems associated with acquiring, cataloging, and preserving Southeast Asia research materials. To tackle these problems and provide solutions, a national library committee named CORMOSEA was established.

The Committee on Research Materials on Southeast Asia (CORMOSEA) is a sub-committee under the auspices of the Southeast Asia Council (SEAC), formerly known as the Interuniversity Southeast Asia Committee (ISAC)², and then the Southeast Asia Regional Council (SEARC) of the Association for Asian Studies (AAS). It was established to enhance the collection of Southeast Asia research materials and to assist in making them available to Southeast Asia scholars, faculty, and students nationwide.

Academic interests of American scholars were drawn to Southeast Asia studies after World War II, and consequently Southeast Asia Studies Programs were established at Berkeley, Cornell, Hawaii, Michigan, Northern and Southern Illinois, Ohio, Wisconsin, Yale, and the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. By the mid-fifties, libraries had started to collect Southeast Asia materials of research value in the United States and in Southeast Asian countries. Southeast Asia librarians began to discuss their library-centered problems, exchanged library news, and planned for future cooperative projects at the meetings of the Non-Western Studies Committee of the College Library Section of the American Library Association instead of at the annual AAS meetings³.

The historical background of the Committee on American Library Resources on Southeast Asia (CALROSEA) is a necessary prelude to understanding the roots of

¹ "The Birth of CORMOSEA" in Virginia Jing-yi Shih. *Committee on Research Materials on Southeast Asia (CORMOSEA): Past, Present, and Future*. M.A. thesis, Cornell University, 1993: 1-5.

Virginia Jing-yi Shih is the Southeast Asia Curator at the South/Southeast Asia Library of the University of California, Berkeley. She can be reached at vshih@library.berkeley.edu

² For the origin of ISAC, see the comments made by Fred W. Riggs in Discussion Session -- No. 5, Cecil Hobbs, ed. *Conference on Access to Southeast Asian Research Materials Washington, D.C. 1971: Proceedings* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1971) 214-215.

³ Donald Clay Johnson, ed., *Memorandum to Librarians Concerned with or Interested in Southeast Asia* [1] [1967]: 1.

CORMOSEA. In 1956, the Library of Congress received a grant from the Ford Foundation to plan a conference for libraries and institutions associated with South and Southeast Asia studies. So, in April 1957, a National Committee of librarians and scholars interested in South and Southeast Asia studies was established; and a Conference on American Library Resources on Southern Asia was held on November 19 to 22, 1957, at the Library of Congress, attended by eighty-two representatives from various libraries and institutions. The topics covered "reference needs, including bibliographical control, channels of acquisitions, processing problems, including language transliteration schemes, cataloging procedures and personnel, union catalogs, pamphlet collections, manuscript collections, cooperative acquisitions, and general problems of public and research libraries."⁴ After the conference, the Committee was named the Committee on American Library Resources on Southern Asia (CALROSA), which became a standing committee of the AAS in April 1958 and held meetings funded by the Ford Foundation at the Library of Congress once or twice a year⁵.

Established as an autonomous committee of the AAS for a number of years, the Committee on American Library Resources on South and Southeast Asia (CALROSSA) was divided into two sections: the Committee on American Library Resources on Southern Asia (CALROSA) and the Committee on American Library Resources on Southeast Asia (CALROSEA) to cover South Asia and Southeast Asia separately by the Board of Directors of the Southeast Asia Committee which served as the parent organization of these two divergent committees at the AAS annual conference in New York City in April 1965⁶.

At the same time, a proposal for launching the Committee on Archives and Documents of Southeast Asia (CARDOSEA) was under discussion before its inauguration in April 1966. The decision was made by the Southeast Asia Committee that a joint executive council headed by the two chairpersons should be established. Accordingly, Cecil Hobbs of the Library of Congress became chairman of CALROSEA, which was interested in acquiring and processing regularly published library materials, while Professor Robert Van Niel of University of Hawaii became chairman of CARDOSEA, which was concerned with locating and microfilming archives and documents⁷.

