

A Combined Library, Archive, and Museum – Exploring the British Library

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Hamish Todd

The British Library, London, United Kingdom

Introduction

Hamish Todd (Fig. 4.1) leads the curatorial team responsible for the British Library's collections from East Asia. The British Library—through the combination of the collecting traditions of the old British Museum Library and the India Office Library and Records—possesses one of the finest single resources for Asian studies in the world. Since British Museum Library's inception, the British Museum Library and the India Office Library have both enjoyed the privilege of legal deposits of printed books, periodicals and newspapers from colonial India, which expanded the collections enormously during the second half of the 19th and first half of the 20th century. The British Museum Library also benefited from similar legislation relating to Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Fiji, Hong Kong, Malaysia etc. The effectiveness of the colonial legacy's legal deposit eventually dwindled by the 1930s and it was not until the 1960s that systematic collecting—largely through straightforward commercial channels backed up by some exchange agreements—was revived. The India Office Library and the British Museum Library (from 1973 onwards part of the British Library) continued to independently collect both English-language and Asian-language material right down to 1982, when the India Office Library was transferred to the British Library.

Could you begin this interview by first introducing yourself, for example, your training and background, and your major roles and duties as the Head of the East Asian Collections at the British Library?

I read Japanese at Cambridge University¹ and graduated in 1983. I then spent two years in Japan as a participant in the British English Teachers Scheme (a precursor of the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme²), which offered UK graduates

¹ University of Cambridge – Homepage. Available at: <http://www.cam.ac.uk>.

² Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme – Homepage. Available at: <http://jetprogramme.org/en/>.



Figure 4.1 Hamish Todd.

the opportunity to work in schools, colleges and other organisations in Japan, primarily to teach English. I worked at Suntory,³ a brewing and distilling company, teaching English to staff members and translating correspondence and advertising material.

On my return to the UK in 1985 I worked as a translator, and then in December 1986 I joined the British Library⁴ as one of two Japanese language curators in the Department of Oriental Manuscripts and Printed Books. I have been with the British Library ever since although my job title and the name of the department have undergone several changes over the years. In 2000 I became Head of the Japanese Section, then in 2010 Lead Curator for Japanese and Korean.

Since April 2015 I have been Head of East Asian Collections. As such, my primary role is to lead, develop and manage the Library's collections of material relating to East Asia (China, Japan and Korea). I also act as the lead curator for Japanese Collections and am responsible for the Korean Collections. I lead a team of four other curators, two for Chinese, one for Japanese and one for Manchu/Mongolian, as well as project staff and interns. Together we work to develop, preserve and exploit the Library's holdings in the East Asian languages to build international collaborations and partnerships, and to make the collections available to users through record creation, digitisation, exhibitions and events.

How, and at what age, did you develop an interest for the East Asian languages and cultures?

From a young age I have been fascinated by languages and scripts, I remember family holidays to Greece and North Africa where I was intrigued by the strange symbols that I could not read. At one point I was determined to study hieroglyphics and be an Egyptologist but decided the weather might be too hot! At high school our history curriculum included Asian history and it was there that I first really became interested in East Asia, especially Japan. Its history, culture, language and writing

³ Suntory – Homepage. Available at: <http://www.suntory.com>.

⁴ The British Library – Homepage. Available at: <http://www.bl.uk>.

seemed so different and challenging. In the late 1970s, when I was considering what to study at university, I bought a number of ‘Teach Yourself’ language books and in the end Japanese won out over Arabic, Hebrew and what was then called ‘Serbo-Croat’.

How many different languages have you mastered? You began your career as the Japanese Curator at the British Library. From 2000 to 2014 you then became the Lead Curator of the Japanese and Korean Collections. Given your experience and the positions you took at the British Library, I take that you are also fluent in both Japanese and Korean?

At school I learned French, German, Latin and Ancient Greek, all of which have proved very useful over the years, either when travelling or for helping with the vagaries of English spelling! I have also learned Dutch and Danish, since the Netherlands and Denmark are two countries that I love to visit and where I have good friends. Of course, the foreign language that I am most fluent in is Japanese. I especially enjoy the challenge of reading the non-standard forms of Chinese characters and kana scripts that I encounter in the course of my work.

