

NETWORKS AND DATABASES:
ONLINE ACCESS TO EAST ASIAN RESOURCES

Susan MacDougall
Library and Information Studies
University of Canberra

Library catalogues and the indexed journal literature are becoming more accessible in databases of various kinds. Online sources of information have been around for a number of years; now, Compact Disk Read-Only Memory (CD-ROM) and the academic wide area networks, of which the Australian Academic Network (AARNet) is one, circumvent telecommunications costs and bring online resources more within the reach of librarians and academic staff. This paper outlines some of the online information channels and resources which are available for East Asian studies, mainly in Australia and the United States.

In the last few years, information has become accessible through an increasing number of information channels. There are now databases available on search services, CD-ROM, library networks, and stored on microcomputers. Librarians have had access to online search services and library resource-sharing networks for some years. However, access has been restricted by telecommunications costs and search fees. Academic staff have been more isolated than librarians, although they had access to these same services through their libraries. Now at last, academic wide area networks are significantly improving access to online information for both groups.

In Australia, the bulk of research resources for East Asian studies is concentrated in the collections of the National Library of Australia (NLA), the Australian National University (ANU), Sydney University and the University of Melbourne. Other university libraries also contain a growing number of East Asian materials: notably the Universities of Griffith, Murdoch and Macquarie. The new National Korean Studies Centre is a joint undertaking between Swinburne Institute of Technology and the universities of La Trobe, Monash and Melbourne, and it is to be hoped that those institutions will support their courses with library resources. Overseas, and in the United States in particular, there are large East Asian studies collections of interest to Australian scholars.

Online information has long been available for research and business. Commercial search services offer access to online databases which are predominantly, but not exclusively, business-oriented, while services offered by public utilities tend to be research-oriented. A number of

services offer database with some East Asian coverage. Some databases which specifically index Asia-related materials are listed in Appendix 1.

Asian materials can be found scattered in other databases too. A search of China-related materials in selected databases on the DIALOG search service, which offers over 300 databases, revealed that coverage of China-related materials in economics comprised less than point three (.3) percent of the total records (MacDougall, 1991: 4). While it is a small percentage, it could represent up to 15,000 records in a database of 5 million records. Thus, although Asia-related materials are concentrated in particular databases, there is potentially useful material scattered through other databases.

CD-ROM is another method of accessing much the same information. Libraries make CD-ROM disks available to the user at no cost to the user. If cost is more important than currency of information, CD-ROM is a convenient substitute for online searching: CD-ROM is more user-friendly, although slower. On the other hand, if CD-ROM is viewed as a substitute for the paper-based indexing and abstracting tools, searching is markedly quicker and more convenient. The coverage of East Asian materials on CD-ROM disk is more restricted than in the online databases since, to the best of my knowledge, no Asia-specific database is yet available on CD-ROM.

CD-ROM products have proved particularly popular in libraries. Of course, despite an increasing number of databases becoming available on CD-ROM, the range of databases is less than that offered by online vendors, and library users are limited by the CD-ROM databases purchased by their library. But if a library's CD-ROM services are networked to the local system, they can, in turn, become accessible through AARNet.

CD-ROM brings external databases into the library, while networks provide access within the library to external databases. There are various types of networks, including library resource-sharing networks. In Australia alone, there are over twenty of these. Examples are: the Australian Bibliographic Network (ABN), the Co-operative Action by Victorian Academic Libraries (CAVAL); the Curriculum Corporation (ASCIS); Technilib; and, Unilink (formerly Co-operating Action Libraries Network NSW, or CLANN). These networks offer information on books and serial titles that complements the online journal literature services. They also hold some East Asian content. Their services are not freely accessible, however. A subscription and a knowledge of one or more command languages is necessary to search them.

Results of a search in September 1991 in the ABNF (non-English materials) subset of the ABN database for titles on several broad subject areas, wholly or partly in Chinese, Japanese or Korean, are set out in Table 1. Figures 1a, 1b and 1c show the percentage of these materials which are available in Australian libraries, for Chinese, Japanese and Korean respectively. The figures were obtained by limiting the previous searches to those bibliographic records with Australian holdings (HOLDING EQ Y).

