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Information in isolation : the case of the Republic of Singapore and the Union of Myanmar

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INFORMATION IN ISOLATION:
THE CASE OF THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE AND
THE UNION OF MYANMAR

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of
Library and Information Science
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master in Library and Information Science

by

Monika M. Landenhamer

May 1997

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ABSTRACT

INFORMATION IN ISOLATION: THE CASE OF THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE AND THE UNION OF MYANMAR

by Monika M. Landenhamer

This is a comparative study of the information systems and policies of Singapore and Myanmar. What links both countries and distinguishes them from the United States is that their cultures and history create a powerful rationale for government control of information access and dissemination. However, the degree of control and determination to isolate populations from western viewpoints differs markedly between the two nations and reflects their unique economic and political agendas. Recent electronic information dissemination policies of both countries impact directly global information flow.

Research for this study is based on principles of comparative studies and utilizes qualitative methodology. These principles and their linked methodology are based on the idea that it is important to understand the historical, socio-economic and political traditions of a country in order to evaluate information systems and policies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This thesis would not have been written without the inspiration from several journeys to Myanmar over a period of fifteen years. This country had dropped from the world consciousness, lived in isolation for decades, and still maintained among her people a sense of dignity, serenity, hospitality and uprightness. These conditions and virtues stimulated this research. It is dedicated to all those who do not enjoy the freedom of expression, and it is hoped that continued discussion about *Information in Isolation* will one day bring about lasting changes and grant this basic right of freedom of expression to all. My appreciation and thanks go to all those who have shared their experiences and provided me with information regarding their country.

This thesis would not have been completed without the continued support, critical review, and ongoing discussion of the chair of the committee, Dr. Ruth Hafter, who not only took sincere interest in the topic and encouraged the writing of this thesis, but was crucial to developing the ideas expressed. My sincere thanks go also Dr. James Healey and Dr. Linda Main who through their suggestions, recommendations, and critiques helped focus and clarify the direction of this research.

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Abbreviations

AFPFL	Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (first democratic movement 1944-1958)
ALA	American Library Association
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam)
BSPP	Burmese Socialist Programme Party (till 1988)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CBL	Central Biomedical Library, Yangon
CONSAL	Conference of Southeast Asian Librarians
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNP	Gross National Product
IFLA	International Federation of Library Associations
IHT	International Herald Tribune
ISI	Institute for Scientific Information (Philadelphia, US)
LDC	Less Developed Country
LIS	Library and Information Science
MLA	Myanmar Library Association
MLS	Master in Library Science
NBDCS	National Book Development Council of Singapore
NCB	National Computer Board (Singapore)
NIC	Newly Industrialized Countries
NII	National Information Infrastructure
NLD	National League for Democracy (1988, Aung San Suu Kyi)
NWICO	New World Information and Communication Order
PAP	People's Action Party (Singapore's ruling party)
PSO	Press Scrutiny Office (Government of Myanmar)
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council (1988, military government of Myanmar)
SPH	Singapore Press Holdings
TTC	Teacher Training College
TTS	Teacher Training School
UCL	Universities' Central Libraries (Yangon)
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

Chapter 1

Introduction

The Problem

Information is becoming a crucial commodity in the local, regional, and international marketplace. The power of information has long been recognized by the leaders of all nations, and depending on the political orientation—democratic or authoritarian—the flow of information is expected to be either promoted or controlled. Citizens of democratic countries, predominantly those of the Western Hemisphere, seem to enjoy great liberty in access to and use of information. Freedom of speech and of the press, and the freedom to assemble are constitutionally guaranteed rights in the United States and other democratic countries, and are taken for granted by the population.

In the United States of America the right to free information access for all members of the society is also affirmed in the *Library Bill of Rights* (American Library Association, June 1948, rev. 1961, 1980, and the 1995 interpretation concerning electronic access). These documents state that there should be free and open access to the use of any material, and library collections should reflect diverse ideas and satisfy the needs of all. According to the Library Bill of Rights, libraries should not promote a particular opinion or ideology, but are ethically bound to provide free, unrestricted access and participate in activities to ensure

and uphold this principle. Worldwide, many nations do not acknowledge this basic right of access to information. By western standards, this right is the basis for the development of a prosperous and successful economy, higher levels of education for the general population, and a significant drop in illiteracy.

Two countries of Southeast Asia—the Republic of Singapore and the Union of Myanmar (formerly Burma)—were selected for this comparative study. The selection of two such distinctly different nations is based upon analysis of their historic, socio-economic, and political conditions, and the approach to education, library development, and access to information for the public as provided by the governments.

Analysis will focus on the impact of self-imposed isolation and restrictions on the information flow of both countries. When information is officially promoted and controlled, what consequences does this have for the population and how are its information needs met? This investigation argues that control of information is not a characteristic of repressive or authoritarian governments alone. Control of information as secrets is exercised at all levels of societal life independent of its organizational form (democratic or repressive), in research institutions and businesses worldwide, and in personal relationships (Bok, 1989). An important distinction needs to be made as to whether control of information is considered legitimate and accepted or is condemned as harmful. What links both countries and distinguishes them from the United States is that

their cultures and their history create a powerful rationale for government control of information access and dissemination.

This study depends on the published literature in various fields, the Internet, on interviews and in the case of Myanmar on personal communications. It has become an accepted standard not to disclose personal informants, and such references are noted as “personal communication”. The country analysis was based on principles of comparative studies as outlined by Danton (1973). For the interpretation of information systems and policies an “emic,” or insider, approach was preferred, to remain open to cultural analysis rather than employing standards and principles based on American librarianship.

Definitions of Terms

In the context of this study, terms are employed that have acquired a special meaning within a specialty field, or carry a particular connotation. These terms also indicate the attitude of those who first used them and do not express the attitude of those to whom a term is referring.

Southeast Asia has only been considered as a region after the Second World War and is divided into Mainland Southeast Asia, comprised of Burma (Myanmar), Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Island Southeast Asia, including Malaysia and Singapore, Indonesia, Borneo, Brunei, the Philippines.

Other terms used to refer to this region are South-East Asia, South Asia (India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka), and formerly Indochina. In regard to the pre-World War II period, the countries are referred to as British, Dutch, or French colonies. Further, Southeast Asia is not identical with ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. This association was established in 1967 by Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand for the purpose to accelerate economic growth and promote regional peace and stability.

Owing to developments in so-called Third World countries and in an attempt to overcome discrimination, the terms “undeveloped” or “underdeveloped nation” have been replaced by “developing nation”. These terms deserve further scrutiny. Since the countries of the Third World represent a wide array of conditions and developments, it did not seem appropriate to lump them together using a single expression. Further division into “Newly Industrialized Countries” (NIC), e.g., Singapore, Hongkong, Mexico, and Brazil, and “Less Developed Countries” (LDC), among them Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, is common in the literature.

With regard to Burma, or Myanmar, there has been some confusion over the correct labeling of that country. In accordance with Steinberg (1993), Myanmar, or the Union of Myanmar, is the most recent designation implemented by the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) in 1989. Burma is used as the common country name for the time period prior to the

recent name change. The 1995 edition of the *CIA World Factbook* continues to use Burma as country name, demonstrating that the United States government has not adopted the name change. Burmese is the designation of all citizens, whereas Burman refers to the ethnic majority (about 69 percent of the population) among the 135 known ethnic groups of Myanmar (Fredholm, 1993, p. 10).

Southeast Asian scholars employ the feminine pronoun when referring to their country instead of the form “it” or “its”. In Asian philosophy, the country and the land is not considered “a thing”, and is respected as the “motherland”, the soil from which the people derive their growth and nutriment is “mother earth”. In keeping with the methodological principles of this study, the designation for Singapore and Myanmar will be feminine, whereas references to western countries follow the accepted standards of western terminology.

The study will be organized as follows: Chapter 2 will review methodological considerations. Chapter 3 will present a review of literature concerned with Southeast Asia, and literature that provides the necessary background for the country study of Singapore and Myanmar (Burma). Chapter 4 will explore the historical and social conditions of Singapore and analyzes education, the library and information system, publication policies, and the impact of governmental information control. Chapter 5 will deal with Myanmar, a society that chose to isolate herself from the world community, and look at

policies concerning the use of vernacular language, publications, and censorship, or press scrutiny, of domestic and foreign materials. Chapter 6 will summarize the findings, compare and contrast both countries, and draw conclusions that will suggest criteria for identifying and analyzing the social and cultural conditions that influence information access and flow.

Chapter 2

Methodology

For data about both countries—Singapore and Myanmar—the author depended on the published literature and drew on various disciplines: history, political science, sociology, psychology, economics, and the library and information science literature. An effort was made to retrieve literature published in these countries by native researchers, as well as literature from the pool of publications about these countries. This thesis is in part based on previous research and visits to Singapore and Myanmar by the author, although these studies were not related to library science. Earlier investigations into historical and cultural context, religious practices and social conditions stimulated this research.

This writer agrees with Tuchrello (1988) that research methods concerning Southeast Asia need to be modified and adapted to circumstances that often do not permit first-hand research. He suggested a more extensive use of “printed vernacular works, non-textual data, and second-hand reports from visitors, which has been a way of life for Americans in Burma studies, [and] is or should be spreading throughout Southeast Asian studies” (p. 128).

In order to compare the information development of both countries, relevant literature from the field of comparative studies has been reviewed

emphasizing *Dimensions of comparative librarianship* (Danton, 1973), and *Comparative librarianship* (Colling, 1971). Asheim's publication *Librarianship in developing countries* (1966), although not a comparative study by the strictest of definitions, opened the doors to culturally based questions and awareness of preconceptions that hamper an unbiased interpretation.

Danton (1973) presented himself as an advocate of the scientific quantitative method as the basis for library science research when he stated "there is the method of science, scientific method, which has been found to be, on the whole, the most satisfactory of all methods in all fields, and is the most satisfactory method for comparative studies in librarianship as well" (p. 113).

He saw the advantage of scientific method in that

. . . it does not depend on chance, insight, intuition, inspiration, or the happenstance event; it may be used by anyone who has mastered its procedures to investigate almost every kind of phenomenon, problem, and relationship; it is largely self-correcting, in that the data and techniques used may be re-examined and are open to public scrutiny; it minimizes the possibility, inherent in all inquiry, of bias on the part of the investigator, a possibility to which studies in librarianship are peculiarly susceptible; it is consistent and widely understood; and its results provide stepping stones that lead to further inquiry, either of a verifying or refined nature or along new paths, and building blocks upon which further extension of our knowledge may be based. (p. 123)

This statement must be understood in the context of Danton's critique of Library Science research as a whole and that of comparative librarianship in particular, which he described as "descriptive, narrative, subjective, didactive, and entirely innocent of methodology, and not comparative at all" (p. 85). There

is renewed interest in methodological concerns for library science research, and Danton's critique of the quality of library science research may no longer be valid, although his emphatic plea for more and better quantitative research was echoed by Cooper (1992) and Glazier (1992) who discussed the non-exclusiveness of quantitative and qualitative studies, and by Sandstrom and Sandstrom (1995), emphasizing scientific ethnography as a quantitative branch of ethnography.

In the specialized area of comparative library science, Danton's evaluation of the literature, and his outline of principles and requirements for a truly comparative study, have not been superseded by a more current publication. His *Dimension of comparative librarianship* is the authoritative work in the field, and includes the various fields of comparative studies (education, medicine, law, and history).

Danton (1973) outlined five elements that must be present to constitute a comparative study:

1. The phenomena investigated must have a fundamental similarity—they may not be wholly different.
2. The phenomena may not be completely identical.
3. There must be absolute clarity concerning which particular characteristics . . . are being considered, and this requires careful delimitation and definition.
4. There must be description and analysis of the similarities and differences among the various elements being compared.
5. There must be explanation of the differences. (p. 129)

In considering these five elements as valid principles for a comparative study, it must also be clearly understood that analysis and interpretation in this study cannot be confined to the “neutral, objective, and value-free” environment of scientific research, and does not solely evaluate them against standards produced in industrialized countries. Rather, analysis and interpretation are in line with standards for qualitative research as expressed by Benge (1979), Strauss and Corbin (1990) and others, and is based on a historical, social, and cultural context.

Newly industrialized countries, and to some extent the less developed countries, are increasingly acknowledging the need for a unique interpretation of local conditions and have gradually overcome intellectual dependence on western ideologies. The Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, Anwar Ibrahim, clarified the Asian standpoint as part of what Naisbitt (1996) called “an Asian renaissance” (p. 56). Ibrahim stated “the Asian mind has finally broken free from intellectual morass” (p. 56) and continued that there is

. . . a more positive attitude towards our own traditions, and a genuine interest in the traditions of our fellow Asians. What we are about to embark on is a voyage of self-discovery, a journey through the myriad Asian traditions in order to understand and know each better. (p 57)

Along with overcoming the political and economic effects of centuries and decades of colonialism, an effort is made toward “decolonizing the mind”, that is, overcoming the mental conditioning produced through colonialism.