Since being given responsibility for our Korean Collections I have made efforts to learn Korean, but my knowledge of the spoken language is not as good as I might wish. Fortunately, the widespread use of Chinese characters in premodern Korean texts allows me to understand our important collection of antiquarian material and is also a great help now that I deal more with Chinese matters.

Are you a second career curator/librarian – meaning have you had other careers before you started working as a curator for the British Library?

As I mentioned earlier, I worked in Japan as an English teacher for two years and then as a translator after I came back to the UK.

Could you please provide a brief introduction to the East Asian Collections at The British Library?

The British Library’s East Asian Collections include material in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Mongolian, Manchu and other ‘minor’ languages. They cover a wide range of subjects and formats including manuscripts, printed books, periodicals, maps and newspapers. They range in date from Chinese oracle bones, which are 3500 years old, to the most up-to-date electronic resources. Apart from what is technically the ‘East Asian Collections’, material in these languages and relating to the countries of East Asia can also be found in other departments of the Library. So for example, there are rich resources in the Sound Archive, the Map Collection and Archives and Manuscripts.

What is the current size of the East Asian Collections? Could you also describe the highlights of the East Asian Collections at The British Library?

Calculating the total size of our East Asian Collections is problematic. Firstly, not all material has yet been included in online catalogues. Secondly, the collections are not all kept in one location. However, a rough estimate would be as follows:

Languages	Printed Books	Manuscripts	Serials/Official Publications
Chinese	100,000	22,000	2500
Japanese	80,000	500	6000
Korean	15,000	50	700

My colleague Sara Chiesa has commented on the Chinese highlights in her interview, so here I will mention some key items from the Japanese and Korean Collections.

The pre-1868 antiquarian holdings of 4000 printed works and 400 manuscripts are the most important part of the Japanese Collection. One undoubted highlight is *Feiqe monogatari*, a series of extracts from the Tale of the Heike, printed by the Jesuit Mission in Amakusa in 1592–93 using movable type. Works produced by the Jesuit Mission Press are known as *Kirishitanban* or ‘Christian publications’ and are very rare. Only 73 copies are known worldwide and the British Library is fortunate to have seven of them. Our *Feiqe monogatari* is the only extant copy in the world. What makes it particularly significant is that it is printed in the Roman alphabet not Japanese script, so it offers a valuable insight to the pronunciation of the Japanese language at that time.

Among our Japanese manuscripts, the most important are the 19 lavishly illustrated *Nara ehon*, versions of popular tales which were produced from the mid 16th to late 17th centuries. Among them is an early manuscript of the *Ise monogatari*, probably written around 1520–60, and *Tengu no dairi* which tells of Minamoto Yoshitsune’s visit to the palace of the Long Nosed Goblins. All these *Nara ehon* have been digitised and can be viewed on the British Library’s Digitised Manuscript pages <http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/>.

As the highlight of the Korean Collection I would select *Kisa chinp’yori chinch’an ũigwe* (records of the ritual presentation and banquet in the *kisa* year) written in 1809. This manuscript was created for the Korean Royal Court as a record of the ceremonies conducted in the first and second months of 1809 to mark the 60th anniversary of the consummation of the marriage of Lady Hyegyōng (1735–1815), widow of Crown Prince Sado (1735–62), and grandmother of the reigning King Sunjo. The ceremonies organised in 1809 were part of the latter’s desire to make amends for the past ignominies his grandmother had suffered and no expense was spared. The manuscript provides a faithful record in words and images of the arrangements, participants and objects involved in the formal presentation of cloth (*chinp’yori*) and in the banquet (*chinch’an*). It has now been digitised and is available on our Digitised Manuscripts website.

What best prepared you for your work as the Head of the East Asian Collection at the British Library?

