

## **Collaboration and co-operation in Asian library resource collections – an example from Melbourne, Australia.**

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### **keywords:**

collaboration, Asian studies, benchmarking, collection development, professional development, resources sharing

### **structured abstract:**

- **Purpose**

In this paper I will present an example of collaborative work: an international Asian collections benchmarking study conducted by ALIM (Asian Libraries in Melbourne). The ALIM team worked together to compare Asian collections in university libraries around the world, in terms of staffing, holdings, budget and areas of collection strength.

- **Design/methodology/approach**

The survey target libraries were chosen based on those belonging to the Australian “Group of Eight” and the international Universitas 21. We sought out information on the libraries’ homepages and sent out a survey by email to library staff at these institutions.

- **Findings**

While this is still a work in progress, preliminary findings suggest that ALIM libraries are ranked in the middle of the group of universities surveyed. The survey also revealed data about hitherto unknown collections.

- **Research limitations/implications**

The research is limited by lack of responses from all universities. Further, ALIM projects are undertaken in addition to our usual duties, and this can cause delays in collecting and analysing data.

- **Practical implications**

Our study demonstrates that staff at specialized libraries benefit from the opportunity to work collaboratively, share their expertise and expand their professional networks. Senior management must encourage and support such activity and most importantly, be actively involved themselves. Library patrons will benefit from our expanded knowledge, greater resources access and inter-university collegiality.

- **Originality/value**

Managers of specialized libraries who are seeking possible answers to budget cuts and staff shortages will find this paper useful. Individual library staff should get to know their counterparts in local institutions, and thus expand their networks and assistance offered to researchers.

**Categorization:** case study

**Paper:**

*Asian Libraries in Melbourne (ALIM) is a collaborative venture between Monash University and University of Melbourne libraries. By sharing resources and expertise and jointly developing collections, ALIM facilitates access to Asian materials in Melbourne libraries and provides an enhanced service to researchers and students.*

(ALIM mission statement from <http://alim.monash.org/>)

## **1. Asian Libraries in Melbourne**

In Melbourne, Victoria, Australia there are several large universities, including (in no particular order) Melbourne (began teaching in 1854), Monash (1961), LaTrobe (1967), RMIT (previously a college; became a university in 1992), Deakin (1977), Swinburne (previously a college; became a university in 1992), Victoria (previously a college; became a university in 1990). All of these institutions have offered Asian languages and studies at some point in recent history; after an early start Melbourne taught Chinese and Japanese with renewed vigor from the 1960s, and also teaches Indonesian and Arabic. Monash has offered both Japanese and Indonesian almost since its inception in the 1960s, adding Chinese and Korean some time later. The Melbourne East Asian Collection has been in existence since the first Chinese Studies Librarian, Ms Wai, was employed in 1962 [1].

While most institutions have library holdings of at least basic Asian language learning materials, Melbourne and Monash have separate (East) Asian collections. These collections have specialist staff who are fluent in the languages offered and who are responsible for the acquisition, cataloguing and development of their collection and ongoing liaison with academic staff and students.

Melbourne offers specialist staff in the areas of Chinese and Japanese Studies, and Monash has specialists in Indonesian, Chinese, Japanese and Korean. The size of each collection is similar, but the Chinese collection at Melbourne is larger; Monash also hosts the Melbourne Centre for Japanese Language Education Collection (<http://www.lib.monash.edu.au/matheson/mcjl.html>) in addition to holding small collections of Thai, Vietnamese and Malay materials and special

collections on Cambodia, Burma and Tibet, among others. It seems there is an unwritten understanding from the 1960s that Monash would put its emphasis on Japanese acquisitions while Melbourne would concentrate on Chinese; whether this is true or not the collections do reflect this approach. The Monash Chinese collection was established formally in the late 1970s. Melbourne's holdings in Indonesian and Arabic are intershelfed in the general collection, and there is no Arabic-speaking subject specialist for Arabic and Islamic Studies. The situation with Indonesian is discussed below.

Both Monash and Melbourne Universities are within the borders of Greater Melbourne, and are approximately 25 kilometers apart – a half to one hour by car depending on traffic or sixty to ninety minutes by public transport. We are close enough for us to be in frequent face to face contact, but far enough apart for students to roll their eyes and complain when we suggest they visit the other institution.

## **2. History of ALIM**

### **a. Melbourne-Monash Protocol**

ALIM is a project under the auspices of the Melbourne-Monash Protocol [2] which began in 1997 and was revitalized in 2006 [3]. There are several collaborative endeavors under this Protocol, including jointly offered wine and viticulture studies in 2002, a water research group formed in 2007 [4], and in the library, an inter-campus loans system [5].

