

## A Summary of What the Project Accomplished

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I was not a computer illiterate in my work back home in Bangkok, although I sometimes felt ill at ease, wondering whether I would ever fit perfectly into a society filled with information technology. I worried about my clumsy hands and the frustration I felt whenever I went surfing in cyberspace and found nothing; sometimes not knowing where to start and sometimes overwhelmed by the many questions that I hesitated to ask. Hence, my goal in coming into this project was to acquire the necessary skills to function more competently in the area of electronic technology and resources. I strongly wanted to master these skills no matter in which format they appeared.

On my arrival at the University of Oregon, I immersed myself in CD-Rom stations and PC for electronic databases. I managed to read the local newspaper - The Oregonian - on a CD-Rom station. Then I went on to searching for my friends' telephone numbers from a CD-Rom directory. And so, during the first few weeks, in my free time from meetings with people, I educated myself - using different CD-Roms - and came to appreciate America and Americanism. Then, I spread my wings and exposed myself to the very broad, real world.

It didn't take me long to realize that the CD-Rom (as a medium) was a bit too limiting, and so I moved on and tried 'surfing' in cyberspace. In the electronic classes where they taught the tricks and treats of the different search engines, I immersed myself in cyberspace, looking for answers to some of my many questions. I found myself making progress. I could find the state - of union address of President Clinton in one minute; in

Bangkok it would have taken me hours. Not only could I search and find, but also I could manage to download or export any of my discoveries, right from the website window directly to my friends or to my own account.

On top of that I learned to publish a home page and helped to create one for the SEAsian Collection. Electronic journals were something that I heard about, but I hadn't realized how complicated they were until I had the chance to work on them under the supervision of Ms Chadwell. I want to especially thank her for the valuable introduction she provided and for all her help in preparing me to function in these new areas. In my country, we had been taking these matters for granted for so long that we tended to forget that Thailand had signed the copyright agreement and needed to put its conditions into effect.

As I prepare to leave the United States to return to Thailand, I feel overwhelmed by the accessibility to the world of endless knowledge. I have been so impressed by the information technology capabilities of the librarians around me. The goals I set for myself have been achieved to a large extent. My American counterparts have the wide range of information technology at their fingertips. I hope - as I continue my work in Bangkok - to attain some of their mastery. I will have to work hard, but I have made a good start. Thanks to the unique experience provided by the Fellowship, I feel more confident to survive in this Age of High Technology.

My Fellowship was hosted by the ***Knight Library, University of Oregon, Eugene***. The Library, with a history going back to 1882, has collections in the Humanities, Social Sciences and Pure Sciences.

The automation of the Library started in 1976 with a machine-readable record and then with COMP Cat which was a microfiche

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catalog. The first online database to be made available to the public was introduced in 1988 through the acquisition system.

Today, the Library is fully automated using a system called *Janus*, the gateway to more than two million volumes and 15,000 periodicals. It includes the Library's online catalog, access to electronic resources including periodical indices, full-text databases, multimedia and electronic journals. Besides the Knight Library, there are branch libraries located around the campus. Of these, two were most interesting to me.

The first is the *Visual Resources Collection in the Architecture and Allied Arts Library*, which houses images mainly in slide and photograph format. I appreciated the effort of the librarian in arranging them for easy use by the instructors.

The second, the *Map Library*, was also well-organized and I found it unbelievable how the librarians could acquire and make accessible to their users such a comprehensive range of maps.

In the Knight Library, itself, I was impressed by the special collections (which were housed separately from the general collection) and by the sophisticated preservation methods that they had in place to protect the collection.

In applying for the Fellowships I focused on two main areas: information technology and Americanism. I have come to realize that the two are almost the same, inseparable. Modern technology is always part of the American civilization and in the present world, we cannot separate the information technology from the daily American life.

As a matter of fact, I achieved my two goals simultaneously, working with technology in the American workplace in the American environment.

My American colleagues are so com-

pletely equipped to deal with technology that I could not help but equip myself to a certain extent! Surrounded by all the technology, taking courses, not only could I acquire the skills needed to surf cyberspace, but also I learned how to write the html language, create images and scan pictures into a home page. On my return to Thailand I will be able to present the results of my project with slides created by the Power Point program; a program I learned to use in one of the classes I attended.

