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# I Hear the Train A Comin' -- Anianet: Connecting Scholars Worldwide

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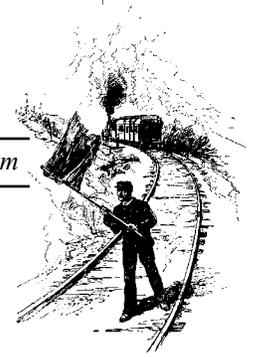
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# I Hear the Train A Comin' — Anianet: Connecting Scholars Worldwide

Column Editor: **Greg Tananbaum** (Founder and CEO, Anianet) <greg@anianet.com> [www.anianet.com](http://www.anianet.com)



I began writing this column four years ago, with a goal of taking a peek around the scholarly communication bend, into a future divined but as yet unseen. If one were to pore over the two dozen pieces I have written for *Against the Grain* (a task virtually inconceivable for anyone other than my mother, to be sure), one would likely find a few common strands uniting the essays. Technology is lowering barriers to communication, while simultaneously creating information clutter. Systems that create efficient means to share information, ideas, and experiences are crucial to effective discourse. How we define information that is worth sharing is evolving rapidly. The ability for scholars from across different disciplines, time zones, backgrounds, viewpoints, and generations to interact with one another is creating amazing possibilities for the advancement of human knowledge.

I take this trip down memory lane with an intensity of purpose. In writing about the ways in which others are transforming scholarly communication, I have come closer to realizing the particular impact that I hope to make on the space. Shrinking the world. Reducing clutter. Fostering interesting and unexpected collaborations. These are concepts that matter to me personally. Pulling these goals together, I have found my next challenge.

Recently, I have had the good fortune to launch a new service called **Anianet** ([www.anianet.com](http://www.anianet.com)). **Anianet** is a professional network that connects Chinese scholars to their counterparts in America and Europe. As I have written about previously on these pages, China's trend lines in terms of its investment in R&D, the number of Ph.D.'s it is producing, the size of its academic workforce, the desire of its scientific authors to publish in high-impact journals, and other key indicators are through the roof. Thousands and thousands of Chinese scientists, professors, and other academic professionals are currently conducting vital, groundbreaking work. **Anianet** integrates these Chinese researchers into the international community by providing a platform to create free English-language profiles detailing their professional accomplishments in a format that is optimized for a western audience, as well as by providing vital information detailing western grants, research partnerships, jobs, fellowships, meetings, publications, and other opportunities (think LinkedIn for Chinese scholars). In short, **Anianet** provides Chinese researchers with a "western base of operations" for the first time.

I have come to believe that one of the most substantial problems within the research community today is the divide separating Chinese and western scholars. While the number of Chinese scholars is exploding both in absolute terms and as a percentage of authors in high-impact scientific journals, Chinese researchers find it difficult to make their interests and expertise known to western colleagues. More than 80%

are not very satisfied with the visibility of their research and writing among their European and American colleagues. An equal number would like to be more knowledgeable about western research trends and opportunities. My hope is that **Anianet** will provide a bridge to this burgeoning scholarly community.

**Anianet** launched in preview mode late this summer, and already thousands of Chinese scholars — in fields ranging from architectural design to zoology — have created **Anianet** profiles. **Anianet** has received additional validation in the form of statements supporting its mission to bring Chinese and western scholars closer together from a number of prominent organizations, including the **Royal Society of Chemistry**, the **Biochemical Society**, and the **Institute of Physics**. There appears to be genuine interest from both eastern and western corners to forge tighter connections.

Here is how **Anianet** works. First, a member takes a few minutes to create a Member Profile. Membership is absolutely free, no special technical skills are required, and is open to Chinese scholars and scholars of Chinese descent working anywhere in the world. The Member Profile describes a researcher's interests, institutional affiliation, publishing history, teaching experience, awards, collaboration histories, and other details of his professional accomplishments. A member can enhance his profile by including pictures, a CV, links to published articles and presentations, and so forth. Profiles can be easily updated by members at any time.

Many American and European researchers have only a vague understanding of the important and innovative work being conducted in other areas of the world. It is often difficult for them to gain a complete picture of a non-westerner's interests, accomplishments, and stature. Indeed, our research indicates that nine in ten American scholars would like to have closer ties with their Chinese peers. With that in mind, westerners can browse the **Anianet** network or search within a specific subject area to identify possible collaborators, authors, and invited speakers, or simply to get a fuller sense of who is doing what within the Chinese research community. As a means to increase the visibility of this free resource among western researchers, a number of prominent western electronic publishing and scholarly communication organizations, including the **Public Library of Science (PLoS)**, the **Social**

**Science Research Network (SSRN)**, and the **Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (ALPSP)** are making their own substantial user bases aware of **Anianet**.

In addition to highlighting professional interests and achievements in an encapsulated format designed to appeal to western editors, reviewers, and funding agencies, members use **Anianet** as a means to better connect with the goings-on in their field. What conferences are upcoming? What breakthroughs have just been published in a journal or reported in the mainstream media? What visiting fellowships and grant opportunities have recently been announced? **Anianet** collects this information from thousands of sources and makes it available to members automatically on their profile pages. Members are notified only of that information that is relevant to them — microbiologists get microbiology information, political theorists get



political theory information, and so forth. These information feeds help Chinese researchers understand and keep track of global developments and opportunities in their field.

Will it work? Will **Anianet** shrink the world? Will it reduce clutter? Will it foster interesting and unexpected collaborations? I obviously hope so. It seems foolish that scientific innovation would occur along parallel tracks, with no way to recognize the leaps in advancement that closer contact might produce. This matters. Research teams that could be working in concert to cure H1N1 and other diseases instead operate in parallel. Theorists from east and west who might collaborate on new economic models to guard against global recessions instead remain siloed, working without benefit of each others's knowledge. I have written often about the need for more efficient, more groundbreaking tools to support and enhance scholarly communication. It feels exciting — exhilarating, actually — to roll up my sleeves and contribute to the cause. 🌸