The best preparation for my role as Head of the East Asian Collections has been the years of experience working in the British Library and in the field of Japanese studies librarianship. One of the key elements of the work of a curator is knowledge of the collections for which he/she is responsible, and this can only be acquired with time and by learning from colleagues. I certainly learned a huge amount from my predecessor and I see it as an important part of my role as Head of the East Asian team to help my colleagues develop too.

The British Library is a large and complex organisation so it is crucial to have a good understanding of its history and how the various parts work together. At the same time the skills required by a librarian or curator are constantly changing. When I first started at the British Library in 1986 the most sophisticated technology I had to master was an ancient typewriter, a catalogue card and a pen! Now so much of what we do involves digital media and web-based projects and I am constantly learning. I am very grateful that other members of my team and the department are so ‘tech-savvy’.

I think it is vital to be flexible and open to new ideas and opportunities. For those of us who have been in the profession or an organisation for many years there is sometimes a tendency to think ‘we tried that before but it did not work’! New technology, collaborations and an innovative approach to funding can often make the formerly impossible possible!

Do you also work closely with the East Asian curators/librarians at the British Museum, the National Library of France, the National Library of China or National Diet Library of Japan for different cross-national collaborative projects?

The East Asian team maintains close contacts with libraries, museums, universities and other institutions within the UK and around the world.

We regularly work with colleagues from the British Museum⁵ and frequently lend collection items to each other’s exhibitions. Given our shared history, the British Museum and British Library could be called ‘sister organisations’ and many of what are now British Library collections were originally acquired by the British Museum. We have loaned Chinese, Japanese and Korean items to the British Museum’s exhibition *Ming: 50 years that changed China* which ran from September 2014 to January 2015. As my colleague Sara Chiesura mentioned, we are currently participating in a UK government-funded project to share skills with China along with the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum⁶ and the Tate Galleries.

Naturally, the national libraries of East Asia are key organisations for us to work with. The British Library has a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Library of China (NLC),⁷ which is a partner in a number of our projects. The International Dunhuang Project (IDP)⁸ has a long and fruitful relationship with the

⁵ British Museum – Homepage. Available at: <http://www.britishmuseum.org>.

⁶ Victoria and Albert Museum – Homepage. Available at: <http://www.vam.ac.uk>.

⁷ National Library of China – Homepage. Available at: <http://www.nlc.cn/newen/>.

⁸ International Dunhuang Project (IDP) – Homepage. Available at: <http://idp.bl.uk>.

NLC and the East Asian team is now working with NLC on a number of cataloguing and digitisation initiatives, among them one centred on the British Library's collection of Chinese oracle bones. Colleagues from NLC are sharing their expertise on the best practice for cataloguing and housing these precious items with our curatorial and conservation staff.

Similarly the British Library has worked closely with the National Diet Library of Japan (NDL)⁹ over many years. I and several other British Library staff have benefited from training opportunities provided by NDL. I spent 3 months at NDL early in my career as part of an official staff exchange between the two institutions and it provided a valuable grounding in many aspects of Japanese studies librarianship, as well as creating a network with many leading figures in our community. Other British Library and UK librarians have also been able to take advantage of such arrangements. In June 2015 we hosted a workshop conducted by a reference specialist for UK Japanese studies librarians.

Our relations with the National Library of Korea (NLK)¹⁰ also go back many decades and there is a formal Memorandum of Understanding between the two institutions. We are currently planning a project with NLK to digitise some of our rare books and manuscripts and I attended the Overseas Koreanology Librarians Workshop,¹¹ which NLK organised and hosted in October 2015.

With all three national libraries we have long-standing exchanges of official and government publications, which have proved an excellent way to obtain these important but often hard to acquire materials. In addition, we frequently welcome staff from the national libraries to the East Asian Collections, and are often involved when they visit colleagues in other areas of the British Library, since the working relationships are not limited to the Library's Asian and African Collections.

Curators versus Librarians – people working for the British Library are sometimes called curators and sometimes librarians – what are the major functional differences between the two?