Analysis, especially of the condition of conscious isolation from the western community, is undertaken from this standpoint, as it provides some understanding of the inherent conditions that led to this choice. Finally, this comparative study examines approaches to information systems and technologies, including publication policies, libraries, and culture-specific forms of information dissemination (oral traditions, acceptance of ethnic minority information needs), and culminates in analysis of factors that led each country into practicing some form of information isolation.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

This literature review is limited to those works providing background and overall understanding for the topic of *Information in Isolation*. It deals first with general works, then focuses on publications directly addressing issues in the Southeast Asian context, and finally on writings about Singapore and Myanmar.

General Works

In 1966, L. Asheim published *Librarianship in developing countries*. He tried to instill a sense of openness and appreciation for different cultures. While analyzing the problems faced by western-educated librarians, he stressed the pitfalls of comparison. According to Asheim, the purpose of librarianship is “to promote the useful exchange of information and ideas” (p.3). Asheim emphasized that this exchange must reflect “a two way flow, not only from us to them, but from them to us” (p. 3). He believed that every culture developed on its own principles and assumptions based on historical context. These conditions require comprehension from within and should not be judged based on a comparison to western library models. Asheim presented the philosophically oriented perspective on cultural and ethnic issues in librarianship that is so often missed in more current writings.

In *Cultural crisis and libraries in the Third World*, R. Bengé (1979) studied the issue of development and its impact on library development. In this well-presented analysis, Bengé addressed issues—supported by examples predominantly concerning Africa—which are of importance today: information transfer, freedom of expression, education as well as literacy programs for adults, communication, mass communication media, and book production. He devoted an entire section to dealing with library development, education and professionalism, national libraries, and international and comparative library studies.

Bengé stressed that a definition of development concerned only with economic conditions is insufficient once its effects become apparent. Increasing social imbalances in the developing countries led to inclusion of a component of social justice in the theories of development (p. 14). Bengé accepted the idea that cultural context, not western values, should determine both the flow and control of information.

A next step in identifying stages in development theories and approaches is reflected in *A Society for international development: Prospectus 1984*. Under the editorship of A. Mattis (1983), this volume brought together “development concepts of the past as well as their contemporary evolution and praxis” (p. xvii), new ideas to “examine the paths to the future” (p. xviii), and proposals for actions. The Society’s definition of development as “a sustainable process geared

to the satisfaction of the needs of the majority of peoples, and not merely to the growth of things or to the benefit of a minority” (Mattis, 1983, p. xiii) continued the line of thought established by Bengue’s “social justice” in development theory.

J. Naisbitt (1996) drew a different picture of the future of developing countries in *Megatrends Asia : Eight Asian megatrends that are reshaping our world*. He provided a fresh look at the economic and intellectual developments of Asian countries when he insisted,

The story of the New Asia is a story of the miracle of the human spirit, driven by an awakening to one’s own potential and propelled by the power of determination, and of the progress achieved by toil and sacrifice. (p. 10)

Naisbitt noted that “as the global economy continues to shift from its industrial past to the full potential of the information-based future, the key to productivity will not be inexpensive labor but the best use of high technology” (p. 175). He concluded that the countries of Asia have “envisioned the future more clearly than most” (p. 175). Other issues discussed by Naisbitt (1996) dealt with the definition of basic democratic rights. Naisbitt pointed out that Asian people are no longer willing to accept western definitions per se, for “what is resisted in Asia is the presumption by the West that the West gets to say what democracy is and is not” (p. 77). Asian nations assert the right to define for themselves what democracy, freedom of speech, access to information, liberty, social and moral values mean to them in the context of their own cultural heritage.

From a completely different perspective, S. Bok (1982) introduced in great detail various forms of information transference or non-transference. In her publication, *Secrets: On the ethics of concealment and revelation*, Bok emphasized the psychological impact of information, ways of communication, and the need for restrictions in communication, or secrecy. One of the themes discussed throughout the book is the tension between the need to conceal by an individual or state and the desire or right to know. Every attempt to exclude an individual from knowing is associated with establishing boundaries, enforcing power, and creating a sense of isolation for the one who is excluded. "Every government has an interest in concealment; every public in greater access to information" (p. 177). Conflicts arising from this tension are "conflicts over secrecy . . . , are conflicts over power: the power that comes through controlling the flow of information" (p. 19). In analyzing information systems of developing countries, the dynamic of secrecy and publicity needs to be kept in mind to understand that boundaries, acceptable restrictions, and openness are based on different cultural and historical experiences.

G. Sussman and J. A. Lent (1991) took a critical look at information politics and information flow in *Transnational communication: Wiring the Third World*. In a brief review of international information politics in the introductory essay, the authors drew the conclusion that the promise of a free flow of information is but an illusion, and with the development of information

technologies, one-way communication becomes even more apparent. Sussman and Lent insisted that the needs of the developing countries have not been met in the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). This UNESCO report—known as the MacBride report—was published in response to problems and issues experienced by developing countries concerning the dominance of western media in international broadcast. It attempted to clarify and make public the needs of developing countries concerning international media.

Focus on Southeast Asia

Although there is an increased interest in the Southeast Asian region as a promising business partner and market for European and United States companies, publications concerned with library and information issues are sparse and often hard to locate. Information technology, on the other hand, draws the attention of Third World and international researchers as a rapidly growing area that appears to be the link to modernization and industrialization. The political, and at times the social impact of these developments are the focus of these publications.

Among them, J. Carpenter's survey of *Libraries and information in East Asia* (1995) provided a comprehensive overview of library development in Asia. Carpenter's survey dealt with the countries of East Asia and Southeast Asia.

She analyzed historical conditions, the current political situation, economic development and the educational background for each country. She pointed out that “education and training have a high priority in the region, and funds for research and development are increasing” (p. 1). Areas compared included the level of education, availability of universities, number of libraries, literacy rates, and GNP. Section 2 provided a review of library and information services by national, public, academic, and special libraries, and included an evaluation of the professional organizations and status of librarians.

Carpenter concluded, “information has gained a high profile alongside other sectors of the economy” (p. 47) and provides the necessary knowledge base for the development of the NICs. She summarized the most important information about the region, and provided a valuable overview of the problems of information services in East and Southeast Asia.

One of the most reviewed series in the field is *Information and libraries in the Third World* (1993), with the second volume on *South-East Asia and China*, edited by A. Olden and M. Wise. This volume collected essays concerned with different aspects of libraries and information services. There is no indication of the criteria or conceptual assumptions on which the selection was based. Individual articles, written in English by regional librarians, cover topics of automation, interlibrary lending and regional cooperation, and bibliographic standards, but a unifying aspect is somewhat lacking. The value of this work

would have been greater with an introductory essay outlining the development and history of information systems and libraries in Southeast Asia. In its current form, it is for specialists in Southeast Asian librarianship.

H. Anuar, librarian at Singapore National Library, is a recognized authority in the field, has widely written on librarianship in Southeast Asia, and represents a regional perspective. *Issues in Southeast Asian librarianship* (1985) brought together a series of her articles, lectures, and talks at conferences (from 1972 to 1983). This collection focused on the function and development of the National Libraries serving also as public libraries, the information needs of the public, and the difficulty of obtaining information. In the final section, emphasis was on the urgent need to develop literacy, awareness of available materials, and on the need for cooperation by the publishing and printing industries with the educational institution of each country.

From a similar perspective, D. Wijasuria's *The barefoot librarian* (1975) emphasized the distinct needs of the region, and is one of the first volumes written by Southeast Asian librarians. A brief historical introduction to library development in the countries of Southeast Asia disputed the impression given by some western-oriented publications that Southeast Asian libraries are a recent development. In fact, libraries or collections of written materials have a long history in Southeast Asia, dating back to the 11th century. The ideas presented

here are of national and regional importance, and indicate an effort to reclaim a regional view of historical events.

The issues of accessibility and relevance of publications from Southeast Asian researchers is discussed at length by C.H. Davis and T. O. Eisemon (1989) in *Mainstream and non mainstream scientific literature in four peripheral Asian scientific communities*. Their study showed why indigenous publications were being excluded from the international peer-reviewed literature, indexed by the Institute of Scientific Information, ISI, Philadelphia. The scientific community believes that indigenous research relies too often on outdated information and methodological approaches. For this reason, the international research community tends to ignore the work of indigenous scholars unless they are linked to a parent institution in an industrialized country.

Davis and Eisemon attempted to dispel prejudiced ideas held by the international and regional scientific community through their detailed bibliometric analysis, which revealed the growing independence of indigenous research, showed that methodological quality has improved, and demonstrated that more recent publications are cited.

C.E. Carter (1994) discussed issues of retrieving information on Southeast Asia and her people. In her article on *Accessing ethnic group information on CD-ROM: The case of Southeast Asians* she stated that information poverty is often experienced in the developing countries as a result of technical and political

restrictions on the flow of information; and industrial countries suffer a similar loss of information about subjects that have not been the primary focus of western oriented research.

Carter pointed out that terms are not employed consistently in such sources, referring to one aspect in one instance and meaning something completely different in the next. Another problem arises from the use of country names in some databases and ethnic groups in others, and the change of names of several countries reflecting political changes. Searching CD-ROM databases for information on Southeast Asia or Asians requires considerable understanding of historical, regional, ethnic and political development. Because interest in the Southeast Asian region is a recent phenomenon, many databases only cover material since the early 1980s. Unlike Davis's and Eisemon's analysis on the indexing of scientific publications, Carter's analysis lacks information about the type of material that has been indexed.

Singapore

A History of Singapore, edited by E.C.T. Chew and E. Lee (1991), is an attempt to provide a complete presentation of a national history. Under the auspices of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, several distinguished professors collaborated to write about historical, cultural, educational, and political issues relevant for understanding current policies in

Singapore. This work dealt at length with cultural issues—transition to independence, family, community, education, and national identity—that provide valuable insights into “doing it the Singapore way,” a way guided by historical and political considerations not easily comprehensible to the western mind. Lacking natural resources, Singapore depends for its future on peaceful cooperation with all nations, and so refrains from interfering in the internal affairs of her neighbors. She demands the same right for herself, and maintains that all citizens have a right to improved living conditions, a stable and safe environment, free education, guaranteed health care, and prosperity. The authors stated that the welfare of the state and all citizens takes precedence over the needs or wishes of individuals in order to achieve the goal of creating a national identity for Singapore’s multiracial community (Chew, 1991, chap. 16).

An equally valuable title from a western perspective is C. M. Turnbull’s (1989) *A history of Singapore, 1819-1988*. Chew and Lee (1991) comment on her work as “the most recent and best single-authored history” (p. ixx). Turnbull, a history professor at the Universities of Singapore and Hongkong, united the need for a systematic descriptions of historical events period by period with the understanding of Asian conditions, culture, and problems. Although Singapore has achieved a peaceful co-existence among the different racial groups and has overcome the image of an Asian “sweat-shop” (Turnbull, p. 297), the major

problem is still the “reconciling [of a] western-type democracy and individualism with social and economic discipline” (Turnbull, p. 327).

Turnbull’s and Chew and Lee’s accounts of Singapore include events up to the late 1980s. A description of recent events is given in *Singapore: The global city-state* by G. Murray (1996). Murray emphasized an economic outlook, international business involvement in Singapore, and the effects of the new generation of leaders on development. Like Turnbull, Murray analyzed the criticism of Singapore concerning freedom of the press and the rights of the citizen. Evaluating economic conditions, he stated that “high-profile government intervention or official ‘paternalism’, has been an important contributory factor to Singapore’s development, whatever certain western journalists may say about the lack of press freedom or true democracy” (Murray, 1996, p. 19).

Communication technology, transnational information flow, and the effects on Third World countries were the themes of G. Sussman’s (1991) contribution *The “Tiger” from Lion City: Singapore’s niche in the new international division of communication and information*. Sussman took a critical look at the works of Toffler, Boorstin, Bell, and Naisbitt. He disagreed with them on the evaluation of information technology representing a “global revolution” (Sussman, p. 279). He also opposed the “stage theory of development” (p. 280) and insisted on a historical and social analysis of the impact of information technology on society (p. 281).

Sussman commented that Singapore deserved special attention as she is celebrated for her economic success, but at the same time condemned for governmental restrictions and interference in the private lives of the citizens. With her striving for perfection, Singapore developed “the most sophisticated telecommunications network in Asia after Japan” (p. 289) which is one reason she is attracting numerous international companies. Sussman concluded that “the monopoly of information by the Lee Kuan Yew government and its hypersensitivity to criticism do not synchronize with an ‘information society’ posited on ‘open architecture’ systems of communicating” (p. 306).

