

# THE CHINA-AUSTRALIA ELECTRONIC INFORMATION CENTRE

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## Abstract

The paper describes the development of the China-Australia Electronic Information Centre (CAEIC), initiated in 1995 as a cooperative project of the Australian National University Library, the National Library of China and the Australia-China Council. Funded by substantial grants from the Australia-China Council and subsequently DETYA, the project involved upgrading the already established Internet link between the ANU and the NLC and at the same time establishing an Australian Electronic Information Centre and an associated web-site (URL: <http://caaic.nlc.gov.cn>) at the National Library of China.

The Centre was seen as acting as a platform for the dissemination of information about Australia in China whilst also serving as a gateway for Australian and other international access to the rich resources of the National Library of China and ultimately through it, to other sites in China. It was intended that the Centre would be accessible to users throughout China via computer networks, or directly through the Centre's facilities in the National Library of China. This project and an earlier project associated with it made a major contribution to the provision in 1996 of Internet access to the catalogues of the National Library of China and other major Chinese libraries for Australian and other international users.

The project has involved the provision of hardware and software and several periods of training in information technology for National Library of China personnel both in Beijing and in Canberra; the development of the CAEIC web-site of information sources on Australia and the dedication of a room in the National Library of China to provide information about Australia to visitors to the Centre. The project has undergone several metamorphoses since its inception in 1995, influenced not least by the rapid developments in information technology, particularly Internet accessibility in China. Other factors have also had an impact on the development of the project.

Following the withdrawal of the ANU from the project in 1997, the Australia-China Council awarded a contract to continue the development of the project to ASIA In Australia Pty Ltd in May 1998. The web-site was completely redesigned and rebuilt prior to the official opening of the China Electronic Information Centre at the National Library of China in Beijing in October 1998 during a visit to Beijing by a delegation of Australia-China Council Board Members. Work currently in progress involves the establishment of the CAEIC Australian Studies Network comprising the National Library of China and Australian Studies Centres throughout China.

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[ The Australia-China Council ] 澳中理事会 | [ National Library of China ] 中国国家图书馆

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at the National Library of China



#### Australian Related Internet Resources

##### • General resources

- [Australian Studies Centres in China](#)

中国澳大利亚研究中心  
 ◦ [Australian Studies Network](#)  
 有关澳大利亚研究的网络  
 ◦ [Publications, Libraries and the Media](#)  
 出版物、图书馆及媒体

##### • Subject resources

- [Reference sources](#)  
 参考资料来源
- [Culture](#)  
 澳大利亚的文化
- [Economics and Business](#)  
 经济与商业
- [Education](#)  
 教育
- [History and Geography](#)  
 历史与地理
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- [Science and Technology](#)  
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##### Other information

- [About the CAEIC project](#)  
 有关中澳电子信息中心背景
- [The Australia-China Council](#)  
 澳中理事会
- [Australian diplomatic missions in the region](#)  
 澳大利亚驻亚太地区外交机构
- [Australian Embassy in Beijing](#)  
 澳大利亚驻华使馆
- [Other Australian Government Agencies](#)  
 其它澳大利亚政府机关

##### Specialist Resources

Only accessible to people registered to use them through an Australian Studies Centre in China. You will need to obtain a user identifier and a password. Contact [Zhuang Jing](#) at the National Library of China.

- [Australian Databases](#)  
 澳大利亚研究相关数据库



The China-Australia Electronic Information Centre was initiated in 1995 as a joint project of the Australian National University Library, the National Library of China and the Australia-China Council, and made possible by generous grants from the Australia-China Council and the Australian Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs under its Offshore Australian Studies Program.  
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Last updated Fri, 1999 Feb 26. Comments and suggestions to [ASIA In Australia](#).

