

THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG: EAST ASIAN INFORMATION SOURCES ON THE INTERNET

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East Asian librarians in Australia tend to be scattered geographically and suffer from isolation, especially those in smaller libraries. Internet gives access to the wider community of colleagues with similar interests, not only in the US, Canada and the UK, but also in other European and East Asian countries. News and views can be shared without the time lags associated with correspondence or the expense of long distance telephone calls. Electronic networks provide an exciting opportunity to break down the barriers of time and distance.

However, electronic information is not immediately visible. Those wanting to find out what is there have had to take an active role in seeking it out. Australian institutions have gained access to the Internet through AARNet, the Australian portion of the network, relatively recently, and many users are eager to use relevant online services if only they can find them. On the Internet there are most certainly services of interest to East Asian librarians and scholars: a brief introduction is presented here.

The range of services available on the Internet is ever-growing. The main types of services can be summarised as: electronic mail (email), bulletin boards, and databases supplying mail facilities, news, announcements, computer programs, statistical data and bibliographies or full text electronic documents and journals. These are made available on database and archive file servers at given sites in various countries. Of course, document supply is an important aspect of information retrieval. Documents are obtainable in various ways, including: capturing searches to file; inserting text-only documents or files within the body of email messages; attaching documents or files to email; emailing to oneself documents or data found on a database; transferring files; or lastly, by the online ordering of items for delivery by fax or post. The method may depend on the type of document (text or binary), its size, and on its availability in full form online.

Resources of interest to East Asian libraries are scattered over various services. With appropriate equipment, it is possible to access documents written in Chinese, and, presumably, also in Japanese and Korean. The most difficult part is knowing where to find these services.

Bulletin boards and newsgroups

The News is an open access news server (bulletin board) which enables searchers to read notices posted by other people as well as replying to notices or "posting" new notices themselves. Newsgroups can be accessed through news software on local file servers or through menus on local campus wide information services (cwis). Some mailing lists are also accessible as newsgroups, and are thus available without the need to subscribe to a mailing list.

Conferences and mailing lists

An electronic discussion is a group of network users who have joined the same group because a shared interest in a common subject area. Names are held on a distribution list or mailing list which allows the same message to be sent to all the people on the address list. One method of administering a mailing list is to maintain it at a coordinating site on a computer called Listserv, Mailserv, Comserve or Mailbase. Subscription to any of these is through email to the computer at a given Internet address. Instructions vary slightly, and should be followed carefully. In particular, it is important to send the subscribing message to the computer rather than to all the recipients of the mailing list, and to cancel or pause the subscription when going on holiday.

Eastlib is THE mailing list for East Asian librarians. Current membership consists mainly of American and Canadian, but also European, Asian and a few Australian librarians and other interested people. Email topics can cover any issues that participants wish to discuss. Typically, participants receive notices of meetings, conferences and job vacancies, resources, crises or other events affecting individual libraries or institutions, and discussions on a range of matters such as cataloguing standards and East Asian name authority control.

Subscribe to Eastlib by sending the message `subscribe eastlib <your name>` (e.g. `subscribe eastlib John Jones`) to the archive file server `archive@mento.acs.unc.edu`. Do not put anything in the Subject field. Messages for distribution to members of the group itself should be addressed to `eastlib@mento.acs.unc.edu` (`archive@mento.acs.unc.edu`). Similarly, to leave the list, send the command `unsubscribe eastlib` to `archive@mento.acs.unc.edu`. Commands to join and leave the list must be sent to the archive server address and not to the conference group mail address.

Transferable files

File archives are available for anonymous access (that is, no password or account is needed) and can be transferred using file transfer protocol (ftp) facility. A good source of information about China, Hong Kong and Taiwan can be found at the anonymous ftp site `ifcss.org` established by the Chinese Community Information Center (CCIC) of Independent Federation of Chinese Students and Scholars. This site has documents in Chinese which can be read in the original with appropriate hardware and software. Ftp to the site and use the guest login `anonymous` then your email address as the password. Use the `get` command with the filename to transfer the selected file to your own file server or local computer. For information, fetch the README file first and have a look at it. (Remember that commands and file names are case sensitive.)

Database services

Databases include library catalogues, commercial search services and specific services such as Carl Uncover. Library catalogues are readily available through many information service menus, while commercial database vendors such as Dialog offer restricted access to the indexed and abstracted journal literature.

Carl Uncover now contains an increasingly significant Chinese, Japanese and Korean content of journal literature, including the full text of the *Bulletin of the Committee on East Asian Libraries* (CEAL). Selected journal articles can be ordered quoting a Mastercard, Visacard, American Express or special deposit account number and identifying a fax number (preceded by the international dialling code 0011). Charges include royalties and fax fees, and documents are delivered within 24 hours.

There are library online public access catalogues (OPACs) on the Internet on which supply searching and displaying in Chinese script. The University of Science and Technology of Hong Kong (HKUST) library catalogue is one example, based on Innopac software.

In general, since the development of gopher-based menu systems and hytelnet software, network users no longer need to worry about Unix or VAX commands or network addresses. It is, quite properly, the concern of the providers of information services to make online services easy to find through user-friendly interfaces.

Electronic Journals

The term "electronic journals" is often used to cover a wide range of serial publication types: newsletters, magazines, peer-reviewed journals, and new kinds of publication for which there is no print counterpart. Transmission by electronic means is an eminently suitable method for the rapid distribution of current information.

The *China News Digest* is an electronic journal containing general news about China and Chinese affairs. As the online information file explains, China News Digest (CND) is a non-profit broadcasting service based on computer networks in which all CND members are volunteers. To subscribe, send email to listserv@asuacad.bitnet with the message `sub china-nn` followed by your name. Do not put anything in the Subject field.

There are further related lists including a Chinese-language version called the *China News Digest - Chinese Magazine*, which can be read with appropriate hardware and software. To subscribe, send the message `sub ccman-l <your name>` to listserv@uga.uga.edu. Do not attach a signature. Back issues can be retrieved from archives by anonymous ftp from ahkcus.org or by email from the relevant LISTSERV file server.

The foregoing is just a taste of what is available over the Internet. As time goes on, those who do not have access to the Internet may feel increasingly left out. Those who do have access would be unwise not to make the most of the opportunity. The greatest problem, as everyone knows, is finding time to explore and experiment. If East Asian librarians pool their information concerning resources on the Internet, we can all share and benefit.