

Bibliothek & Information International (BI-International) Grant Program for
Professional Visits to Germany

Final report

For attendance of the 44th European Association of
Sinological Librarians (EASL) conference, held in Berlin
State Library (4-6 September 2024)

by Ekaterina Pavlova

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Room

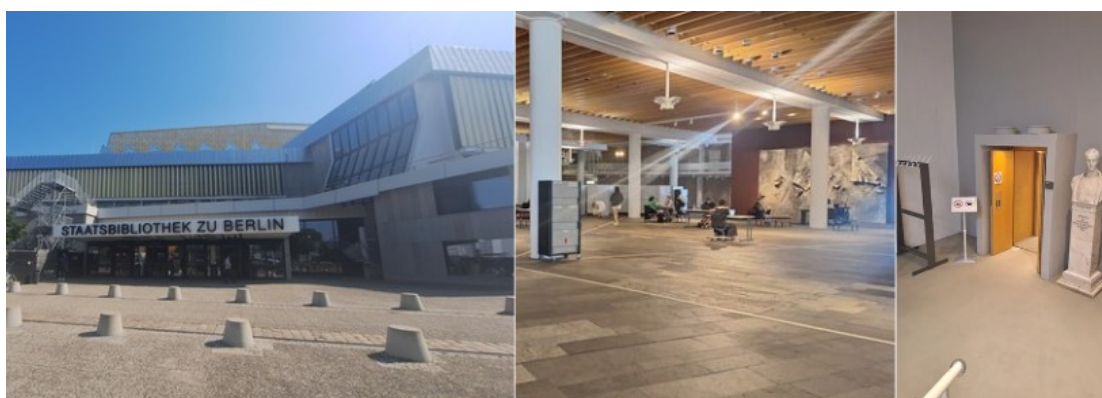
National Library of Latvia | Centre of Branch Collections

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First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to *Bibliothek & Information International* for providing financial support and making this visit possible. I would also like to thank the team of Berlin State Library's (SBB) East Asia Department for all the effort they put into organizing the conference, making it a memorable and enriching experience.

The goal of my visit to Germany was to attend the annual European Association of Sinological Librarians (EASL) conference. EASL started in 1981 as a workshop for sinological librarians, later establishing itself as an association. One of the most important purposes of EASL was and still is to create a platform for knowledge, experience and opinion exchange between libraries and other institutions holding China-related book collections.

The three-day conference was held at Simon Bolivar Hall of the Berlin State Library, bringing together field specialists from all around Europe to share current issues and successes everyone had experienced in their institutions throughout the year.



Venue of the EASL conference. Berlin State Library, Potsdamer Platz 33

The first day was dedicated to introductions and reports by each present member on projects in progress, events and news on collection developments. It became clear that many institutions are facing similar challenges. One of the major issues is the decrease in number of Sinology students, most probably because there is less interest from the public towards Chinese culture due to political reasons. Other topics that were touched upon during the member meeting included: database licensing practices, handling provenance research, digitization projects, in-depth research of the library holdings.

Agenda for the second day included vendors' presentations in forenoon, followed by a presentation of rare books from the Berlin State Library collection. Database suppliers introduced new features and collections of their products. In Latvia the origins of Asian studies can be traced to at least nineteenth century, but it didn't become an academic discipline until 1991.

Today, main readers coming to the NLL Baltic Research Centre for East Asian Studies Reading Room are BA and MA students, who are still lacking language proficiency, thus the demand for highly academic e-resources in Chinese language is very low. Nevertheless, I find it important to familiarize myself with existing databases that provide materials in Sinology.



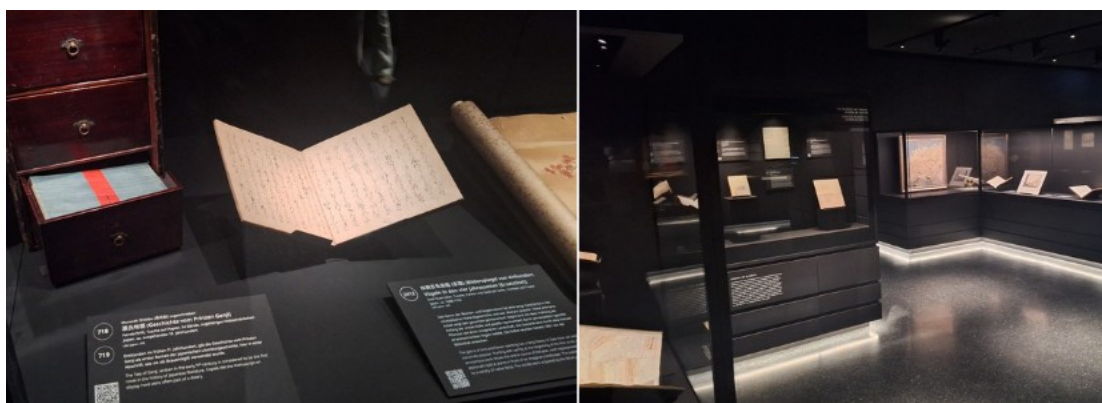
Rare books from the Berlin State Library East Asia Department collection

These two days were further complemented by cultural visits to the Berlin State Library building on Unter den Linden and to the Museum of Asian Art located at Humboldt Forum.

Our guided tour to the main Library building introduced us to the history of Stabi from its creation, to growth, damage during the war, dispersal of collections and final unification with new challenges of maintaining two buildings and shaping a logical system for dividing collections among them. Apart from seeing the General Reading Room “Atlantis”, we were also brought to the *Stabi Kulturwerk* exhibition space to explore selected objects from the library’s collections, one of the highlights being autograph scores by Mozart.



Visit to the Unter den Linden building of the Berlin State Library



Visit to the Stabi Kulturwerk museum

The final day was scheduled for presentations by members on various topics related to their collections and services. The presentations dealt with topics ranging from overview of children's literature at the library's holdings, provenance research in preparations for an exhibition, manuscript restoration to discovery of unpublished article by prominent Dutch scholar Robert van Gulik, and CrossAsia. CrossAsia is a portal maintained by Berlin State Library, it offers access to information from and about Asia. This subject was of particular interest to me, since recently SBB has started a new service of providing access to institutions under Nordic Baltic Association for Asian Studies (NoBAS). At present, NLL AsiaRes reading room still lacks user demand for such resources, but I hope that as level of Asian Studies research activities in Latvia increases, there will be more interest and more means for us to join NoBAS in future.

The EASL conference concluded with the re-election of the Board, the confirmation of the venue for the next year's conference, and the discussion of several last-minute questions.

In Latvia, there are few institutions with book collections about Chinese culture, and I may be the only librarian specializing in this field in the entire country. Therefore, attending EASL conferences significantly impacts my professional competence and development. These annual meetings provide an invaluable opportunity to deepen connections between librarians, thereby strengthening our collective network. I deeply value being part of the EASL professional community, where I experience a strong sense of purpose and belonging.

In concluding the report, I would once again like to thank *BI-International* for supporting my trip that has provided me significant experience in librarianship.

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