

REPORT
MEMORY OF THE WORLD PROGRAM FOR ASIA/PACIFIC
1ST SPECIAL EXPERTS' GROUP MEETING

10-12 DECEMBER, 1997

XIAMEN, CHINA

BACKGROUND

The First Special Experts Group Meeting on the Memory of the World Programme was held in Xiamen City, China on 10-12 December 1997. It was organized jointly by the State Archives Bureau of China and UNESCO and hosted by the Xiamen City Archives. The Meeting was attended by 9 experts from 6 countries - Australia, China, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, and Republic of Korea, plus 7 observers from institutions within China and one representative from UNESCO. The meeting was chaired by the Ms. Delia E. Torrijos, UNESCO/INF Regional Adviser for Asia/Pacific. The objective of the meeting is to discuss the problems of safeguarding the documentary heritage existing in this region. This meeting also strengthen the regional cooperation among librarians and archivists in this region. Through the meeting it is hoped that problem areas within the region could be identified and the discernment of regional level issues which could not be addressed by single countries.

TECHNICAL SESSION

The meeting proceed to a general 'brainstorming' discussion. The topics are summarized as below :

1. Mrs. Habibah Zon Yahaya presented a report on the first meeting of the Standing UNESCO Committee in Tashkent, Uzbekistan (29 September - 1 October 1997). The main purpose of the meeting was to review the progress of the MoW program and make recommendations to the Director General of UNESCO on placing

nominated documentary heritage on the MoW Register, granting the MoW register, granting the MoW label to selected projects and raising funds for the program.

2. Mr. Ray Edmonson presented a paper outlining the inception and development of the MoW program, its data bases and publications, the general guidelines, some pilot projects, and the outputs of the IAC sub-committees.

3. Mr. Kim Seung-yoon of the Korean National Commission for UNESCO, presented a paper on the preservation of documentary heritage in Korea.

4. Mr. Li Yuhu of the Research Institute of Shaanxi Provincial Archives of China made a presentation and demonstration on the process of chemical treatment for restoring and fixing deteriorated documents. The treatment process are subject to Chinese patents.

5. Mrs. Rahani Jamil presented a report on the MoW survey of documentary heritage materials in the Asia/Pacific region. The objectives of the survey were to collate data and information for the purpose of identifying documentary heritage materials in participating countries, and for possible inclusion in the MoW register.

DISCUSSION

The meeting proceeded to a general brainstorming discussion which includes :

a. *Clarifying the role and mission of MoW*

The meeting felt that since the MoW program is not universally known, there is a need for supportive action at the International level.

b. *Rationale and guidelines*

The committee feels that there is a need for a simple, clear and brief introductory publication which is useful for promotion and can be readily translated into the languages of the Asia/Pacific region.

c. *Marketing strategy*

The meeting agrees that a strategy patterned to the IAC report presented to the IAC should be developed at the Asia/Pacific region. This should be done in harmony with action at the international level.

d *MoW Convention*

Much valuable documentary heritage material in the region is held in private hands and is always in danger of loss or damage. In some countries there are policies or legislation to safeguard such material but they are often difficult to implement and they differ from country to country. This task could be made easier if an applicable UNESCO convention existed to which member countries could subscribe. The meeting noted that the concept of a MoW convention was discussed in Tashkent, but seen as a distant possibility rather more proactively, and urges UNESCO and the IAC to begin the lengthy process which could lead to such a Convention, without delay.

e *Register and criteria*

The meeting agrees that the value in the Register lay in its selectivity : its identification of the highest priority heritage items in the country, as means of effective presentation of heritage concerns and also as a way of drawing attention to larger heritage and access issues.

f *National and Regional Committees*

It was noted that there are relatively few national MoW committees so far established within the Asia/pacific region and that the response to the recent regional survey was disappointing. The meeting agrees that the formal establishment of a regional MoW committee was felt to be the key to faster progress. The committee would aim to encourage the establishment of national MoW committees and develop greater awareness in the region, would filter nominations for the register and work to make itself ultimately unnecessary, when national committees are fully operational. It is seen as interim mechanism representing countries which are present sources of good practices and expertise, such as Japan, Australia, republic of Korea, China, Malaysia, Pakistan.

Each country would designate a contact person. China would be the inaugural chair of the Committee. Malaysia was again nominated to actively provide the role. The meeting also agrees that there need to be a UNESCO commitment to support such a regional committee, along with support from countries in the region. Pakistan was nominated to take a coordinating, persuading and energizing role in the South West Asia sub-region, encouraging the establishment of national MoW committees, identifying collections at risk and potential nominations for the international, regional and national registers.

g *Endangered heritage and priority regional projects*

The meeting also discussed the survey results and some of the more endemic problems of the region. These includes the large quantities of materials in advanced stages of decay and requiring urgent conservation work; inadequate storage conditions; the loss of proficiency in languages so that younger people can no longer read ancient records; the uneven availability of adequate facilities and skills. Also discussed were ways in which a regional approach could facilitate the linkage of heritage items across national boundaries and create an entirely new dimension of access.

h *Communication and training*

The meeting also discussed the ways to address the limited communication within the region. The approaches identified as :

- Standardizing systems
- Formal training courses at various level
- Improved access to the Internet
- Workshops in strategic locations
- Skills transfer by role modeling, staff exchanges, internships

Existing training programs needed to be identified and reinforced, whether at academic, sub-academic, continuing education and in-service levels, providing for both new recruits and older practitioners. Maximum use needed to be made of current facilities and opportunities for collaboration, so that gaps can be identified and ways found to fill them.

i Action plan

The following action was agreed on :

1. Establishment of regional MoW committee
2. Organization of 1st Regional Committee meeting and workshop.
3. Creation of introductory publication
4. Encourage establishment of national committees
5. Establishment database of experts within the region
6. Identifying endangered collections
7. Set up website for regional committee

RECOMMENDATIONS

The meeting adopted the following recommendations :

1. That the IAC and UNESCO review the communication strategy for the MoW program, in order to present a clearer message to both public institutions and professional associations, to engage them in a complementary and mutually beneficial relationship, emphasizing the dimensions of the program which assist and add value to their existing work.
2. That an introductory publication should be developed at the international level in consultation with the experts present at this meeting. It is proposed that recommended Asia/Pacific Regional Committee should take the initiative to develop such material.

3. That the IAC Bureau and UNESCO address the question of implementing the Marketing Sub- committee's strategy as quickly as possible.
4. That the IAC and UNESCO begin the work of developing a MoW Convention as soon as possible.
5. That a Regional Asia/Pacific MoW Committee be established, with the given terms of reference.
6. That the first meeting of the Regional Asia Pacific MoW Committee be held in 1998 in accordance with the set out proposal. China's invitation to host the meeting in conjunction with a UNESCO Regional Participation Program support be warmly accepted and supported.

OFFICIAL VISITS

The participants were taken for a visit to the Xiamen City Archives and Overseas Chinese Museum.