In April 1966, the idea of having a library panel was initiated at the annual meeting of the Committee on American Library Resources on the Far East of the AAS. In August 1967, the first library panel was on the agenda of the 27th International Congress of

⁴ Cecil Hobbs, "Committee on American Library Resources on Southeast Asia (CALROSEA)." App. 1. Michigan Historical Collections, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Cecil Hobbs and Robert Van Niel, "Memorandum to Members of the Committee on American Library Resources of Southeast Asia (CALROSEA) and Committee on Archives and Documents of Southeast Asia (CARDOSEA)," p. 1. 15 Nov. 1966. Michigan Historical Collections, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

⁷ Ibid.

Orientalists in Ann Arbor. The discussions on cooperative acquisitions, microfilm projects, and lists of American dissertations turned out to be fruitful and it was suggested that a library panel should become permanent in the Congress⁸. In the same year, Donald Clay Johnson, then Curator of the Southeast Asia Collection of Yale University Library, recognized the need to disseminate library news to Southeast Asia librarians. He distributed an informative memorandum to begin communication among librarians.

On March 21, 1968, a full agenda library meeting was convened by the Committee on American Library Resources on Southeast Asia (CALROSEA) in conjunction with the 20th annual AAS Conference at the Benjamin Franklin Hotel in Philadelphia. Important issues such as acquisitions, cataloging, bibliographic needs and microfilming were discussed in some detail⁹. On Friday, January 3, 1969, CALROSEA and CARDOSEA held a joint meeting to discuss their status in the AAS, since the ISAC Council had replaced the Committee on Southeast Asia of the AAS of which they were subcommittees. The Planning Committee for ISAC unanimously approved establishing the Committee on Research Materials on Southeast Asia (CORMOSEA) as a subcommittee to deal with library matters pertaining to Southeast Asia, and a resolution to the Southeast Asia Committee that CALROSEA and CARDOSEA be disbanded was adopted¹⁰.

On January 4, 1969 at the Center for Continuing Education, University of Chicago, the planning committee for ISAC convened a meeting to draw up recommendations for the establishment of CORMOSEA to the ISAC Council. Formation, membership, and functions of CORMOSEA were discussed. Professor Fred W. Riggs, Chairman of the Planning Committee emphasized the importance of CORMOSEA maintaining an autonomous status within the AAS: "CORMOSEA should be appointed and incorporated directly by the ISAC."¹¹ The ISAC Executive Committee would act as the funding agency for CORMOSEA and appoint the chairman of CORMOSEA. The Planning Committee also considered the relationship between CORMOSEA and CALROSEA/CARDOSEA for its new membership which should be a balance of both librarians and scholars. Terms of membership should range from two to four years to assure the continuity of CORMOSEA. CORMOSEA would inherit the functions of its predecessors to continue making Southeast Asia research materials available and accessible to American scholars.

Between January 31 and February 1, 1969 ISAC officially sanctioned the creation of

⁸ Ibid., pp. 3-4.

⁹ For detailed minutes of the meeting, see the whole issue of *Southeast Asia Librarians Newsletter* 5 Mar. 1968.

¹⁰ Donald Clay Johnson, ed., *CORMOSEA Newsletter* 9 [1969]: [1].

¹¹ "Minutes of the Meeting of the Planning Committee for the Committee on Research Materials on Southeast Asia, January 4, 1969, Center for Continuing Education, University of Chicago."

CORMOSEA, which was chaired by Professor Fred W. Riggs of the University of Hawaii, during the first ISAC meeting at the Center for Continuing Education in Chicago. To inherit the functions of CALROSEA/CARDOSEA and simplify the organizational structure of the pre-existing two committees, CORMOSEA was set up as a 15-member committee, composed of equal numbers of scholars who represented a range of disciplines and country specializations, librarians who represented major research collections on Southeast Asia, and the chairman. Since its inception, CORMOSEA has acted as a forum for librarians who share and discuss mutual library problems associated with acquiring, cataloging, preserving, and enriching Southeast Asia materials. Scholars from various disciplines in Southeast Asia studies who are interested and concerned with these library-oriented problems join with the librarians to come up with proposals, solutions, or resolutions to fulfill the needs of teaching and scholarly research.