The issue of censorship is discussed by H.A. Peng and B. Nadarajan (1996) in *Censorship and the Internet: a Singapore perspective*. The authors indicated that censorship in Singapore is justified for historical and socio-political reasons. Stating that censorship has no place in western ideology, especially not in the United States, and emphasizing that “the internet is . . . inherently resistant to censorship, both in its operating philosophy and technical set-up” (Peng, §33), the authors contrasted this approach with the expectation of Singaporeans that the government needs to take responsibility for monitoring information flow. Censorship laws in Singapore affect all publications, printed and digital, sound and moving images, produced in the country or imported. Because the government recognized the extent of the activity required to monitor all Internet transactions and the impossibility of implementing total control, a

committee was set up to “provide information (and rebut inaccurate information) about Singapore on the Internet through ‘Singapore Infomap’” (Peng, §53).

The government of Singapore is involved in implementing information technology and making it available to the public. F.W. Chan (1993) introduced the ambitious goals of *Information technology 2000* and *Library 2000* in his presentation *Future dimensions and library development: Information technology and libraries in Singapore*. The Library 2000 report indicated increased information access for local communities through community libraries (a pilot project), and special services focused on the needs of pre-school and lower primary school students (Chan, F.W., p. A45).

The foremost goal of the *IT 2000* plan is expressed by the phrase “Vision of an Intelligent Island” (Chan, F.W., 1993, p. A46), and includes state-of-the-art technology, networking capabilities, and on-line access for all citizens from office and home. As a special service to the public, the government proposed a kiosk information system “SingaTOUCH” for fast and easy access to government information and services (Chan, F.W., p. A47). This reflects a change in information policy from a collection orientation to information “access at any point”, with libraries becoming global information centers and service oriented. Singapore’s ambition is, according to F.W. Chan (1993), to join the league of developed nations by the turn of the century, and enhanced information access is one step in achieving that goal.

Three recent publications concerned with information management deserve mention. W. Gibson's article *Disneyland with death penalty: Wired sends William Gibson to the future: Singapore* strongly reflected a western approach to the analysis of Singapore's information policies. Guided by expectations of American experience, he obviously fell into the trap so eloquently alluded to by Asheim when he spoke of the "pitfalls of comparison". Ramachandra (1994), rejected Gibson's view of Singapore's information policies, and made a point that much of what is considered under freedom of information in the West is not information at all by Singaporean standards. He stated, "The sole purpose of his article seemed to be the careful choosing of facts, figures, and impressions to support his view of how an information society should, or should not, be run" (Ramachandra, 1994, §1).

A more differentiated approach presented S. Sandfort (1993) in *Intelligent island*. Presenting some facts and figures in support of Singapore's information technology development, she is critical of the political implications caused by controlled information flow. She summarized Singapore's information policy as "hear no evil, see no evil, televue no evil". She also gave voice to those who believe that the development of information technology—at this point in time ahead of the United States—will speed up evolving changes to information access for the people of Singapore.

Myanmar (Burma)

When one turns to the Union of Myanmar the effect of intentional withdrawal from the international community becomes visible. In searching for literature about information policies, information technology, access to information through libraries and other information centers, a vast gap was noted concerning the era from 1962 through 1988. The selection of material cannot be coherent as it was in the case of Singapore, but is truly reflective of the difficulties associated with trying to gain understanding about a culture where information is treated as power and is not shared.

The history of Burma from the first Burmese empire in the eleventh century to independence from Britain is well documented. Among several publications, J. Silverstein's (1980) *Burmese politics: The dilemma of national unity* provides a historical and cultural background. Silverstein, who has traveled to Burma on many occasions since 1955, analyzed the complicated web of internal affairs in Burma, and discussed the importance of the "fourteen-year era of constitutional government" (p. 207) from 1948 to 1962.

The analysis by Mya Than (1991) on Myanmar's economic co-operation within the ASEAN community provided valuable background. In *ASEAN, Indo-China and Myanmar: Towards economic co-operation*, Than showed how Myanmar attempts to establish herself as a partner in regional trading, and to maintain economic independence from the western industrialized countries. In

1988, Burma switched to a “market-oriented economy”, leading to moderate economic improvement. Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand are becoming more important in Myanmar’s trading, whereas there is a considerable decline in imports from other countries of the world (Than, p. 187).

D. I. Steinberg has written widely on the political conditions of Burma. His recent article *Liberalization in Myanmar: How real are the changes?* (1993) tried to shed light on the difficulties western analysts encounter in comprehending what really happens in Myanmar. The intentional isolation of Myanmar which had been brought upon the country in 1962 continued, but the growing number of Burmese people living overseas and developments in information technology make it more difficult for the Myanmar government of the 1990s to isolate the country completely. Despite economic and political changes, the politics of cultural and ethnic purity are still continued. Although Myanmar seeks to open her economy to foreign investments, every attempt to influence internal affairs is resisted. Steinberg stated also that under current conditions, Southeast Asian countries will not interfere in internal affairs as a matter of keeping to the ASEAN agreements, but will work toward mutual support and understanding.

A comprehensive overview of library development in Burma beginning with the time of the first Burmese king in the eleventh century, is provided by P. Bixler in *Encyclopedia of library and information science* (1970). He described

how educational and literary developments depend on political and economic conditions. Because libraries began at the court as palm leaves collections of the Buddhist sacred texts, the public did not participate in this development.

Bixler noted that the first public library was established in the early part of the twentieth century for the benefit of the British people in Burma. After independence these collections were integrated in the university libraries. He pointed out that the often criticized lack of interest in reading of Burmese students stems from the poor conditions of libraries in Burma, with little or no material available appropriate for different reading levels or subject areas (p. 507).

Changes in the educational environment are presented in great detail in M. Cameron's dissertation (1992) *Legitimacy and violence in education in Burma*. Before British colonial rule in Burma, education on all levels "from the court to the village" (p. 71) was conducted by the Buddhist monks. British missionaries reformed the educational system following the British model. After independence, education became compulsory and state-prescribed in 1974 (p. 1), enrollment increased and illiteracy declined. The traditional symbiosis of monasticism and education was further weakened, and schools promulgated government ideologies and goals. As English was no longer taught, further isolation of the people was accomplished.

A. Allott (1981) described in her essay *Prose writing and publishing in Burma today: government policy and popular practice* the struggles for the development of a national publication industry that focuses on textbooks and literary works. The democratic period (1945-1962) was characterized by emphasizing literature that was reflective of the life of the people and instilling pride of independence and national cultural heritage. After 1962, when Burmese had become the medium of teaching and publication, the government offered awards and grants to those writers who expressly supported the goals of the Burmese Socialist Programme Party. Allott dealt at length with publications guidelines for writers, government control of the media, and the government's critique of literary writers for not producing works that contribute "towards a man's ability to improving the quality of life" (p. 31).

Allott (1990) updated this essay with the publication of *The media in Burma and the pro-democracy movement of July-September 1988*. This review demonstrates clearly the need of the Burmese people to express their ideas and their wish to be informed. A dramatic increase of newsletters, magazines, and leaflets was noted during that time, and it appears that for the first time since 1962 the population of Burma received current uncensored news of the events in their country. But, at the end of this short period, some newspapers and magazines were shut down for good, and information was once again scarce and monitored.

The effects of intended isolation have a direct impact on the availability of information about a country. W. Tuchrello (1988) compiled rather inaccessible literature on Burma from libraries worldwide. The results are summarized in *A survey of selected resources for the study of Burma*. Acquisition problems, foreign currency exchange, and the use of vernacular in Burmese publications contribute to the difficulties libraries encounter when collecting Burmese materials. Collections in Australia, Eastern Europe, and Russia indicated a much higher level of research interest in Burma than those in United States libraries which depended largely on private donations and did not collect systematically. Although Burmese publications had received some attention in the 1970's and 1980's, recent developments in Burma have again placed this country low on the agenda of the United States, and information collection and dissemination is in the hands of only a few interested individuals.

Materials dealing with the pre-colonial and colonial period have been the main focus of researchers. Because of the British rule over Burma from 1824-1941, the British Library and the India Office in London house historic treasures—printed materials and artifacts—from this Southeast Asian country. E. P. Quigly (1956) in *Some observations on libraries, manuscripts and books of Burma from the 3rd century A.D. to 1886 (with special reference to the Royal Library of the last kings of Burma)* presented a rare collection of printed material relating to Burma. Quigly described individual items originally held in

the Royal Library in Mandalay. She brought together the research done by scholars worldwide, analyzing and classifying Burmese manuscripts and books. Her essay is illustrative of the attitude Burmese kings and people showed toward the written word, and she was able to draw a picture of a highly literate and culturally developed society. Descriptions of palm leaf processing, the process of writing, and applying decorative ornamentation on the leaves are included. Although only 25 pages in length, this essay is considered an authoritative text, and is referred to in subsequent publications on the literature of Burma. Written in English, with stories and anecdotes, this volume is an invaluable resource for anyone interested in the historical aspects of literary development of Burma.

The recent classification of Myanmar as one of the LDC does not reflect the rich traditional heritage of this nation. Rather, political and economic conditions in the nineteenth and twentieth century have torn this country apart, and deprived it of continued development toward internal stability, economic prosperity, and scientific and cultural advancement. Eaton (1975) characterized the Burmese people as “charming and gifted, with a long cultural tradition, a relatively high literacy rate, and an interest in education, books, and libraries” (p. 742). The questions remains: Will the Burmese people be able to maintain these qualities under internal restrictions and isolation and intentional exclusion from the world community?

Chapter 4

Singapore:

The Developing Information Society

Singapore has emerged from colonialism and post-colonial struggles as one of the leading technologically advanced societies in Asia. In the Singapore IT 2000 Masterplan (1993) and the Library 2000 Report (1993), Singapore envisioned herself as “The Intelligent Island”, a nation of educated people, conversant with information technology applications, and with access to the universe of knowledge via electronic resources. How can Singapore achieve such ambitious goals and at the same time limit access to resources and information, including the Internet?

The exploration in this chapter will focus on those developments that allow the government to implement policies restricting information access and dissemination. These policies appear to reflect the state of mind of Singapore citizens who expect some control by the government (Peng, 1996). Why would a nation that has risen from a war-torn undeveloped country to one accounting for the third highest Gross National Product (GNP) and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (The Bottom Line, 4 October 1996) accept control over information flow and voluntarily refrain from “free access to information for all”?

A brief review of Singapore's history, approach to education, family and society, doing business the 'Singapore way', and an understanding how she strives for intellectual independence will provide the background for evaluating information systems and services in Singapore, and ascertain the question whether Singapore is in fact partially isolating herself from the pool of information available world wide.

The History of Singapore

Modern Singapore history began in January 1819 when the East India Company founded a trading outpost on the island. Prior to this event records are sparse, though they date back 11th century. "Main written sources available are accounts by Chinese travelers, Portuguese historians, and the Malay Annals . . . which is the earliest Malay account of historical events" (Chew & Lee, 1991, p. 3). From 1819 onward, Singapore was successively ruled by the British, became an Indian Crown Colony in 1867, was occupied by the Japanese during World War II (1942-45), and joined a federation with Malaysia (1963-65) before gaining independence in 1965. A trade post, Singapore gained increasing importance as a harbor, and centered her industry around ship building and repairs. With no natural resources, Singapore depended on trading and friendly relations with neighboring countries as a prerequisite for economic development.

Modern Singapore is a small city-state on the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula, 85 miles north of the equator, and extends to about 221 square miles (Southeast Asia, Britannica, 1991, p. 841). The population of 3.1 million (The Bottom Line, 7 February 1997) is largely Chinese (78%), with Malays (14%) being the second largest group, and Indians (7%) predominantly from Tamil Nadu (South India) as a third recognized ethnic group (Republic of Singapore, Encarta 94). Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil are national languages, and English is mandatory for all. Therefore, Singaporeans are at least bi-lingual, with many of them speaking three or more languages.

Singapore is a parliamentary democracy based on the Westminster model (Southeast Asia, Singapore, 1991, p. 844). A non-executive president is head of state, the Prime Minister and the Cabinet hold executive powers, and are responsible to the unicameral Parliament. Since 1965, Singapore is ruled by the People's Action Party (PAP), with Lee Kwan Yee as Prime Minister till 1988, a position held since by Goh Chok Tong. Several other parties and independent candidates have participated in the election process, but have had little chance against a PAP majority, notably again in the January 1997 elections (Oorjitham, Asiaweek, 2 February 1997).

