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## **THE CHANGING NATURE OF AREA STUDIES**

Carolyn T. Brown  
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### **INTRODUCTION**

In early January 2006, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings co-hosted the University Presidents Summit on International Education to engage U.S. higher education leaders in a partnership to strengthen international education. Its aim was to engage college and university presidents with the U.S. government in "attracting foreign students and scholars to U.S. institutions" and to seek "investment in educating globally competitive U.S. students to work in fields of international interest." The agenda included encouraging study abroad in non-traditional locations, strengthening non-traditional language acquisitions, and, a more vaguely stated goal, "developing coherent international strategies at U.S. universities and colleges."

Clearly Area Studies, under a new name, is back on the national agenda at the highest levels. Belatedly, or rather once again, the United States government has come to understand what all of you have known all along: that in this interconnected world it behooves us to understand other peoples and cultures from their own perspectives in their own idioms. So we have, to quote Yogi Berra, "deja vu all over again."

Area studies and international issues have been an intermittent interest of mine for some 40 years, sometimes as my professional focus, other times as a side interest. What follows are my personal reflections on the changes in that field over time and on features of the current environment that now affect collections development, digital preservation of international materials, and international cooperation.

I will begin with a brief historical overview of the field; a running survey of some recent changes in the academy; and a longer glance at changes in the international environment that influence what we collect, what we access, what we preserve.

### **BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Area Studies has been a vibrant area of research, teaching, and librarianship since World War II, when the United States began to understand that the Soviet Union in particular, but also other parts of the non-Anglo American and non-Western European world might have a significant impact on the United States. Then as now, fear seems to have been a more convincing spur to sensible action than simple respect for others' perspectives. But we often do the right things for the wrong, or at least limited, reasons. The understanding that fueled the field was that the

cultural “other” of the Soviet Union, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and perhaps to a lesser degree Latin America, were peoples that we, the United States, needed to better understand. Other influences also contributed to this interest. It was not just a matter of realpolitik. Some American military personnel returning from the war had come to appreciate the inherent value and richness in these other cultural traditions. But fear seems to account for the high level of governmental support. Thus the new field of area studies was born.

Area studies meant learning about the totality of a nation and culture from the perspectives of multiple disciplines: history, literature, philosophy, art, less frequently music; political science, sociology, anthropology, and of course language. More recently expressions of popular culture such as film has been added to the mix. Within that complex of approaches, of course, one specialized in a country or region and a discipline, but the essential goal was to make the foreign culture as intelligible as one’s own by gaining some mastery of the whole.

To area studies librarians fell the responsibility for securing materials from these worlds to support the inquiry. Although arguably Western Europe might itself have been construed as a foreign area, the predominance of immigrant ties to Europe no doubt made it seem less “other.” In fact the term “area studies” has largely remained associated with parts of the world beyond the sphere familiar to the mainstream. Area studies librarians were tasked with acquiring hard to get materials from parts of the globe that were systematically neglected in “normal” subjects. Whether one studied art history, or political science, or the history of science, etc. the unstated, default assumption was that the inquiry focused on materials or thinking from or about the U.S. and Western Europe. If an area of inquiry stretched beyond that world, an additional adjective was added: Islamic Art or the history of Chinese science, etc.

The field was also tinged with the patronizing notion that “we” had the right to scrutinize and define “them,” and “they” were not equal agents in this enterprise. It was not an equal exchange. Nevertheless much good came of it. Without the dedication of Area Studies students, scholars, and librarians, cultural knowledge from those swaths of territories beyond Anglo-America and Western Europe would not have had a presence within the academy and today’s research collections would be far poorer.

## **CHANGES IN THE UNIVERSITY ENVIRONMENT**

Subsequent years have seen numerous changes. Let me mention quickly a few that have deeply affected the academy. These, of course, have had implications for the work of area studies faculty and the kinds of materials area studies librarians have acquired.

### **1) The Addition of Disciplinary Knowledge**

The first of these I will mention is the application of disciplinary rigor to the subjects of area studies research. For example, when I began my work in Chinese literature in the 1960s, it was possible to teach and write about that subject without training in literary theory, without having learned to examine one’s presuppositions or to articulate the questions that one was asking of the text. Once disciplinary rigor began being exercised on area studies literary material, it became easy while listening to, say a conference panel, to distinguish those who were still naive about methodology and those who had been schooled in the discipline. A similar process occurred in other fields.

