

## Archives in Developing Countries: The Role of Philanthropic Foundations

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**T**HE ROLE of the nonpolitical, technical assistance agency in a foreign society is to employ its financial and intellectual resources toward the solution of that society's problems. It should not act as an independent agency unconcerned with its host country's own priorities and sensitivities.

The private foundation is the most nonpolitical of technical assistance agencies and is, therefore, an interesting institution to study for motives, as well as for modes of performance, in seeking to determine how archival concerns weigh among developmental priorities. All foundations are set up with a definite purpose in mind. Most are established as conduits of private money to public causes. Foundation funds flow in specific directions, however, determined by a founder's wishes or the trustees' philosophy. Public causes are thus defined by charters, bylaws, and evolving policy. These are the motives, which need not be political. Motives may be as narrow as providing all of a foundation's income to a special institution, or they may be as all-encompassing as calling for the use of funds for "the advancement of human welfare."

A number of the larger foundations, such as Rockefeller, Carnegie, and Ford, have recognized a universality in their concerns for human welfare. In the search for stability in human endeavor, they consider interrelationships between and among countries and their peoples as important as interrelationships among conflicting domestic groups. Such views have placed these foundations on a tightrope of diplomacy where they must balance their own reason for existence with the needs and aspirations of the countries in which they work.

The problems of developing countries—where most technical assistance is directed—are overwhelming. Population growth is out-

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running food production. Hard currency reserves needed to pull developing economies into the 20th century are slim; they are earned usually by exploiting one or two basic natural resources and are often dependent on a fluctuating market that is controlled by external sources. The race to industrialize and thereby to lessen dependence on costly imports is spurred more often by xenophobic fervor than by rationality, and it brings with it uncontrolled pollution and social disorientation. The urgency of societal pressures created by such cultural disintegration directs the energies and channels the financial reserves of developing countries toward today. Little time, energy, or money is left to think about yesterday. And archives, to the layman, is an esoteric word describing things of the past. What Indonesian politician can find immediate benefit in preserving 17th-century records of the Dutch East India Company, and what value would those preserved records have in providing rice to feed millions of hungry people?

These are harsh facts. We should remember that many historical materials, with which historians and archivists from developed nations are concerned, are often alien documents to their current guardians. The written record of the developing world is primarily a history of the colonial expansion of European metropolitan powers. The attractions of tropical lands—among them the spice trade and the slave trade—were the causes of history. A Zanzibar Government official wrote to the Ford Foundation in the early post-colonial period: "The Zanzibar . . . [archives] . . . therefore cover, and in great detail, the whole period of European penetration from the east into the interior of Africa, the establishment of the first Christian missions and the measures for the suppression of the slave trade, and the international rivalries of the European powers in the 'scramble for Africa.'"<sup>1</sup> For today's political leaders of emerging nations, these are more often memories of a much too recent period of national disgrace. Nationalism, as it has intensified in the developing world, does not find its spirit in the heritage of the colonial past. In fact, it often derives a stimulus from negating that past.

Therefore, the answer to the question of how archival concerns are weighed is inherent in the hypothetical statement about the Indonesian politician. On the scale of priorities in developing countries, archival concerns do not rank among the most urgent, and the attention they receive from those countries is less than enthusiastic. Consequently, archives cannot rank as top priorities of foundations that are trying to help these countries bridge the development gap. In philanthropy, as in all things, there are no absolutes.

<sup>1</sup> P. A. P. Robertson, Chief Secretary to the Government of Zanzibar, to the Ford Foundation, Oct. 5, 1960.

Foundations have made grants in developing countries for archival needs, but these grants are very few. Before reviewing several of them, we should consider, in a general way, why a foundation might make archival grants.

In the history of overseas philanthropy, large-scale development assistance grew out of reconstruction programs following the Second World War. Although some foundations (primarily Rockefeller) had been working overseas for many years, a greater concentration of effort began in the 1950's. The financial assistance programs of the governments of developed nations were supplemented by separate programs initiated by some of the large private foundations. The principal focus of the past two decades has been on economic and technological advance. Assistance was aimed at bringing into the 20th-century economy the developing nations that span the tropical regions of the globe. Attempts were made to transplant the educational and technological experience of Western societies into soil that was often ill prepared for it.

