

AALL Spectrum

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Connecting and Changing: An Energizing Success Story

by Mark E. Estes, mark.estes@hro.com

I recently received a research request that required rapidly retrieving an English translation of a proposed Chinese law—within two days—for a pitch to a client. Nonplussed, I checked

Sources of Foreign Law for some leads to Internet-based resources. A check of those sites, however, proved fruitless. Next, I tried some commercial services—looking for news stories about the law—hoping that they would point to a source. I found several articles, but none referred to a source for an English version.

I tried a couple of search engines, Ask and Google, without success. One, however, did point me to a www.llrx.com article, which in turn led me to an academic law librarian colleague. The LLRX article reminded me that someone might have written a law review article on the topic. Sure enough, a check of the *Legal Resource Index* yielded multiple articles on the proposed law, but the best footnote reference to the law was, “A current English translation is in the author's files.”

By now it was late afternoon in Denver, so I decided to try multiple approaches since everyone East had probably gone home already. Still, I made the long-shot phone call to the academic librarian...and it rolled into voicemail. I explained my quest in a voicemail message and promised a follow-up e-mail so that he could easily reply. His reply the next morning confirmed my research that there was not an English translation readily available. And in his reply he copied a key sales representative of a commercial site who might be able to provide the translation.

Alas, by 10 a.m. Denver time I had not heard from the sales representative and decided it was time to try the author of the law review article, a partner at a large, southeastern law firm. As I drafted the e-mail to the partner, I suddenly realized (duh) that I knew the librarian at the firm. I stopped typing, found the phone number, called my librarian friend, and within five minutes I had the most recent translation of the current proposed law. Wow!

Two weeks later China finally passed the law, and the sales representative from the commercial site sent me a special trial offer, which included a link to the English version of the law.

The moral of the story: I made connections using the standard approach to legal bibliography and research, trying one source and then another source, changing the sources used as new ones presented themselves and remembering a core belief that law librarians want to help each other and that it is much easier to help someone when you have the personal connection. I had started the personal connection years ago by participating in AALL and attending meetings. I reestablished that connection by telephoning, chatting briefly, and then getting the translation e-mailed to me.

This issue of *Spectrum* covers many topics and connects us with our changing law library world and what we do outside of our library world. ■