## **2) Internationalization of the Disciplines**

The second change, which has arrived more slowly, is the internationalization of the disciplines themselves, the reluctant recognition that the supposedly universal tenets of a discipline honed on Western data and experience should at least be tested in the context of another culture. The debate that raged in the field of economics about 10 years ago over whether the discipline was primary regardless of cultural region or whether the particularities of culture should dominate inquiry were a part of coming to terms with internationalization. Whatever the conclusions, it grew clear that one needed to look both at discipline and at culture broadly understood in order to comprehend operational features at ground level.

**3) A third impact was seen in the internationalization of the professions,** as it became apparent that the premises of Western culture did not necessarily apply in a foreign setting. I remember my own eye-opening discovery in learning that, in the field of mental health, Chinese patients presented problems in somatic terms that middle class Americans would describe in psychological terms. One of the most pressing and dramatic intersections of the professions and the cultural approaches of “the other” occurs in the area of law, where for the sake of international and business relations we are mutually forced to come to terms with one another. You will find this afternoon’s presentation about the Library’s Global Legal Information Network of special interest in this regard.

One consequence of the internationalization of the disciplines and of the professions is that faculty and students with modest or no foreign language capacity are coming to area studies librarians, and area studies librarians, accustomed to dealing with the language savvy area studies clientele, have sometimes been reluctant to change their paradigm of service. Area studies librarians here at the Library of Congress frequently find themselves assisting with reading or translation as well as providing resources to those without foreign language skills.

## **4) Diversity of the student body.**

At the same time, the academy itself has become more international, with students from all parts of the world coming to universities as foreign students, or more recently coming in fewer numbers. The State Department initiative noted in my opening addresses that issue.

Further, the influx of American students from culturally diverse backgrounds, many of whom were born in other parts of the world, has further changed the equation. I suspect it has resulted in students with language capacities that are not primarily academic, and perhaps a demand for more popular expressions from their native cultures. I am only guessing here and would be interested in your experiences with this population.

The implications of these changes on collections development, service, and access issues in the university are undoubtedly better known to you than to me. What is apparent is that if area studies librarians are to effectively provide resources, they have to be attuned to the implications of these changes.

## CHANGES? WHAT HASN'T CHANGED

Although this talk emphasizes changes in the academic and international environment, we should also take quick note of a few things that have not changed.

**1) First, our collecting will always respond to our particular interests** as a nation and our particular campus environments, and while we will increasingly define those interests more broadly than in the past, our own concerns will always be our primary lens. We will focus our collections dollars on subjects of greatest interest to us, not necessarily on those seen of greatest importance by others.

**2) Second, always as before, the non-American, non-Western European “others” must be both respected** and understood in their own contexts, on their own terms, and in their own languages. The wisdom embedded in this premise of traditional area studies should not be discarded. It is one this community's great strengths. This premise underlies the structure of our collecting strategies, which have first tried to attain materials from, about, and in the languages of the particular part of the world region in question. Thus, we are well structured, for example, to collect materials from Brazil, about Brazil, and written in Portuguese, and are pretty good at it. This will not change.

**3). Third,** while Western Europe is often not considered an area studies “area,” **Western European perspectives do differ from those of the U.S.,** something of which we have been reminded as the United States government has searched for partners in the Iraq war. Even though the United States is very much a product of the European enlightenment and a 400 year history closely linked with Europe, and even though our collections from European nations (I believe this is true in most research libraries) are interfiled with American and British publications, Western Europe is a distinct cultural area of enormous importance to us.

**4) Fourth,** to the extent that the U.S. and Europe do share common interests and perspectives, **it has become clear that both are strongly interrelated to the “other.”** A bit of drama can be interjected into the daily news by disruptions in the flow of capital, for example, the near felt down of currencies in the late Clinton administration; or drama appears in the struggles over key resources, oil for example. Increasingly we understand that how “the other” is thinking and relating to “the us” matters a great deal. Any number of issues makes this plain. International terrorism is only one.

5) Some things will still tend to slip through the cracks. For example, early European Union publications because the EU was not a nation and there was no established acquisitions method; materials written in one country, printed in another, in the language of a third; for the Library, material published simultaneously in Great Britain and the U.S. for which we should receive a copy through copyright but do not.

## CHANGES? WHAT HAS CHANGED?

**1) Materials from areas of greatest importance.** It used to seem possible to focus collecting on world areas of greatest importance, and it was reasonably clear what these were. Globalization has changed that: threats and opportunities can arise any place. We can predict that Western

Europe will remain important into the indefinite future and that Japan, China, and more recently India as economic powerhouses will command a degree academic and governmental attention. But what of the small, out of the way places? Who would have guessed 10 years ago that Afghanistan or Bali would become areas of keen U.S. government interest? At the Library of Congress we have had the luxury, which translates as budget, and the means, which translates as overseas offices, to collect materials from these areas over a long period of time. We may need to collect more deeply at selected local levels.