Looking at Figures 1a, b and c, it is evident that the amount of material held in Australian libraries depends on the topic and the language. For Chinese-language materials, Australian libraries held between 4.6 and 56 percent of the titles; for Japanese, they held between 27 and 64 percent; and, for Korean, they held between 6 and 23 percent. The percentages reflected teaching and research emphases and community needs in Australia. The highest percentage for Chinese and Japanese was for materials on Language, while the highest percentage for Korean was for Religion. The lowest percentage of items held in all three was for Economics. The overall low level of holdings of Korean materials reflected the fact that Korean collections were only just being developed in Australia.

The figures do not give a complete picture of Australian resources for Chinese, Japanese and Korean studies, as not all Australian libraries put their resources onto the ABN database. However, most libraries with East Asian collections are full participants of ABN.

In the United States, the two major resource-sharing networks are the Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN) and the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC). Both these networks support CJK scripts online. Two Australian libraries, ANU and the University of Melbourne, are participants of OCLC; ANU Library copy-catalogues from the network but does not catalogue online (Chan, 1991: 3).

AARNet is a network but not a database. Its importance lies in the access it provides to services through the international network system, Internet, which connects more than 2,000 networks. Many Australian and US higher education institutions with major East Asian collections are available over the network. Australian libraries with East Asian studies collections which are not within the higher education sector may not be entitled to join the network; therefore, their material may not be available by these means. Fortunately, the National Library became available over AARNet this year.

Table 1: Numbers of titles on ABN wholly or partly in Chinese, Japanese or Korean

SUBJECT	CHINESE	JAPANESE	KOREAN
Economics	541	784	128
History	8024	14386	1978
Language	3126	3374	396
Literature	2052	1944	551
Philosophy	820	881	218
Religion	82	408	43

Figure 1a: The percentages of Chinese resources on ABN held by Australian libraries

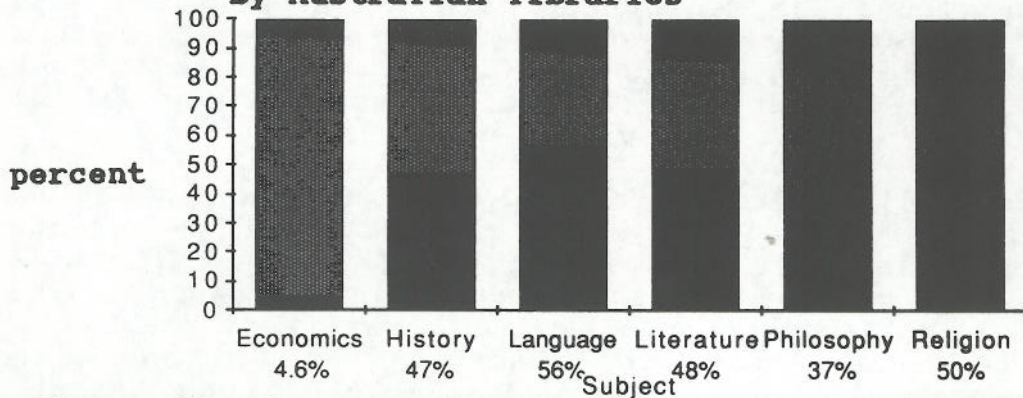


Figure 1b: The percentages of Japanese resources on ABN held by Australian libraries