Economy

Economically, Singapore is based on free enterprise, with the private sector playing an “essential entrepreneurial role”. The government is committed to developmental goals, and has a strong influence on the economy (Southeast Asia, Singapore, 1991, p. 844). Turnbull (1989) pointed out that in order to shape her future, Singapore elected “the West in her economy, capitalist style of business, opposition to communism, promoting of free trade and respect for technology and modernization. Yet the republic was far from being a Western clone, and she rejected competitive politics, individualism and the concept of the welfare state” (p. 326). According to several indexes, Singapore ranked among the ten economically most developed nations between 1990 and 1994 superseding Japan, Australia and its former colonial master Great Britain in some comparisons (Murray, 1995, pp. 5-7). This strong economic development and relative political stability make Singapore an attractive place for international businesses.

Nationhood - Family - Education

The Singapore government has emphasized three principles in support of its economic development: nationhood, family, and education. At the time of independence, Singapore was a culturally diverse, disconnected society (Chew, 1991, p. 360) and immigrants to Singapore continued to be loyal toward their

home country. Government politics were geared to instill pride and responsibility into the people and to develop a sense of community. The commonality of the people from China, India, Malaysia, and other countries living in Singapore was the acceptance of the family as a dependable unit. The concept of family was then extended to mean “nation”. Success of this concept depended—according to the government—on education, knowledge of one’s own history and culture, and knowledge and acceptance of the culture of other members of the newly formed society (Chew, 1991, p. 364).

In an effort to respect the cultural tradition of each ethnic group, Chinese, Malay, and Tamil were raised to national languages with English being mandatory as the language of commerce, technology and administration. The bilingual policy was a necessary stepping stone in preparing the new generation of Singaporeans for the task of building a strong nation that is internationally conversant. The objective of education is expressed in a statement by the Ministry of Education, Public Affairs Office (1994)

Education in Singapore aims to prepare our children for the process of life-long learning to cope with the constantly changing world and to build a responsible, cohesive and robust society. The school curriculum and education programme are aimed at producing a well-rounded, morally upright individual who is fully conversant with the latest technological advances and yet in touch with his Asian heritage. [General Policies, §1]

Libraries and Information Services

As part of the educational process, the Singapore government emphasized literacy and library developments. According to Anuar (1982) literacy rose from 52.3% in 1957 to 75.6% in 1975 (p. 411). These numbers have been updated by a recent statistic published in *Asiaweek* (Vital Signs, 19 April 1996) reflecting the effects of a continuous effort in literacy education. Singapore shows a 91.9% literacy rate for persons at over age ten, whereas the U.S. and all other countries included in this report base information on its population of over 15 years of age. In this comparison, Singapore is just four points behind the U.S.

Asheim (1966) stated that literacy, although “a comparatively late and sophisticated development in a culture”, is required for a functioning library system (p. 49). For “those who cannot read”, he continued, “libraries hold little attraction”(p. 49). In the case of Singapore, the development of libraries came alongside the literacy program. Anuar (1982) reported the existence of libraries in pre-colonial times dating back to the 1st century A.D. These libraries consisted mainly of religious texts, served as state archives, and were part of monasteries and temples. Their use was restricted to priests, state officials, monks, and scholars (Anuar, 1982, p. 413).

Recent library development began with the founding of modern Singapore in 1819. Sir Stamford Raffles established the Singapore Institution, a small library for the use of teachers and students was attached, and a museum was

added in 1849. This library was later placed under government administration due to financial difficulties. The library became a “legal deposit library with the passing of the Book Registration Ordinance of 1886”, and finally in 1955, library and museum were separated administratively. Two years later, in 1957, the formerly private library of the Singapore Institution “became a free public and national library” (Anuar, 1985, p. 413). Through an Amendment to the National Library Act in 1968, its role was expanded to reflect leadership “in relation to the development and coordination of national library services in Singapore” (Anuar, p. 414).

Few smaller libraries were established during the same period. The best known is part of the Medical College, and others were non-governmental special libraries—the Chinese library, the Ramakrishna Mission library, and libraries reflective of the needs of ethnic minorities. Some smaller school libraries served students of primary and secondary education.

Library and information services continuously improved during the past thirty years. A comparison of the reports to the First Conference of Southeast Asian Librarians (CONSAL) held in Singapore in 1970, and the Ninth Congress held in Bangkok in 1993 speaks for itself. T. S. Chan (1972) reported from the first conference (pp. 77-95) and F. W. Chan (1993) provided the details of the ninth congress (pp. A43-A55). In 1970, the National Library consisted of the main unit, a full-time branch, two part-time branches housed in community

centers, and twelve mobile library service points. By 1993, the two part-time branches were expanded to full-time service, five new full-time branches had been added, and the ninth full-time branch was under construction and has been opened in December 1994 (National Library Board, Information, 1995).

The number of registered users climbed from 23,000 adults (about 2% of the adult population), 33,000 young readers, and 113,000 children (total of 169,000 or approximately 10%) in 1970, to 890,000 total registered users in 1993. In 1970, the national library had a total of 444,000 titles in four languages, and 27,000 other material types, added about 40,000 volumes per year, and received nearly 2,000 periodicals. In contrast, in 1993 the national library had holdings in excess of 3 million with an operating budget of \$18.5 million. Library staff increased from 45, with 27 being qualified professionals in 1970, to 393 in 1993 of which 88 have received professional training. Similar numbers can be shown for libraries of higher education and special libraries. Although the conditions have improved, school libraries are still underserved. They are staffed by teacher librarians and not by professional librarians. The majority of libraries had fewer than 12,000 volumes each in their collection in 1970, which rose to only 15,000-20,000 items in 1993. The total budget for 375 school libraries in 1993 was \$4.5 to 5.0 million.

Library education has not received the same attention as the building of libraries and the development of collections. As T.S. Chan (1972) concluded in

his report to CONSAL, Singapore's librarians depended on foreign library education to perform their duties by professional standards. In 1993, plans were underway to begin a part-time masters program in library science at the School of Applied Science of the Nanyang Technological University. The library technicians program was established in 1991 as a joint program of Temasek Polytechnic and the National Book Development Council of Singapore (NBDCS) (F.W. Chan, 1993, pp. A45-46).

The organization of librarians and library technicians in professional organizations began in 1955 with the Malayan Library Group and was a joint association for librarians from Singapore and Malaysia. Constitutional changes required the break-up, and Singapore librarians organized themselves in 1966 in a separate professional association (Anuar, 1985, p. 416). T.S. Chan reported to CONSAL in 1970 a personal membership of 284 and 46 institutional members. In 1982, the Singapore Library Association reported a total of 323 personal and 60 institutional memberships (Singapore Libraries, 1982, p. 91). Data for 1993 was not available.

Developments presented here strongly reflect attitudes and policies of the Singapore government. Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong expressed clearly in his 1993 National Day Message, "The future belongs to countries whose people make the productive use of information, knowledge and technology. These are

now the key factors for economic success, not natural resources” (Library 2000 Report, 1994).

The Library 2000 Report summarizes goals and strategies in “establishing Singapore as an international information hub; preserving and promoting Singapore’s literary heritage; providing for education, knowledge and research; and promoting a well-read and well-informed society” (Library 2000 Report, 1994).

Media, Publishing and the Internet

To fully understand the approach Singapore takes toward monitoring information content and flow, it is essential to look at developments of the printed press, TV and movie industry, and most recently, the Internet. Printed media in Singapore date back to the early 1900s and was reflective of the time in reporting on European and East Asian issues. In 1858, the Singapore Daily Times was founded, and reported about local, social and political themes. Other papers followed—the Strait Times and the Singapore Free Press, and numerous local papers published for ethnic groups. It was not until the Japanese occupation of the Second World War that Singapore newspapers started to increase coverage of specific regional news, rather than communicating European points of view (Chen, 1991, pp. 289-298).

The influence of the government on the printed media is reflected in the events of 1984 and 1985, when several papers ceased publications and others were merged for financial reasons and to “develop common ideals”. Under the Singapore Press Holdings (SPH), formed in 1984 by a merger of the two largest Chinese newspapers and the Singapore Strait Times, (Turnbull, 1989, p. 320) all “editorial writers of SPH newspapers are now required to meet daily to develop common editorial positions” (Sussman, 1991, p. 295). Currently, about “63 foreign news agencies, newspapers, magazines, and broadcasting stations” operate in Singapore, under the careful attention of the government. Any critical position toward Singapore leads to reprisals, as was evident during 1986-88, when daily circulation for major foreign newspapers and magazines was dropped from several thousands to just a few hundred (Sussman, 1991, p. 296).

Broadcast media were first established in 1935 by the British Malay Broadcasting Corporation. After 1965, radio and TV became “increasingly important as dominant government information channels” and functioned as the medium “for building common outlook and a national identity among the people” (Chen, 1991, p. 300). Television programming is largely in English (59%) and Madarin (25%); Malay receive about 9% of program hours, and Tamil a bare 7%. Much of TV programming is imported from the United States, Hong Kong, and Taiwan (nearly 60%), and about 10% of English radio broadcast (Sussman, 1991, pp. 293-294).

The government controlled printed and broadcast news since 1965, out of fear of “social pollution” (Sussman, 1991, p. 294). Emergency regulations of 1948 require the annual renewal of all newspaper licenses, a means to subdue critical voices concerning official policies. In reaction to growing criticism of government policies during the 1970s, the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act of 1974 and the Amendments of 1977, increased government pressure on and control over mass media. In 1986, steps were taken against the foreign press which were suspected of trying to influence Singapore opinion (Turnbull, 1989, p. 320).

Book and periodical publication for the local market is relatively small, and of less importance than newspaper publications or broadcasting. The International Literary Market Place (1996), however, provides addresses of several international publishing houses in Singapore. According to Sussman (1991), Singapore printing is generally cheaper than elsewhere in Asia, and color and graphics reproductions are of high quality. In 1978, over 1,000 titles were published annually with equal shares in English and Chinese. Singapore exported about 39.5 million books at \$86 million in 1979 (Chen, 1991, p. 308), which rose to S\$990 million (US \$470 million) in 1985 (Sussman, 1991, p. 296). The NBDSC supports the publishing of books and magazines for the local market by sponsoring book exhibitions, training courses for writers and illustrators, and awarding prizes (Chen, p. 308).

Film and videos have an important place in the life of Singaporeans. There is a small film industry in Singapore, and most of the movies viewed are imported. All foreign production must be previewed by the Board of Film Censors. Sussman (1991) stated that "the government is seen as having a cautious attitude toward foreign films and other mass media" (p. 295). Films and videos are previewed with "particular sensitivity shown to what is interpreted as pornography (anything that tends to "propagate free love, homosexuality, incest [and] permissiveness"), ethnic incitement, political destabilization, and foreign interference and subversion" (cited by Sussman, p. 294). In 1985 alone, the board viewed 684,000 videotapes, 22,000 industrial, training, and promotional tapes, and 3,762 films (Sussman, 1991, p. 294). International and Singaporean journalists, publishers, editors, and authors have at various times felt the consequences of the restrictive press acts which are recently extended to include the Internet.

Singapore takes pride in being one of the most wired nations in the world. The IT 2000 plan "The Vision of an Intelligent Island" "sees the transformation of Singapore into an intelligent island in 15 years." State of the art technology and a National Information Infrastructure (NII) will practically link all homes and offices in the nation (F.W. Chan, 1993, p. A46, 3.10). Approximately one-fifth of Singapore's 750,000 households are networked and it is the aim of the government to have the entire island wired via broadband fiber-optic cable by

1999 (International Herald Tribune (IHT), 14 October 1996, Cyberscape). Among libraries the use of IT is increasing: In 1991, of 55 surveyed libraries (of over 80 libraries in higher education including the National Library and 375 school libraries), 87% used IT in reference and information services, 27% provided access to local databases, 33% have access to international databases, and CD-ROM is available in 20%. Almost 75% of the surveyed libraries have computerized their library operations, including ordering, cataloging, indexing, and circulation (F.W. Chan, 1993, p. A47, 3.12-3.16).

In striving to become an important information hub, the government faces the increasingly unmanageable task of information control. Peng (1996) stated that according to current thinking technology and censorship are opposing forces. Singapore, while trying to reap the fruits of technological advancement nevertheless attempts to have censorship controls in place. There seems to be an almost agreed-upon understanding that both the government and the people believe that some form of censorship is justified on historical and socio-political grounds (Peng, 1996, Abstract). Murray's (1995) point of view is that the government has acknowledged Internet censorship as an impossible task. It therefore takes the approach that it must build a socially responsible "immune system capable of fighting off the infection" (p. 170).

In order to begin implementing such policies, the government of Singapore defined the Internet as a broadcasting system (rather than

telecommunication or computer service) (Peng, 1996). While Peng speculated over “licensable broadcasting services”, the government has meanwhile approved three companies as Internet access providers, and as of 15 September 1996, these companies were required to “install powerful computers to filter requests for information” (IHT, 14 October 1996, Cyberscape). While reassuring Internet users of non-censorship, the government vigorously promotes its use. One way of monitoring discussions is to require newsgroups to declare their sites and face either civil or criminal charges if laws are broken. “It’s just a way to encourage responsibility and accountability,” says George Yeo, Minister of Information and the Arts (IHT, 14 October 1996, Cyberscape).