**2.) From bilateralism to multi-lateralism.** As I noted earlier, traditional area studies assumed that “we” were studying “them.” The relationship was bilateral. We often thought of this as a country to country relationship, Japan to the U.S. or as region to country, East Asia and the U.S. or perhaps and North America. The bilateral perspective, while somewhat simplistic, had great value in bringing into the academy a dedicated cadre who cared deeply about other peoples and cultures in the fullness of their humanity

Although the U.S. is still the military and economic hub of the globe, the metaphor that better describes emerging relationships among nations is not the wheel but the network. Not yet well articulated is what I predict will become a general realization: that “the other” may have strong connections with other “others” outside of their regions; that these may currently be more significant to them than their relationship to us; and finally that those relationships will become very important to us. The just dawning competition for energy sources is one such arena. Certainly many of these relationships will never be significant to the U.S. government and will generate academic interest. But some will, and which these are may not be predictable.

A multi-lateral world demands that we think multi-laterally and develop our collections with this in mind. An example: in the context of limited budgets historically the Library has not always done well at collecting Chinese language materials about Chinese-Japanese relations, much less Japanese-Korean relations written about in Chinese language publications.

**3) Diasporas have increased in importance.**

The world has always had diasporas. The Jewish and African diasporas have been prominent in American awareness for a long time. What has changed is that the movement of peoples from their native countries or cultural region to other regions has accelerated, and the capacity or incapacity of the host countries to absorb these “others” has raised the issue to a high level of attention. The recent riots in Paris made clear that immigrants from North Africa, though officially considered French, had not been absorbed into the body politic.

Ideally our collecting strategies would reflect this in at least two ways.

**First**, at some level we might want at least to **try to collect a sampling of materials originating in these immigrant communities.** These would not normally enter the mainstream publishing flow from France, and our French dealer would not normally be acquiring small publications from North African immigrant communities in France.

**Second, immigrant communities in Europe may have publications from the parent country that are not easily available there.** Because first generation immigrants usually maintain

connections with the country of origin, in recent years the Library of Congress has gone to Europe to secure materials from or about the parent nation, e.g. materials from North Africa in Aix en Provence in France.

**Third, the publications of stateless ethnic groups may only be available in host countries.** For many years, the best place to securing Kurdish publications was in Sweden. The Iraq War may have changed this. I am not sure.

My final point: **collecting diasporan community materials in the United States may fall in the interstice between area studies collecting of foreign materials and American studies collecting of American immigrant communities.** The mid-sixties change in U.S. immigration policy decreased the longstanding favored treatment accorded European immigrants and opened the doors to immigrants from non-white nations. The consequence has been great diversification of the immigrant population holding green cards and acquiring citizenship. In the late 90s, the Russian linguist Vyacheslav Vsevolodovicvanov Ivanov had recorded nearly 220 languages being spoken in Los Angeles. Most recently, to fill in the lacunae of American diasporan publications, the Asian Division acquired a strong collection of Chinese American materials. As I recall the University of Texas, Austin, specializes in Hispanic American publications.

Thus diasporan resources have gained significance.

#### **4) Minorities within their nations.**

Certainly we have collected materials about significant minority ethnic, religious, or racial groups within other nations. One of the consequences of the Cold War, largely unnoticed at the time, was that these various minority groups tended to be suppressed by the heavy hand of the U.S.-Soviet competition. When that ended, various groups asserted their cultural identities and incipient nationalism. All of us are aware that the break-up of the Soviet Union released Central Asians and other former-Soviet entities to form their own nations. This complicated our acquisitions strategies, but that adjustment has been accomplished.

But as a consequence of rising turmoil in the Middle East, Muslim minority groups in various nations are claiming a heightened identity as Muslims. This is an interesting phenomenon in and of itself. It also has political consequences. For instance, the rumblings among Uigur communities in China and Central Asia hold great interest for Americans as well as Chinese and others. The recent election of a populist indigenous Indian as president of Bolivia has sent ripples through U.S. policy, and the policies of the Aymaras president, Evo Morales are being scrutinized. Our existing collections should be able to tell us the history of these people over the last 2000 years as well as in the recent past, and the cultural dimensions of what we might expect in the future. I suspect that following this talk, the Hispanic Division will assure me that they do.