As for the expansion of my appreciation of things American, I learned to bring my packed lunch to eat in front of my computer like the others. I tried different ethnic foods. I learned to choose among the daunting selection of milk: the low fat, 2% fat, half and half, no cholesterol. I called the TV channel to vote yes or no on a particular issue, which was to be decided at a sort of electronic public hearing. I learned to keep my receipts in case the merchandise I bought turned out not to suit me. I enjoyed having consumer's rights, something that only can happen in the U.S. During the period of my Fellowship, a brown bag lunch talk was organized and I was asked to talk to faculty members and graduate students who were interested in doing research in Thailand. I felt honored that the Director of International Studies, well-recognized as a SEAsian scholar, was among the participants. A Ph.D. candidate came up to ask for information on higher education in Thailand, the area of his proposed research. Then there was another student with an interest in the topic of discrimination against women in Buddhism. I suggested that a comparative study of children of second and third generation overseas Chinese women might be relevant to her interest and a useful study in its own right. Other ideas were put forward and discussed. As the group and I shared ideas on a variety of different topics, I must say (modestly of course) that I could not believe that I knew so much about so many things. I guess the information was just hiding at the back of my mind waiting for the right question to trigger an answer. Either that, or the fact that my lifelong work has been as a librarian.

I also attended several conferences and workshops. I was impressed by the simplicity of their organization and by their academic impact. OLA - Washington in Portland, a gathering of librarians of Oregon and Washington States, a meeting on high technology in library service - could it be anything else? A meeting with publishers and salespeople at which I was able to announce that Thailand would host the 1999 IFLA conference in Bangkok.

The Northwest Consortium for the Southeast Asian Studies Conference amazed me with the amount of interesting presentations by American and international scholars in the field. I learned a lot about my neighboring countries and as well as my own. There were facts and figures that would have been hard to believe if they had not set out by scholars in the field - my eyes were well and truly opened.

The workshop in Seattle, organized by the E.U. Delegation in Washington D.C. and the European Commission, strongly moved me. I was so impressed by the technological capabilities of the American librarians.

When I arrived Eugene, my mentors, Ms Chadwell and Ms Paynter, apologized for their inability to find and have ready an apartment for me to move into. They needn't have apologized. I felt quite the opposite. It would probably have been awkward for me if I had had to stay in a strange place all by myself from the first moment I arrived in Eugene. It was fun to hunt by myself for a place to live - a new experience for me - and wonderful to get to know the people with whom I would be working.

We found an apartment near the downtown area, across from the public library. It was empty, unfurnished, but everybody helped to fill it up, lend me all the necessities to make me feel comfortable and at home. Then I was introduced to a Japanese - American secondary school teacher who was active in ethnic issues, especially those relating to native

Americans and to building understanding among different groups of people. With her, I attended different gatherings of the Asian-American community to exchange ideas on how to live together, free of problems of race and color. Stories of Chinese migrants to Thailand and the Sino-Thais were told and the culture, beliefs and art (a mixture of Thai, Chinese and Indian) were explained. This led me to be active in helping the Chinese - American Women's Benevolent Club to hold the Dragon Boat Festival on the 7th of June. Mingling with these people and participating in a series of workshops in the Nation That Work Program, I learned that in this land of democracy, where people had rights to enjoy and take a wide range of freedoms for granted, there remained the problem of discrimination, a problem found everywhere, no matter how big or small the country is. It's so unfair! I could only suggest to get rid of the idea of making America a 'melting pot' and replace it with 'making America a salad bowl' in which every ingredient compliments the other. The dream of 'seeing no colors' seems still to be impossible. We have to accept the truth that every color adds color to the world. What would the world look like if there were only one color and that color was white.

I made a few trips out of Eugene. One was to Corvallis to attend a meeting where librarians were working very hard on relating every detail of the Declaration of Rights to every person in America. I went also to Seattle for a workshop and also to visit an old friend who has retired but remains a workaholic. He continues to work on the Native American project to revive a language which has only twenty elderly speakers. What a splendid challenge. I made two trips to Portland: the first was to attend the Oregon Library Association conference. One of the sessions I attended explained why the librarians here had to be very careful and strict with matters of copyright.

The second trip to Portland was to celebrate the traditional Thai/Laotian New Year on April 12 - the water-splashing festival.

Portland amazed me with its diversity of communities: the large area known as 'Chinatown' complete with a traditional herbal drugstore, the Vietnamese section with Vietnamese flags fluttering from the front porches of the houses, the Laotian temple filled with Laotian people of all ages. In this temple, one could be forgiven for imagining one's self in Laos: the sounds of the Lao language, the smell of Laotian foods, the elderly people who could speak not even one word of the American language. These people are in a sense pioneers - the first refugees to this land of liberty!