中澳电子信息中心

## THE CHINA-AUSTRALIA ELECTRONIC INFORMATION CENTRE

URL: <http://caaic.nlc.gov.cn>

Susan Prentice

### **History of the Project**

The China-Australia Electronic Information Centre (CAEIC) was initiated in 1995 as a cooperative project of the Australian National University (ANU) Library, the National Library of China and the Australia-China Council. The concept of the Centre had its birth in 1994 in the early days of Internet connectivity in China when the only visible Chinese site on the Internet was that of the Institute of High Energy Physics in Beijing. It grew from the Chinese Serials Database an earlier path-breaking project of the Australian National University Library and the National Library of China - to develop a searchable database of Chinese serials on the Internet. The project built on the already extensive personal and technical links between the Australian National University Library, the National Library of China and other major libraries in China.

Funded by substantial grants from the Australia-China Council and subsequently the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) under its Offshore Australian Studies programme, the project involved upgrading the already established internet link between the ANU and the NLC and at the same time establishing an Australian Electronic Information Centre and an associated web-site at the National Library of China. The Centre was seen as acting as a platform for the dissemination of information about Australia in China whilst also serving as a gateway for Australian and other international access to the rich resources of the National Library of China and ultimately through it, to other sites in China. It was intended that the Centre would be accessible to users throughout China via computer networks, or directly through the Centre's facilities in the National Library of China. This project and the earlier project associated with it made a major contribution to the provision in 1996 of Internet access to the catalogues of the National Library of China and other major Chinese libraries not only for Australian but also for other international users.

In mid-1995 the Australia-China Council provided a grant to the ANU to meet the costs of establishing the centre. This grant was used to meet large capital costs for the project, including the purchase of necessary major computer equipment. Over the next year the scope of the project was refined to fit more closely with Australian Studies objectives with the focus of resources and information directly related to the promotion and

advancement of the field of Australian Studies in China. This resulted in the establishment of the CAEIC with a basic web-site in mid-1996.

The project has undergone several metamorphoses since its inception in 1995, influenced not least by the rapid developments in information technology, particularly Internet accessibility in China. Other factors have also had an impact on the development of the project including cuts to Higher Education Budgets in Australia and the departure of key personnel involved in the project. The cuts culminated in the Australian National University Library's withdrawal from the project in mid 1997 when the ANU advised that as a result of resource reduction and loss of staff they were no longer in a position to continue running the project. Given the value of the project to promoting and disseminating information on Australia throughout China, and bearing in mind that the Centre was still then at a developmental stage, the Council decided to continue its support for the project.

While overall direction for the development of the CAEIC to fit within its Australian Studies programs has been provided by the Australia-China Council, the Council considered it necessary for implementation to be managed by people with the necessary background and knowledge of the technical aspects as well as China-specific expertise. The Council called for expressions of interest in the project in February 1998 to ensure that implementation and oversight of the project would be carried out by appropriate experts. Asian Specialist Information Associates in Australia (ASIA In Australia Pty Ltd), one of whose principals had been responsible for the work undertaken while the project was under the umbrella of the ANU, was ideally placed to continue development of the project. ASIA In Australia Pty Ltd was therefore selected by the Australia-China Council to provide the necessary advice and to implement the project.

Since the project was awarded to ASIA In Australia, Susan Prentice working as part of an informal consortium of Consultants with Rob Hurlle of Connect-A and Tony Barry of Ningau has been responsible for the carriage of the project. As a result of the rapid growth of technology and in the Internet in China, a review of the content and organisation of the site was considered necessary before commitment to further work on the project. This review was undertaken in late 1997 to early 1998 and helped determine the scope of the current project and align it with the objective of developing the CAEIC to the level required to provide access to relevant electronic information on Australia for the broader Australian Studies community in China. The large volume of information on Australia that had become available meant that a simple flat site was no longer sustainable. As a result the site needed to be restructured and redesigned as a 'Gateway' into Australia, incorporating all the new sources and concentrating on top level pages only with emphasis on information content. The very rapid growth in size and facilities in World

Wide Web services and advances in technology and equipment meant that it had become possible to broaden the scope of the project. The web-site was completely redesigned and rebuilt prior to the official unveiling of the China Australia Electronic Information Centre at the National Library of China in Beijing in October 1998 during a visit to Beijing by a delegation of Australia-China Council Board Members. At the same time, the project was also launched at the Sixth International Conference on Australian Studies which marked the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the China Australian Studies Association and was one of many conferences held at Peking University to celebrate the centenary of China's most prestigious university.