#### **5) Globalization of culture.**

At the same time that many groups are reasserting ethnic distinctiveness, a globalization of culture is occurring, sometimes dramatically, often unnoticed. The focus on the status of women has undoubtedly been incorporated into your selection categories Have you noticed also that in photographs of turmoil across the world, angry male youths are often wearing blue jeans, which at one time were as American as apple pie. That is just a minor visual symbol of a cross-global

revolution in cultural expression. It can easily be heard in popular music from around the world. This is not my area of expertise. However, in October 2005 I saw Western designer clothes for sale Shanghai, and I have heard about rock concerts in Scandinavia featuring musicians from North Africa.

With the current academic interest in popular culture, to what extent will these phenomena become a subject of interest, and will we have the resources to support the inquiry?

## **6) Cross-Global issues**

In the last several weeks we have been reading about the epidemiology of the Avian flu, non-American management of American ports, and new proposals on U.S. immigration policy. These issues are being addressed at high levels across the globe, and my guess is for that international cooperation, English is sufficient. Those of us with Area Studies backgrounds also know that how policies are perceived and the implemented on the ground will be impacted by local conditions and culture. How useful it might be to capture knowledge of these phenomena as played out at the local level. With sadness, we cannot collect everything.

In this context, we might note the increasing importance of NGOs, whose materials are not easy to collect but who in some areas of Africa, so I understand, and undoubtedly in other world regions, produce excellently informed publications.

## **7) The unexpected.**

Invariably phenomena arise that have not been anticipated. One such instance is the new interest in textbooks from Muslim countries. “Just what are the madrasas teaching?” we get asked. The Library collects a sample of textbooks published in the U.S. but we have not generally collected foreign textbooks. Post-9/11 the intelligence community, policy makers, and scholars showed new interest in these materials, and we began to acquire them. Robert Worden may have more to say on this in his comments. Always we need to respond to the unexpected.

## **THE DIGITAL INFORMATION REVOLUTION**

Then there is the digital information revolution, the greatest challenge to the area studies community as to the library community in general. All of the above issues impact internet publication. Further, there is no point in rehashing those changes that affect English language materials from the U.S. I will just point to a few changes that particularly affect international resources, omitting discussion of issues that other speakers will address, such as preservation.

### **1) The digital information revolution affects different parts of the world at different speeds.**

In this transitional period, nations enter this arena at different speeds. Most Americans seem to assume that the Internet is all written in English. For years my colleague Everette Larson has been tracking language variety on the Internet, and I regret I did not ask him for current statistics. We do know that the Chinese, unhampered by the copyright traditions that govern us, are one of the leaders in offering full text digital books on line—well over a million at this point. In other parts of the world, for reasons of leadership, culture, and economics, digitizing the national patrimony has barely begun. .

## **2) The complexities of language.**

Let me note an interesting although peripheral issue. While English has become the current de facto lingua franca, the Internet has also facilitated a revival of indigenous languages. This phenomenon was first brought to my attention in the context of West Africa. The radical decrease in the per person cost of publishing means that speakers from small language groups or less privileged communities can converse across great distances. Even while many languages are dying, a great concern of cultural preservationists, others are experiencing a revival. How all of this will play out and affect our search for resources remains to be seen.

**3) An obvious point: the revolution makes available an amount and variety of materials from abroad that we never could have collected in print.** This includes foreign government information, the nuts and bolts of certain kinds of academic research, now available only in digital form. It includes born digital, peer reviewed e-journals, which in print might have reached North American libraries. Most dramatically, it includes vast amounts of grey literature. For the first time we have access to sources totally unavailable previously which, however, come and go at a rapid pace. We are just beginning to figure out technically how to capture and archive it, but we are nowhere near having the capacity to capture what is important, assuming we could figure that out. At the moment, the issue is no different from what we encounter in U.S. based web sites. (Of course, figuring out where a site is geographically based is often a major challenge.) But at least with respect to U.S. based sites, we at the Library of Congress can hope to change copyright legislation so as to be legally able to claim them for the Library's collections—all after we acquire the capacity to receive them. Bernie Reilly will have more to say about that this morning, and later you will get Abby Grotke's presentation on the Library's project to archive materials related to the humanitarian crisis in Darfur. The copyright issues play out differently in the international environment. CRL, with Mellon Foundations support, spearheaded an early movement to archive this grey material.

Given our mission, however, the priority for the Library of Congress will always be documenting the U.S. heritage, and capturing international materials will be of great interest but invariably have a lower priority.

## **4) Access to International Materials**

Fully challenging, but in fact easier than capturing and preserving significant born-digital web materials is gaining access to digitally converted foreign materials. The most promising approach is through international cooperation with libraries, publishers, and other players located in countries, usually well developed, who share with us a tradition of free access to information. These countries often have the will and the means to begin taking responsibility for access and preservation of their own production, including web sites, and are often willing to cooperate with us in permitting access. Australia has taken this on as have some of the Nordic nations. In other cases it means collaborating on digitally converting materials. I was happy to learn recently from my colleague Hwa-Wei Lee that the National Library of China has been persuaded that this free access model is one that they might wish to adapt.

