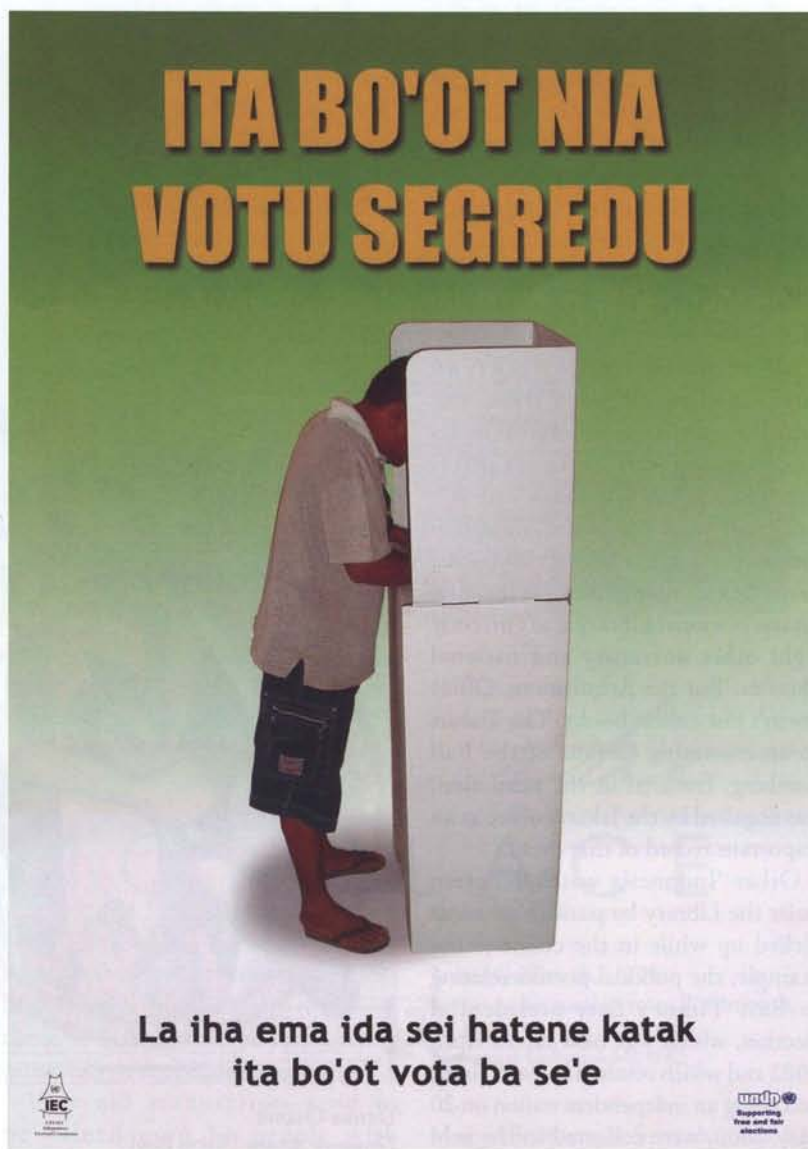


A Glimpse into Asia

Collecting material on contemporary Asia, says Amelia McKenzie, helps us to understand our place in the region

The National Library of Australia began collecting material relating to Asia in the early 1950s, when the importance of Asia to Australia was first realised. Today, the Library's Asian Collections hold over half-a-million volumes, making it the largest collection in Australia.

The focus of collecting has been on contemporary Asia and the social sciences. From the start the Library collected both Asian-language and English-language material, acquiring books and journals from East Asia (China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, Japan and the Korean peninsula) and Southeast Asia (Burma, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam). The Asian Collections were enhanced by the acquisition of key formed collections, such as those of the London Missionary Society on China, the Coedes Collection on



Indochina and the Braga Collection on the Portuguese in Asia.

Future Memory highlights recent acquisitions from China, Indonesia, Japan, East Timor, the Korean Peninsula, Thailand and Taiwan. It includes newspapers, books, ephemera, and old and new publications. The Library uses

Seguransa

[Poster showing types of uniformed United Nations and East Timorese security personnel for East Timor's first presidential election, held on 14 April 2002] [Dili]: UNTAET Independent Electoral Commission, [2002] col. poster; 41.9 x 29.7 cm Pictures Collection nla.pic-an25107466 Courtesy of United Nations

Ita Bo'ot Nia Votu Segredu (Your Vote is Secret)

[Poster informing of secret voting in first presidential election, held on 14 April 2002] [Dili]: UNTAET Independent Electoral Commission, [2002] col. poster; 42 x 29.6 cm Pictures Collection nla.pic-an25107954 Courtesy of United Nations

almost all known acquisition methods for building its Asian collections. Many items are acquired through established relationships with in-country library suppliers and publishers. Others are obtained through donations and exchange, with the assistance of embassies, libraries, Asia scholars and



travellers, and through Library staff based in the region.