The British Library uses the term 'curator' for some of its staff, partly for historical reasons and partly to reflect the nature of our roles. The core collections and departments of today's British Library were originally part of the British Museum until 1973, when the British Library was founded as an independent body. The Museum terminology of 'curator' rather than 'librarian' has continued to be used for those staff who are responsible for management and care of a specific collection. It reflects the fact that our collections contain not just books and manuscripts but a wide range of material including artefacts, archives, sound recordings, photographs, paintings, oracle bones and so on. 'Curator' also seems an appropriate term to convey the range of our duties which, alongside obviously librarian-type activities such as acquisitions and cataloguing, also includes tasks more normally associated with a

⁹ National Diet Library of Japan – Homepage. Available at: <http://www.ndl.go.jp/en/>.

¹⁰ National Library of Korea – Homepage. Available at: <http://www.nl.go.kr/english/>.

¹¹ Overseas Koreanology Librarians Workshop – Homepage. Available at: <http://nias.ku.dk/news/overseas-koreanology-librarian-workshop>.

museum, for example arranging exhibitions and displays, organising ‘show and tell’ sessions for visitors and liaising with conservators over preservation and treatment of the collections.

In the British Library, we use ‘librarian’ in a more general sense to distinguish those staff who work with the collections from those who fulfil other roles within conservation, imaging studios, and operational, technical and support services.

Following restructuring of the Library’s senior management, the term ‘Chief Librarian’ has been introduced for the post in charge of all collections-related departments, while the Chief Operating Officer heads the other sections such as Reading Room Services, Finance, Human Resources, Collection Storage, Document Supply and Customer Services. Both of these report to the Chief Executive who is the overall head of the British Library.

For the professional librarians working at the British Library, do they also need to be holders of an American Library Association-accredited Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) degree?

As far as I am aware there is no requirement for British Library staff to hold an American Library Association-accredited MLIS. It may be included as a ‘desirable’ qualification in recruitment but not as ‘essential’. For curatorial (librarian) posts at the British Library more emphasis is laid on knowledge of the appropriate language or discipline, relevant research or practical experience and other ‘competencies’ identified by Library management. For example flexibility, the ability to work independently or as part of a team, problem-solving skills etc.

The Library also sets great store by ensuring that staff receive appropriate training, either ‘on the job’ or through organised courses and workshops.

(1) Language Skills, (2) Knowledge in History, (3) Research Skills or (4) Knowledge in Archaeology. Based on your experience, which has proven to be most important in order to do your job well?

In fact all of these skills are necessary for my work as a curator. A knowledge of the linguistic, historical and, in some cases, archaeological context in which an item was created is very important in understanding, managing and exploiting the collections in my charge. At the same time research skills are needed for much of the bibliographic and interpretative work I do as well as to help me understand the needs of readers and users.

Please describe the staffing structure of the East Asian Department at The British Library? For example, what are the working relationships between the Head of the East Asian Collections, the Lead Curator of the Japanese and Korean Collections and the Japanese Curator? Also what is your working relationship with Sara Chiesura?

The East Asian team is part of the Asian and African Collections, alongside curatorial teams responsible for Middle Eastern and Central Asian Collections, South Asian Collections, SouthEast Asian Collections, African Collections, the IDP and the Prints,

Drawings and Photographs section. Our team consists of five people: the Head of East Asian Collections, who manages the team and is also in charge of the Japanese and Korean Collections, supported by the Curator of Japanese Collections; the Lead Curator of East Asian Collections is responsible for the Chinese Collections and works closely with the Curator of Chinese Collections and the Curator of Manchu and Mongolian Collections.

This nomenclature is perhaps a little confusing as the British Library recently changed the names of some of the posts. There was formerly (1) a Lead Curator for Japanese and Korean, (2) a Lead Curator for Chinese, (3) a Japanese Curator and (4) a Chinese Curator. I was appointed to the new role of Head of East Asian Collections that absorbed the functions of the Lead Curator for Japanese and Korean. The post of Lead Curator of Chinese Collections was renamed Lead Curator of East Asian Collections.

In addition, we often have a number of staff working with us on a temporary basis as interns or on special projects.

Outside the East Asian Collections proper a number of staff work on East Asian material. For example the IDP has a team of seven who work on cataloguing, digitisation and conservation of the Central Asian/East Asian Collections, acquired by Sir Marc Aurel Stein in the early 20th century.