After two decades of such "development assistance," the developers have begun to sense the cost of progress. Increased crop yields reduce the need for labor-intensive farming. Resulting mass migration from rural areas to cities strains existing urban capacities. The sterile discipline of Western industrialization displaces centuries of tradition. Cultural heritages are trampled in the march toward the future.

One result of denigration of cultural heritage is the disintegration of a society. The developers have begun to realize that a nation cannot survive on economics alone. For proof, take a tour of one of the most economics-oriented countries of the world: Soviet Russia. A new order was implanted after the Soviet revolution of 1917. Yet today, one of the most striking sights a tourist will find is the palace of Catherine the Great in Pushkin, a short distance outside Leningrad. Completely gutted by the Germans during World War II, this gilded palace is being reconstructed in all its past glory by the Soviet Government and is open as a museum. A similar tour of Moscow will reveal the same reverent maintenance of the regalia and memorabilia of the czars in the palaces and churches within the Kremlin walls. And the clusters of ordinary Russians around the display case of the fabulous Fabergé eggs silently underscore a nation's need for its past.

The last quarter century of Western civilization has been dominated, however, by technology. Progress was something that could be calibrated or computerized: we were not listening to the humanists. We drew on technology to help the developing nations advance. How could we have possibly measured their need to preserve the past?

What has happened to cause a change of view? A look at our own country may provide some leads. The last 5 years have been a period of social turmoil. There has been an awakening to the possibility that the American culture we thought had been distilled from the melting pot has little cohesiveness. Ethnic minorities are rejecting a "oneness" and opting for their own cultural identities. Unity and equality must now provide room for dignity of cultural difference.

Ethnic awareness stimulates the search for cultural roots. The black community has renewed its interest in Africa; descendants of Latin Americans no longer forsake their Latin traditions. Such community responses are being heard by those concerned with societal needs. The seeds are planted for the idea that a people's dignity is shaped by the patterns of its history—by the greatness of its past as well as by the progress of its present. As philanthropic foundations help to harness this ethnic energy into constructive forward thrusts for our whole society, they begin to sense the importance of the lesson for the developing world.

After throwing off the shackles of colonialism, many developing countries set their goals of nationhood on economic progress. But economic survival in today's world involves interdependence with other countries and interdependence does not serve as the glue of nationhood. The cultural peculiarity of a people binds them together, and their awareness that it does has raised cultural concerns to a new level of priority in foundation development work overseas. One of the first things that must be realized is the identity of the cultural heritages on which new pride will be based.

The search for such identification takes one beyond the written history of a country. As we study the past in the developing world, we find that past emerging from music, dance, painting, sculpture, and not written documentation. The media for preservation of such heritages are not those that we are familiar with as archivists. We must record the music; we must film the dance patterns; we must clean and repair the paintings and sculptures. To do these things we turn to the museum curator, the documentary film producer, and the sound technician.

Foundations have made a start toward preserving visual histories. The JDR 3rd Fund, established in 1963 by John D. Rockefeller 3rd, supports an Asian Cultural Program. One of its activities is, to quote from the Fund's 1969 Annual Report, "the conservation of Asia's magnificent traditions in the visual and performing arts."<sup>2</sup> The program has provided awards to Asian museum directors and curators, enabling them to observe procedures used in European and

<sup>2</sup> JDR 3rd Fund, *The JDR 3rd Fund Report 1969*, p. 8 (New York, 1969).

American museums, to study archeology, art history, and conservation of monuments and art works, and to attend international conferences so they can exchange information with other specialists. In addition, the Fund has supported special projects in individual countries. In India it helped the Calico Textile Museum in Ahmedabad to do research and to prepare catalogs on its textile collection. In Thailand archeology students were enabled to participate in excavation of an early Buddhist site. In Indonesia the work of several institutions documenting and recording traditional music and dance was funded.

