

PAUL BIXLER

## The Academic Library World— Not So Round

*Drawing upon data gathered for an earlier paper by Carol Wall, the author proposes that the holdings of American academic libraries reflect the cultural bias of the United States, with its general orientation to Europe, primarily Western Europe. The data show gross concern for Asia especially and for the developing countries.*

CAROL WALL has accomplished a considerable service in pointing up the serious inadequacy in the holdings of foreign serials in American academic libraries.<sup>1</sup> To summarize her conclusions all too briefly, she finds that library serial holdings tend "to represent major world powers, and generally pro-Western powers, at the expense of neutrals and lesser Communist nations"; that for "libraries with budgets under \$100,000, foreign news coverage is very limited"; and that the American student finds it difficult to locate a balanced library diet in current news coverage. From the tables presented and from other evidence, one could propose that the conclusions may go further than that.

For one thing, it would appear that American bias is more cultural than political. To put it bluntly, American society has long been European-oriented; Europe was where our culture was born, and that is where we head when we put out to sea. As a particularly glaring example of contrast, Asia is a "foreign" culture to us; it has always seemed to the Western-cultured to be the inscrutable

<sup>1</sup> Carol Wall, "Foreign Press and Academic Libraries," *CRL*, XXIX (May 1968), 213-16.

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East, and we have been quite willing to leave it that way.<sup>2</sup>

The problem of dislocation of interest, of course, runs deeper than serial representation in American libraries—though we like to think that our libraries are on the frontiers of knowledge. In the Western world of learning and information, our bias is major—residing in a lack of adequate regard first for Asian, then for Latin American and African peoples and their affairs.

For representativeness of the world press, Miss Wall selected *Atlas*, a monthly magazine of news and comment which reprints (translating when necessary) editorials, short features, and news articles from foreign serials. Examining seventeen issues, every third one from 1961 to 1965, she compiled a list of ninety-three serials, taking every one mentioned two or more times in separate articles. It is doubtful that by any other method she could have found a list half as representative. Yet note the result. In

<sup>2</sup> The issue is not a new one. When the *Washington Post* published a letter of mine some months ago about American innocence and ignorance of Asian affairs, I received from Mortimer Graves, for many years administrative secretary of the American Council of Learned Societies, a note accompanied by a brochure of his written more than twenty years ago making a similar point in greater detail. The readability gap on Asia closes with less than all deliberate speed.

the total of daily and weekly news serials from abroad the breakdown of origin by areas is as follows:

Western Europe . . . . .	52
Russia and Eastern Europe . . . . .	12
Africa, North and South . . . . .	7
Near East (Israel and Lebanon) . . . . .	2
Latin America . . . . .	7
Australia and New Zealand . . . . .	3
Asia . . . . .	10
	93

The dominance of Western Europe in the *Atlas* list is apparent. Yet among other regions Eastern Europe, including Russia, does not come off so badly either—particularly if one considers language problems and the fact that, for libraries at least, access to the *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* (not, of course, included in the list) is a major American channel for news from Russia.

The major discrepancy which stares at one from this tabulation is the general lack of representation from the underdeveloped areas: nine serials from Africa and the Near East, seven from Latin America (six of these from Brazil), and ten from all of Asia.

Of these the most glaring figures are those for Asia: ten serials only for an area representing more than half the world's population and geographically as much as a third of its land mass. The distribution of the ten by nations is in-

teresting also: India four, China two,<sup>3</sup> Hongkong two, Japan one, Philippines one. Most of the countries in Asia are represented by nothing at all, nor are these only small countries. There are, for example, no entries for Indonesia or Pakistan, and only one for industrialized Japan. These countries are, demographically, the fifth, sixth, and seventh largest in the world.

Miss Wall's objective, of course, was to point up the weakness of academic library holdings of the *Atlas* list of publications. She received replies from 258 libraries (73.71 per cent) out of a total of 350 contacted. Consequently she constructed a table of the titles listed per country, the percentage of the list per country, the titles held by all the answering libraries per country, and the percentage of the entire holdings. The result eloquently substantiates her contention of inadequate news coverage by libraries. But a number of other significant sidelights appear if one examines total library holdings of foreign serials by areas.

The "language barrier" is sometimes given as the reason for the inadequate holding of foreign serials, but Miss Wall disposes of this argument with informa-

<sup>3</sup> China is by itself, of course, an enormous lacuna within the total problem of knowledge and information about Asia—though a special case. The lacunae are just as apparent, however, in Asian areas not so special and not so blocked by a so-called bamboo curtain.

TABLE 1

ACADEMIC LIBRARY HOLDINGS OF FOREIGN SERIALS IN THE *Atlas* LIST BY AREAS

Australia and New Zealand . . . . .	7
Latin America . . . . .	18
Africa and the Near East . . . . .	66
Asia . . . . .	237*
Russia and Eastern Europe . . . . .	352
Western Europe . . . . .	1755**

\* 85 of these subscriptions are to *The Peking Review*, and 84 are to four Indian publications.  
 \*\* Almost half of these (870) are from England.

tion that the colleges and universities represented in her findings teach foreign languages. Further examination of the study increases the emphasis on this point.

One looks at the number of total serial holdings from Latin America above in practical disbelief—a disbelief that may be confirmed when it appears that there is only one publication in Spanish on the *Atlas* list and that one, Cuba's *Palante*, is held by no library. One may blame this fact to some extent on the inadequacy of the *Atlas* list, for surely there must be a number (no matter how few) of academic libraries which subscribe to news serials in Spanish. But it is worth looking at the phenomenon in another way. If

the language barrier is a low hurdle, the "news barrier" can be a higher obstacle. Spanish is one of the world's most significant languages and is widely taught. Doubtless many libraries without dailies or weeklies in Spanish have on their shelves a half-dozen or more journals in Spanish, principally academic. This emphasis is true not simply for Spanish alone. The academic library, encouraged by the majority of its faculty, runs more to publications which print academic studies than to current news serials.

For Asia as an area, the problem of news coverage is generally much greater, more varied, and more complex, yet the end result—a lack of news resources in the library—is the same. One cannot reasonably expect a college library to subscribe to news media in Chinese,

Japanese, Thai, Vietnamese, Malay, Burmese, Hindi, Urdu, or any other of a dozen languages in which aspects of Asian news regularly appear; nor could one expect to find more than a handful of such publications in even the larger university libraries. Yet there are a few news serials in English which have the advantage of being closer to Asian sources and Asian views than the *New York Times* or some of the better European weeklies of news comment.

One example is *The Far Eastern Economic Review* published in Hong Kong—a weekly covering news, political and social as well as economic, from twenty-six Asian countries. There is no journal more steadily inclusive of Asian events presented from a broadly Asian view. Academic libraries in the United States which subscribe to it and where the librarians and reader clients are interested in Asian events from the Asian point of view find their subscriptions widely used. For the record, however, Miss Wall's listing indicates that the academic libraries subscribing to *The Far Eastern Economic Review* number only 46 out of 258, or fewer than 18 per cent.

There is more to Asian news than the Vietnam war or speculation about China as told by American reporters or by European commentators. But American academic libraries still reflect their clients' American and European bias. In this respect the academic library is lopsided rather than round.

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