For example, with the assistance of the Embassy of the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea the Library recently re-established contact with a supplier in Pyongyang, North Korea. The Library is now able to order books, journals and newspapers again after not receiving any North Korean material for 10 years. Featured in the exhibition are newspapers from Pyongyang, North Korea and Seoul, South Korea respectively. In style and presentation they are a reminder of the different conditions of two countries sharing the same language.

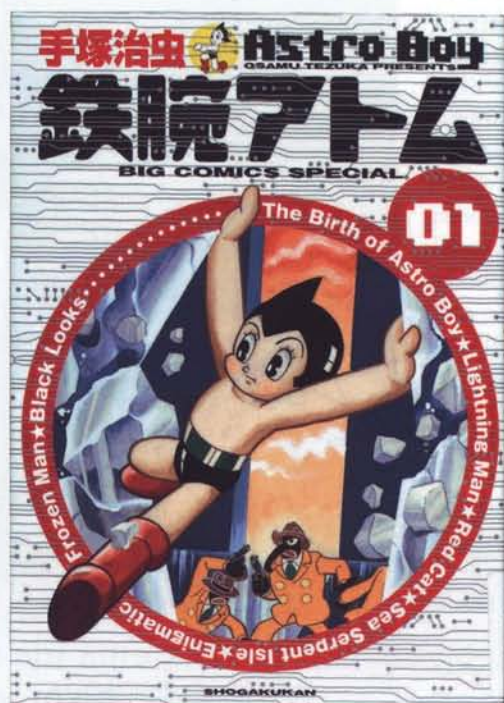
As Indonesia still lacks an established export book trade, the Library continues to maintain its Acquisitions Office in Jakarta, Indonesia. A Library officer and two local staff work out of the Australian Embassy to acquire Indonesian books, journals and newspapers on the spot for the National Library and currently eight other university and national libraries. But the Acquisitions Office doesn't just collect books. The T-shirt commemorating victims of the Bali bombing, featured in the exhibition, was acquired by the Jakarta office as an important record of that event.

Other 'Indonesia watchers' often assist the Library by passing on items picked up while in the country. For example, the political posters relating to East Timor's first presidential election, which was held on 14 April 2002 and which resulted in East Timor becoming an independent nation on 20 May 2002, were collected in the field by a number of Australian observers who travelled to Timor to observe the election process. The election was organised by UNTAET (the United Nations Transitional Authority in East Timor) with assistance from the Australian Electoral Commission which included the production of educational posters explaining the voting process, a number of which are on display.

While many recent acquisitions relate to contemporary events, the Library also acquires classic literary and historical works published in the countries of the region. Featured in the exhibition is a classic of Chinese literature, *Romance of the Three*

Kingdoms by Luo Guanzhong. Published 300 years before the birth of the English novel, it illustrates both how far in advance of the West China was in its literary forms, but also how enduringly similar some literary archetypes are in every culture of the world.

Romance of the Three Kingdoms is an adventure epic in novel form, published in China in the late fourteenth century. Based on the history of the Three Kingdom period in Han dynasty China in the third century, the tales have been continuously transmitted to Chinese readers ever since the fourteenth century, offering a combination of Arthurian-style heroic



Tezuka Osamu
Tetsuwan Atomu (Astro Boy)
Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2003
Vol. 1 of 5 vol. set
Asian Collections JAP 726.1 Te95A (v.1)
© Tezuka Production

battles and Machiavellian intrigue. In recent times *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* was lavishly adapted for television, ensuring a resurgence in its popularity worldwide. Its latest manifestation as a video game has sparked further popular interest, resulting in renewed interest in the book form of the tale.

The edition featured in the exhibition is a handwritten copy of the original text by a master of calligraphy from Fujian province. This copy was a gift from the Chinese government

to the Australian government on the occasion of the 2001 APEC Leaders Meeting in Shanghai, China.

Other materials besides books, journals and newspapers document Asian culture. Comics, too, are part of the Library's Collection. *Future Memory* displays the 'Astro Boy' comics (*manga*) from Japan. *Manga* represent about one-third of total book sales in Japan, and are read by adults and children alike. Heavily influenced by the style of twentieth-century American cartooning and comic books, Japanese *manga* nevertheless uniquely demonstrate the link for East Asian cultures between pictures and

language. These traditions of illustrated popular storytelling using both text and image were shared with the West until the coming of the Protestant Reformation in Europe, when the use of images in texts was circumscribed. However image as text has endured in the East and taken on a new life and vigour in the *manga* form.

The 'Astro Boy' (or 'Atom Boy') comics, first created by Tezuka Osamu in the 1950s, are a good example of the *manga* genre. Astro Boy is a friendly boy-robot, capable of human emotions, who battles to save the world from disaster. Some point to the Astro Boy *manga* as a major influence on Japan's

interest in and development of robotic technology.

The Library's Asian Collections are a rich resource serving the needs of academia, government and the general public. The sustained collection building of the last half century will be continued into the twenty-first century, ensuring that Australians have the best possible resource for understanding their region and Australia's place in it.

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