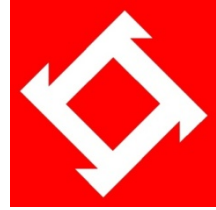


ASIAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

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To: Dr. Marie-Louise Ayres
Director-General, National Library of Australia.

5 February 2020

Dear Dr. Ayres

Thank you for sharing information about the cancellations of Asia-related electronic resources and print serials last December. Since that time, I have shared the lists with various members of the Asian Studies Association of Australia, including leaders of the various regional associations, and with members of the Asia section of the Academy of the Humanities.

Members have raised serious concerns about the cancellation of several resources and serials. It appears that the cancellations go beyond any routine clearing out of redundant and less relevant items, but strike deeply at the heart of the Asia collections of the library and, by extension, the nation. Several fundamental resources on important countries have been cancelled. Accordingly, we ask that the library reconsider its decision to cancel several items. At the same time, we do appreciate the financial constraints facing the library, and the need to cut print subscriptions in cases where the item concerned is adequately covered by an electronic database.

In fact, members have mentioned a large number of items as being important, here I list only the cancellations which have caused most distress. I did not anticipate the strength of the reaction, and obviously did not understand the importance of many of the cancelled items when I first surveyed the list. I understand some colleagues may have contacted you directly, so you may note some overlap with other communications you have received.

We seek the opportunity to meet with you or other relevant library staff to discuss these matters in further detail. I could organise a group with expertise on the relevant countries. I would also appreciate it if you could convey our concerns to the members of the NLA council.

Japan: Kikuzo II

Numerous colleagues have contacted me regarding this electronic resource, and some of them may have contacted you directly. Kikuzo II is the database of the Asahi Shimbun, arguably Japan's leading newspaper, and accessible offsite. The Nikkei Database of Japanese newspapers (available at some university libraries, such as ANU) includes other newspapers but excludes the Asahi in part because university libraries direct researchers to the NLA. Kikuzo II also included (until recently) an archive of Asahi articles from the Meiji era onwards, which researchers of modern Japan find invaluable. Academics from around the country have contacted me with pleas to intercede on their behalf to ask the NLA to retain this resource, not only because it is crucial to their own research but because they frequently direct honours and graduate students to it. Prof. Tessa Morris-Suzuki at the ANU (whose remarks I draw upon in the above) consulted with various colleagues and compiled the following responses:

- "Kikuzo is such a useful and vital resource for current issue research and historical study" (Dr. Keiko Tamura, ANU)
- "It has been very useful to me in the past, especially, as you say, because I don't have to be in Canberra to use it" (Prof. Sandra Wilson, Murdoch University)
- "It's a major service as registered users from throughout Australia can access it." (A/Prof Morris Low, University of Queensland)
- "Dear all that's terrible! I was using it without problems just a couple of weeks ago. I rely on this database!" (Dr. Beatrice Trefalt, Monash University)
- "It is a very important source for us. Please add my name to any letter of protest." (Prof. Li Narangoa, ANU)
- "I happen to be using the database at the moment and if pre-1985 data is no longer available that will be a big headache" (A/Prof Simon Avenell, ANU)
- "Please add my name to any letter. This is a major resource for postgraduates, too." (Prof Vera Mackie, University of Wollongong).

Other Japan titles

While the strongest concerns were raised about Kikuzo II, colleagues also raised concerns about other cancellations:

- Yomidasu Rekishikan is the one other available database of Japanese historical articles held by the library (from the Yomiuri newspaper). Cancelling both would mean that researchers in Australia would be left with no generally accessible online databases of Japanese historical newspaper articles before 1945, and no access to the Asahi Newspaper database for more recent years.
- JapanKnowledge Library. Several colleagues have noted that this is an important resource, not duplicated elsewhere.

China

In earlier discussions, I understood that the NLA's China collecting strategy would be largely unaffected by the foreshadowed changes. However, China specialists across Australia have also expressed grave concerns about the cancellation of several China resources:

Duxiu. This is the cancellation that has raised most concern. One colleague, a China researcher at ANU states that she was "horrified" by this cancellation because "we rely on Duxiu to access thousands of Chinese language books and periodicals." She mentioned that another researcher had contacted her with the message "What do I do now?". A Melbourne scholar referred to a quotation from Princeton saying Duxiu is like "google scholar and google books for Chinese materials", but she added that it is "more than that." Another described Duxiu as an important full-text search database that provides valuable resources for research on Modern Chinese history, allowing researchers to gain access to content of historical books and journals, and helps researchers locate key resources even if they are not available online. Many researchers on modern Chinese history in Australia use it frequently to identify key resources. One China specialist ended: "We would really hope this database could be preserved." Another comment, by Mark Strange of ANU, is worth quoting in full:

"This is an absolutely fundamental database, of central importance to scholarship on all periods and areas of China. In Chinese universities and libraries, it is seen as a basic resource. In the context of Australia, it serves to fill in the (substantial) gaps in our hard-copy and electronic holdings. To address the criteria on which these cuts are being proposed. I cannot think of anything more relevant to the NLA's national mission of supporting China-related research. And, far from duplicating existing holdings, it does much to supplement and support them. I do not know the exact costs involved here, but in terms of value for money, this resources seems of great value given its scope whatever its cost to the NLA, to supply the same resource through individual items (hard copy or electronic) would no doubt be several times more expensive. So it seems utterly extraordinary that this, of all things, should have been identified as a potential area of saving."

