

BOOK REVIEW

Asia Access: A Guide to English Language Resources for China, Japan and Korea. Asian Studies Research Library, Monash University Library. Melbourne, Moninfo, 1996

Asia Access: A Guide to English Language Resources for Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. Asian Studies Research Library. Melbourne, Moninfo, 1996

The initiative of Monash University Library's Asian Studies Research Library which has culminated in these two guides to China Japan and Korea in one volume and Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore in the other is most welcome. This is particularly so at a time when it is widely acknowledged that there is a growing need throughout all sectors of Australian society for a heightened awareness and deeper understanding of the countries of the Asian region.

The guides list sources of information in the English language on China including Hong Kong and Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. Also included are sources of information on Australia's relations with Asia as a whole and with individual countries of the region. Both guides are selective compilations of what are regarded by the specialist compilers as the most relevant and useful and where appropriate current sources of information on all aspects of the Asian countries covered, encompassing the humanities, the social sciences, business and statistical sources in both printed and electronic form as well as a useful section on Asia related organisations. The target readership includes businesses with an interest in the Asian region, librarians and other information professionals, researchers and Asian study centres.

The information in both guides is clearly presented and well organised as would be expected from this team. Both compilations are organised in chapters devoted to major collections, printed sources, electronic sources and organisations and within chapters are subdivided according to type of source, eg atlases, journals and newsletters, business information, online databases, Internet and further subdivided geographically. Each entry includes a brief but useful annotation and there is a useful index. The volumes are designed with the convenience of the reader in mind and are 'user-friendly'.

Unfortunately all publications of this type in the traditional printed form are out of date even before they are published. In this respect it is interesting to compare the approach of the Australian Library and Information Association's Asia-Pacific Special Interest Group in regard to its recent publication *Asian resources: a directory of databases on Asia accessible in Australia*, compiled by Nereida Cross and edited by Susan

MacDougall. This has been published in both printed and electronic form, with the electronic form being updated on a regular basis. It would I believe be of value if this approach were considered for future updating of the information in these two guides.

There are some minor inconsistencies and other irritations such as the lack of phone numbers or fax numbers for some of the organisations listed as well as the absence of URLs in some cases for the web sites referred to in the section on electronic sources. Such oversights however were presumably due to resource constraints and do not detract from the overall success that the publication of these two useful guides represents.

Mrs Ho Chooi Hon, Associate University Librarian who is acknowledged in the foreword as the driving force behind this and related developments in the Asian Studies library and information field is to be commended, as is her team of specialist Asian Studies librarians, Helen Soemardjo, Dennis Kishere, Jung Sim Kim and Eiko Sakaguchi who were responsible for the compilation of these guides and Edward Lim, as University Librarian for his support for such an initiative. At a time when university libraries are struggling to adapt to the many demands imposed by shrinking resources and rapid change in information technology, the publication of these two Asia Access resource books is a considerable achievement and commands our respect.

The guides have already been used to great effect as the basis of a popular workshop initiated by APSIG and conducted by the Monash University Library specialist team at the ALIA Conference held in Melbourne late in 1996. I hope that the team responsible for these publications will build on this solid foundation and that we may look forward to future 'revised editions' in the Asian Studies Research Library Information Series whether printed or electronic or both. As an ardent believer in the importance of vernacular language sources, I hope we may also see similar guides of vernacular material in the not too distant future.

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