

## MELBOURNE ASIAN RESEARCH LIBRARIES CONSORTIUM AND JAPANESE INFORMATION RESOURCES

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### BACKGROUND

Academics and senior university planners have long been acutely aware of the paucity of resources to support Asian studies. In spite of the many discussions about the limited resources spent on Asian language materials and the acknowledgment of the need for increased resources, there has been little success in obtaining additional funds for Asian collections. In the early 1990s, a concept was being promoted of all major Asian resources being Canberra-based. The idea of a joint Australian National University / National Library of Australia Asian store was mooted at about the same time.

We Melbourne librarians have a seriously practical streak and our response to all of this was to see what we could do for our researchers within the resources available to us, within this region. Essentially, this was the model on which the Melbourne Asian Research Libraries Consortium (MARLC) was based and on which it continues its cooperative activities.

During this period, we were also beginning to plan for the **National CJK (China-Japan-Korea) Project**. Librarians had to face the challenge of delivering a service in a new scenario where researchers would be able to see the resources of our own libraries as well as the major Australian libraries on the national databases in vernacular script. Naturally we intended to retrospectively catalogue our card materials as well so we had the prospect of a real resource sharing database before us.

It should be noted that we were also talking about Chinese, Indonesian and Korean materials though for the purpose of this paper, the focus will be on Japanese materials.

## Monash and Melbourne Links

In the early years, Melbourne University Library and Monash University Library developed their Asian collections to support the Asian programs at the respective institutions. Since the 1980s, there has been a blurring of academic programs between the two institutions and the libraries had to spread their limited resources across many more Asian countries.

The librarians with responsibility for managing the Asian collections in both Monash and Melbourne have long recognised the need for cooperation in order to maximise their limited resources. By sharing expertise and the joint development of collections, both the libraries would be able to provide an enhanced service to their respective clientele. Since 1993, the associate university librarians and their Asian studies teams have been holding joint meetings as the Melbourne Monash Asian Library Group. Over the years this group worked in close cooperation for the common good of both the institutions. It eventually evolved into the Melbourne Asian Research Libraries Consortium which was renamed the Melbourne Asian Research Libraries Consortium (MARLC) in June 1996. MARLC was formally launched in April 1999.

### WHAT IS MARLC?

MARLC, the Melbourne Asian Research Libraries Consortium, comprises the Asian language collections in the libraries of Monash University and the University of Melbourne.

The Consortium provides:

- **MARLC Research Guide to Asian Language Resources** - a web-based guide designed for researchers in Asian studies with the emphasis on material held by consortium members
- **reciprocal access to the collections** by users from both universities
- preferential treatment of **interlibrary loan requests** for material from Asian collections
- more efficient **collection development** through exchange of information between both libraries.
- access to a wide range of **electronic databases** held at both libraries.
- a team of **Asian studies specialists** covering China, Japan, Korea, and Indonesia.

For example, the Japanese Studies Librarians: Michelle Hall (Melbourne) and Eiko Sakaguchi (Monash)

Over the period 1995-1997, the Group concentrated its energies on two fronts:

- **Local**  
Librarians focussed on meeting the academic requirements of their respective institutions.

- **National**

Much energy went into the planning and development of the National CJK Project, which would provide for the first time ever a vernacular database accessible to all researchers. The NCJK project was our top priority, as it underpins our strategy for regional resources sharing.

Similarly, as a result of agreements at the 3rd National Roundtable on Libraries and Asia, subject specialisation was seen to be important and in order to achieve that we agreed to do Conspectus work and report this to NLA. However, it has never become a major plank of our cooperative endeavour.

## **LIBRARY RESOURCES FOR JAPANESE RESEARCH**

Despite the Internet and its promise (or fantasy) of cheap and accessible research resources, libraries supporting Japanese research in Australia are generally under-resourced both in terms of the size of their collections and the financial resources required to build them. A further reality is that while collections in Canberra or Sydney are accessible to researchers in Victoria, in practical terms, it is only at the high cost of interstate travel.

In Melbourne, in the early 1990s, there were two major, though small, Japanese language collections located at Monash University and the University of Melbourne. To put this in perspective the combined holdings of both the libraries total some 24,000 titles or 40,000 volumes

### **MARLC JAPANESE LANGUAGE COLLECTIONS**

LIBRARY	SERIAL TITLES	MONOGRAPH TITLES	TOTAL TITLES	TOTAL VOLUMES
ASRL MONASH	362 (102 current)	16,000	16,362	25,000
EAC MELBOURNE	297 (18 current)	9,013	9,310	14,700

While there was cooperation between the libraries in that there was negotiation before the purchase of expensive items and the librarians knew each other well, the two collections were distinct with a rubric to serve the needs of their own academics. It should be noted that there was also an existing reciprocal borrowing program between the libraries as part of the CAVAL arrangement for Victorian academic libraries.

