Ed Teague introduced the session and welcomed the three panelists stating that they would each explore various aspects of art libraries and publishing in China.

B.J. Kish Irvine reported on "Chinese Art Libraries: Developments and Trends." While a visiting scholar at the Nanjing Arts Institute during April through June 1999, Ms. Irvine had the opportunity to visit a number of major art libraries in Nanjing, Shenyang, Beijing, Hangzhou, and Shanghai. Through an engaging slide presentation, Dr. Irvine provided a good overview of the collections, services, funding, and staffing at these libraries. The research resulting from her visit has been published in an in-depth, two-part article in the Art Libraries Journal (vols. 25/4 and 26/1).

According to Ms. Irvine, there are approximately thirty art libraries in China—ranging in scope from art school libraries (Nanjing Arts Institute) and museum libraries (Shanghai Museum of Art Library) to academic art libraries (Central Institute of Fine Arts, Beijing) and the national library (The National Library of China). Despite this number, there is a shortage of librarians nationwide. Most library school programs in China are at the undergraduate level, although some twenty masters’ programs and two doctoral programs do exist. For a good overview of this subject, Ms. Irvine recommended reading Sharon Chien Lin’s Libraries and Librarianship in China (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1998). She then described many of the issues confronting Chinese art libraries, such as the automation, preservation, and accessibility of these collections. Ms. Irvine concluded her presentation by stating that we have much to learn from our colleagues in Asia, and that she would strongly encourage each of us to go visit these libraries at some point in our professional careers.

Angela Lew, in her talk entitled “Exposing Hidden Treasures of the Dragon,” described a special project that she is currently working on which aims to bring art information and publishing in China to English language readers in North America. As indicated by Ms. Lew, there are six primary channels through which art books are generated in China: people’s arts publication houses; provincial publishers; academic presses; ethnic minority publishers; specialty presses; and museum and archives presses. Of these, the largest are the people’s arts publication houses—government owned and run presses located in each of the 25 provinces of China. Founded in the 1950’s, they are fairly stable outfits publishing anywhere from 150 to 400 titles annually. Ms. Lew noted the prestige and authority given to the people’s arts publication houses: once a person’s work is printed with these publishers, they are then considered to be the country’s most established artists.

Ms. Lew went on to explain in some detail her collaboration with two major art publishers in China on a two-phased project attempting to fill the void for Asian art books, specifically those on contemporary Chinese art. The first phase of the project is to identify Chinese art publications that already come with English text, and/or to provide English text to selected art publications. The second phase, which is in mid-process, is to locate a wide reaching distributor that will systematically distribute Chinese art publications with English text in North America. She went on to state that there are tens of thousands of art books published annually in China, of which less than five percent contain English text; of those, even less make it into the North American market. Presently, there is no incentive for Chinese publishers to expand their operations. Ms. Lew hopes to rectify this situation through her project. Since May 2000, she has taken four trips to China, established contact with seven Chinese art publishers, and participated in two international book fairs. The bottom line, according to Ms. Lew, is that Chinese art publications must provide English text in order for them to be marketable in North America.

Gu Yinhai closed out the panel with an informative paper and slide presentation, “The Introduction to the Management of the Shanghai Museum
Art Library.” Mr. Gu provided a first-hand account on the opportunities and challenges of managing a major art library in contemporary China.

Located in the eastern end of the city, the new Shanghai Museum of Art opened in 1996. Mr. Gu presented the architecturally stunning museum building and described the equally impressive collections housed within it, which include: early- and middle-dynasty Chinese paintings, calligraphy, ceramics, bronze and jade works, ancient imperial seals and coins, scrolls, bamboo artwork, metal arts, sculpture, and the costumes and embroidery of minority ethnic groups.

Mr. Gu’s account was the next best thing to actually being there.

A lively question-and-answer session followed. The audience was particularly intrigued to learn more about the Chinese publishing industry from Ms. Lew. She agreed to supply a list of names and contact information for Chinese art book vendors on ARLIS-L. She also remarked that she eventually intends to publish a report on her research project. A discussion then arose concerning the book trade in Taiwan and Hong Kong where the art publishing business is prosperous, primarily because of the availability of English language text. In conclusion, a representative from Paragon Books also noted that they currently have two offices in China, of which one is located in Shanghai. They, too, are working closely with art publishing houses to try to improve the quality and quantity of Chinese art materials that enter the North American market.