



EAST ASIAN LIBRARY RESOURCES GROUP OF AUSTRALIA

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## Report on the Librarians' meeting at the 2012 ASAA Conference, UWS.

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A number of librarians representing Asian collection of respective libraries met during the Asian Studies Association of Australia's biennial conference at the University of Western Sydney Library in July 2012. There were thirteen librarians representing UWS, NLA, ANU, University of Melbourne, University of Sydney and two retired librarians. The discussion was robust and touched on many issues of pressing concerns around the table. Some of the issues include: sharing resources nationally, sharing information nationally, purchasing consortia, national approach perhaps in the form of an independent/neutral body ('library for libraries').

The meeting started with brief introductions around the table, followed by a quick update on the Asia Pacific Special Interest Group (APSIG)'s submission to the Asian Century Task Force and Ken Henry's presentation at the NLA. There was also a short presentation from the 'Australia in the Asian Century' Submissions Summary April 2012.

The rest of the time was open discussion on the following topics pertaining to issues of "doing Asian collection" at our respective institutions and across the nation.

### Organisational structure

It was raised that "doing Asian collection" is necessarily different with each organization. Each institution has different organisational structures within which Asian collection sits; for example, liaison-type where there is no specialised staff or collections dedicated to Asian material alone.

### Sharing resources nationally

There was also quite a lot of discussion on the need for those working on Asian collection to think collection development nationwide. ALIM (Asian Libraries in Melbourne) was offered as an example of such an effort: collaboration between University of Melbourne and Monash University libraries. For example, the Korean collection development is shared, purchased with a shared budget, and stored in Monash University Library. Reference, user education (LibGuides, etc.) and other areas of expertise are shared as well.

Concern was also raised regarding the duplication of resources around the nation, and the recognition that some duplication is always necessary due to the institutional needs and concerns.

### **Central register**

Currently there isn't a central register of collections which indicates their significance, contacts, policies and other information. It was agreed that a central register such as this would promote communication and information sharing amongst all librarians involved in Asian collections. It was proposed that a register should be updated on a monthly basis with possible reviews by interested academics, and published in Asian Currents (published monthly by ASAA). However, it was raised that sometimes it can be difficult to get the academic community to take interest in library news.

### **Purchasing consortia**

A buying consortia was raised particularly for e-resources that would complement the different libraries, their collections and policies. It is argued that such a consortia will help with negotiations with vendor and concerning licensing and such issues. The group discussed the benefits of such a consortium: to help Australian libraries negotiate better with vendors in terms of greater bargaining power as a united group, particularly for the smaller libraries/collections. However, this was contradicted by NLA's experience in their negotiation for a national license; they had to pay three times the normal rate.

It was also raised that some libraries may not have adequate funds and would have problems maintaining a long-term commitment to a consortium. If this is the case, purchases through the consortium may exclude ongoing subscriptions. There are two existing consortia we can draw examples from: CAUL (Council of Australian University Libraries) and NSLA (National State Library Australasia). CAUL sometimes has difficulty garnering interests for specific and specialist resources, and faces problems specifically in reaching out to specialists. From the NSLA experience – the cost of individual products was at times more than it would be with individual negotiations with vendor/s.

### **National approach**

The idea of databases and other resources jointly owned and subscribed nationally as opposed to that owned and subscribed to by individual institutions. But for this type of collaboration to be successful, there needs to be agreement at the executive level for long-term commitment. Both librarians and the users they serve need to have assurance of continued providence of access. We need a national approach and agreement in purchasing and in dealing with vendors.

Such an approach will also allow us to share resources and expertise – where a group of specialists can assess resources and share that information to others. For example, the Asian Studies Subscription Databases (as on ALIM website) is updated yearly and proven to be very useful to users. Another Victorian initiative is the registry of Asian language databases available at Victorian public libraries. This is a state-level mechanism that can be a model towards developing a national-level one.

## **Independent/neutral body**

Also raised was the idea of an independent body that is solely dedicated to Asian collection nationally. It was proposed that in the interest of equitable access for all Australians, be it in major cities or regional areas, the idea of an autonomous body outside and above all the university, national, state and public libraries that will serve the interest of Asian studies nationally. Under this body, Asia-related libraries can negotiate as a single entity with vendors which will avoid many of the issues discussed, especially some of the divide-and-rule tactics some vendors employ. This will be a body that can strategically steer Asian libraries and collection nationally.

## **Other issues**

Other issues raised were shortage of staff, different users and needs, and Southeast Asian and other smaller collections. While much of the discussion focused on China collection, it was acknowledged that there is equally no long-term policy on collection development in this area, and similar issues are compounded by the lack of expertise and diversity of languages.

The group also discussed the role and tasks for the first Asian librarian representation to the ASAA Council. Among which were to establish a means of communication (e.g. an email mailing list), facilitate regular discussions, organise the next meeting in conjunction with the ASAA Conference, and establish a national register of Asian librarians and collections. With the representative actively on board, it is hoped that the Asian librarians' meeting will be held regularly.

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