

**A National Approach to Chinese Electronic Resource Subscription :
Presentation to the EALRGA Round Table Discussion on Chinese Collection
13 July 2011, Menzies Library, the Australian National University**

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Rebecca Wong presented at the EALRGA Round Table Discussions, 13 July 2011.
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East Asian libraries in Australia have been striving to provide useful information resources to support teaching and research needs of our user communities. This paper is an exploratory attempt to investigate whether a national approach is a feasible way forward.

A National Approach – what does it mean

Literature reviews show that the “National approach” can be summarized into two categories, based on the funding structure and organization model:

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1. National License with full or partial central funding support

Examples of National License for library electronic resources exist in Germany (Coordinated and supported by the German Research Foundation in collaboration with other libraries), South Korea (Korea Education & Research Information Services KERIS), Finland (FinELib), Canada (The Canadian Cochrane Network and Centre). One common feature of these is that they are steered and operated by institutional leaders who initially provide full or partial funding support for the licenses. It is not uncommon for these national initiatives to gradually turn into a member self-funded approach, once the establishment has matured or central funding is not sustainable, or has reached its limit.

2. Consortia approach

Most of the other library consortia operate under the guidance of an institutional leader or with collaborative efforts from consortium members by jointly negotiating national or consortium agreements. Such subscriptions are self-funded by participating members. Examples can be found in the United Kingdom, Hong Kong, and Australia.

The Australian Landscape

A number of consortium-like collaborations already exist in Australia. National Licenses are successfully established by *Universities Australia* as one joint license negotiated for access by all member libraries which pay a share of the license fee agreed through internal distribution. The *CAUL Electronic Information Resources Consortium* of the *Council of Australian University Librarians* has been a key player in consortium negotiation for more than a decade. Consortium negotiation is central to reaching common agreements for all CAUL members. All subscriptions are self-funded by participated members. Go8 joint negotiation process has been in place for some time for selected product(s). These are of common interest to the Group's member libraries, under a funding model similar to that of CAUL. *Electronic Resources Australia* (ERA) is a national purchasing consortium for Australian libraries which extends beyond academic sectors into a range of non-academic libraries. ERA evolved from an Australian parliamentary report in 2003 and took its current shape after the *4th National Licensing Proposal Forum* in 2007. Despite the original recommendation that

- the National Library of Australia identify a number of key databases for which national site licensing might be desirable; and
- additional Australian Government funding be extended to the National Library of Australia for this purpose,

Agreement to proceed was established in 2007 in the form of an "opt-in/opt-out", vendor/library financial model with a defined governance framework and communications strategy (Missingham, 2009). The interests of East Asian Libraries have so far not been well represented in these established consortia. A consortium such as CAUL has tried to promote East Asian electronic resources (CJK resources) but no agreement has been established because of an inadequate level of interest shown by members for an agreement to be reached.

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This could be because of a range of factors, such as that some member libraries already have their individual license established, or there is a lack of funds, or lack of interest, or a combination of such reasons. A significant contributing factor to this situation is the small number of East Asian academic libraries in Australia. East Asian academic libraries are comparatively insignificant within the existing group of CAUL members. The number of potential participants is further diminished to a negligible level given collection funding constraints which hinder East Asian libraries from adding new subscriptions to their collections. Another possible obstacle may be the language barrier and lack of business negotiation experience between CJK information providers and Australian consortia operators.

Challenges

CJK resources are a treasure and are unique, multilingual and traverse cultural boundaries that are not characteristic of monolingual collections. There are several features of information needs that CJK resources have and which are demonstrated in Australian academic communities:

1. Small user communities

The size of East Asian information resources user communities is minimal when compared to American or Asian counterparts. Standard pricing of CJK resources applied to western academic libraries are often too high to be justifiable within the Australian market.

2. Broad range of research interests

Despite the comparatively small user communities, research interest within the Australian academic arena covers across a broad range of subject areas with quality increasingly recognized both regionally and internationally.

3. Limited collection funding and staffing resources

These two limitations force individual East Asian libraries to be extremely selective when it comes to making decisions around subscriptions or purchases. When only few high priorities purchases can be made, a significant quantity of potential useful resources is left behind. Affordability in terms of collection budgets and availability of processing staff with both language and professional skills are not easy hindrances to overcome.

4. Organizational support

Levels of support for an East Asian library within an institutions' overall library system will always vary, as this depends on the weight of Asian studies within the institutions' broader strategy. There may also be historical reasons bearing down on the question of collection development direction(s).

5. Government support

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The lack of central funding support has already been illustrated in the history of establishing ERA. Given that East Asian libraries are only a subset of academic interests within academic communities, this perception makes the question of ongoing central funding a lesser priority.

Way Forward

Scope of local interest

Before moving forward to a collaborative approach to tackle the obstacle of limited resources and meet the broad range of information needs, there is an urgent need for East Asian Libraries to identify their local interest in terms of scope and size of relevant user groups. In order to enable further collaborative effort, communication strategies are required to support identification of resources of common interest between two or more East Asian libraries.

Perspective of the local to the global

Whether a resource is of interest to more than one library (or even of Australia-wide interest), it is important to place the scale of need in some perspective by evaluating it against our counterparts in other parts of the world. In most cases, the effective number of potential users may not be as large or daunting as the perceived number for a “National license” being applied in other countries. This will be an essential indicator on reasonable pricing that Australian libraries need to insist on when this issue comes to the negotiation table.

Potential institutional leadership and improved sharing

To overcome the challenge of limited funding and staffing constraint, East Asian libraries should begin to look into potential institutional leader(s) which can advocate for government funding, as a grant seeking agent, and/or provide administrative support on collaborative negotiations or support resource management processes. Before then, East Asian library communities have to explore alternate solutions such as various means of collection sharing within or beyond Australia and rigorously manage limited resources to meet the needs of their users to the best possible extent.

Endnote:

Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts References Committee (2003), “Libraries in the online environment”, Senate, Canberra, available at www.apf.gov.au/senate/committee/ecita_ctte/completed_inquiries/2002-04/online_Libraries/report/report.pdf (accessed 7 July 2011).

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