The Ford Foundation, within the last 2 years, has also initiated a program for support of cultural projects in India. One of the prime targets, according to a project staff paper, is the preservation of that country's cultural heritage by recognizing that "each year the death of a professional teller of folk tales diminishes irretrievably the number of such tales extant, the death of a dancer results in the permanent loss of particular dances, even as the death of a great musician diminishes the number of surviving ancient musical compositions."<sup>3</sup> Under this program a few small awards have been made, however, that can better be classified as archival than as visual. A grant of \$6,500 was made to the Asiatic Society of Bombay for microfilming its collection of rare manuscripts, newspapers, and periodicals. Also, the Adyar Library and Research Center in Madras was given \$6,500 of which \$2,000 was for microfilming that Library's palm leaf and paper manuscripts and the remaining \$4,500 was for air conditioning its facilities. A third award, of \$960, was made to Edwin Bernbaum to assist in his work of inventorying Tibetan manuscripts in the library of a Buddhist monastery in Nepal.<sup>4</sup>

As these few examples show, even when preservation of audio-visual histories appears to take priority, one cannot completely forget the written documents. They, too, represent a part of history, even if it is, in many instances, unpleasant.

I noted earlier that United States foundation interest in "archival" problems emerged over the last two decades from the growing experience of the various foundations' staff members in development assistance. But an earlier spark of interest in archival problems was exhibited in the late 1930's by the Rockefeller Foundation. Rockefeller, through a grant-in-aid of \$17,000, financed a survey of libraries and archives in Central America and the West Indies.<sup>5</sup> The

<sup>3</sup> Staff paper, Request for Foundation Support for Cultural Projects in India, June 18, 1969, Ford Foundation.

<sup>4</sup> Mr. Bernbaum has described his efforts in a very interesting article entitled "The Tibetan Books of Thyangboche," in the April 12, 1971, issue of the *Harvard Bulletin*.

<sup>5</sup> Arthur E. Gropp, *Guide to Libraries and Archives in Central America and the West Indies, Panama, Bermuda, and British Guiana*, p. ii (New Orleans, 1941).

survey was conducted by the Middle American Research Institute of Tulane University in 1936 and 1937 and was focused on a study of the organization and administration of libraries and archives and their collections, with reference to local and regional source materials. A progress report on the survey was published by Arthur E. Gropp in 1936 in the *Handbook of Latin American Studies*.<sup>6</sup> As a result of the survey, Dr. Gropp subsequently published an extensive *Guide to Libraries and Archives in Central America and the West Indies, Panama, Bermuda, and British Guiana*.

It is interesting to note that the Rockefeller Foundation did not follow up that initial survey with any financial assistance for archival programs. It did, however, expand its work throughout Latin America in the field of library development. I can find no reasons for this interest in the one field over the other. It perhaps reflects the attitudes of foundations that library development is primarily a peripheral adjunct to their other concerns, such as improvement of professional training in foreign universities.<sup>7</sup> Archives, unfortunately, are not as closely linked to those concerns.

The Rockefeller Foundation did make two grants in the late 1950's for archival assistance programs, but did not follow either of these two interrelated programs with further assistance. These grants, however, preceded the current, more acute awareness by foundations of the need for cultural preservation as an important ingredient to national development.

The first was a small grant-in-aid of \$2,280. It was made in 1957 in response to a request from the Ministry of Education and Culture of Trinidad and Tobago.<sup>8</sup> In a Rockefeller Foundation internal document, the reasons for the request were stated as follows:

Parallel to [the creation of the West Indian Federation] . . . has been an ever increasing interest on the part of West Indians, and more especially by the Governments in power, in the history of their islands. Only recently have West Indians considered their islands' history as peculiarly their own rather than as a fragment of Britain's colonial empire. This recent interest in history has been made urgent by the necessity of knowing the results of past experience in preparing plans for the immediate present and the future.<sup>9</sup>

The grant funds were used to pay for the services and expenses of

<sup>6</sup> "Statement of the Progress of the Survey of Libraries and Archives of Central America and the West Indies," p. 473-481 (Cambridge, Mass., 1936).

<sup>7</sup> See Robert A. Mayer, "Latin American Libraries and U.S. Foundation Philanthropy: An Historical Survey," to be published in 1972 by the *Journal of Library History* in the proceedings of the Fourth Library History Seminar, held at Tallahassee, Florida, February 25-27, 1971.

<sup>8</sup> Rockefeller Foundation, *Annual Report 1957*, p. 255 (New York, 1958).

<sup>9</sup> Request for Grant-in-Aid, September 3, 1957, Rockefeller Foundation.