Other titles raised by China specialists as having particular value are the following:

- China core newspaper database
- Zhongguo shu ju zai xian = China data online
- China infobank
- Xin fang zhi = Local gazetteers

In particular, we have received strong support for retention of the China core newspaper database. This includes many regional and local newspapers that capture what is going on over China's vast territory in a relatively timely fashion. This information is not always duplicated in the more formal (and possibly more censored) national newspapers. Few university libraries subscribe. Not having the core newspaper database would mean that whole areas of knowledge about China might be lost to Australia, including in places like Wuhan or Hubei province –of obvious contemporary relevance. Similarly, the local gazetteers provide an update of data on specific regions not easily obtainable in other sources.

Again, few universities can afford to subscribe to it, so this too will represent a significant loss of Australian expertise. For social scientists, the loss of Chinese data online and China infobank also leaves a gap in data access that cannot be easily made up elsewhere.

Mainland Southeast Asia.

The Association of the Mainland Southeast Asia Scholars has prepared a separate submission, which I have attached, and I will not repeat (but simply endorse) their comments and requests here. They make the important point that many mainland Southeast Asian online and print sources frequently become inaccessible over time in the region, underlining the importance of the NLA's collections. Please see the attached (you may have already received this separately).

South Asia

I circulated the material to members of the South Asian Studies Association of Australia, and received the following feedback. First, members were very concerned about the cancellation of several resources related to Pakistan:

Pakistan Horizon. This is one of the most established and reputable journals published from Pakistan, published by one of the oldest think tanks in the country, Pakistan Institute of International Affairs, Karachi, established in 1948. Some of Pakistan's top international relations scholars and policymakers publish in this journal, and it is ranked highly in the rankings of the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan.

Pakistan Development Review. Published by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, this is a prestigious journal in which one can find high quality research in development and economics in Pakistan. It was first published in 1964, and is also highly ranked by the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan

All-Pakistan Legal Decisions. This contains all the court judgements from the four High Courts, Supreme Court and the Federal Shariat Court and is critical to the legal, political study of Pakistan

Members also raised questions about **Economic and Political Weekly** and **India Today**. Both publications are high-profile, long-running resources that are invaluable to the study of modern Indian history, society and politics. Though both will continue to be accessible via online databases, there are concerns that the print archive of these journals will not be preserved. A member writes: "some publications may claim to have a full archive [online], but - for example - the *Far Eastern Economic Review* does not (or did not a few years ago when I was trying to chase references). Only select items had made it to the digital process.' This concern also applies to the print archive of **Journal of Asiatic Studies**, which has an old pedigree of more than 200 years and an important source for Indological studies.

Strong concerns have been raised about the cancellation of **Social Scientist**. The monthly journal of the Indian School of Social Sciences, New Delhi, it has been published since 1972 and features some of the best writers in South Asian Studies.

Members are also anxious to preserve access to **Shodhak**. This is a journal devoted to subcontinental historical and geopolitical research on smaller/obscurer regions that is normally not undertaken by bigger Indian or first world journals, Shodhak is indispensable for researchers of anthropology, history and geography. They have also added cultural projects based in non-metropolitan areas to their roster recently, which will be lost to scholarship if not accessed and supported.

Other journals members see value in preserving are **Quarterly review of historical studies** and **Indian Anthropologist**. While the NLA catalogue shows online availability for the latter, the link appears to be broken.

Asian art

Emeritus Professor John Clark of the University of Sydney provided us with a strongly worded statement in which he explains that the cancellations will place Australia in the “third rank of countries to do research on Asian Art.” In particular, he noted the cancellation of the following items: Asian art news; Bijutsu fōramu 21 = Bijutsu forum 21; Bijutsu Kenkyū; Bijutsushi / [hensha Bijutsushi Gakkai]; Kinema junpō (The movie times); Kokka; Artibus Asiae; Warasan muang boran = Muang boran journal. Other specialists agreed with him, noting that electronic versions are a poor substitute for print for many high-quality art journals.

Clarifications

Some of our members raised concerns about titles that were on the list of neither cancelled nor retained subscriptions. One colleague, for example, wrote: “I do not see key resources, such as Da cheng lao jiu kan quan wen shu ju ku (大成老旧刊全文数据库), database of the Shanghai Municipal Police files, in either of the lists. It would be nice if we could receive a full list of Chinese e-resources for a detailed review?”

Conclusion

As noted above, the ASAA would welcome the opportunity to meet with NLA representatives with a view to providing further information. We hope that the NLA will be able to rescind at least some of the cancellations of such important titles.

At the same time, we also seek clarification on the extent of consultation with university libraries on the changes. We understand that, at least in the past, many university libraries have designed their collection strategies in conjunction with the NLA (ANU, for example, de-emphasized collecting Korea material on the understanding that the NLA would cover this

area). We would like to ensure that a coordinated, nationwide and that university are engaged in decision processes prior to cancellations being made.

I would also like to explain that over coming weeks and months the Association, and no doubt many of our members, will be making public statements on these and other impacts of the reduction of Asia collecting. Please appreciate that we understand that you and the library are operating under circumstances that are not of your own making. Nevertheless, we are very alarmed about the extent and impacts of the cancellations already determined, and we believe it is important for us to bring this matter to the attention of the public, the media, and Australia's political leadership.

Finally, I would like to close with a comment from one member of the Academy of the Humanities, a distinguished historian of China from the University of Melbourne. She wrote to me: "NLA has a magnificent collection of periodicals from Asia. Looking through the list, you can see that it has created a wonderful heritage of knowledge of the Asia-Pacific, and has taken on an important role regionally in this regard. It is very sad to see it surrendering this role."

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'E. Aspinall', written in a cursive style.

Professor Edward Aspinall

President, ASAA