

EALRGA AT ALIA '96

Susan MacDougall

EALRGA conducted a session at the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA)'s 1996 Biennial Conference in Melbourne. The session, "East Asian Library and Information Services: Looking Ahead", was one of several activities outside the conference proper. It was held on 7th October from 2 to 5.30 pm in the World Congress Centre.

Susan Prentice chaired the session. There were four presentations followed by a discussion. The papers were:

Issues and prospects in East Asian librarianship Susan MacDougall

A Pinyin and Wade-Giles database for the University of Melbourne

Bick-har Yeung

Reading the future: Japanese information services Toshio Takagi

Library services and the Internet: a Japanese perspective Eiko Sakaguchi

The papers will be published in a special issue of the *EALRGA Newsletter*, scheduled for February 1997.

It was unfortunate that there were several Asia-related activities running concurrently, and attendance at the EALRGA session was low. On the other hand, the informal atmosphere of a small group encouraged a useful and lively discussion.

During discussion, the point was made that, while the National CJK Service is a welcome development, such networks tended to be oriented towards academic institutions and had little to offer public libraries by way of cataloguing copy. Public library users were a neglected group: it was important to ascertain and address their needs for East Asian materials. At the same time the trend towards groups - or clusters of expertise - was noted, for example, in CJK cataloguing, to solve the problems of libraries with few staff or 'one person' libraries in the handling of non-English language materials.

It was suggested that EALRGA could organise a two-day conference in conjunction with a function such as an ASAA conference or the next Roundtable on Libraries and Asia.

There was also the question of the most appropriate conference to host EALRGA sessions. One problem with librarians' conferences was that participants were talking to other librarians, whereas maybe they should be talking - and listening - to their users. Added to this were the high charges for running sessions at ALIA conferences and the lack of integration into the main body of the conference. Only Monday and Friday at either end of the conference were available for these extra sessions, and most groups

preferred to hold their sessions on the Monday while participants were still fresh. Overall, registrations at the conference were down; this was attributable partly to the high cost for a three-day conference, and partly to the lack of variety in the program, which concentrated on "main issues", divorced from their practical applications to specialist areas. The result was that a number of people travelled to Melbourne for activities on the Monday without registering with or attending the conference itself.

Whether or not there is a need for general conferences is a debatable point. From a personal point of view, it would be preferable (that is, cheaper) to attend one good conference a year that includes streams for a range of special interest groups, rather than having to belong to and choose between three or four specialist conferences - for example, conferences of the Australian Society of Indexers, Online and OnDisc, the Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA), and the Chinese Studies Association of Australia. Of course, each attracts a different set of people and covers topics in greater depth than a general conference could. General conferences can be successful: the ALIA '94 conference in New Zealand brought in new ideas and prevented too much introspection by having several high profile non-librarian key speakers. Even the laid-on entertainment was more imaginative than at ALIA '96.

EALRGA has, in the past, held sessions at ASAA conferences, and will consider doing so again. Since EALRGA is not affiliated with ALIA, any sessions at ALIA conferences will always be outside the main conference, and EALRGA will therefore have to pay for facilities. The stumbling block has been the fact that not all members of the current committee belong to ASAA for reasons mentioned in the previous paragraph.

Opinions and suggestions about future conferences are welcome - either over the mailing list or as letters to the editor.