Theodore R. Schellenberg, then Assistant Archivist of the United States, to complete a survey of the archives and prepare an archival program for adoption by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. He was to be assisted in this effort by Clinton Black, the Archivist for Jamaica. In February 1958 they jointly submitted a report on their work.<sup>10</sup>

The second grant was made in 1959 to the University College of the West Indies. The grant of \$39,330 was to permit an experienced professional archivist to survey existing materials in the archives of the member nations of the West Indian Federation, to publish a guide to those materials, and to microfilm or maintain in permanent custody the archives of the smaller islands.<sup>11</sup>

This grant program produced two extremely useful publications: *A Guide to Records in Barbados* and *A Guide to Records in the Leeward Islands*.<sup>12</sup> As I mentioned before, Rockefeller made no further funds available for continuing these archival programs. It is not unusual under normal foundation philosophy that continuing support for programs be provided by the assisted organizations. As history sadly reports, the West Indian Federation collapsed in 1962. Most interisland activities, with the exception of the University of the West Indies, collapsed with the Federation. It is possible that the cooperative archives venture suffered the same fate.

Before going on to the work of other foundations—and in view of my comments that many of the documentary sources of developing countries are alien to them—we should perhaps explore one of the statements quoted earlier from the Rockefeller archives: “Only recently have West Indians considered their islands’ history as peculiarly their own rather than as a fragment of Britain’s colonial empire.” One cannot question the thought that the West Indians consider this history their own, but one can ask why they would have a more favorable attitude toward their colonial history than other developing nations. The roots of the societies of the English-speaking West Indies are transplanted ones. Little but a handful of artifacts remains of the Indian tribes that originally inhabited the islands. Their primitive cultures have been almost wiped away. The West Indian of today brought his culture from Europe or Africa or India and the Orient. The West Indian heritage in its own right began with the colonial period and is documented, there-

<sup>10</sup> “Survey and Preservation of Archives in the West Indies,” unpublished, undated (ca. July 1958) report, Rockefeller Foundation.

<sup>11</sup> Rockefeller Foundation, *Annual Report 1959*, p. 160 (New York, 1960).

<sup>12</sup> M. J. Chandler, *A Guide to Records in Barbados* (Oxford, 1965) and E. D. Baker, *A Guide to Records in the Leeward Islands* (Oxford, 1965).



fore, in the records of the slave trade, indentured labor, episcopal establishment, and colonial rule. Because of this, colonial history is more relevant to today's West Indian culture than, for example, the Dutch colonial record is to today's Indonesian culture. Diverse cultures predating Dutch hegemony still exist in Indonesia and form a basis for an older and more integral national heritage there. West Indian colonial history cannot be exorcised in the name of nationalism.

The Ford Foundation has made one archival grant in each of its three regional development programs: Asia and the Pacific, Middle East and Africa, and Latin America. Like the Rockefeller Foundation, in the late 1950's it gave to a government assistance that touched on archival concerns. A grant of \$45,000 was made to the Government of the Union of Burma to help the country's Historical Commission plan a definitive history of Burma by Burmese scholars. In his final report to the Foundation, the Commission chairman wrote that the Ford Foundation's aid had "helped the Commission to lay solid and sound foundations . . . for the planning . . . of an agency to preserve current historical documents. . . . On the archives side [we] have collected data that will be essential when drawing plans for setting up a National Archives."<sup>13</sup>

In 1963, Ford responded to a request from the National Archives of Mexico to provide the services of consultants in the field of historical archives to assist in organizing archival material from the independence period (post 1821). Dr. Schellenberg was again tapped to carry out the assignment, but a serious illness prevented him from going to Mexico. Albert H. Leisinger, Jr., worked with the Mexican authorities and prepared a report entitled "The Mexican National Archives: A Report and Recommendations."<sup>14</sup>

The third Ford effort was actually financed through two grants: \$16,700 from a larger grant to the African Studies Association (1963) and \$14,400 to Oxford University (1969) were used to support the Oxford University Colonial Records Project.<sup>15</sup> The aim was to collect papers of historical interest about Africa from former colonial officials in Great Britain. In the 6 years following the first grant, 1,700 collections of papers, including diaries, letters, and documents, were accumulated. Cooperative relationships were also established with several government archives in Africa to facilitate regular exchange of materials and information. An extremely thorough review of the Colonial Office Records Project has been written by

<sup>13</sup> Pe Maung Tin to Ford Foundation, undated.

