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ELECTRONIC DATABASES FOSTER MORE IN-DEPTH RESEARCH ON CHINA

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Research on China has greatly benefitted in recent years from the phenomenal rise of online and CD ROM (compact disk read-only memory) databases. With these electronically transmitted resources, researchers can accomplish in minutes what previously had taken them hours of painstaking work. This is particularly true of researching contemporary China issues in the areas of economy, business, trade, politics, and public policy, areas in which current information and data are crucial to our understanding of the rapid evolution of events in China and to the making of many important political and business decisions. In this brief article, I want to share with my colleagues in East Asian librarianship my knowledge of and experience with some English-language on-line databases that are useful to China research and are now available in most American academic libraries.

Bibliographic search of literature, the first step of any research efforts, is often extremely time-consuming and painstaking. The bibliographic search for topics on China has certainly gone beyond the bibliographies and indexes in Chinese studies or East Asian studies to often include those tools in the social sciences and humanities. Now H. W. Wilson, the publisher of many well-known indexes, has produced a database called Wilsonline with more than twenty-five indexes that had been available only in print. Of those indexes, Social Sciences Index, Humanities Index, Economics Index, and Modern Language Association MLA Bibliographical are among the ones used most often by China researchers. Many important English-language journals from China and East Asia, such as Beijing Review, Far Eastern Economic Review, and China Law Reporter are included. One can also access some of these index databases through other databases such as OCLC and EPIC. Needless to say, the virtue of the on-line availability of those bibliographic tools is fully appreciated by all researchers, including those dealing with China.

Many other databases have gone a step further to provide not only bibliographic citations but also the full text of newspaper and journal articles in specialized fields. For example, NewsNet, a business-oriented database system, carries the full text of several Asian newsletters like Asian Political News, East Asian Express, and East Asian Business Intelligence, which together offer good financial and economic news and analysis related to China and other Asian countries.

Databases are often available through networks or vendors. DIALOG, the world’s largest database, provides access to hundreds of databases in various formats. Several of these databases are particularly useful for research on contemporary China’s politics, economy, business, finance, trade, foreign relations, and public policy. PAIS International offers citations and short abstracts for political and public policy journals as well as citations and data from published forecasts in trade journals. NEWSWIRE ASAP provides access to both
citations and full-text files from foreign and US newspapers and wire services. PTS Newsletter Database, another popular database, provides access to full-text articles from such journals as Asian Political News, Asian Economic News, East Asian Express, and several other Asian-related publications.

Another DIALOG offering is Asia-Pacific, a business-oriented database that carries, in addition to bibliographic citations, records on companies in Asia, including nearly all the companies in China that have foreign connections of various kinds. DIALOG users can also access Predicast's Overview of Markets and Technology PTS PROMPT, a bibliographic database with access to information from many other PTS databases. It contains more than 2.8 million citations, with abstracts and selected full texts, to the worldwide business literature on companies, markets, products, and technologies for major international, national, and regional manufacturing and service industries. Also available to DIALOG users is Chinese Patent Abstracts in English Data, a small database of selected Chinese patents.

For research on financial and business issues in China, NEXIS from Mead Data Central has been highly appreciated. It provides citations and full English texts for such publications as Asian Pacific Business, East Asian Executive Reports, Xinhua news releases, Nikkei Weekly, and many other newspapers and specialized newsletters. More specifically, the Economist Intelligence Unit's country report on China gives a quarterly analysis of issues related to China's political and economic developments or conditions.

Another product of Mead Data Central is LEXIS, a full-text database that focuses on legal documents and issues. It offers a number of China-specific data sets that are particularly useful for legal research on China. Two of these data sets, ChinaLaw and China Hand, provide translations of Chinese legal documents, regulations governing foreign business activity, and foreign investment laws in China. One can also find information about some Chinese companies with international connections through LEXIS Financial Information Service, another database with international coverage.

Reuter is another system of databases that features a number of business-oriented databases with international coverage, including Reuter Econoline, Reuter Financial Report, Reuter Monitor Capital Markets Service, Reuter News Reports, and Reuter Textline. Reuter Textline, which also includes Reuter News Reports, is particularly useful in researching business issues in China. It contains more than five million citations and abstracts and, in most cases, the complete text of articles from nearly two thousand of the world's major daily financial and business newspapers and journals and offers a broad spectrum of information and data relating to public affairs, financial and economic policy, marketing, management, pricing, trade, and social events. This database is also available on DIALOG and NEXIS.

A few English-language databases produced in East Asia have entered American markets and libraries, of which Nikkei Telecom II Japan Financial News & Data by Nihon Nikkei Shinbun is wellknown to Japanese librarians under its former name, Nikkei Telecom Japan
News & Retrieval. Although it focuses on Japan, its Nikkei Asian Corporate Data offers some essential information on several thousand Chinese companies, though this information is often incomplete. From Taiwan, Taiwan On-line Business Data Services offers some business, financial, and economic news from mainland China and some useful data about Taiwan's trade with China.

China's Peking University has produced CHINALAW, which offers information on national and provincial laws and regulations governing foreign business activity in China, joint ventures, foreign-owned enterprises, foreign trade and economic relations, and government agencies in charge of foreign business activity. It is available through WESTLAW.

The United Nations organization has produced a number of databases, of which United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics and U.N. Demographics, the two time series databases, can be useful to China researchers in their respective fields.

As we can see, most existing on-line databases that China researchers can utilize are business-oriented. This is certainly understandable for, in the world of business where time is money, quick access to the most current information is so crucial to decision-making. Japan has produced a number of databases on China in Japanese, such as China Industry Report and China Information Bulletin Service. There are, as we know, a few Chinese databases of Chinese enterprises and CD ROM products in nonbusiness-related fields. In the not too distant future, our use of databases in East Asian libraries may go far beyond the OCLC/CJK and RLIN/CJK bibliographic systems to having a variety of CJK databases for our patrons to use.