

REPORTS

ASAA Off-shore Conference, Hong Kong, 29 June - 2 July 1991

The conference

The Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) conference was held at the University of Hong Kong with two series of sessions running concurrently over three days of meetings. Although there were about 80 names in the list of participants, it appeared that a number of people could attend only for a day or so; and, as it clashed with the Chinese Studies Association Conference in Sydney, several people, including Professor Colin Mackerras, came to Hong Kong for a few days and then returned to attend that meeting. There were only about 40 people present most of the time, but there was a very interesting mix of people, and, as happens at small conferences, you get to know people more.

Australian librarians present were: Andrew Chin of the Parliamentary Library, Canberra; Magdalen Lee, the East Asian Librarian from Fisher Library, University of Sydney; Pauline Haldane and myself. On the Hong Kong side, Mrs Lily Hu, formerly of Melbourne University and now at Lingnan College in Hong Kong, attended some sessions, and Roy Stall of Hong Kong Polytechnic was also there briefly.

Saturday 29 June: Professor Wang Gungwu, Vice Chancellor of the University of Hong Kong, gave the opening address and spoke in a most interesting way to the conference theme of "Old cultures in a new Asia". He spoke of how the Western view had predominantly been that the old Asia must be replaced, modernised and brought up-to-date. He felt that there was now re-assessment, both in the West and Asia, of the value of the old - in terms of religion, art and cultures.

Professor John Ingleson, President of ASAA, then gave the Keynote Address on the topic "Australia's Asian future: rhetoric or reality?" He spoke of the opposition in Australia to a regional role and a future in Asia, which he blamed on the Anglo-Celtic background of Australian institutions. He thought that most Australians felt that they could not really cope with the region, both from the aspect of learning languages and culturally. The slogan "Australia's future lies in Asia" he saw still as an empty slogan, although now it is politicians at the seat of power and leaders of commerce and industry who are saying it. Although the need for micro-economic reform is accepted, the need for cultural micro-reform is not. There was, however, an increase in Asian language teaching in Australia.

Professor Ingleson had hopes for the next generation, rather than this.

Following these introductory speakers, a plenary session was held. As a result of discussion, two points arose which ASAA would consider:

1. It was suggested that ASAA might try to have discussions with employers, especially State governments, on the usefulness of employing people with Asian qualifications.
2. Future off-shore ASAA meetings should try to integrate more closely with the local academic community so that Australians could learn more about their local colleagues' activities. Some surprise was felt at the lack of academics from the region attending the conference.

I attended sessions later in the day on the use of microcomputers in the teaching of Chinese. Philip Yung-king Lee of the University of New South Wales is developing some interesting microcomputer based programs which offer multiple choices in identifying characters, romanising, etc. At a later stage it could be possible to add a writing mechanism so that students could practise writing characters. It was hoped to market the package later. Dr Lee thought that the system was well adapted to his University of New South Wales students, as it allowed them to learn at their own pace. It was felt to be a useful teaching aid when there were large student numbers.

There was a lively session at a paper on Australia's marketing of education to Asia. This was prepared by Roy Stall and David Murphy, both of Hong Kong Polytechnic. While there was no opposition to the overall concept of overseas paying students, it was felt by the speakers and the audience that there was a great deal still to be learned by both government and academics on how to present Australia's case, and how to administer such a scheme. The lack of uniformity between the various Australian states in their educational systems and the very competitive approach that has been taken by various institutions were seen as problems. Also, the educational tests administered overseas were not revealing problems which subsequently emerged at Australian universities. Many speakers felt that the program had been started too quickly with insufficient central co-ordination.

On Tuesday I attended the sessions on Indochina. A paper by Dr Ben Kiernan, an Australian academic at Yale University, on Maoism and Cambodia, sought to compare Pol Pot with earlier Chinese figures. This is a chapter in a forthcoming book he is writing on Pol Pot. Dr Helen Jarvis followed

with a paper on the United Nations peace plan for Cambodia. Dr David Marr, of the Research School of Pacific Studies at the Australian National University, spoke next on information policy in Vietnam.

This conference, supplemented by visits to libraries and bookshops and a trip to Macau and Guangzhou, proved most useful and interesting.

Library visits

Magdalen Lee, the East Asian Librarian at the University of Sydney, and I decided to undertake some joint visits to libraries in Hong Kong during our visit, especially since there was no library program in the Conference.

There are seven major academic institutions in Hong Kong which all fall under the Universities Polytechnic Grants Committee (UPGC). They are:

- The University of Hong Kong
- The Chinese University of Hong Kong
- The Hong Kong Science and Technology University
- The Baptist College
- Lingnan University
- Hong Kong Polytechnic
- City Polytechnic

Some years ago, the University of Hong Kong purchased British National Bibliography (BNB) MARC tapes, and later Library of Congress (LC) MARC, and distributed records on demand. When Bibliofile became popular, that system ceased.

There is a dial-up facility offering access to all seven libraries' catalogues. Each library has its own automated system, either developed in-house or purchased from a vendor. Unlike the situation in Australia, there seem to be many generous donors and alumni who are happy to make gifts, so libraries seem to be under less pressure than they are here.

During one busy day, we made some quick library visits and saw the Chinese University of Hong Kong, situated in the Shatin area of the New Territories on the mountain-side with wonderful views, space and modern buildings; it is very much a contrast to the crowded and historic campus of the University of Hong Kong. Dr Painan Rashid Wu has been University Librarian for less than a year. His major library experience has been in the United States and the Middle East.

DOBIS E has recently been adopted by the University Library and is currently being developed for the control of Chinese materials. Two subsystems are operating for Chinese

characters - the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) and Circulation. I saw some MARC records with Chinese characters being input and high quality cards produced on a NEC Printwriter P7. Wade-Giles is the romanisation standard.

The collection size is over one million volumes, with half being in English and half in Chinese. Japanese is taught in the University, but not Korean. LC classification is used for the main collection and National Library of Medicine (NLM) classification for the medical collection. The University is a legal deposit library for Hong Kong publications.

The Contemporary China Collection: this separate collection in the basement of the main library building is of 1949+ imprints. It consists of 100,000 volumes and has its own classification system. Researchers can use it but they must apply for access. It is very strong in newspapers and has extensive news clippings. The collection includes contemporary political posters.

Hong Kong Polytechnic: Magadelen and I paid a quick visit and spoke to Roy Stall, their Circulation Librarian. Much to my please, I met Ah Fong Cox and Grace Cheng, all former members of National Library of Australia staff. Grace is Systems and Bibliographic Control Librarian. The Polytechnic is using the Atlas (now DRS) Datasearch Associates system. Wade-Giles is used as the romanisation standard. Of a total collection of 20,000 titles, ten percent is in Chinese. This reflects the strong technological and Western orientation of its courses.

University of Hong Kong: a tour of their new extensions was offered to conference participants. The Library had expanded into its extension only in the week before we visited. The Librarian, Dr Kan Lai-bing, showed us around. The extensions offer very large new reader areas. Their automated system for Chinese was demonstrated by Lee Chik Fong. They have an imposing Rare Book Collection which contains various older works about the region. The Hong Kong collection, being added to by legal deposit, is quite impressive and contains 20,000 books including bound journals. It is a major collection of Hong Kong imprints.

Magdalen and I were very happy to have had this opportunity to visit these Hong Kong libraries and very grateful to the librarians who gave us their time and hospitality.

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