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Article information:

To cite this document:

Xiaoxia Yao YongChao Zhao , (2015),"Cooperative purchase and use: a study of the ProQuest full text database of dissertations and theses (PQDT)", Interlending & Document Supply, Vol. 43 Iss 2 pp. 94 - 97

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Cooperative purchase and use: a study of the ProQuest full text database of dissertations and theses (PQDT)

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Abstract

Purpose – To purpose of this study is to describe and to demonstrate the value of a consortium purchase of the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses full-text database (PQDT) in China.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors provide a first-person account based on their professional positions at the China Academic Library & Information System Administrative Center.

Findings – That the PQDT database has steadily increased the use of theses in China with more institutions subscribing every year. The PQDT full-text database has become one of the most cost effective databases cooperatively purchased in China.

Originality/value – One of the few in-depth studies of the use of the PQDT database.

Keywords Resource sharing, Consortium, CALIS, Cooperative purchasing

Paper type Case study

Introduction

The ProQuest Dissertations and Theses full-text database (PQDT) is the world's most comprehensive collection of dissertations and theses. It covers nearly three million searchable citations to dissertations and theses from around the world from 1,743 to the present day, together with over one million full-text dissertations that are available for download in PDF format. More than 80,000 new full-texts are added to the database each year through publishing partnerships with 700 leading academic institutions worldwide and collaborative retrospective digitization of dissertations through ProQuest's Digital Archiving and Access Program. Full-text dissertations are archived as submitted by the degree-granting institution. Some will be native PDF, some PDF image[1].

PQDT includes many subjects that meet everyone's needs as far as possible. In December 2013, PQDT provided the full-text of 768,658 dissertations and theses to which the CALIS consortium could subscribe. The largest number was in the applied sciences (26 per cent); followed by social sciences (18 per cent) and biological sciences (13 per cent) (see Table I).

Cooperative purchasing of PQDT

China Academic Library & Information System (CALIS) has organized the PQDT purchase annually since 2002. Each participating member must purchase a fixed number of dissertations and theses each year; 200 for Chinese mainland members and 260 for Hong Kong members.

Taking part in the CALIS consortium

Firstly, an institution that would like to join the CALIS consortium for PQDT completes a request and uploads it to the management platform. Then, they must sign a purchasing agreement with the ZhongKe I/E company, which is the agency for PQDT in China. After payment, ZhongKe I/E will offer submission privileges to participating members who can then submit dissertation and thesis orders to the system. The order cannot subsequently be modified or cancelled. If the valid orders submitted by members do not reach the fixed number, the balance will be selected and submitted by CALIS since the subscription period of the consortium lasts for about six months. To get the full-texts as soon as possible, ZhongKe I/E submits orders to ProQuest monthly. Lastly, the whole full-text orders will be uploaded to CALIS and two other servers in China by ZhongKe I/E, and these can be accessed

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Interlending & Document Supply
43/2 (2015) 94–97
Emerald Group Publishing Limited [ISSN 0264-1615]
[DOI 10.1108/ILDS-01-2015-0002]

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The authors thank Xiao Long and Zhang Lin for the support. They did lots of work on PQDT full-text purchasing and provided some statistical data.

Received 26 January 2015
Revised 13 February 2015
Accepted 17 February 2015



Table I Subject distribution of PQDT provided to CALIS

Subject	No. of dissertations and theses	Proportion (%)
Applied science	198,513	25.83
Biological sciences	100,865	13.12
Communications and the arts	28596	3.72
Earth and environmental sciences	36,665	4.77
Education	64606	8.41
Health sciences	40,382	5.25
Language, literature and linguistics	31,056	4.04
Philosophy, religion and theology	12,647	1.65
Psychology	28,592	3.72
Pure sciences	88,810	11.55
Social sciences	137,926	17.94

by members and their end-users within 45 days of purchasing. The workflow can be seen in Table II.

The sharing model

The first core policy of PQDT is “Unlimited cross access”; this means end users of the participating member can also access collections bought by other participants. PQDT offers researchers unlimited access to digital copies from their own institutions as well as affordable copies from other institutions of the CALIS consortium. For example, members can access 24,300 full-texts owned by Consortium One even though each of them only ordered 200 full-texts in 2002. The other policy is “cost savings”, which means that each participant chooses a different collection and they are then aggregated to maximize the collections available to all users. The sharing of the collections benefits all members of the consortium. It creates the largest collections, whilst generating significant cost savings for consortium members and avoids duplication.

Long-term storage and permanent access policy

- CALIS had organized four consortia by the end of 2014, namely, Consortium One, Two, Three and Four. Members will continue to have the right to access the resources of their consortium whether or not they renew their subscription. For example, each member of Consortium One can permanently access the resources purchased by all members of Consortium One as long as the member fulfilled the contract of Consortium One.
- Whether a member joins the consortium later or exits earlier, they will retain the rights of long-term storage and

permanent access of the full-texts they ordered. For example, the members belonging to Consortium One can download the full-texts from the retrieval system of ProQuest to choose and save the full-texts that all members of Consortium One ordered.