Could you describe your typical day at work? Is there ever a typical day at work?

It is one of the joys — and challenges — of my job that no two days are ever the same. It all depends on what projects we are working on in the team, what deadlines we have and how busy we are with visitors and delegations.

There are some regular or recurring activities which form the core of my curatorial work: selecting material for acquisition, cataloguing antiquarian material, answering a wide variety of reference enquiries from readers and the general public, assisting colleagues in the Acquisitions team and elsewhere in the Library with tasks that require a knowledge of Japanese or Korean, identifying collections items in need of conservation and so on. Or I might be asked to provide valuations for collection items going on loan or to give an expert opinion on export licenses.

I am regularly contacted by members of the public who have Japanese or Korean items that they want me to identify. Sometimes they send a photo; sometimes they bring the item in person. It is always an interesting challenge and requires a good deal of detective work. It can also need some tact when a precious heirloom turns out not to be the hidden treasure they are hoping for! Fortunately British Library staff are not permitted to give financial valuations so I just gently hint that an item may be of primarily sentimental or curiosity value. Generally people are simply keen to find out more about their mystery objects.

Representation and promotion of the collections are important elements of a curator's work so I may be giving a presentation or a lecture, or writing a post for our Asian and African Studies blog about an interesting collection item or project we are involved in. I often have to receive visits from VIP delegations, academic researchers, university students or other groups with an interest in our East Asian Collections.

Frequently this involves organising ‘show and tell’ sessions which is one of the really rewarding and enjoyable aspects of my job.

As Head of East Asian Collections, I also have to attend a lot of meetings — some more interesting than others — to do with the strategy and planning part of my job. For example there may be discussions with our legal and licensing teams or our Imaging Services colleagues when we are involved in a digitisation project, or with other Collection Heads over issues that affect the whole department.

What scholarly and professional associations are you a part of, and how do they assist you in your work?

I find it hugely valuable to know so many knowledgeable and dedicated people both in the UK and overseas to whom I can turn for information and guidance. I have been fortunate to be involved with a number of organisations including the Japan Library Group (JLG),¹² of which I am chair, the Korea Library Group (KLG), the National Committee for Information resources on Asia (NACIRA)¹³ in the UK and the European Association of Japanese Resource Specialists (EAJRS),¹⁴ all of which allow colleagues to share information, expertise and experiences. In recent years I have also benefited enormously from participating in conferences and organisations in the US. I regularly attend the Council of East Asian Libraries meetings and am currently a member of the Committee on Japanese Materials, as well as serving on the Executive Committee of the North American Coordinating Council on Japanese Library Resources (NCC). I have learned a great deal from North American colleagues with their wide range of skills and experience.

As East Asian Studies librarians around the world face many of the same technological issues and challenges of ‘how to do more with less?’, I believe it is increasingly important that our community works together to offer support and expertise. Whatever the advances of technology, much of what we achieve continues to rely on personal networks and our willingness to share our knowledge.

Who are the majority users of the East Asian Collections at the British Library? That is, who comes to see you about your collections? Are they mostly professors or students from higher education institutions? Or are they people from outside the post-secondary sector, i.e. the public?

As a national library we have a wide range of users. Given the nature of our East Asian Collections the majority are academic researchers or postgraduate students. However, independent researchers, undergraduates and members of the general public often make use of our collections and seek our advice. A large number of our users are from

¹² The Japan Library Group (JLG) – Homepage. Available at: <http://www.jlgweb.org.uk>.

¹³ National Committee for Information resources on Asia (NACIRA) – Homepage. Available at: <http://nacira.org.uk>.

¹⁴ European Association of Japanese Resource Specialists (EAJRS) – Homepage. Available at: <http://eajrs.net>.

East Asia since much of our material is unique, very rare or impossible to access in the country of origin.

Access to British Library collections is free of charge so anyone with an interest in our East Asian holdings can register for a Reading Pass.