ALIM had its beginnings in the Melbourne Asian Research Libraries Consortium and its predecessor, the Melbourne Monash Asian Library Group, in 1993 [6, 7]. As there are few Asian library specialists in Melbourne, initially there was an informal agreement whereby we kept each other informed of new acquisitions (especially very expensive ones) so that we kept duplication to a minimum, and we shared any information gleaned from personal trips overseas. Of course there is a degree of overlap in the collections as both institutions teach Japanese and Chinese language, as well as a selection of area studies subjects.

In addition, Melbourne contributes financially each year to Monash to support the Korean collection – the Korean specialist is located at Monash and the arrangement avoids having a half-used, unsupported collection at Melbourne. Melbourne reaps the benefits by the Korean Studies Librarian visiting Melbourne for information literacy classes, and by arranging for Korean materials to be borrowed long term from the Monash collection.

Another important collaboration through ALIM is the shared employment of the Indonesian Studies Librarian at Monash, who spends one day each fortnight (two weeks) at Melbourne. Although Melbourne has a good collection in Indonesian, it is intershelfed with the general collection and we have no permanent specialist. Having the Indonesian librarian visit us regularly is of immense value to the academic staff and students of the Indonesian program.

She also facilitates access to Monash's more extensive research collections on Indonesia.

### 3. Previous collaborative projects

All ALIM projects have as their aim better and easier access to Asian languages materials, in both university and non-university contexts. In these times of budget constraints, sharing resources and collaborating in endeavors such as information literacy classes help to make our small collections reach a larger audience. We can also help our academic staff and researchers to find resources by sharing information among ourselves.

The usual practice with ALIM projects is for the six professional staff (two at Melbourne, four at Monash) to split up the tasks required and then work together later to collate and analyze the data. This collaborative approach is what makes it all possible, as well as the fact that projects are kept to a small and manageable scale.

ALIM has undertaken several projects to assist academic staff, researchers, students and the general public in accessing Asian language materials:

#### a. Asian Language Resources in Victorian Academic Libraries

<http://www.lib.unimelb.edu.au/services/alim/university.html>

This database is searchable by institution or by language. The value of the database is that it includes not just the languages we specialize in, but all the languages mentioned in the survey returns, such as Tagalog, Vietnamese, Farsi and Malay. This survey was completed in 2006 and is due to be revisited and updated sometime in 2010.

**b. Subscribed Asian studies databases** – a list of Asian Studies databases subscribed to by Australian research libraries [8], downloadable in excel spreadsheet form from <http://alim.monash.org/>

**c. Asian architecture classes** – resources for students of what was the University of Melbourne subject “Asian Architecture” <http://alim.monash.org/alimarch.html> but is now “Architectural Conservation in East Asia” [9] <http://alim.monash.org/alimarchcon.html> :

*“Resources for Architectural Conservation in East Asia are housed in the ALIM collections (Asian Studies Research Library of Monash University and the East Asian Collection of the University of Melbourne Library). The collections support research and teaching of East Asian Architecture and related areas, especially, the subject Architectural Conservation in East Asia, taught by Dr Qinghua Guo, at the University of Melbourne. This subject offers a comparative approach to architectural conservation in East Asia from an international perspective. It emphasizes the mutually dependent relationships between conservation of historical buildings and preservation of traditional techniques and knowledge”.*

#### 4. Current project – benchmarking

Our most recent project, a benchmarking survey, was first mooted several years ago by an academic staff member. During a meeting where we discussed lack of space for collection expansion she asked “well, what is it like in Asian collections elsewhere?” If we could compare ourselves with similar-level institutions and discover we were operating with much less shelf space, for example, it would help support our appeal for improved funding and physical amenities.

Moreover, through this project, ALIM is starting out on a new sort of collaboration, with colleagues at universities overseas. As well as being a vehicle for collaboration locally, it is a chance to expand our networks. We wish to find out what other collections are like, and the particular highlights of a collection. We are not competing with each other, but working together to make the most of our resources and to get the best outcome for our library patrons.

Perhaps the major driver in this project is the fact that although digitization is increasingly popular, many Asian language materials are still only available in print, especially older publications. While it is easy to see the similarities in institutions which all subscribe to the same (consortium-arranged?) set of electronic databases, the difference and value in many specialist libraries is in the staff and the book stock. By undertaking this survey, we can discover where items of interest are held which cannot be kept in every library.

Previous research and reports on benchmarking and especially Asian libraries have concentrated on libraries in the specific Asian countries, and have a different focus [10]. In addition, benchmarking research is often about large scale studies of big institutional libraries [11, 12], and is somewhat at variance with what we are attempting in a small, specialist library setting.