The continued discussion over censorship of the Internet will certainly push the Singapore government to clarify its policies. J. Kao, professor at Harvard Business School believes that the discussion about the NII “will cause some cognitive dissonance between freedom of information and social control, it will hasten the evolutionary incremental change toward greater freedom.” He continues that this development “will hasten the debate about access to information, a debate that is already going on” (J. Kao in Sandfort, 1993).

As part of the IT 2000 masterplan, in June of 1996, the government of Singapore began to implement a major strategic initiative—Singapore ONE, the national high-capacity network. In cooperation with 14 multinational corporations, among them Reuters, IBM, Hewlett-Packard, Sun Microsystems,

and Yahoo!, the government develops projects ranging from “on-line educational, training and learning packages, and information services, to entertainment and edutainment packages” (National Computer Board (NCB), Press Release, 30 January 1997). The Singapore government is committed to making Internet access available to all citizens, and to provide the necessary training to utilize this new medium. Reuters, as an international news agency “will be working with the Singapore ONE agencies to identify products and services that will be delivered through the Singapore ONE broadband network” (NCB Press Release, 30 January 1997).

An interview with Yahoo!’s Director of International Business Development, R. Salim, confirmed that NCB did not require self-censorship on Yahoo!’s mirror site which will be established in Singapore as Yahoo!Asia. The service is available to the extended Southeast Asian region, and only users from Singapore are directed through the proxy servers for filtering materials (personal communication, 29 January 1997).

This arrangement with Yahoo! shows a strong commitment of Singapore’s government toward developing access to Internet services, and demonstrates that there is room for negotiations. The general manager of SPH identifies the problem as one of regulatory issues and consumer confidence when he states, “Even though technology may be ready this year, regulatory issues and human confidence concerns mean that it will take longer before transacting on the

Internet becomes the norm rather than the exception that it is today" (Anderson Consulting, 1996, p. 36).

Chapter 5

Myanmar : The Society Isolated From Information

Myanmar (formerly Burma) became independent from Britain and Japan on January 4, 1948 (Facts about Burma, 1983, p. 14). Following a brief democratic period (1948-1962), the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma established a way of governing the country that was characterized by isolation from the world community, and has kept the people of Myanmar at one of the lowest levels of economic and social development. Why did the government of Myanmar so forcefully object to continued influence of the Western community? Why were attempts to consolidate the colonial past with newly gained independence unsuccessful? Silverstein (1980) indicated a reason by stating

the Burmans never accepted the idea that colonial rule was a blessing or an unlimited benefit for their country. Psychologically they resented their conquest by a stronger foreign power, the political rise of the minorities, and their own failure to unite and restore Burman leadership and prestige. (p.35)

The question arises: What effect did the self imposed isolation have on the people, their education, the establishment of library and information systems, and how are the information needs of the population meet? To comprehend the current information system of Myanmar one needs to reflect on her history, the dramatic changes on the social, educational, and administrative level during the

colonial period, and finally to consider attempts to rebuild a Burmese national identity reflecting the needs, wishes, and traditions of the various ethnic groups.

The History of the Union of Myanmar

The Union of Myanmar is part of the region of Southeast Asia. It is bordered by China in the north, Laos and Thailand in the east, by the Gulf of Martaban and the Andaman Sea in the south and southwest, Bangladesh and the Bay of Bengal in the west and India in the northwest. The population totals 47.2 million, growth is estimated at 2.1 percent (The Bottom Line, 7 February 1997), and “is the second largest state of Southeast Asia, with an area of approximately 261,000 square miles (Steinberg, 1980, p. 37). In 1993, the population of 43.1 million was composed of 69% Barmars (Burmans), and Shan, Karen, Mon, Kachin, Rakhine constituted the larger of 135 ethnic groups (Population and national races of Myanmar, 1993; 1995 CIA World Fact Book).

Three distinct ethnic groups—the Mon-Khmer, the Pyu, and the Tibeto-Burmans—first settled as early as 3000 B.C. Their cultures laid the foundation for a flourishing period during the 9th to the 13th century, known as the Pagan dynasty. The decline of this dynasty was followed by internal warfare, and the founding of small independent kingdoms, based on ethnic identity. These struggles lasted through the 19th century, until Britain had established power over Burma in 1885 (Southeast Asia, Myanmar, 1991, pp. 836-839).

The impact of this powerful subjugation over the people of Burma affected all areas of political, economic, cultural, and social life. Traditional forms of education through the monks were destroyed, administrative power was handed to the British governors, the name of the country was changed to Burma, many cities were renamed, and the judicial system was replaced by British courts and law.

Following the colonial period and World War II, Burma attempted to establish a democratic rule under the leadership of U Aung San (till his assassination in 1947), U Ne Win (leader of the country after 1962) and U Nu (Prime Minister of Burma, 1948-1962). The time from 1948-1962 was marked by intensive internal power struggles—within the ruling Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) and the country: The Communist Party of Burma led a civil war to gain control of government, and one ethnic minority, the Karen, tried to establish an independent state in 1949. AFPFL won democratic elections in 1956, but a split in the party allowed a caretaker government under General Ne Win to take control of government affairs.

The last parliamentary election in 1960 brought a win for U Nu, but an already weakened movement was brought to a halt when a military group—under General Ne Win—established power and introduced the “Burmese Way to Socialism” in 1962, a mixture of Socialism and traditional Burmese system with no previous beliefs and experience in socialist ideology. Henceforth, only one

party, the Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) was allowed. During the following period, Burma isolated herself from the world in an attempt to control the civil war, and to integrate various ethnic groups into the Union of Burma.

On the verge of economic collapse, brought about by economic mismanagement by people neither qualified nor prepared for the positions they held, the Burmese government applied for less-developed nation status to be eligible for international financial aid, which was granted by the United Nations in 1987. To receive this status, the Burmese government officially lowered the literacy rate from 78.6% to 18.7%, excluding all forms of monastic education as not relevant for development purposes and thus continued the educational policy of the former colonial power (Cameron, 1992, p.2).

The time from September 1988 to 1990, reflected the struggle between a growing democratic movement under the leadership of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi (U Aung San's daughter) and the government of General Saw Maung. The military seized power in September 1988 after mass protests by the population demanding changes from the ruling Socialist government of General Ne Win to a democratic political system and free market economy. The first general elections since 1962 brought an overwhelming win for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) in 1990. But, the military ignored the result of the election (Becka, 1995, pp. xviii-xix), and established itself as an authoritarian government known as the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC).

The SLORC changed the country's name to Union of Myanmar, introduced low level free market policies, and encouraged trading within Southeast Asia and Asia (Than, 1991, p. 187). It remains to be seen if economic changes and the regional participation—including the proposed ASEAN membership (planned for 1997)—will prompt Myanmar to participate in international discourse and to become a constructive part of the developing region of Southeast Asia.

Economy

Myanmar is and has been an agricultural society, and rice and teak are important products for export. Rich natural resources (minerals, oil, and gem stones) have barely been exploited. Under British governance, the economy became more profit- and export-oriented. The local population could not satisfy the increased demand for labor, and immigrants from India and China were admitted. Under British governance, rules and regulations kept the Burmese people from accumulating wealth or property (Southeast Asia, Myanmar, 1995, p. 840).

After 1962, the military government withdrew from international relations, but maintained carefully planned economic contacts for the export of its primary goods, and eventually achieved a balance of imports and exports during its first decade of governance (Southeast Asia, Myanmar, 1995, p. 834). Politically not aligned, the government attempted to find a way for self-sufficient

production of all necessary commodities, hoping thereby to bolster a sense of national self sufficiency and identity. During that period, the government revoked licenses for foreign business, and discontinued all funding for educational or social projects (e.g. Ford Foundation). Foreigners had to leave the country, including all teaching staff from universities. For years to come no visas were issued, and not until the middle of the 1970s, were even seven day visas granted. Excluded were members of politically sensitive professions, such as journalist and photographers. Banks, factories and all businesses were nationalized after 1962, and Burmese people were allowed only to maintain small shops, producing just enough revenue to maintain their livelihood. As an outward sign of rejecting Western culture, men and women alike were required to wear traditional Burmese cloths—a type of wrap-around skirt, and jeans were especially banned. Since people had little incentive for economic growth—once a business would produce a higher yearly income, it was bound to be nationalized—stagnation, and economic decline followed rapidly. By the mid-1980s, it became clear that the politics of isolation had not produced the expected results, and Burma was on the verge of economic collapse.

Accepting “Less Developed Nation” status did not bring the expected financial support, and therefore the SLORC, “introduced the economic reform known as the ‘open door policy’ in 1988” (Than, 1991, p. 179). Some measures were taken to improve economic conditions and to move from a socialist planned

economy to a controlled free market economy (Than, p. 179). Myanmar engaged in more extensive trade with the countries of ASEAN and Asia, but in 1997 still maintained very little economic interaction with Western countries. The per capita GNP of Myanmar was reported at US \$278 in 1991 (Than, p.180) and rose to US \$890 in 1996 (The Bottom Line, 7 February 1997). Although these figures could indicate improved economic conditions and a higher standard of living, Steinberg (1993) cautions to interpret these changes as a “tactical, not a strategic, shift in the SLORC’s public policies” (p. 175). He states that no significant shift in political power took place after 1988, although a liberalization seemed to have occurred with a change in the SLORC leadership in 1993, which marked “the end of the official endorsement of socialist ideology”, the release of political prisoners, the reopening of universities, and the beginning of the National Convention to “set guidelines for a new constitution.” Nevertheless, as long as most civilian affairs are still in the hands of direct military authority and no timetable is set for the introduction of a multi-party political system, he questions the feasibility of real change (Steinberg, p. 162).

Nationhood - Family - Education

Burma’s history is characterized by attempts to form a unified kingdom, but only under British colonial power was the country unified. With independence the question of national identity as Burmese—the citizens of the

country, and not Bamars (formerly Burmans), the ethnic majority—dominated the discussions about what form of governance should be established, what states or districts should be formed, and what degree of independence would be acceptable for ethnic minorities. According to Fredholm (1993) “the true situation, with virtually all ethnic minorities currently fighting for freedom and the right to their own culture, was never revealed in Burma before the protests of 1988” (pp. 5-6) due to censorship of the military government. Silverstein (1980) also believed that there was little hope for peaceful development in Burma, unless the issue of national identity as either Burmanization or unity in diversity is resolved. A union under the leadership of the Burmans seems unacceptable to the minority groups, and a federation following the examples of the United States of America or the Federal Republic of Germany (proposed by Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD) is not acceptable for the SLORC (Fredholm, 1993; Silverstein, 1980; Brown, 1995, pp. 33 - 65).

In Burmese life, family and education play an important role. According to Spiro (1986), family in the broadest sense includes the families of both parents and the spouse’s family (pp. 56-66), and the village was the next larger unit a person related to and shared responsibility. A headman or headwoman, a hereditary position, attended to the needs of the village, and was the connection to the district government. During British governance, this structure was replaced by the system of appointed governors who had little or no knowledge of

the needs and conditions of village folk. City administration was fully turned over to British officers and Burmese citizens qualified only for low level clerical appointments (Brown, 1994, pp. 41-43). This break up of the traditional government system was one reason for the inability to reestablish governance after independence. For over 150 years, the people of Burma had played a minor role in handling the affairs of the country. Even today, the signs of British administration are visible within the government, in the centralized organization of the country, the extensive bureaucracy and the neglect of the village organization.

Education in Myanmar was and is regarded highly as part of strong Buddhist beliefs. Before colonialization, every village had a monastic school and the monks were in charge of teaching reading and writing skills along with moral and religious instructions. Recitation and memorization were the preferred teaching methods. Cameron (1992) described Burmese monastic education based on Furnival (1948) as an expression of the political and social structure of an indigenous and medieval society

[where] social and political relations were customary, not legal; authority was personal, based on Will and not on Law; and both custom and authority were closely bound up with religion. The social order rested not on impersonal law and individual rights, but on personal authority and customary obligations, and authority and custom derived their sanction not from reason but from religion. (Furnival, 1948; cited by Cameron, p. 68)

The rise of British Missionary Schools in the mid 19th century brought dramatic changes. Schools were no longer attended by all children, the language of instruction was English, and discrimination developed between students in English and monastic schools. Instruction in cultural tradition and in the moral discipline of monastic training lost influence in children's education. Education was not compulsory, and only about 20% of the students attended school beyond the second standard (Cameron, 1992, p. 78).