<sup>14</sup> June 5, 1964, Ford Foundation.

<sup>15</sup> Ford Foundation, *Annual Report 1963*, p. 126 (New York, 1964), and *Annual Report, 1969*, p. 134 (New York, 1970).



Louis B. Frewer under the title "The Provision of Raw Materials for African History."<sup>16</sup> In a letter to the Foundation, an American professor of history explained succinctly the value of such projects as this one:

... Administrative archives are created by men who know the main outlines of the situation at hand, and the letters back and forth are directed to people with the same background. Unofficial records, like letters home or private journals, often assume a much narrower background on the part of the potential reader. They therefore fill in precisely the areas of assumed common knowledge that make the official correspondence partly unsatisfactory.<sup>17</sup>

Another foundation that has made a few grants for archives programs in developing countries is the Asia Foundation. In its 1969 annual report, the foundation described its reasons for considering grants in the cultural area: "Asian nations attempting to weave the often diverse ethnic and cultural threads of their peoples into a national unity which permits stable development, are defining and strengthening their cultural heritage."<sup>18</sup>

In 1967, the Asia Foundation made a grant of \$1,962 to the Ministry of Culture in South Viet-Nam for a survey of historical monuments, archives, and libraries. The project was carried out in the Hue area with the help of a Western expert, shortly before the Tet offensive that devastated that historical city. The following year the foundation provided electric typewriting equipment to the National Archives of Malaysia for use in preparing a national bibliography and furnished travel funds for the prospective head of the Records Management Division of that Archives to visit leading institutions in the United States and Canada. This observation visit was organized by the Society of American Archivists, which was also instrumental in arranging for needed supplementary funding from the Carnegie Foundation. Funds were provided in 1969 for the chairman of the Malaysian Library Association and the librarian of the National University to attend the Seminar on Tropical Archivology held in Djakarta under the sponsorship of the Southeast Asian Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives. The principal recommendations adopted by the seminar were for introduction in each country represented of comprehensive national archives legislation; provision by governments of adequate funds for archival services; recognition of the archivists' profession on a level

<sup>16</sup> In *The Bibliography of Africa: Proceedings and Papers of the International Conference on African Bibliography, Nairobi, 4-8 December, 1967* (New York, 1970).

<sup>17</sup> Philip D. Curtin, professor of history, University of Wisconsin at Madison, to Ford Foundation, Mar. 6, 1969.

<sup>18</sup> Asia Foundation, *1969 President's Review*, p. 35 (San Francisco, 1970).

with those of architects, engineers, and lawyers; and increase in the level of archivists' salaries.<sup>19</sup>

Although the more recent grants cited in this paper have all been small, they are a beginning. They represent a growing awareness among foundations of the importance of cultural pride to national unity and stability. We are now more aware that the need for help is there, and those of us familiar with the problems facing archivists in the developing countries of the tropics know that this need is acute. The natural resources of the tropics once attracted colonial expansion, and now the region's severe heat and humidity ironically endanger those fragile documents, which record that expansion.

As I have said, international philanthropy is a tightrope that must be walked with extreme caution. The emotional nature of cultural sensitivities calls for even more careful choices by foundations in entering this field of activity. Therefore, the momentum is bound to be slow and, in all probability, will never swell into an avalanche of financial assistance for cultural programs.

But foundations have undoubtedly turned a corner. Ten years ago a foundation executive summed up his feelings concerning a major proposal to assist in organizing the vast and historically rich archives of the Ottoman Empire: "I find myself worrying about the fact that the project will do more for foreign scholarship than for Turkey. If we had a few more solid contributions to Turkey's development to exhibit, I could work up more enthusiasm for this [project]." That was a very valid and sensitive statement in its time. We can be certain that we would not hear it repeated today.

<sup>19</sup> Robert S. Schwantes, Vice President for Programs, Asia Foundation, to the Ford Foundation, Aug. 2, 1971; *Unesco Bulletin for Libraries*, 24:226 (July-Aug. 1970).