### **BASIC PRINCIPLES**

As the Melbourne Monash Asian Library Group was anxious to get the endorsement of the academics, a discussion paper entitled "*Library Cooperation on East Asian Studies*" was circulated to the academic and library staff of both universities in February 1994. This paper was well

received and set in place a series of principles that provided a solid basis for cooperation. The principles were:

- mutual benefit of researchers at both institutions
- cost effective sharing of East Asian Information resources
- more comprehensive coverage
- increased access/reciprocal access
- interlibrary loan more flexible
- establishment of a clearinghouse concept to avoid duplication, especially of expensive materials
- regular exchange of information about the research needs of academics in both institutions
- some specialisation in collection building

These principles underpin the cooperative initiatives that paved the way for the establishment of MARLC in 1998/99.

It would be true to say that our cooperation has been strengthened by the 1997 Melbourne and Monash Universities agreement at vice-chancellor level, for the two universities to cooperate rather than compete. It gave MARLC a stronger umbrella to operate under.

## **DEVELOPMENTS TO DATE**

The Group has made slow but steady progress in strengthening its collaborative activities. Achievements to date include:

- improved communication through regular meetings and email. This has proved to be one of the most effective parts of the agreement as it encourages closer relationships. We have got used to working together and thinking as one group
- exchange of parts of collections on long term loan
- easy access to electronic databases at both libraries
- 1998 MARLC brochure developed and launched in 1999
- creation of MARLC web-site

## **BENEFITS**

MARLC has brought about positive benefits to the academic staff and students, the librarians, and the library.

### **1. The Academic staff and students**

- have easy access to the collections of both libraries
- can take advantage of the fast track interlibrary loans and when necessary arrange for long term interlibrary loans (special conditions apply). This aspect will further improve as we run joint websites with resources from both institutions listed together. We are already working on this in one form with the Asian Theses Project.

- are able to draw on a greater pool of expertise from the subject specialists of both the institutions

## 2. The Librarians

- have a much greater awareness of the collections held by the consortium. They are in frequent contact and so can arrange service at each other's libraries with ease. (This may not appear significant on the surface but in fact such close working together is less common than one might think)
- support each other and share information and resources

## 3. The Libraries

- have greater 'clout' with publishers - like a sort of mini-consortium. We are currently looking into getting shared site-licenses for electronic database;
- have better chance of getting funds. The chances of successful grant applications is higher, and both institutions can contribute to matching funds for such applications.

## FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Academics and administrators alike recognise the merits of cooperation in supporting Asian studies research, particularly in the light of limited budgets.

MARLC is actively investigating a series of joint projects that will improve access to Asia related materials, for the benefit of Asianists and librarians. In the immediate future, the Consortium will be focussing on the following areas:

- joint submissions for grants to strengthen the combined holdings of both the institutions
- projects to enhance the electronic resources of both libraries (in particular consideration should be given to purchasing titles to be available to both sites. This would require considerable negotiation with suppliers)
- further enhancement of the MARLC web-site
- moving towards a philosophy of developing ONE major library collection for Asian studies research and minimising duplication of resources. The growth in electronic publication, particularly on the web, will have impacts that we can only speculate about at the moment, but they should make it easier to purchase for both sites as one

Other possible developments include:

- transforming relationships with other major Asian language collections outside Victoria as holdings in electronic format become more widely available.
- provision of a tailor-made online document delivery service for researchers in Asian studies. The two libraries are currently involved in a pilot project to share science serial resources through a web-based product, which places contents pages on the web and allows customers to order copies of articles from each other's libraries electronically. The READS (Regional Electronic Access and Delivery of Serials) project has potential for East Asian materials also.
- extension of MARLC to cover over Asian language collections such as Korean and South Asian. These have not been given central coverage in MARLC, being small and print based.
- extension of consortium membership within and beyond Victoria on a cost-recovery basis

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The librarians and the academics will need to be work closely to ensure that Asian studies teaching and research is supported by strong information resources and library collections. It is important to involve customers more closely in the planning of the consortium. Up until now it has been, to some extent, a librarian's concept, working behind the scenes, but we see the potential benefit of including the academics in the planning group. We plan to invite some academics to our future meetings.

We were pleased that MARLC had the support of the top administrators of both the Universities. Without doubt the establishment of the Melbourne Asian Research Libraries Consortium is an outstanding example of the universities' Melbourne and Monash Protocol for collaborative endeavour.

In the interest of increasing our collective research resources, we should perhaps look at extending the consortium beyond the library collections of Monash and Melbourne Universities.