Despite unstable conditions after 1962, the BSPP launched an extensive literacy campaign from 1964 through 1982, reaching more than 1.5 million people with the help of 400,000 volunteer teachers. Over the course of this program, illiteracy was reduced by approximately 20%, raising it to its highest level of 76.23%. The effectiveness of this program was recognized by UNESCO through its award of the "Mohammed Reza Pahlawi" Prize in 1971 (Facts about Burma, 1983, p. 243). Literacy continued to rise to 78.6% in 1987 (Cameron, 1992, p. 2) and Asiaweek reported 82.0% for 1996 (The Bottom Line, April 19, 1996).

Science education and research experienced a dramatic setback after 1962. While English and Burmese were used for university level instructions through 1964, the government decreed after 1962 that all subjects should be taught in Burmese. The Department of Translation and Publication had the

“responsibility for compiling, translating, and publishing suitable textbooks in Burmese” (Allott, 1981, p. 14). A special terminology committee was established in 1965, to “draw up lists of scientific and technical terms to be used in the translation of textbooks” (Allott, p. 14). By 1977, medicine was the only field that still used English to some extent, although the younger students were not able to fully comprehend instruction in that language.

In the 1980s, English was readopted as a language of instruction and study for university education—when through a personal experience, General Ne Win recognized the importance of English language study. Thirty-five years had produced a vacuum, and few trained teachers were available, as native English speakers were not allowed to return to the universities.

Library and Information Services

Earliest records of written manuscripts are ascribed to the 5th century A.D. (Quigly, 1956, p. 12), although the history of Burmese libraries dates back to the eleventh century, when King Anawratha retrieved Buddhist scriptures (*pitaka*) for the royal library which also housed the archives. Quigly (1956) provided the following quote from Symes (1795) that illustrates the literary wealth of the Burmese kings. “It is not improbable, that his Birman Majesty may possess a more numerous library, than any potentate from the banks of the

Danube, to the borders of China” (Quigly, p. 11). Symes also commented on the thoughtful organization of the collection by subject areas—history, music, medicine, painting, and romance, but most were on divinity—and the “beautiful writing on thin leaves of ivory, the margins of which were ornamented with flowers of gold, neatly executed” (Quigly, 1956, p. 12).

A noteworthy historical event in Burmese library history was the building of the *Kuthadow Pagoda*, or the stone tablet book in Mandalay. This work, initiated by King Mindon, reproduced the Buddhist scriptures (Ludu, 1980, p. 3). During the last British-Burmese war (1885), the Stone Book was heavily damaged, much of the Royal Library destroyed, and parts of the remaining collection were placed in the India Office Library in London.

Recent library development began with the Bernard Free Library in 1883 (Khurshid, 1970, p. 324) which became the National (and legal deposit) Library in 1952 (Bixler, 1970, p. 502). The library is home to a substantial manuscript collection and preservation and conservation are now part of the library's function. Budget and space problems hampered a steady growth, and recently automation began with the establishment of a microcomputer department, consisting of one computer for staff use only. Circulation statistics from 1994 reflect a low use of the library with less than 20,000 users annually. The National Library is administered by the Ministry of Culture.

A second institution of national importance is the Sarpay Beikman Institute (Palace of Literature), a publishing house and library. In 1994, the library's collection held over 37,000 titles in Burmese, and over 11,000 in English (personal communication, April 1996) whereas the World of Learning (1996) reported over 55,000 Burmese and over 17,000 English language items. These numbers demonstrate the unreliability of statistics for Myanmar's libraries, since a low budget and the difficulties in acquiring foreign materials could hardly allow an increase of 6,000 English language items in two years. Circulation and readership are at very low levels. Reference, interlibrary loan services, and copying are generally not available to users. Library technology is limited to a thirty year old microfiche reader obtained through UNESCO.

University libraries fall under the administration of the Ministry of Education, Department of Higher Education, and have received more attention than basic education or public libraries. The Rangoon University Library (renamed to Yangon University by the SLORC) was founded in 1929 and was known as a research and reference resource of high reputation. Heavily damaged during World War II, it reopened as Universities' Central Library (UCL) in 1952 and became the largest library in the country, the leading research and reference library for university staff and students, all institutes of higher learning, and for researchers and scholars. UCL and the Biomedical Library in Yangon have some access to foreign publications, but low budgets and

restricted foreign exchange funds are the main reason for insufficient collection development. Even if acquisition librarians have knowledge of foreign publications, the central trade department is responsible for ordering from overseas, and books are low on the list of priorities. Since 1971, libraries have depended on exchange of publication programs with university and research libraries in several countries. Reference, readers advisory and interlibrary loan services are barely operable. Closed stacks, mainly author/title cataloging for Burmese items, and shelf arrangement by acquisition number make access to the collection difficult. Users depend on the support of individual librarians to have material retrieved from the collection for them (personal communication, May 1995).

In the process of strengthening education and school libraries, the role of the Department of Basic Education Library is to become the educational resource and information center. Teachers Training Colleges libraries (TTC), Teachers Training Schools libraries (TTS) and school libraries are also part of the basic education libraries. With no professional staff, no library buildings, small collections and inadequate budgets, these libraries are barely functional. In 1993, two additional resource centers for the TTCs and TTSs were being built with funding from UNESCO and UNICEF.

All state high schools have small school libraries that provide textbooks for teachers and students. A library committee and a senior teaching staff

member share administrative responsibilities. A committee of librarians formed under the Ministry of Education is preparing a draft for a project to upgrade and strengthen school libraries with support from UNESCO and UNICEF. Through these enhanced library services, teachers and library committee members hope to improve reading abilities and reading habits of students.

Special libraries have a privileged status in Myanmar as is apparent from an article on *Scientific and technical libraries* (Encyclopedia for Library and Information Science, 1979, vol. 27, pp. 48-49). The library of the Myanmar Scientific and Technological Research Department and the Central Biomedical Library (CBL) are more up-to-date than other academic libraries. Partly automated, the CBL provides access to Medline and other CD-ROM products. The Scientific and Technological Research Library uses in-house developed software for automation. An online catalog is available to librarians, but cannot be accessed by the public owing to lack of terminals.

Statistics that would allow comparison over years or between types of libraries are scarce. The statistics in the 1996 World of Learning deviate from numbers otherwise obtained and reflect the difficulties of evaluating library collections in Myanmar. It is not clear what agencies provided information, when it had been collected, or how items were counted (issues, series, monographic series, etc.). Facts about Burma (1983) briefly mentions the National Library, the UCL, and Sarpay Beikman People's Library (p. 249) as the best known

libraries but without further information concerning mission, administration, or development plans for these libraries. The problem of reporting about the library system is reflected in a recent publication by Carpenter (1995) where information is summarized in four lines, stating that Myanmar has two (not one) National Libraries "with a combined strength of 100,000 volumes, with about one-third in English. The strength of the holdings lies predominantly in primary source material on colonial Burma" (p. 35). This information does not correlate with what is reported in the 1996 World of Learning. It is also interesting to note that Myanmar, while trying to develop national identity in its own cultures, relies on library holdings of the colonial past.

In 1991, the government began to implement plans establishing more than 300 libraries in 50 districts under the Department of Information and Public Relations, a division of the Ministry of Information. The purpose of these information centers is to acquaint the public even in remote areas with the plans, politics and activities of the government, and to provide access to literature. Audio-visual equipment (TV, VCR and radios) will be installed in all centers. Senior Information Officers have the administrative responsibility for the centers within their region, although it is not clear whether these would be professional librarians (personal communication, April 1996).

Library education has not received much attention. Before 1962, librarians were trained abroad, but achieved little in their home country due to

lack of basic support during the post war period. In 1971, a two year seminar granting a diploma in Library Science was established at Rangoon University. Overseas library education is only available through grants provided by invitation from foreign library schools, and candidates for these scholarships are selected through a test administered by the Ministry of Education. Few librarians have had the opportunity to receive a MLS in the United States, Australia, or the United Kingdom, or to participate in shorter training programs in Singapore or India. Foreign-trained librarians receive the same salary as librarians graduating from the University of Yangon program, and thus there is no professional incentive to apply for overseas training.

Although there are reports of a professional library association that existed from 1952-1958, this organization had no impact on library development (Khurshid, 1970, p. 334). A new Myanmar Library Association (MLA) was founded in 1992, following the advice of IFLA. The association has 300 members statewide, of which 150 are professional librarians (1996). No contact with other library associations has been established, and only the National Library is a member of IFLA. The British Ambassador in Yangon provided funds for the purchase of books and periodicals for MLA, and thus founded the newest library with the most current material available. In addition, IFLA offered support for the association as soon as specific proposals were presented (Bowden, 1993, p. 22).

Media, Publishing, and the Internet

Newspaper publications and the television and radio broadcast station were nationalized in 1962, and all publications fell under the auspices of the Press Scrutiny Office. International news agencies (Reuters, Associated Press, United Press, BBC) and their correspondents were forced to leave the country, unless they agreed to report news provided by the government. Most agencies accepted these conditions and stayed hoping to provide a minimum of information (Burma 1992, 1992, p. 19). Publications are evaluated for content, based on censorship guidelines from 1975 issued by the Printers' and Publishers' Central Registration Board.

- . . . political, economic, and religious manuscripts, and novels, journals, and magazines. . . must be scrutinized to see whether or not they contain:
1. anything detrimental to the Burmese Socialist Program;
 2. anything detrimental to the ideology of the State;
 3. anything detrimental to the socialist economy;
 4. anything which might be harmful to national solidarity and unity;
 5. anything which might be harmful to security, the rule of law, peace, and the public order;
 6. any incorrect ideas and opinions which do not accord with the times;
 7. any descriptions which, though factually correct, are unsuitable because of the time or the circumstance of their writing;
 8. any obscene (pornographic) writing
 9. any writing which would encourage crimes and unnatural cruelty and violence;
 10. any criticism of a non-constructive type of the work of government departments;
 11. any libel or slander of any individual. (Allott, 1981, p. 29, Appendix A)

The *CIA World Factbook* (1995) reported that Myanmar has only two AM and one FM stations. TV broadcasting began in 1979 with a single channel

(Facts about Burma, 1983, p. 250)—about forty years after the first TV was available in western countries—covering news, sports and special events. Allott (1990) reported that in 1988 only one channel was broadcasting three or four hours a night, a mid-day news bulletin, and Burmese feature films on Sundays. (p. 17). In 1994, programming was expanded, and longer hours were available along with satellite TV receiving BBC broadcasting and Indian TV. After year-long negotiations with the government, the first amateur radio station was opened in Yangon in 1995, and two clubs now operate the station (Kennamer, 1996, pp. 28-31). Short-wave radio broadcasts in the Burmese language from BBC, Voice of America (VOA), and Voice of India are well received in Myanmar. A few months ago, Burmese dissidents in Norway were granted permission by the German government to broadcast via Germany, despite protests from the Myanmar embassy in Bonn (personal communication, February 1997). Movies and videos reflective of western culture are banned, but videos are popular and circulate among the population, and therefore the people are exposed to content that “may well be different from what the Government would like” (Allott, 1990, p. 17).

Radio broadcasts and newspapers are the primary source of information for the citizen of Myanmar. Facts about Burma (1983) reported the combined circulation for four Burmese language newspapers at around 450,000 (daily) and two English language papers at around 40,000 in 1982 for a population of

approximately 35 million (Tint, 1991, p. 21). After 1988, only one English and one Burmese language newspaper (The Working People's Daily) remained in print.

The latest edition of the CIA World Factbook (1995) makes no mention of printed media. Steinberg (1993) noted that the "foreign press have been given some access to the country, especially since the latter half of 1992, because the government has recognized its poor international reputation and has complained about inaccurate reporting, based on rumours" (p. 167). According to Allott (1990), the Burmese press provided some detail on international events, but not on what was really happening in their country. Only during a short period from August 28 to September 20, 1988 did the Burmese media experience the beginning of freedom of the press. Numerous newspapers and pamphlets appeared on the scene, and official newspapers were boycotted for three days in order to support the right to report freely about events concerning the country. Since most of the printing activity was concentrated in Yangon, the population of other cities and the rural area still depended on radio broadcasts. This short period of press freedom came to sudden halt when the SLORC took over, and censorship was implemented more vigorously than before. What can be noted as a result of this movement for freedom of the press, is a change in the

Burmese government's attitude to handling information and to foreign media . . . ; they are more careful about accuracy and truthfulness; they have realised that they are under observation by the world outside and that they can no longer cover up all their misdeeds. They are allowing in a

few selected foreign journalists and giving press conferences . . . But for the Burmese public it is back to the old diet, but worse. . . . And for editors and producers of monthly magazines life has been made even more difficult. (Allott, 1990, p. 24)

Magazines (currently about 20-30) are published by interest groups (religious, cultural) but are subject to the same review and editorial process as book publications. No news magazines were published since September 1988, and those on the market “feature stories, cartoons, poems, news of film stars, pop stars, sport stars, general features of a non-political (Reader’s Digest) type” (Allott, 1990, p. 17). The Press Scrutiny Office (PSO) also determines the number of copies to be printed and makes the appropriate allotment of paper. All book publications except for politics, economics and religion were printed before submission to the PSO and all changes were to be implemented at the cost of the publisher. Printed material could not be distributed until clearance was received from the PSO. According to Allott (1981), this process was used to avoid the impression of a total censorship and it assures a high degree of self-censorship. Because of the high cost of printing and the shortage of paper, this procedure was changed in 1977, and from now on all manuscripts had to be submitted in twenty typewritten copies before printing (Allott, pp. 23-24).