To date, the project has involved the provision of hardware and software and several periods of training in information technology for National Library of China personnel both in Beijing and in Canberra; the development of the CAEIC web-site of information sources on Australia and the dedication of a room in the National Library of China to provide information about Australia to visitors to the Centre. Training in information technology continues to be provided for personnel at the National Library of China to support the project as well as upgrades to equipment and software for the Centre. The purchase of fundamental textbooks on network administration, maintenance and management was also identified as a priority. Obtaining suitable technical textbooks in Beijing was identified as difficult and Chinese translations located were found not to be dependable sources of information. It was considered necessary that textbooks for the Centre would need to be provided from Australia to ensure reliability.

The CAEIC is seen as significant to the further development of Australian Studies programs and links in China. It is intended that the Centre enable Australian Studies researchers in Australia, China and other countries, to link up with each other, and provide them with access to key documentation and up-to-date research in their respective areas of specialisation within the broad discipline of Australian Studies. It is also intended that the Centre facilitate links between Australian Studies researchers, the wider Chinese academic community and the Chinese public.

### **CD-ROM Network**

To this end, the ability to provide access to CD-ROMs for researchers at the NLC and across the Internet was regarded as a logical next step, particularly in view of the increasing availability of reliable Australian information sources in CD-ROM format. The most recent stage of the project therefore has involved the establishment of a CD-ROM network that ensures access by selected Australian Studies Centres throughout China to electronic information on Australia in CD-ROM format. The CAEIC Australian Studies Network currently comprises the National Library of China, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Peking University and Beijing Foreign Studies

University in Beijing, Nankai University in Tianjin, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences and East China Normal University in Shanghai, as well as Suzhou University, and Xiamen University.

RMIT Publishing was approached as a major supplier of reliable information sources about Australia in both CD-ROM and online formats and offering a range of titles which provide comprehensive coverage of Australian information.

Selection of the titles for the network was based on the following considerations:

- consultation with Australian Studies specialists on the selection of appropriate titles
- consultation with RMIT Publishing on the content of individual titles in their catalogue
- information provided by Professor Hu Wenzhong, internationally one of the most highly respected scholars in the field of Australian Studies. Professor Hu identified History, Society and Culture, Politics, Foreign Relations and Literature as being major areas of interest to Australian Studies in China
- an awareness that the Australian Studies Centres are interested in full text information where possible
- the major objective of the Australia-China Council to promote a greater awareness of Australia, projecting Australia as a technologically sophisticated, multicultural, open and liberal society, increasingly oriented towards Asia
- the need for the CAEIC to have access to basic bibliographical sources such as ANZBiP (Australia and New Zealand Books in Print) and SAL (Serials in Australian Libraries) as well as possibly a wider range of subject coverage than the individual Centres.
- personal knowledge of the work being done in the field of Australian Studies in China

The CD-ROM titles selected for the project were installed at the CAEIC and networked to the Australian Studies Centres in August 1999. The CAEIC, the associated web-site and the resources available through it were marketed to the Australian Studies centres in October 1999 following the celebrations commemorating the 50th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. At the same time training targeted to the content of the individual titles selected as well as basic training in searching techniques was provided to each of the centres to facilitate use of the resources by Australian Studies specialists throughout China.

At the present time, the original aims of the project have been fulfilled, and current options and future directions are being explored. Use of the site is being monitored on a regular basis and work on the maintenance, review and updating of the site continues.