As we execute these international partnerships, we move into a world where our peer group is not only those in this room, but colleagues around the world. This is another change with great implications.



**5) Let me add a few words of caution about relying on international partners for long term access to international information.** Sixty-five years ago we were at war with Japan and Germany. Yesterday's enemies are today's friends; today's friends may be tomorrow's enemies. Because the Library of Congress is located in the nation's capital and is legislative branch agency, and because my background in Chinese studies me sensitive to Chinese successes over more than 2000 years in censoring or deliberately destroying knowledge, I would like to see the Library of Congress find ways to "own" not just access, essential parts of the corpus of digitized and born-digital resources originating at least from those nations which predictably will be important to national security, trade, and other key U.S. government interests. Accepting access only undoubtedly is the short term solution. I hope my colleagues have not tired of my saying that as a long term solution mere access may be all we can achieve but that is not sufficient.

**6)** Finally, having pointed to lots of challenges, in some ways our euphemism for things that would discourage us if we allowed ourselves to be discouraged, let me talk about the digital preservation of the world's cultural patrimony. You will hear more about this when John Van Oudenaren talks about the World Digital Library.

**Digital conversion, viewed as a primary tool for creating access, can also be an acquisitions and preservation tool.** The Library's use of digital conversion to preserve brittle books is a small part of our overall digitization efforts which overall have emphasize access. American Memory, was driven by that motive. The flagship project for digital acquisition of converted material is "Meeting of Frontiers." In this context let me briefly mention our work with the Mama Haidara Library of Timbuktu, Mali. In 2003 our colleague Abdul Kader Haidera brought 23 manuscripts from his family's collection to the Library of Congress for a small but stunning exhibition. While they were with us, we microfilmed and digitized them. Subsequently this past fall we mounted the digital images, some 4000 pages in all, on the Internet. I have heard estimates that there are some 1 million manuscripts, many several hundred years old, in private hands, scattered along the "ink road" from North African to Mali, subject to environmental degradation, though of course preserved by the dry climate. These are one of a kind documents, written in Arabic script but not necessarily in the Arabic language and they contain learning that has not been incorporated into the world's understanding of human history. Digital conversion at last provides a means to keep the originals in private hands, if that is what their nations decide; to preserve the knowledge contained in this cultural patrimony; and to make it accessible to scholars all over the world. This is a happy case where we have willing partners and technical capacity, and all we lack is money, perhaps the easiest necessity to acquire. Compared to the challenges of preserving the Internet, this is a piece of cake.

## **IN CONCLUSION**

It appears, yet again, that each new generation has to learn old lessons that need never have been forgotten. When we enter into relationship with the cultural "other," it is wise to acquire understanding from multiple perspectives. The Iraq war has reminded us yet again that seeing the "other" solely through prisms of military power, economic interests, and politics is insufficient and distorting. To have entered Iraq with a strategy that did not deeply integrate knowledge of the peoples, cultures, religious variety, without sufficient and deep language capacity was to invite disaster. Whether we should have created that conflict, of course, is a separate question.

Those who knew the region have not been surprised by the result, which nevertheless appears to have caught the Bush administration off guard.

The unlooked for opportunity created by the terrible events of September 11 and the Iraq war is the renewed national appreciation for the values that the Area Studies community has embraced for decades. Undoubtedly we will have to adapt to the changed environment, stepping out of the comfort of the accustomed role of primarily serving the humanities and social science faculty and students, to demonstrate the value of locating disciplinary and professional knowledge in the thick context of cultural knowledge, and revealing to university presidents and provosts the capacity of area studies' cultural knowledge to facilitate their work in the wide international arena. At the Library of Congress, the Librarian's deep historical knowledge of Russia has been a well appreciated resource for Congressional leaders, and Congressional members and staff have often sought the knowledge and counsel of area studies specialists, for example, as they prepare for travel abroad. So we know that cultural knowledge can be valued and appreciated in the highest levels outside the Area Studies community. We may have to change the name, call it "international education," as the State Department did, or some other term. But at base we are talking about the same issues: understanding "the other" in her own context, from her own perspective, in her own language.

The ancient Chinese philosopher of war, Sun Tzu cautioned us—I have not checked the translation against the original text, but it goes something like this--"know the enemy and know yourself, and in a hundred battles you will avoid defeat." The peacenik in me says, know your enemy and know yourself, and perhaps you will no longer be enemies and never have to fight at all. Thank you.