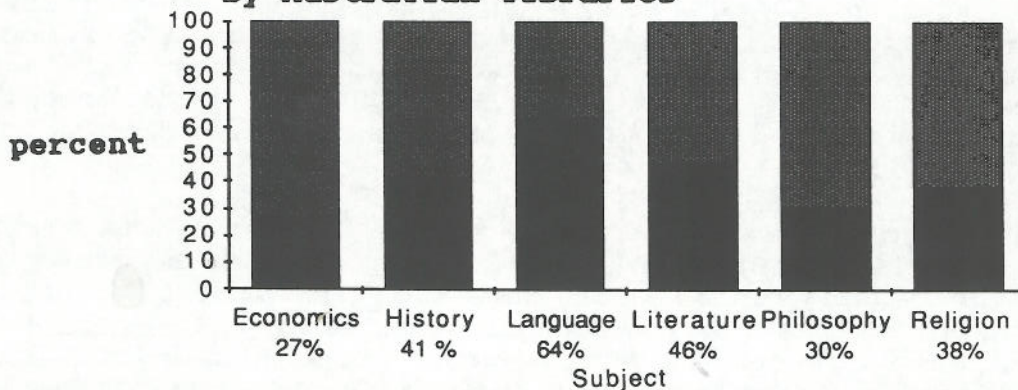
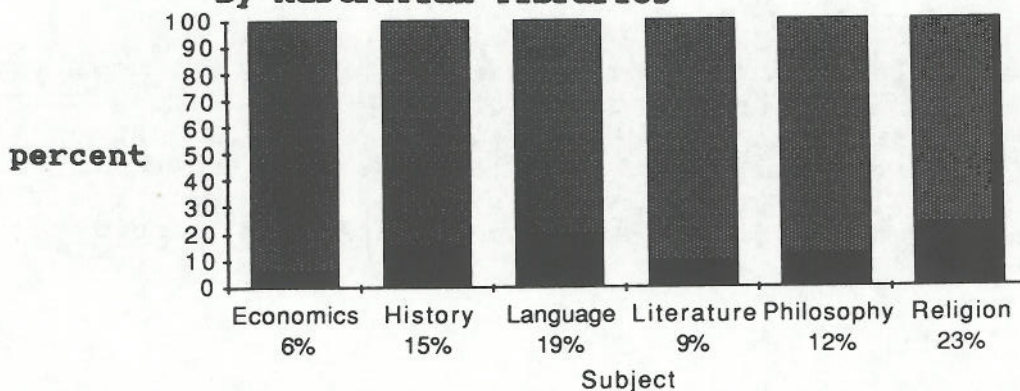


Figure 1c: The percentages of Korean resources on ABN held by Australian libraries



Some library catalogues have been available online for several years, firstly in the local library, then through dial-up over the telephone system, and now on university networks. Online catalogues are usually menu-driven and easy to navigate. Most importantly, they are usually free. Most Australian universities are connected to AARNet, and their libraries are or will be connected.

For example, the ANU Library's catalogue is available through dial-up and on AARNet. English-language works on East Asian topics are accessible, but online access to East Asian-language materials is currently limited to serials. The National Library's East Asian materials are on ABN in romanised form only, and accessible, for a fee, through direct line or dial-up, and now on AARNet. Overseas, the library catalogues of many United States universities with major East Asian research collections are accessible from Australia through AARNet. However, it should be noted that the East Asian-language collections themselves may not be online.

Other potentially useful databases also exist which may be searchable online. There is a current trend to create private databases for study and research. These databases can grow into a useful resource which can eventually be shared with colleagues in other institutions through the exchange of floppy disks or by mounting the database on a network, which may in turn be accessible through AARNet. The information itself may be extremely useful, although searching may be affected by the quality of vocabulary control and indexing; not all of these databases are being established by people with information management skills. Details about these databases are limited, but a directory of Australian university research databases is currently in preparation (Cockerill & Triffett, 1991).

From the foregoing, it is evident that a number of factors inhibit effective retrieval of information from online sources. Some are general problems of online access, others are specific to East Asian-language materials. Problems associated with online databases include the absence of East Asian script, automation, the existence of two Chinese romanisation standards, and difficulties in document supply. These are outlined next.

A prerequisite for finding materials online is that they are available online. The databases offered by search services can be identified from directories. However, it cannot be assumed that all the faculties and the libraries of the institutions listed as belonging to networks are in fact connected, or that their East Asian catalogue records are automated.

Then again, cost is a major factor in online searching. The charging for online time, data transmission, and monthly service fees, and the need for subscriptions to each search service effectively prohibit regular and casual searching by the individual researcher. The free services are most likely to be individual library catalogues and bulletin boards.

Another important factor is searching itself. Library catalogues tend to be menu-driven, but the ability to search the indexing and abstracting databases relies on knowledge of specific command languages. Since there is no standardisation of command languages, searchers may need to learn several. To some extent, this restricts access to trained users or intermediaries. A common command language which would simplify searching has been under investigation for some time but is not universally available. Some services offer menu-driven searching for the inexperienced searcher. This is helpful, but has the disadvantage that searching takes longer and costs more. The use of front end packages to compose a search strategy which can be uploaded after log-on saves search time but reduces interaction between the searcher and service, and may affect the effectiveness of the search.