CALIS provides long-term storage and permanent access to the members of the PQDT consortium. CALIS is also permitted to upload the MARC data of PQDT to the CALIS retrieval systems for the purpose of resource sharing. For new participants who want to visit the resources purchased by past consortia, ProQuest also provides possible solutions. As long as they purchase a fixed number of dissertations and theses and share them with others, they can access the resources subscribed to by other members.

3. The subscription and retrieval system of PQDT

To facilitate the subscription of dissertations and theses by members and maximize the shared resources, CALIS provides technical support and subsidized hardware for PQDT purchasing. CALIS has also developed the “PQDT dissertation and thesis subscription system”, which avoids repeating orders and duplicating holdings for participating libraries. The system also facilitates member libraries management of their orders. CALIS plays an important role in guaranteeing the success of cooperative purchasing.

In 2002, CALIS and ZhongKe I/E jointly developed a PQDT search and retrieval platform. It is suitable for all types of researchers whether they are online novices or information professionals. The servers of the platform were deployed in three places: the CALIS Administrative Center, ShangHai JiaoTong University Library and the Institute of Scientific and Technical Information of China. The end users of the PQDT consortium with internet protocol addresses within the campus network can access this platform.

In 2010, a new version of the search and retrieval platform was officially launched, with enhanced features for data updating, retrieval and management. Data synchronization between the three servers and a smooth access through load balancing are guaranteed. The stability of data transmission was improved via multi-threaded downloading technology. The new platform supports full-text search and retrieval, along with simple and advanced search functions. The platform also offers subject-based navigation. The search and retrieval results can be limited by subject, year of publication, and so on. Some functions for personalized service have also been added to the new search platform. Valid users can customize the service they want, such as subscribing to interested

Table II The workflow for PQDT full-text subscription

No.	Working contents	Company in charge	Time needed (days)
1	Download the orders submitted by members	ZhongKe I/E	3
2	Handle the orders and confirm the copyright	Beijing Office of ProQuest	3
3	Make data discs and post it from USA to China	Headquarters of ProQuest	25
4	Check data discs and finish the arrival registration	ZhongKe I/E	3
5	Upload the metadata and full-text to servers	ZhongKe I/E	5
6	Backup data and notify members	ZhongKe I/E	3
	Total		42

subjects, saving search history, managing favourites. Finally, traditional Chinese and English search interfaces were added to the new search platform.

4. The effectiveness of the PQDT consortium

PQDT is one of the most popular resource sharing activities of CALIS. Its key benefits are:

- The number of dissertations and theses continually increases:
The number of dissertations and theses purchased increases every year because both the number of members increases and the size of the database increases. By the end of 2013, more than 450,000 dissertation and thesis full-texts can be accessed by all participating libraries and these full texts are permanently owned by CALIS. Table III shows the number of dissertations and theses purchased each year and the total number that can be accessed.
- More libraries have joined to promote the resource sharing:
More libraries have joined and purchased and utilized the PQDT full-text database. Participating members are quite diverse, including academic libraries, public libraries, research libraries and other information service institutions. In 2002, when the consortium was created, there were only 88 participants, and this number has increased to 249 by 2013, see Figure 2. Clearly, this cooperative purchase and utilization model is encouraging more and more libraries to participate (Figure 1).
- Increasing of the PQDT full-text database:
The use of the PQDT full-text database is increasing each year. From Figure 2, we can see that: in 2003, the number of full-text download was about one million; in 2011, the number peaked at more than two million, a new record; and the total number of full-text downloads was more than 20 million from 2003 through 2013. There is no doubt that “collection sharing” and “unlimited cross access” has generated significant utilization.

PQDT is one of the most cost effective databases

The PQDT full-text subscription model is “one-time purchasing, permanent access”. Hence, resources that can be

Table III The number of PQDT full-texts purchased

Year	No. of full-text purchased each year	Total no. of PQDT full-text purchased
2002	24,300	24,300
2003	22,895	47,195
2004	30,670	77,865
2005	25,135	103,000
2006	31,070	134,070
2007	36,387	170,457
2008	40,374	210,831
2009	43,514	254,545
2010	50,436	304,781
2011	49,225	354,006
2012	51,300	405,306
2013	52,930	458,236

