

A short report on a survey of Asian Librarians in Australia – a snapshot of academic and state library collections, July-August 2013

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Introduction

During July and August 2013 the members of ALIM (Asian Libraries in Melbourne, a collaborative effort between Monash and Melbourne universities' Asian Collection librarians) conducted a survey of the academic and state libraries of each state and territory in Australia. We hoped to discover where Asian studies and language collections were held and where Asian studies library staff could be found in addition to the "known" large collections held at institutions in Canberra and Melbourne (and to a lesser extent, Sydney and Queensland). We were hoping to discover unknown colleagues with whom we could collaborate and share resources, and perhaps find new (to us) collections which we could make known to our regular library users.

We sent out a simple email survey and collated responses. There was a rather large non-response group (29%), which we will follow up as a next step.

Libraries surveyed

The following libraries (academic and state) were surveyed, with the responses below:

State or Territory	Response (28/39 or 71%)	No response (11/39 or 29%)
ACT	National Lib, Canberra U, ANU	
NSW	Macquarie, Newcastle, Notre Dame, UTS, UNE, State Lib, UWS	Charles Sturt, UNSW, U Sydney, Aust Catholic U, Wollongong
NT	Charles Darwin	
QLD	U Southern Queensland	U Queensland, Griffith, James Cook U, Southern Cross U
SA	UniSA, Flinders, U Adelaide, State Lib	

TAS	U Tas	
VIC	Deakin, La Trobe, Monash, RMIT, State Lib, Swinburne, Melbourne, Victoria	
WA	Murdoch, UWA, Notre Dame	Edith Cowan, Curtin

'Top' libraries for Asia research

On the basis of responses received, the top libraries for Asian studies, in terms of numbers of staff (2 or more) and coverage of language/country areas are perhaps as we may have expected:

Institution	Number of specialists	Language areas	Comments
National Library Canberra	6 (<i>7 if you include the manager of the Jakarta office</i>)	China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau, Japan, Korea, Indonesia, Thailand, Laos, East Timor, Malaysia, Brunei, The Philippines, Singapore, Vietnam	
Aust. National University Library	3 (<i>currently</i>)	China, Japan, Korea, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, Burma, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Central Asia	Under review
Monash University	3	China, Japan, Korea, Indonesia, South East Asia	Chinese position unfilled since July 2013
Uni Technology Sydney	3	Primarily China, some Japan	all Chinese-speaking staff
U Melbourne	2.1	China, Japan	Dr Aline Scott-Maxwell from Monash comes once/fortnight to assist with Indonesian queries
Macquarie U	2	China, Japan	East Asian collection has been intershelved with main English collection
Charles Darwin	2	Timor Leste, Indonesia and China	

Libraries with at least one specialist Asian studies librarian

Institution	Number of specialists (designated “Asian librarians,” not necessarily language specialists)	Language areas	Comments
LaTrobe	1	?	No details given
UWA	1	?	No details given

Response rate

Methodology for the survey involved contacting individual librarians already known to us, or using the contact email on the library website. Often there was no clear way of contacting the Asia collection and the email would be sent to a generic “contact the library” address. This is possibly why the response rate was 71% (28 of 39 institutions surveyed). It is nevertheless a reasonable response rate and can be improved upon in future reviews. It is possible that the institutions which have not responded are those which have no Asian collection at all, although other institutions did respond and indicate that.

Discussion

Anecdotal evidence from students and researchers is that they use the main libraries with Asian collections as default study/resource centres by using interlibrary loans/document delivery.

Many libraries without sizeable collections are at institutions where the Asian Studies component of subjects is minimal, for example, one student’s special project rather than an ongoing unit of study.

Several librarians with nominal responsibility for whatever Asian materials are held by their library have never been asked for help with those materials during the years of their tenure – either the students don’t need help, or perhaps they don’t use the collection.

Many libraries do not have specialist staff (not just in Asian studies and languages), and all enquiries are answered by whoever is rostered on that day. This seems to be an increasingly common approach.

Discussion at the Asian Studies Association of Australia council meeting, November 2013

As the library representative on the ASAA council I brought the results of this survey to the meeting held in early November, 2013.

I was told of several interesting and priceless collections by the academic members of the council, but had not heard of them from library staff; I will follow up on these in the next phase of the survey.

It was interesting to note that the council members were surprised there was no national-level collection development policy in place, and that policies such as last-copy retention were largely up to the individual (local) librarian. There was strong support for a national collection development policy and strong support for libraries in general, which is pleasing.