Every person that I met and worked with had some characteristic or special interest that fascinated me. I will take the memories of these people with me back to Thailand. I can mention only a few here. The Japanese lady teacher whom I have already mentioned. Lawrence Crump, the reference librarian at Knight Library, who knows every single detail of anything 'ENGLISH' and whose knowledge of modern technology is young and up-to-the-minute despite his age, is another person I'll remember. I'll be motivated by his willingness to search for an answer to every query, and I'll keep the picture of his slow but purposeful walk as he set about to find the needed answer.

I'll remember Robin Paynter, for whom the sky's the limit in her search to explore and explain the endless world of knowledge. I'll remember, too, Faye Chadwell, the Head of the Collection Development Department. She has the personality and the mental qualities needed to work with and gain the respect of the thirty-five subject specialists. I would love to introduce her to my country.

The Fellowship provided me with the first hand experience on the information super highway. During all the years of studying and learning from different sources at home in Thailand, I always wished that I could one day have the chance to get a real taste of working in the American workplace, a workplace which is fully equipped with all kinds of modern technology. This unique opportunity has come true.

Of course I have been overwhelmed with the high technology that I found but, equally, I have been overwhelmed by the opportunities I have had to expose myself to American culture, American society and American values in the real setting of the United States.

Over the years I had many contacts with Americans. These contacts were often no more than short visits that were not long enough to form a sufficiently in depth understanding of the reality of America and things American. As much as I enjoyed and benefited from these brief contacts, the Fellowship allowed me to live and work in the United States. It gave me the opportunity to live like other people in an American community: shopping for groceries, watching the world pass by at the laundromat, listening to American music and news, watching American television. I was overpowered with the variety of Americanism, and by the abundant evidence of democracy - the public hearings, the public forums where every voice was heard. The equality of every person was taken care of. The rights of the disabled were also recognized and acted upon. I admired the love and concern for the natural environment, and noted such valuable programs as those involving recycling. I recognized the concern the members of the public felt for each other in such volunteer programs as providing safe rides home for women who work late at night. The friendliness of the people - such as the drivers who were always willing to help with bus connections - will always remain a fond memory of my time in the United States.

America is truly a warm society. Coming from a society oriented to rank, status and authority, it touched me to see the University Director go for his own coffee, the mailman call the Deputy Director by his first name, and the colleague talking about his father's job as a janitor in the Y.M.C.A. I told myself that this was America where the good work and the hard work that a person did was valued and praised. I saw it was the work - no matter what the work was - that added value and worth to a person.

After only a very brief period of living in this small town of two seasons - the wet and the wetter - I understood why and how the United States (with a history of only 250 years) could move this fast to the very front line of the world's countries. Eugene is a learned society, fertilized by educational opportunities: by lectures, educational programs, art appreciation activities, all packed with involved and questioning people. I want to guard the beauty of the many feelings that I've come to appreciate during my time in the United States.

During the Northwest Consortium Conference (April 24 -27, 1997) I was invited to a meeting of the librarians, the Thai script on catalog was on the agenda.

I gave them a few names to contact on this topic and noted it would be further discussed at the A.L.A. Conference in San Francisco. The acquisition of Thai language publications is also very problematic for them. What I could offer so far was to work on this problem with our University Bookstore at Chulalongkorn University. Already the Bookstore's Committee has contacted me on this matter, and I hope to make steady progress in resolving this problem. Setting up a home page with more bibliographic information would be a helpful start.

The next item on the agenda was concerned with the materialization of a publishing project to produce a Manual for Cataloging Asian Languages. The librarians had been longing for one that including Thai. I could not refuse the challenge, and I look forward to working with the editor of the project, Ms Paynter of the Knight Library. We've already begun work on the definition, layout and details, fundings and publishers to be contacted.

Further, as the International Studies Program of the University of Oregon is providing development support of a Laotian university, Robin Paynter (who will be in charge of overseeing the setting up a the university's library) and I had long talks on the library and information sciences in Laos. The Chulalongkorn University library staff have been involved in the training of Laotian librarians and were able to draw on our experiences in these talks. Together, we drew up a plan which included budgeting for hard/software and aids, staff training, and acquisition of materials. I will be happy to help with this project. I have been caught up by the enthusiasm of so many people in the above projects and am determined to contribute to their successful conclusions.

