

## **Considering a national collection development policy for Asian Studies materials: a solution to budgetary and staffing issues in a not-very-digitised global space**

**- a summary of a talk given at the 2014 ASAA conference at UWA**

by Michelle Hall, Japanese Studies Librarian,  
The University of Melbourne

### **Survey of Asian libraries in 2013**

During July-August 2013 ALIM (Asian Libraries in Melbourne; <http://alim.monash.org/>) undertook a survey of the university libraries around Australia as well as the National Library and some of the State libraries. We wanted to look at the uptake of e-books, discover collection treasures unknown to us, and learn about staffing issues. Our aim was to work collaboratively to improve the library offerings in Asian Studies Australia-wide.

After analysing the data, I wondered if a *National Collection Development Policy for Asian Studies materials* could be the answer.

### **Possible collection development policies to learn from?**

There are many other collection development policies from which we could learn. For example, the National and State Libraries Australia have collaborative collection principles online (<http://www.nsla.org.au/node/1291/publications/all>). Other examples include the cooperative programs between the National Diet Library (Japan) and other libraries worldwide (<http://www.ndl.go.jp/en/aboutus/elib-cooperation.html>), and a document currently being worked up by the cooperative collection working group of the NCC (North American Coordinating Council on Japanese Resources (<http://guides.nccjapan.org/collectiondevelopment>)). This is just from my limited Japanese background and I am sure there are other collaborative examples out there.

### **Staffing and our “wide brown land”**

The survey made it clear that the specialist librarians were few and far between. Most libraries work in teams with no clear Asia specialist, and few librarians had language skills; nor were they necessary. The few who were skilled are clustered (as ever) into the Melbourne/Canberra area.

### **E-publishing (bear with me as I digress somewhat)**

Given this state, it is easy to see the popularity, or preference for e-publications.

- They are easier to acquire

- Require no cataloguing or manual handling
- Can be accessed by students offsite
- Requires no shelving (but “e” space)

And of course there is the enthusiasm from publishers, where

- There is no hard stock to ship globally
- Older materials can be updated easily without the need to pulp acres of trees
- What could be better?

At the University of Melbourne the acquisition of e-books has increased dramatically over the past five years, and our policy is to acquire the electronic version where possible unless the print version is specifically requested. However, in the East Asian Collection, the story was very different.

China makes a lot of books available in e-formats, but Japan does not. In all of 2012, I purchased only 15 e-books. There are many high-school level textbook type books, and technical science books, but little in the areas I would like to collect in for my researchers and students.

### **The borders of difference**

University-wide, e-book ordering is increasing. China produces large amounts of e-content, but Japan does not, and neither do other countries. Not even all English materials are digitised, even now in this “digital age”.

We have fewer specialist staff, and fewer specialist collections. More e-publishing and online databases (rather than say, microfilms) means that inter-institutional borrowing is halted: less resource sharing, more sameness wherever you go.

As languages come and go in popularity in the community and in government, what happens to collections in libraries?

### **Future hope**

My best hope is that we can find some way of keeping track of items in foreign languages so that in the future, a disinterested (and uninterested) librarian won't come across a box containing the only known copies of something held in Australia and have it discarded because no one knows what it is. Thus, we need to keep a base level of library staff with language skills and skills in recognising the items worth. Perhaps a ratified national collection development policy which had teeth and could avoid the pitfalls of the past would work. Could we begin now to digitise particularly fragile or at-risk items?

In my experience, the most necessary ingredient for the salvation of a fragile, small, foreign language collection is the encouragement and engagement of interested and vested academics.



During my talk: Ms Linda Papa (UWA), Dr Aline Scott-Maxwell (Monash), Dr Amy Chan (ANU), Dr Amrita Malhi (UniSA)