The need for individual subscriptions to each search service is another inhibiting factor. Telecom provides a search service called Intelnet which is aimed at the end-user. It overcomes the need for multiple subscriptions and for a knowledge of command languages. Even so, the cost element remains.

As far as AARNet and in-house databases are concerned, information sources exist which are not documented in any directory; access is therefore restricted to those who are aware of them.

The automation of East Asian-language materials also presents some problems, the most fundamental problem being the lack of East Asian scripts in most online databases except those which have been noted, namely OCLC and RLIN. This, of course, affects the comprehensibility of online records. Although the technology exists to handle CJK scripts, the hardware and software required to store and display them are more expensive than for alphabet-based characters. Romanisation remains an unsatisfactory substitute for these scripts.

The choice of romanisation method itself may also inhibit searching. The Wade-Giles/Pinyin controversy is probably confined to libraries, and has been discussed elsewhere. Suffice it to say that end users are not at ease with the Wade-Giles romanisation for Chinese.

Finding useful materials online is only the first step in obtaining information. Unless the full text of documents is available online, it is still necessary to obtain a copy of the original document, either on interlibrary loan or in the form of a copy for retention. There can be obstacles and delays at this stage, too.

This paper has given a glimpse of some online services and databases available to staff and librarians in academic institutions in Australia. AARNet is an exciting development with great potential for improved communication and access to information. The great benefit of AARNet is that it provides relatively unrestricted access to a number of services that are both free and relatively easy to search. These are predominantly online library catalogues, which include English-language resources on East Asian studies but may or may not include their East Asian-language materials.

While there is a range of potentially useful information for East Asian studies in online sources, there are gaps in what is available and, in some cases, barriers to obtaining what information there is. Unfortunately, major research resources in the form of abstracted and indexed journal literature still remain expensive and difficult for the individual to search.

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ONLINE DATABASES ON CHINA, JAPAN AND KOREA

These databases are available over various networks and from various information services. The list is not exhaustive, but provides an indication of what is available. The information is taken from the *Information Industry Directory*.

Asia/Pacific Database

China Economic Database

China Express

China Express Contracts

China News

Chinalaw

CHINAPATS (Patent Abstracts of China)

Chinese Economy Databank

Chinese Patent Abstracts in English Data Base

Chinese Pharmacy Abstracts

Chinese Thesaurus

East Asian Business Intelligence

East Asia Executive Reports

JAPAN (National Biomedical Research Foundation

Japan Brief (GENIOS Economic Databases)

Japan Computer Industry Scan

Japan Consumer Electronics Scan

Japan Directory of Professional Associations Database (JDPA)

Japan Economic & Business Data Base

Japan Economic Daily (JED)

Japan Economic Newswire (JEN)

Japan Economic Newswire Plus

Japan Energy Scan

Japan Free Press

Japan High Tech Review

Japan High Technology Monitor Data Base

Japan Information Center of Science and Technology (JICST):

File on Current Science and Technology Research in Japan

Japan Information Center of Science and Technology (JICST):

File on Medical Science in Japan

Japan Information Center of Science and Technology (JICST):

File on Science and Technology

Japan Information Center of Science and Technology (JICST):

File on Science, Technology, and Medicine in Japan

JAPAN/MARC

Japan National Diet Library Data Bases

Japan National Institute for Environmental Studies Data Bases

Japan Oceanographic Data Center Data Base (JODC)

Japan Patent Information Organization (Japio) Data Base

Japan Pharmaceutical Abstracts
Japan Policy and Politics
Japan Publications Guide Service (JPGS) Database
Japan Science Scan
Japan Semiconductor scan
Japan Technology
Japan Teehnology Information and Evaluation Service (J-TIES)
Data Base
Japan Telecommunications Scan
Japan Weekly Monitor
Japanese Aviation News: Wing
Japanese Investment in U.S. Real Estate
Japanese National Bibliography
Japanese Periodicals Index
JAPICDOC Data Base
JAPINFO

KOMPASS Asia/Pacific

Korea Automotive Review
Korea High Tech Review
Korean Periodicals Index

Kyodo News from Japan
Kyodo News Service

Teikoku Bank: Japanese Companies