Could you give examples of typical reference/research inquiries issued by the researchers or scholars at the East Asian Collections at the British Library?

The majority of our reference enquiries relate to our antiquarian Chinese, Japanese and Korean Collections. Given the history, size and complexity of our collections, and the fact that everything is not yet catalogued online, we are often asked for help identifying particular items or to find material on a research topic.

However, the types of reference enquiries I deal with are very varied: recently, for example they have ranged from how Japanese folding books (*orihon*) were read in the Edo Period to religion in North Korea and from trying to decode ownership seals to looking for evidence of the Chinese Trading Factory in Nagasaki on some of our early Japanese maps.

There is also an Oriental Section (British Library), managed by Hiroko Brittain in Boston Spa. What are the differences in terms of collections and services between the Oriental Section (Boston Spa) and the East Asian Collections of the British Library (London)?

There was formerly an Oriental Section at the British Library's site in Boston Spa, Yorkshire, which handled acquisitions and processing of journals in East Asian languages for the British Library's Document Supply Service, mainly in the fields of science, technology and medicine. However, following the retirement of its former head, Hiroko Brittain, a restructuring took place and the work of the Oriental Section was combined with others so it no longer exists as a separate entity nor is there any specialist East Asian language expertise. Members of the East Asian team in St Pancras are now called on to help with Romanisation and other queries.

How does the collection catalogue and provide access for users? With a non-roman script, what challenges does this present to cataloguing? Are there any?

This is one of our greatest challenges! The British Library main catalogue, *Explore the British Library*, contains more than 56 million items and is freely available online. A second online catalogue *Explore Archives and Manuscripts* provides access to non-print material such as manuscripts, archival documents and photographs. However, not all East Asian material is included in these. A large part of the collection can still only be searched on cards or in printed catalogues. As my colleague Sara Chiesura explains in her interview there are a number of innovative projects going on to help

with the conversion of the 70,000 catalogue cards to records that can be added to our two main online catalogues.

For Japanese Collections the situation is less daunting. Since the early 1990s the British Library, along with other Japanese studies libraries in the UK, has participated in the UK Japanese Union Catalogue Project through which we registered our holdings with the National Center for Science Information Systems (NACSIS),¹⁵ now the National Institute of Informatics (NII)¹⁶ in Tokyo. Since then UK libraries have added over 250,000 records and the union catalogue project has been expanded to include holdings of 30 institutions in eight countries. This is a cooperative cataloguing system so we also contribute records, principally for our newly acquired antiquarian material, which can be of use to libraries in Japan and elsewhere. All of these records can be viewed on the CiNii Books website <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/books/>. Through collaboration with the NII in 2011 we were able to import over 26,000 records into our Aleph system and these are now available via *Explore the British Library*. All current acquisitions of printed material, both modern and antiquarian, are catalogued in Aleph, often using records downloaded from Online Computer Library Center (OCLC)¹⁷ or NACSIS. So the situation for Japanese is that all books and periodicals published since 1900 are available online. Work is proceeding on cataloguing our earlier material. Access to this is via the following printed catalogues: *Catalogue of early Japanese books in the British Library* compiled by Kawase Kazuma and Okazaki Hisaji (Tokyo, 1996) which includes pre-1868 printed books and manuscripts, and *Descriptive Catalogue of Japanese Books in the British Library Printed before 1700*, by Kenneth Burslam Gardner (London and Tenri, 1993) which contains detailed descriptions of 637 items printed in Japan up to and including the end of the Genroku Period (1704). Our 500 Japanese manuscripts are in the process of being added to our online catalogue *Explore Archives and Manuscripts*.

For Korean language material a handlist of the antiquarian material is available and it is hoped that these 250 or so items can soon be added to *Explore the British Library*. Records for manuscripts are available online in *Explore Archives and Manuscripts*. Most modern printed books are available in our main online catalogue and we currently have an intern working to convert the remaining 500 cards.

