Chapter 4
Where Do Mongolian Scholars Go?
The Information Seeking Behavior within Mongolian Scholarly Communities

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ABSTRACT

In developing countries, one of the many challenges faced by researchers is increased pressure to conduct research, but inadequate resources provided to do their work. Perhaps nowhere is the inadequacy of research resources more apparent than in the area of access to scholarly research. In this chapter, using survey data, usage statistics, and interviews of researchers, librarians, and research administrators, we describe the information seeking behavior of scholars in Mongolia and how this behavior intersects with the resources made available by research administrators and librarians. Much of the existing research on scholarly communication in developing countries has focused on whether access to scholars should be donated or provided free of charge without restriction. In Mongolia, the issue isn't so much whether access to scholarly communication should be donated or not, but rather whether the scholarly communication system meets researcher needs, is adapted to constraints within the country, and reduces communication dependency. What we find is that the scholarly communication system in Mongolia fails to completely meet researcher needs and makes the country dependent on the scholarly communication products provided by outsiders.

INTRODUCTION

Mongolia, prior to the 1990s, was a country closely aligned with the Soviet Union both politically and economically. During this time period all adults were guaranteed a job that was assigned to them by central economic planners. The academic infrastructure within the country was designed to train workers according to the needs of the economy and mimicked the infrastructure that existed in the Soviet Union. Researchers within this academic infrastructure in Mongolia were required to be fluent in Russian, published in research journals internal to Russia and Mongolia, and, like other workers, had their research activities controlled by central planners. The fall of the Soviet Union in 1990 translated into significant economic and political change in Mongolia. These changes, in turn, altered Mongolia's academic infrastructure.

Although the size of the Mongolian economy was always small when it was aligned with the Soviet Union, the economy became even smaller between 1990 and 1993 as the economy transitioned away from Soviet support and influence. The economic challenge since 1993 has been that the increase in the size of the economy has not been accompanied by an increase in employment levels or a diversification of the economy away from agriculture and natural resource extraction. This need to grow and diversify the economy drives the restructuring of the higher education system. In this chapter we focus our attention on how researchers, in this environment, engage with scholarly literature and how this engagement is determined. This engagement process plays a critical role in determining the effectiveness and quality of the research produced. The more effective and the higher the quality of the research, the more likely the research will contribute to economic growth and independence. With an extension of the research methodology in Yadamsuren and Raber (2007), we survey researchers affiliated with the Mongolian Academy of Sciences, collect usage statistics, and interview researchers,

librarians, and research administrators and find that the communication environment in Mongolia is slow to change, is not adapted to the needs of scholars, and is unable to meet the goals of the research patron. In Mongolia, as in other countries, the information seeking behavior of scholars is determined in a complex fashion that cannot be simplified to communication speed or cost. This analysis of the Mongolian scholarly publishing environment suggests that in order to promote economic development and independence that researchers need a scholarly communication process that reflects constraints within the country and fosters the development of a local communication infrastructure.

THE TALE OF THREE TRANSITIONS

Mongolia's economy and culture are both undergoing a significant transition from a socialist planned economy to one more responsive to market forces. This transition, in turn, has had the consequence of increasing higher education enrollment and encouraging researchers to do more research and publish their findings. Beyond the changes specific to Mongolia, the way in which research results are published has also been changing in recent decades with researchers around the world being encouraged to communicate via an electronic medium. In this section, we outline the connections between the changes in the economy, in the research infrastructure, and in the scholarly communication process.

With respect to the economy, Mongolia began its transition from a centrally planned to a market based economy in 1990. The early 1990s represented a particularly turbulent time in the transition with triple digit inflation, high unemployment, and shortages in goods and services as economic output fell by a third. Although the prospects for economic growth would not seem immediately apparent for a developing country that was for so long under the tutelage of the Soviet Union,

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