##### a. outline

For the benchmarking project, we first needed to select like institutions to compare ourselves with. For this reason, we did not approach large universities such as Harvard or Oxford; rather, we concentrated on two partnership groups to which we belong – the Australian “Group of Eight”, and the international “Universitas 21”:

- *The [Group of Eight](http://www.unimelb.edu.au/about/partners.html) research universities is a coalition formed through consensus on the principle that Australia both needs and deserves universities of world class. The Group of Eight universities undertake 70 per cent of all research conducted in Australian universities and over half of all basic research conducted throughout Australia.*

*(from <http://www.unimelb.edu.au/about/partners.html>; see also <http://www.go8.edu.au/> )*

- [Universitas 21 \(U21\)](http://www.unimelb.edu.au/about/partners.html) is an international network of leading research-intensive universities, of which the University of Melbourne is a founding member.

(from <http://www.unimelb.edu.au/about/partners.html>; see also <http://www.universitas21.com/> )

We approached a selection of the institutions from these two groups by email with a spreadsheet of questions attached. Many times we ALIM members were able to glean much useful information from the institutions' websites; however we found that for some details we needed individual responses. For this project I volunteered to collate the information, so everyone reported back to me with their findings, and then I went on to contact individual libraries around the world for more details. (See appendix for a list of the institutions involved in the study, and for a list of the questions asked.)

Further, we decided to exclude certain U21 universities if they had an "unfair advantage" – i.e., institutions in China/Japan/Korea with excellent Asian collections. The universities we originally excluded from the enquiry were: Fudan University and Shanghai Jiao Tong University, China; Waseda University, Japan; Korea University, South Korea. However, for reasons which are unclear now, we left the University of Hong Kong in the list. The data from HKU has had the effect of skewing the results somewhat, so we need to revisit that and run some statistics without such an excellent institution in the mix.

### **b. interim report**

An interim report was presented to the ALIM meeting at Monash in November 2009. ALIM meetings are held twice each year, alternating between institutions and sharing the chairing, minute-taking and other tasks. We also go out for lunch afterwards and spend a little time in a more informal setting.

At this point we still have some data to collect, and some universities have yet to provide certain specific details. Several on the list have no Asian collection, and could thus be excluded from further comparison, such as University of Nottingham; University of Birmingham; University College Dublin; and Tecnológico de Monterrey (Mexico). Another few libraries had minimal collections, such as basic textbooks for language learning. These, too, were excluded. (i.e.: University of Glasgow, the University of New South Wales and the University of Adelaide.)

### **c. interesting notes**

The interim report showed that there is a veritable treasury of items out there which we had no idea about. Delhi University has an East Asian Studies Library with substantial holdings; University of Glasgow has little generally but holds the 1000-volume "Prince Bandar al-Saud Collection" of Arabic and Islamic Law; The University of Sydney is the local repository for the Japan Art Catalogue (JAC) Project.

Some points of interest are:

- Staffing levels vary from one person in the Asian collection to more than 11, the rough average being 4 FTE (full time equivalent).
- As a rough figure, approximately 10% of the collections are held in storage.
- Languages most commonly held are: Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Arabic, and Indonesian. Other languages mentioned are Tibetan, Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Sanskrit, Pali, Persian, Malay, Thai, Vietnamese, Burmese, Javanese, Tagalog, and Tamil.
- Average total holdings (monographs and serials) are approximately 320,000 volumes, varying between 90,000 and 900,000.
- Amount spent in 2008 on all formats (print, electronic for both monographs and serials) averages \$246,000 AUD; this varies from \$104,000 to \$509,000 AUD.

#### **d. further enquiry**

There is much more analysis that needs to be done on the project, and I look forward to developing a strategic solution. So far the comparison has been a whole-cohort “compare everyone with everyone else” method; next I would like to compare Australian universities as a group with those overseas. The Australian National University Library has the largest Asian collection; they will always affect the data with their strength of holdings and staffing levels.

The current interim findings suggest that ALIM libraries – Melbourne and Monash individually – seem to fit squarely in the middle of the results. It would appear, therefore, that the benchmarking survey will not be as helpful as originally hoped in pointing out major discrepancies between Asian libraries of similar level throughout the world.

However, it is interesting to note that if we compare Monash and Melbourne together as ALIM in the survey results, we rank a little higher – better in terms of staffing, but still around the median in space for the collection and collection size. Thus we can see the benefits of pooling our resources and our expertise to provide the best service we can with finite resources.

We intend to make the research findings available to all via the ALIM webpage at <http://alim.monash.org>

## **5. Value of collaboration and co-operation in Melbourne**

### **a. ALIM viewed in context of (international) library services**

As mentioned earlier, in these times of limited and even declining budgets, collaboration such as is the case with ALIM is almost an imperative to being able to offer a comprehensive library service to academic researchers and students.