The challenges presented by East Asian scripts are two-fold. Firstly there are the problems which we face as cataloguers, particularly with premodern material, in reading or deciphering the huge number of Chinese characters and their many variants and, especially for Japanese, the cursive forms of *kanji* and *kana*. Secondly there are the technical difficulties of inputting them into our library systems and catalogues, which are primarily designed for roman script languages. However, as technology advances these problems are being solved. Recently, we have been working to create online records for our holdings of Mongolian books and manuscripts, many of which are written in traditional Mongolian script. Since this should be written vertically and

¹⁵ National Center for Science Information Systems (NACSIS) – Homepage. Available at: <http://itt.nissat.tripod.com/itt99012/nacsis.htm>.

¹⁶ National Institute of Informatics (NII) – Homepage. Available at: <http://www.nii.ac.jp/en/>.

¹⁷ OCLC – Homepage. Available at: <https://www.oclc.org/home.en.html>.

is a dynamic script in which letters change their form according to their position in the word this has presented challenges for our IT and Metadata teams.

The themes and information needs of libraries, archives, and museums (LAMs, as some have referred to them) have increasingly converged. What are your experiences and thoughts about these cultural institutions whose work and best practices now often overlap?

As I have explained, the British Library was created from the British Museum Library in 1973 and our collections are similar to those of a museum in their breadth of formats and range of material. The Library also includes extensive archives so it could be said that we are a combined 'LAM'! In many ways therefore, our work is a mix of traditional librarian and curatorial activities including collection development, cataloguing, research, conservation and exhibition and event organisation.

I believe that the fundamental priorities of museums, libraries and archives are the same, to develop, record, preserve and exploit their collections and there is much that we can learn from each other. We also face many of the same challenges: how best to engage with new audiences, especially the 'Internet Generation', how to utilise new technology and, in Europe at least, how to make the most of our shrinking financial and human resources.

Which part(s) of your job as the Head of the East Asian Collection at the British Library do you find most rewarding?

The most rewarding part of my job has to be the privilege of working with our amazing collections on a daily basis. I really enjoy showing them to users and visitors, explaining what they are and why they are significant and then seeing the audience's interest and enthusiasm.

I also get a great deal of satisfaction from solving puzzles, for example helping a researcher to find exactly what they have been looking for, finding out more about a collection item, deciphering the preface of a Japanese book, working out what the characters on a seal mean and so on. For me there is something deeply satisfying, almost therapeutic, in the process of cataloguing, of examining a book or manuscript, trying to understand its history, significance and content and then expressing that information in a way that will be meaningful to others.

So often our library managers are obsessed with statistics and finding ways to quantify activities. Sadly, so far no one has come up with a system to measure the delight of researchers when a librarian helps them find the elusive item or information they have been searching for!

Another exciting aspect of my new role as Head of East Asian Collections is learning more about the Chinese Collections and working with the curators on the various collaborative projects in which they are involved. I find working with my team a rewarding and stimulating experience. We come from different backgrounds and generations and have different expertise, experience and outlooks but together we

make a productive and creative team, a complementary mix of linguistic and collection knowledge, innovative ideas, experience and practical skills.

It is not uncommon to see librarians with no interests in music or visual arts, taking up positions as heads/directors of music and visual arts libraries. They are hired because they are effective administrators or managers or good at IT, and not because of their knowledge or research skills in related fields. Being as effective administrator or being a respectable scholar with well-grounded knowledge in the field, which do you think is more important to serve as a good curator?

Ideally a good curator should combine both administrative skills and expertise in a relevant field of study, although it is not always easy. I am sure most of us can think of examples of excellent scholars who have no idea about managing their time or budgets and of administrators with no understanding of, or interest in, the staff or the organisation they are managing!

At the British Library we are expected to have a thorough knowledge of our collections which underpins our activities but, increasingly, we are also expected to be efficient managers of staff, budgets, time and other resources. Many of us are called upon to develop, raise funds for and manage complex projects which requires a range of new skills. To be able to do this effectively it is vital to have adequate training and support, and to learn from the experience of colleagues who may be further down the road in this regard. We are lucky at the British Library to be able to call on colleagues with a wide range of skills to help us with areas such as fundraising, financial management, human resources, legal matters and copyright/licensing issues.