Figure 1 The members of PQDT full-text database consortium by year

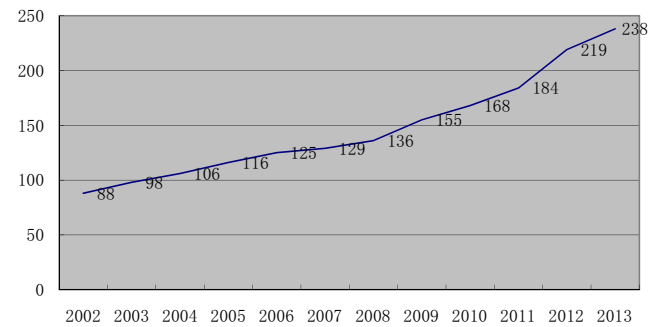
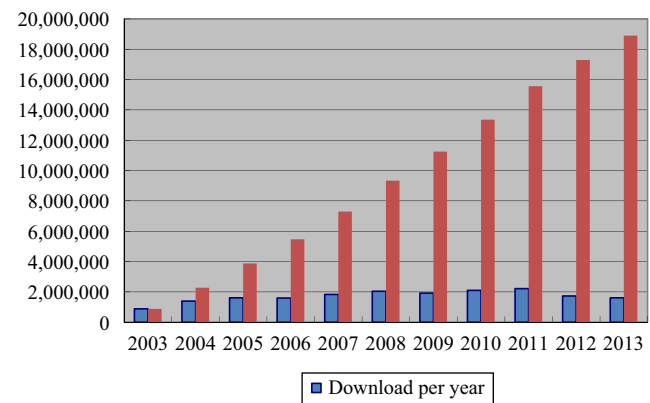


Figure 2 The use of PQDT by year



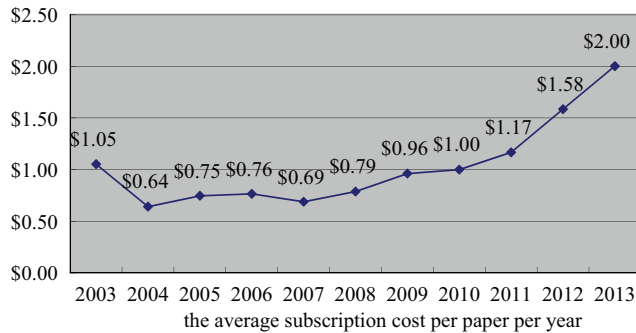
accessed continue to increase Through the “unlimited cross access” resource sharing model, each member can visit the collections bought by other participants, Thus PQDT has become one of the most cost effective databases according to the annual CALIS customer satisfaction investigation.

During the past five years, although the average subscription cost per paper per year increased, the usage cost remained no more than US\$2 (The total cost to the consortium divided by the number of dissertations and theses downloaded is the average usage cost per paper per year). In 2011, for example, the price of a hard copy of a PQDT full-text was US\$77 by interlibrary loan, while an electronic version was US\$42. However, the average usage cost per paper was only US\$1.17 through cooperative purchasing. The average usage cost of PQDT full-text per paper per year is shown in Figure 3.

The contribution of CALIS to resource sharing

Firstly, CALIS provides the guidelines for on the development of PQDT, which has prompted libraries to invest in this resource. CALIS understands that dissertations and theses are unique resources within universities whether in China or abroad. During its development of Phase 1, CALIS offered subsidies to participating members for the purchase of PQDT and organized the cooperative purchasing activities. With the assistance of one million RMB subsidies from CALIS, the subscription of PQDT brought in another 70 million RMB investment from participants. There is no doubt that the initial

Figure 3 The average usage cost of PQDT full-text per paper per year



subsidies mobilized members' enthusiasm to participate in cooperative purchasing.

Secondly, the PQDT consortium was managed by the CALIS National Science and Social Science Information Center (CNSSIC). The negotiation group was established by CNSSIC to evaluate the database, organize the subscription, conduct the negotiations and protect the interests of consortium members. CNSSIC signed agreements with ProQuest and ZhongKe I/E, determined consortium management processes and responsibilities and obligations of the three parties. At the same time, the evaluation of PQDT, namely, the contents, platform, usage statistic and publishers' service, is carried out annually to check for potential problems and devise solutions. A conference of member is held every three years to promote the consortium development and to train staff in the skills needed for the database.

Further consideration

The PQDT consortium has made remarkable achievements with the support, participation and cooperation of participant libraries. More and more dissertation and thesis resources can be accessed in the future; members' budgets were saved on the basis of the model of "unlimited cross access" and "cost savings". Correspondingly, PQDT has played an increasing role in teaching and research activities.

What's more, the model of "unlimited cross access" and "cost savings" has also been applied to the purchasing of NetLibrary e-book and MyiLibrary e-book databases. Unfortunately, the purchase of these two databases was terminated because NetLibrary was acquired by another company and the subscription fee of MyiLibrary rose quickly. However, in the future, we hope to provide this kind of resource sharing model for CALIS consortium members for database cooperative purchasing.

Although the price of the cooperative purchasing proposal of PQDT is cheaper than separate orders, some libraries have still not taken up this option. So, we need to discuss other solutions for those libraries that do not have the ability to buy PQDT, such as interlibrary loan, document delivery, pay per view, and so on.

Note

1. Web References available at: www.proquest.com/products-services/pqdt.html

Further reading

Xiaoxia, Y. (2012), "Evaluation and promotion: the cooperative purchase experience of academic libraries in China", *Library Collections, Acquisitions and Technical Services*, Vol. 36 Nos 3/4, pp. 97-106.

About the authors

Xiaoxia Yao joined Peking University Library in 2000, she works for the CALIS project, a nation-wide academic library consortium in China. As the Secretary-General of CALIS, she is one of the core persons for the management of resource sharing activities. Yao has published more than 30 papers. Xiaoxia Yao is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: yaoxx@calis.edu.cn

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