While at the university level there may be a degree of competition between institutions for student enrolments and research funding, once students are enrolled, the library is bound to offer the best service we can. However it is also the case that students and researchers may choose a certain institution based (among other things) on the library and the staff therein. One example is the Korean holdings at Monash – it would make more sense for a researcher in that field to be located at Monash. However, if there is a Melbourne University staff member or student wishing to access the Monash Korean collection, ALIM facilitates this.

#### **b. shared experiences of staff involved – collaboration and staff development**

I am a non-native speaker of Japanese, although my Japanese is of a very high level and is near-native. As such, I sometimes wonder if I offer the best library service, and whether perhaps a native speaker would be “better.” It is very encouraging to me personally to work with both native speakers and non native speakers in ALIM – at Monash, the Indonesian and Chinese studies librarians are Australians, with native speaking Japanese and Korean librarians. At Melbourne, my colleague the Chinese Studies Librarian is a native speaker, and my Chinese speaking colleagues are from a variety of backgrounds – Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China. I think we all have different strengths to offer, and much to learn from each other. In fact, my “colleagues” are not just the people I see daily in the East Asian Collection at Melbourne, but also include the staff of the Monash Asian Studies Research Collection. Each time we meet is another opportunity for professional development.

### **6. Concluding remarks and recommendations**

#### **a. how could a co-operative arrangement like ALIM be put in place now? How can it be improved upon?**

ALIM originated as a grass-roots, staff initiated idea which was then developed and organized and became an official part of the Melbourne-Monash Protocol. Beginning as it did as an informal method of keeping in touch and keeping our collections complementary rather than competitive has been the key to our success. The original librarians who began the process are mostly still with us – when we update and reprint our marketing documentation every five years or so we note with amusement that little has changed. However, the executive representatives from each institution who oversee ALIM change frequently and this can be a difficulty in terms of continuity. There is almost constant change at the top, and we are always filling in the new representative on what has happened, what is in the pipeline, and what we are trying to achieve.

*With gratitude to my colleagues at ALIM:*

Monash: Dr Aline Scott-Maxwell, Indonesian Studies and South East Asian Librarian, Mr. Dennis Kishere, Chinese Studies Librarian, Ms Ayako Hatta, Japanese Studies Librarian, Ms Jung-Sim Kim, Korean Studies Librarian  
Melbourne: Ms Bick-har Yeung, Chinese Studies and East Asian Librarian

## Endnotes:

- [1] *The Age*, (1962) "Oriental library in her charge", 14<sup>th</sup> September, p14.
- [2] The Melbourne-Monash Protocol  
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- [3] The Melbourne-Monash Protocol renewed  
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- [4] The Melbourne-Monash Protocol water research group established  
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- [5] The Melbourne-Monash Protocol inter-campus loans program  
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- [11] Hayes, H. 'Collaborative Collection Management in Australia' Paper presented to CURL (Consortium of University Research Libraries (U.K.)), 26 March 2004
- [12] Henczel, S. (2002) "Benchmarking Measuring and Comparing", *Information Outlook*, Vol. 6, No. 7

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Jilovsky, C. (2008) "Asian Library Statistics: a Pilot Project", paper presented at the 2nd ARL Library Assessment Conference, Seattle, USA, August 2008. (link to PowerPoint presentation at <http://www.caval.edu.au/research.html>) (accessed 25 January 2010)

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## Articles resulting from the benchmarking project:

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<http://coombs.anu.edu.au/SpecialProj/NLA/EALRGA/newsletter1001/1001.hatta.html> (accessed 25 January 2010)

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## Appendix:

### Institutions invited to take part:

<b>(Australia – Group of 8)</b>	<b>(Overseas – Universitas 21)</b>
The Australian National University Monash University The University of Adelaide The University of Melbourne The University of New South Wales The University of Queensland The University of Sydney The University of Western Australia	University of British Columbia McGill University University of Hong Kong Delhi University University College Dublin Tecnológico de Monterrey University of Auckland National University of Singapore Lund University University of Birmingham University of Edinburgh University of Glasgow University of Nottingham University of Virginia

### Questions asked:

- University, Name of Library, Library URL, Country
- Asian languages actively collected, Are the Asian language materials in a separate or dedicated collection?
- Head of AC, Position title, Contact email, Total no. of FTE staff in the Asian Collection
- Collection Access hours, Collection service/staffing hours, Separate service point (Y/N), Separate website? (Provide URL)
- Size of the collections (no. of volumes), Monographs (no. of vols), Serials (no. of titles), Asian language subscribed databases (no of titles)
- How much of collection is held off-site/ in storage approximately?
- Amount spent in the previous year: Monographs, Serials, Electronic resources, Others