Zero Project Innovative Practice 2018 on Accessibility

# Archive and search engine for Asian sign languages

# China – Hong Kong – The Asian SignBank

## Summary:

### The Asian SignBank (ASB) is a grant-funded project based in Hong Kong, China, documenting Asian sign languages to support sign language research and development through a searchable online database of over 6,000 signs. The project is a collaboration of deaf and hearing researchers jointly with the Centre for Sign Linguistics and Deaf Studies of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and with support from the Nippon Foundation.

## Problems Targeted:

### In the past, sign language – being uniquely visual in nature – could not be recorded, transcribed, organized, and presented systematically. Moreover, there is a lack of information about sign language varieties in the Asia-Pacific, which creates a learning barrier for deaf persons in the region.

## Solution, Innovation, and Impact:

### The Asian SignBank is the first archive for sign language varieties in Asia and has been implemented to facilitate sign language teaching, development, and research. For each participating country of the Asia Pacific Sign Linguistics Research and Training Program – a regional research programme on sign linguistics involving tertiary institutions, government bodies, and deaf organizations within the Asia-Pacific region – signs are collected, filmed, analyzed, documented, and archived.

### ASB has teams of deaf and hearing researchers working across five locations – Fiji, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Sri Lanka, and Viet Nam – who collect and film the sign languages of each country before documenting them in the database, along with information that allows easy searching. Users can search by entering a word or phrase or by clicking on a hand shape. The database then shows all meanings of the hand signal, lists in which country and region the sign is used, and provides a video of the sign and a description in both English and the native language.

### ASB’s primary users are in China (Hong Kong and Macau), Indonesia, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan. However, other persons can benefit from the service, for example, Asian sign-language users who are living outside the region; and as such there are users in such disparate countries as Brazil, Turkey, and the United States. As of the end of 2016, ASB had recorded over 6.000 signs from five Asian languages and had received more than 15,000 web visits.

## Outlook, Transferability, and Funding:

### Visits to the ASB website have increased from around 2.400 in 2014 to over 15,000 in 2016. ASB has also set up sign language research units at partnering universities in Fiji, Indonesia, Japan, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka; and it is working to implement training for students in researching and documenting Asian sign languages. The partnering universities have agreed to disseminate information on ASB within their countries to engage other universities in the process.

### Since its commencement in 2007, 90 per cent of the project’s funding has come from the Nippon Foundation, a Japanese foundation furthering social innovation in Japan and around the world. The remaining 10 per cent has come from research grants. From inception to the end of 2016 the overall budget for this project has been close to 500,000 US Dollars.

## About the Practice at a Glance:

### Name of Innovative Practice: Archive and search engine for Asian sign languages

### Organisation: The Asian SignBank

### Country of Implementation: China

## Facts and Figures:

### Visits to the ASB website:

* In 2014: 2,411
* In 2015: 9,994
* In 2016: 15,249
* 2017: 18,146 (up to November)

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## Links and further reading:

### [Centre for Sign Linguistics and Deaf Studies Hong Kong](http://www.cslds.org/v3/index.php)

### [Chinese University of Hong Kong](http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/english/index.html)

## Quote:

“The convenience and flexibility of the ASB allow me gives me more time to prepare comprehensive teaching materials and design various class activities. Students no longer have to memorize every sign in class.”

– Laura Lesmana Wijaya, Director of Sign Language Center in Indonesia