Allott (1994) described this method in her book *Inked over, ripped out*, a publication offering voice to censored Burmese writers. Paper is in short supply, and according to Bixler (1970, p. 505) had to be imported during the early 1960’s

and into the 1970's (Allott, 1981, p. 24). An efficient and prosperous development of the printing and publishing industry is hampered by these conditions. The World of Learning (1996) lists only nine publishing houses for Myanmar (p. 365), and there is no indication of the presence of major international agencies. The change of economic policies in 1993 brought a moderate increase of bookstores, and the presence of agents of international publishers has been noted (personal communication, May 1996).

With the development of the Internet and the World Wide Web, Myanmar needed to reconsider her policies toward information access and retrieval. On 20 September 1996, the first Computer Science Development Law was enacted, defining computer, the use of computer, and the punishment for not complying with the law (SLORC, 1996). The objectives are stated in Chapter II, paragraph 3 "(a) to contribute towards the emergence of a modern developed State through computer science" and "(f) to supervise the import and export of computer software or information". The Myanmar Computer Science Development Council was formed to supervise all activities of computer science development and operates under the Department of Higher Education.

Chapter IV describes the duties and powers of the Council:

- (a) laying down the policy and giving guidance for the development of computer science in the State to keep abreast with the times;
- (b) laying down the policy with respect to the systematic dissemination of utilization of computer science in the State;
- (c) laying down the policy, giving guidance and controlling with respect to computer network;

- (d) making arrangements for the youth, especially students to get the opportunity of studying basic computer science;
- (e) laying down the policy, giving guidance and controlling with respect to information technology;
- (f) supervising and giving guidance with respect to activities of the federation and computer-related associations formed under this Law;
- (g) prescribing the types of computer software and information which are not permitted to be imported or exported;
- (h) laying down measures to cause extensive development in the utilization of computer science in the respective fields of work in the State;
- (i) forming necessary working committees and bodies related to computer science and assigning duties thereto;
- (j) abolishing any computer association formed or existing not in confirming [sic] with the provisions of this law or any computer association not functioning in conformity with the provisions of this Law or not in conformity with the constitution of the relevant association;
- (k) laying down and carrying out measures necessary for the attainment of the objectives of this Law. (SLORC, 1996, chap. IV)

The import, export or possession of a computer are not prohibited, but the primary target of this law is the ability to use a computer for the transmission of data (networking, modem connections). The carrying out of any act using computer networks or any information technology that (a) “undermines State Security, prevalence of law and order and community peace and tranquillity, national unity, State economy or national culture; (b) the obtaining, sending, and distributing of information of State secret relevant to State security, prevalence of law and order and community peace and tranquillity, national unity, State economy or national culture” (SLORC, 1996, chap. X) is punishable

by law with imprisonment for a minimum of seven to a maximum of fifteen years.

The government of Myanmar is thus attempting from the onset to establish control over this developing medium. In this early stage of computer development in Myanmar, it adapts quickly to controlling networking and data transmission. In addition, computerization is slow to develop due to the following reasons: lack of electricity to operate computers, lack of telephone connections or cabling to connect to an online system, and lack of personal income to apply for a telephone line and the purchase of computer hardware and software. Myanmar's infrastructure is far from providing satisfactory conditions for implementing extensive computer networks. This allows the government to pass laws and regulations controlling all aspects of networking, rather than focusing solely on content.

A final aspect of isolation from information is experienced in the difficulties in obtaining materials about Myanmar. Tuchrello (1988) pointed out that scholars from the United States have—with few exceptions—not been able to conduct first-hand research in Myanmar. He criticized the inaccessibility of information about Myanmar as a result of sporadic collection development by US libraries, leaving this subject mostly in the hands of a few dedicated private collectors. In his review of Burmese collections in libraries around the world, Tuchrello (1988) noted that universities in the (former) Soviet Union and the

Eastern European states have valuable collections, although largely inaccessible to US scholars due to language problems and due to the fact that these publications are often held in departments and not included in national bibliographies (p.131).

He pointed out that even English language publications are not easily obtained, as they are too often part of special collections. And, the study of Burma has never played an important role in South-East Asian studies programs at US universities. Two events, the International Conference on Burma Studies by the Woodrow Wilson Center in 1986 which was followed by the publication of a comprehensive Burma bibliography, and the inauguration of the Center for Burma Studies at Northern Illinois University (NIU) in 1987 are exceptions to an otherwise dormant field. These items resulted from a temporary interest in Southeast Asian research, funded partly through the Luce Foundation, that recognized the growing importance of this region for the US, and the current standstill in research (Luce Foundation, 1987, pp. 29-30).

Lack of interest by the research community created this vacuum in information flow, and did not supply necessary background information for comprehensive analysis of current conditions in Myanmar. The lack of information further leads to a general misinterpretation of events in Myanmar and of the conditions of the people and the country, since there are few reliable facts available that support systematic analysis and informed opinion. In recent

years, and with the use of the Internet, information on current conditions is becoming more available. This information is too often filtered through the perception of political groups and dissidents who are more concerned with getting their views across rather than providing sufficient information for the reader to arrive at an informed opinion (e.g., BurmaNet, Free Burma).

Chapter 6

Summary and Conclusion

This investigation set out to look at information systems in two countries that do not enjoy the freedom of press and right of access to information as defined in the ALA Library Bill of Rights (1980). It further aimed at developing an understanding of causes and conditions that may lead a society to not embrace this alleged universal right or make it part of its constitution. Bok (1982) argues that restricting information flow is not a characteristic of non-democratic nations, but is practiced in various forms in all nations; in governments, businesses, and personal relations some type of secrecy is necessary, unavoidable, and protective in nature. An attempt was made to analyze historical, political, economic, and socio-cultural conditions of Singapore and Myanmar in order to gain insight into the conditions that have led to the practice of restricting and monitoring access to information by their governments.

The methodology applied was twofold: gathering data from the literature, and an analysis based on qualitative assumptions. This research incorporates Danton's five elements of comparative analysis and Asheim's emphasis on a two way flow of ideas between cultures. Wherever possible, the "emic," or insider, viewpoint was identified and explored.

This emphasis on cultural context and values provides insights into the goals and value systems of the cultures being studied, but it also creates analytic and moral ambiguities and challenges for western value systems in general, and for librarians' ideals in particular. (R. Hafter, personal communication, March 1997)

The review of literature exposed two facts: information about the closed society of Myanmar is not easily available, is scattered throughout multiple disciplines, and has not been collected systematically over periods of time (Tuchrello, 1988). On the other hand, Singapore has emphasized the flow and availability of information as a result of economic development, and has drawn the attention of western researchers and the media. While there are not enough data available to generalize, it can be inferred that societies that practice intense degrees of isolation are also isolated by not stimulating sufficient research interest into their conditions, and therefore the lack of information leads in turn to rather uninformed and superficial interpretations of the conditions of such a state.

Similarities

Singapore and Myanmar show similarities in that both countries have undergone an extended period of colonialism which left them unprepared for independence and in a state of economic, political and social disarray. Following the occupation by the Japanese army during World War II, both countries struggled to gain independence. In the case of Singapore an attempt was made

to form an alliance with Malaysia which failed in 1965, and only then did the Singapore government accept the challenge to form a nation. Myanmar's struggle to establish a form of democracy lasted through 1962, before the military took over in the midst of political instability and economic troubles. Both countries experienced a period of instability that lasted nearly 15-18 years before one person emerged to take charge of the country (Lee Kwan Yee in Singapore, General Ne Win in Myanmar) and established a lasting personal leadership.

Culturally, both countries are based on similar traditional Asian values that place the rights and personal development of an individual within the needs of family and society. Naisbitt (1996) noted, "The family system, instead of government, provides social, economic and emotional support to the individual as well as the family itself. Self-reliance and personal responsibility are nurtured within the family" (p. 83). At independence, both countries were composed of a mixture of nationalities: in Singapore Chinese, Malaysians, and Indians were still associated with their homeland rather than being part of Singapore, and in Myanmar ethnic groups (the Karen) were striving for independence from United British Burma, while others attempted to build a federation (Shans), and still others were bound to their ancestry in China and India (immigrant workers) and not part of Burma. The task at hand for both

countries was to instill national pride in their people and to form a strong union that could stand up to any future external threats.

Through reviewing the literature it became apparent that both countries began by implementing extensive educational reforms, making literacy of their population a foremost aim of the post-War period. Both countries improved literacy rate and school attendance, and developed a more equitable school system that would address the needs of ethnic minorities in terms of language teaching, reading material available, and conveying traditional values. Singapore's government recognized the value of education, literacy, and technology as the main assets of the population. The Library 2000 Report (1994) report emphasizes that "information is the currency of the future. Knowledge is power".

Singapore and Myanmar have developed strong ties to countries in Southeast Asia. ASEAN, as the strongest association of Southeast Asian Nations, provides a forum for the exchange of ideas, implementing trade and economic agreements, and focusing on issues relevant to the region. It is also a growing political force that allows members and associate countries to challenge European and American standards and values, an opportunity that had not existed previously. In this context, Naisbitt (1996) pointed to the need of Asian countries to redefine themselves and to define what democracy, civil rights and liberty means to them (pp. 77-78). This definition will also include what level of

control or restriction to access of information is accepted or tolerated by the population.

Differences

The main differences between Singapore and Myanmar stem from the way each country dealt with the heritage of the colonial times. Singapore incorporated infrastructure, business ventures and contacts established during British governance. With no natural resources on the island, the Singapore government began a policy of non-interference in other countries, keeping all doors open for political and business association. High economic, social and moral standards were implemented for the population, and achievement in all areas of societal life became the overall slogan, underlining nation building and establishing of a unique cultural profile. The government emphasized traditional community standards rather than individual rights and successfully motivated the population with the idea that joined efforts would lead Singapore to achieve the same high economic standards as western countries.

Singapore's improved access to information especially attracted international business to the city-state. As part of implementing the IT 2000 Masterplan, the comprehensive Singapore One Network is being created for use by government agencies, businesses and the public. In a cooperative activity with multinational companies that was announced in January 1997, information

services are being developed based on Internet and Web applications utilizing the products and expertise of businesses like Sun Microsystems, Reuters, Hewlett Packard, Yahoo!, Microsoft, Anderson Consulting and others. Business leaders have long expressed their interest in Singapore as a location of choice based on “a world-class business infrastructure, a workforce that ranks among the best in the world, a stable and progressive government, and most importantly, a booming economy that has a crucial role in the overall growth of the Asia Pacific” (Information Technology 2000, n.d., p. 13).

Singapore incorporates the use of the Internet and the World Wide Web into developing a new form of government “like a virtual government that never sleeps” (IT impact, 1996, p. 1). She is committed not only to providing information via the Internet but also to enhancing services that can be performed through Internet communication. In addition, a developing Intranet allows for speedy data access among various government agencies. The result should be a more efficient handling of citizens’ applications and interaction with the government. It is envisioned that “Singaporeans will be able to tap into a vast well of electronically-stored information and services which they can use to their best ends—to improve their business, to make their work easier and to enhance their personal and social lives” (Transforming Singapore, 1996, p. 1).

Despite this innovative and challenging outlook, the government has yet to accept that informed citizens may wish to speak for themselves, and be

unrestrained in their discussion and exchange of ideas. The use of proxy servers for filtering internet content, the continued application of media control, censorship of books, films, and video, are still a sign of the “old Singapore”, a nation that needed to protect itself from western influences in order to form a strong and dependable nation. Having achieved this, the question must be asked: Does Singapore really need restrictions on information flow? While George Yeo, Minister of Information and the Arts explained that Singapore laws apply to Internet communication as they do to other media, the Minister of Health, BG Yeo admitted that it is impossible to censor all undesirable material but “what we can do is keep our front yard and back yard relatively clean, by sweeping it every day” (Strait Times, March 6, 1996).

As was pointed out in chapter four, Singapore does not crack down on individual users stumbling over Web sites or Internet communications of questionable content, rather, policies are meant to counteract infringement on the moral and social standards of the population. Any evaluation of information policies in Singapore needs to account for these cultural differences and Bengé (1979) stressed this point stating “I am more particularly concerned with the way that people regard changes in their own culture than with interpretations from outside” (p. 121). These differences in cultural interpretation are obvious in Gibson’s (1993) view of Singapore expressed in *Disneyland with the death penalty* and contrasted to the view of Singaporeans themselves expressed in a

letter to the editors of *Wired* indicating that Singaporeans “are perfectly content to devote their whole lives to the pursuit of wealth, power, and material happiness” (Ramachandra, 1994, §1).

In contrast, Myanmar gradually turned toward nationalistic politics, and tried to reach economic and political stability from within. With the beginning of the socialist era in 1962 all foreign “elements” were systematically removed from the country (people, clothing, food, music, language). With this approach, the BSPP, not only lost all financial support from overseas, but an insurmountable gap became apparent in terms of the availability of trained administrators, educators, and business people. Burmese people had been removed from the responsibilities of governing their own country for over a century, traditional forms of governance had been replaced by the British colonial structure, educated Burmese citizens left the country, and the education of the largely rural population had been neglected. The rejection of English in teaching and administration further isolated Burma from participating or understanding developments in the sciences, international politics, and regional affairs. Generations of citizens grew up (including the current leaders of Myanmar) limited by language and unable to look beyond the scope of their local or national affairs.

Nationalization of personal property and devaluation of the currency in an already war-torn country dropped living standards for the population a low

level, and there was no incentive to work actively on rebuilding the country as accumulation of personal property was prohibited. Inasmuch as the BSPP could not succeed in building a strong economy, they also failed in uniting the multitude of ethnic groups as one nation on their terms. Instead, minorities continue to fight for their independence from a central Burmese government or for building a federation, based on agreements reached with the democratic government of the era of 1948 through 1962. Although, as Allott (1990) noted, the people of Myanmar were always exposed to news and information from abroad, this knowledge did not affect their ability to improve or change their own condition. Domestic information was scarce and streamlined by the BSPP.

The current approach to information is characterized by the attempt of the government to keep control over media, book publishing, and networked data transmission. Library development is hampered by shortage of funds, restrictions in access to and purchase of foreign publications, and the isolation of librarians from other professional organizations. Libraries are under the jurisdiction of various ministries, and only cooperation or exchange among same level libraries are possible. Extended services as known in American libraries are not available, and material is largely outdated, kept in closed stacks and hard to obtain.

Since the change in economic policies after 1990, there seems to be an increased interest in the development of libraries demonstrated through the

establishment of preservation and conservation departments, or the beginning of library automation. New libraries or information centers are being planned and are thought to improve the population's understanding and acceptance of government policies.

Electronic access to information has prompted the government to regulate its use and application through the Computer Science Development Law. The SLORC is well positioned to become a driving force in Internet regulations, as the low degree of networking capability in Myanmar allows it to include all parts—computer hardware and software, telecommunication, and content—in evaluation. For example, Myanmar requires an application to operate a networked computer or a modem for data transmission, and non-compliance is punishable with imprisonment. As the government of Myanmar shows increased interest in attracting international investors to the country to power up her ailing economy, there are no signs of opening the country to other forms of international exchange. Currently, the tourist industry is being developed but continued restrictions on the movement of visitors apply.

It has been recognized in the literature that the government of Myanmar is trying to improve its image in the media (Allott, 1990; Steinberg, 1993). Some journalists were allowed to return to Myanmar reporting occasionally on the country, and during past years there have been infrequent news broadcast on BBC and United States channels. Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go

before free access to information about Myanmar will be available to the people of Myanmar and to the world and there is no indication by the government that it values free access to information.

Analysis of Similarities and Differences

In comparing both countries, it can be noted that Singapore succeeded through extensive educational programs in nation-building and her emphasis on respecting people of different ethnic backgrounds, color, or race, while Myanmar to this day is struggling to solve the question of “unity in diversity”, or establishing leadership of the Burman majority over other ethnic groups. (Fredholm, 1993; Silverstein, 1980). Singapore has become a multinational, multicultural, multilingual society that is informed about developments in the western world, whereas Myanmar has isolated herself for the sake of nation-building. Because of this total withdrawal much of the necessary skills to develop the country politically, administratively and economically has been lost, and the consequences are visible in low standards of living and internal unrest.

The isolation of Myanmar and the restrictions in the flow of information in Singapore have affected the gathering of data and information about both countries. Several authors (Baker, 1995; Carter, 1994; Sussman & Lent, 1991; Sussman, 1991; Tuchrello, 1988) addressed issues resulting from the lack of information about these countries. Publications about both countries have not

been readily accessible, nor was there extensive or lasting research interest in these countries. Consequently, knowledge about and the basis for interpretation of events that occur in these countries has been rather sparse, and comprehensive analysis was not possible. Therefore, it can reasonably be concluded that information poverty or isolation from information affects also western countries in that there is not enough access to information.

Since about 1987/88, the media and researchers have shown renewed interest in both countries but for different reasons. Numerous publications (newspaper and magazine articles, reports, books) about Singapore discuss how she was able to achieve the current high economic standards. In addition, Singapore's ambitious plans for implementing information technology—although censorship laws are still in place—began to draw attention and to raise questions whether the government of Singapore will be able to continue the politics of restricting and monitoring information. Myanmar, on the other hand, received attention during a brief period from 1988-1990 when changes seemed inevitable, and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi (leader of the NDL) was recognized through the award of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991. These events demonstrated that an active interest from the world community has the power and strength to break through the silence that had surrounded this country for decades. But they also proved that lack of information about previous developments in

Myanmar made it even more difficult to analyze, explain and comprehend such current events and place them in relevant context.

Baker (1995) specifically examined the much larger issue of Internet regulation in a particular country and its impact on information worldwide. As publishers and broadcasters are bound to the regulations set forth in, for instance, Singapore, they also cannot publish criticism about these countries in their associated publications since this would have consequences on their ability to do business there. He concluded that censorship in restricted countries leads to self-censorship by the media, journalists, and writers, in order to keep “one foot in the door”. This point of view is also expressed in *Burma 1992*, published by the magazine *Du* (November, 1992).

Baker (1995) made clear that exercising self-censorship extends far beyond the limits of a country and will finally cut off information for a world-wide audience. Looking at the Internet as a seamless whole, he asked the question, “what will prevent such censorship from limiting our own access to information?”(Baker, §19). And he expressed concern with the fact, that neither the United States government, nor business or civil liberties groups even began asking these questions.

The NWICO will have to reflect a balance between the world-wide need for information and the right to privacy of individuals and countries. Bok (1982) defined privacy “as the condition of being protected from unwanted access by

others—either physical access, personal information, or attention. Claims to privacy are claims to control access to what one takes—however grandiosely—to be one’s personal domain” (p. 10). The dynamics and tensions of privacy versus access to information are apparent in the advocacy of the ALA for intellectual freedom and its simultaneous support for legislation for the protection of privacy. The 1966 Freedom of Information Act with the 1974 amendments is a further expression of the attempt to create a balance between government secrecy and the citizens’ right to information (Bok, 1982, p. 178).

Every government, every administration, every business, university, and research institution reserves the right to secrecy to keep their plans and how they will implement them concealed. Bok (1982) does not see a difference in concealment and secrecy in any society, but concentrates in her analysis on whether secrecy and its boundaries are talked about, or whether secrecy itself has become secret and a means to exercise power (p. 176). Sandfort (1993) agrees that “every government, every society, has limited freedom—to some degree—in the hopes of increasing prosperity.” She also asserts that, “Where that line is drawn may be nothing more than an arbitrary cultural artifact” (Sandfort, §37). Her interpretation of cultural implications as “arbitrary artifacts” hints at the difficulties of coming to terms with an impression Asheim (1966) described as culture shock for librarians.

But when we are in a society that has schools, colleges, and universities, that publishes books and boasts bookstores, that builds libraries and

trains librarians, we find it very difficult to accept the fact that it may nevertheless have an entirely different kind of expectation about its books, its schools, and its libraries. (p. 5)

In the context of the present analysis it should be understood that the implementation of guidelines regulating the flow of information within a country or outside the boundaries of a country, and agreements between countries are culturally based and a reflection of the tension between the right to information and the need for privacy and secrecy. One can only agree with Bok (1982) when she states, "Just as publicity is not always beneficial, so government secrecy is not always an evil"(p. 174). And she continued, "the differences arise, rather, in actual practice, and in deciding how much secrecy the arguments justify. Regardless of the prevailing laws, tension is incessant in most societies over the legitimacy and extent of government secrecy" (p. 174).

The way a country deals with information control and censorship is an expression of its economic, political, social and cultural development. It cannot simply be judged and evaluated based on the assumptions upheld in another country. These Asian countries have through the period of regaining independence developed their own values, and no longer necessarily uphold what comes from the West as the ultimate achievement or truth. Naisbitt (1996) summarized a sentiment expressed in Asia, "it is widely believed that the West is losing moral standing internationally. . . . Given this perception, Asians are

increasingly irritated by the West's lecturing and hectoring them about freedom and human rights" (p. 11).

This analysis has attempted to show that the evaluation of library and information services in countries of the developing world should not be solely based on concepts, values, and standards applicable to western nations. The examples of Singapore and Myanmar showed that the condition of each country is unique, and although there are similarities, there must be awareness and understanding of their differences. It became apparent that with the strengthening of the Southeast Asian region, these countries turn toward each other for support, exchange of ideas (ASEAN, CONSAL, and library specific applications), and discussion of future developments. Among them, Singapore is taking a lead and for that is being studied by her neighboring countries, rather than turning to the West and striving for ideals established elsewhere.

The comparative perspective provides understanding of how and why these two Asian nations eschewed the western emphasis on free access to information and the linked belief in individual liberties. Can this understanding justify a policy of accommodation and/or capitulation to governments that seek to establish strong controls over individual rights? If so, should there be limitations on this willingness to accept definitions of democracy and of human rights that differ from, or even contradict, western value systems? (R. Hafter, personal communication, March 1997). What consequences does this discussion have on

the expectations of internet users especially in schools and libraries in western countries?

Select literature of library and information science has been reflective of this tendency through publications such as Wijasuriya's *The barefoot librarian* (1975), Anuar's *Issues in Southeast Asian librarianship* (1985), Bowden's article in *Focus on international and comparative librarianship* (1993), publications of CONSAL, Olden's and Wise's (1993) *Information and libraries in the developing world* and most recently Carpenter's (1995) evaluation of *Libraries and information in East Asia*.

Although an attempt was made to present current library and information developments and to update earlier publications (Anuar, 1982; Bixler, 1970; Collings, 1971) various problems could not be discussed to their full extent. Questions remain concerning the leadership of Singapore as an information hub in Southeast Asia and the applicability of the "Singapore experience" to other countries of the region. What could China, Malaysia, or Myanmar, for example, learn from Singapore's approach to information technology, restrictions to information access, and the construction of an information system that encompasses easily accessible community libraries, information kiosks, internet access, and televuew?

In the case of both Singapore and Myanmar it became clear that their governments decide to varying degrees what information is useful and "suitable"

for the people. How do these actions relate to the actual need for information of the population? Where have these been met and in what areas have people been left without access to information that would support them in making informed decisions for themselves? Studies of library users in the United States indicate a great discrepancy regarding what information is needed, how this information is sought, and what is deemed to be a sufficient answer to an query. Similar studies in Southeast Asian countries would certainly shed light on information needs, how they are met and would answer the question if controlled information systems in fact meet the need of the population.

A final theme that has reoccurred throughout is: How will societies that practice some form of information control deal with electronic data transmission? Censorship of the Internet has been a topic of growing interest but requires much more informed investigation, analysis, and evaluation before questions like Can information on the Internet be free will be answered. Baker (1995) has already addressed the issue that lies at the center of Internet censorship: What effects does information control in one country have on the right to free access of information in another?

How will this information resource, which developed based on a western democratic ideal of free and unregulated communication and information, be altered as its focus changes to global economic development and it seeks to incorporate governments that are characterized by effective policies of information isolation and control? Will the changes in the system combine to reduce western liberties and enhance the economic influence of totalitarian governments? (R. Hafter, 1997, personal notes)

This comparative study does indicate some possible correlation between information isolation and areas of national development. Might it be possible to create an information index which over time, would act as a surrogate for growth or decline in national development? It is left to future investigations to determine if information systems based on western democratic ideals can fully develop in countries that tend to control or restrict information. This study does indicate that there might be tangible benefits in promoting other studies of information isolation.

The library profession with its national and international associations has much to contribute to this discussion, and needs to re-assess its assumptions and guidelines in the light of growing globalization of information. It can only be hoped that the challenges will be accepted, and that access to electronic information may contribute to a more equitable New World Communication and Information Order.

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