

JAPANESE STUDIES ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA 10TH BIENNIAL CONFERENCE 1997

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The Japanese Studies Association of Australia (JSAA) Biennial Conference was held at the University of Melbourne from 6th to 10th July 1997 in conjunction with the international Japan Anthropology Workshop (known by its acronym JAWS). The joint conference was well attended with around 300 Australian and overseas participants. Librarians were present from the National Library of Australia, Australian National University (ANU), Monash University and the University of Melbourne. The strong involvement of librarians was commented on favourably at the Annual General Meeting.

The opening ceremony was held in the Great Hall at the National Gallery of Victoria. Following a Japanese music recital, the conference was opened by the Governor of Victoria, Sir James Gobbo, who stressed the multicultural nature of Melbourne and the importance of a non-racial immigration policy for Australia's engagement with Asia. The Japanese Consul-General also spoke and pointed out that in the current economic climate Japan was having to reduce overseas funding through bodies such as the Japan Foundation.

The JSAA and JAWS sessions over four days covered a wide range of subjects. There was no single theme, though JAWS panels were largely on the area of mass and other media. While many JSAA sessions were on aspects of teaching the Japanese language, the dominance of this area was apparently not as marked as in past years. Other topics of note included current economic, political and social trends; education; literature and the arts; popular culture; minority groups; the Second World War; and gender issues.

Prior to the conference there had been some email discussion on the possible formation of a Japanese library group affiliated with the JSAA. In Melbourne, a meeting between librarians at the conference and JSAA executive members, Dr Vera Mackie and Dr Alison Tokita agreed that given the small numbers of people involved it would be better to work within existing structures. It was decided that an informal Japanese library group would be set up within the present East Asian Library Resources Group of Australia (EALRGA). JSAA's constitution would not allow affiliation of such a group.

A lunchtime forum on 10 July entitled "Japanese Studies Library Resources: Accessing Japanese Digital and Conventional Resources" was very well attended with over 50 scholars packed into the Baillieu Library Reader Education Room.

Yumiko Tsuji of NLA gave a thorough presentation on the National CJK Service. It was revealing that with some notable exceptions, most of the academics present were clearly unaware of the CJK system. They were very

interested to learn about it, as well as about Internet resources outlined by Toshio Takagi of the ANU Library, and reference and user services described by Eiko Sakaguchi of Monash University Library. Chooi-Hon Ho of Monash spoke about the challenges of producing more trained Japanese and other Asian studies librarians in Australia.

The JSAA Annual General Meeting and a lunchtime forum on developing postgraduate studies raised some issues of significance to libraries.

Professor Bill Coaldrake of the University of Melbourne (formerly at ANU) referred to a report in which he is involved which suggests a worrying trend in Japanese studies in Australia. Despite the much-publicised boom in the learning of the Japanese language, very few tertiary students are undertaking any postgraduate studies. Many are studying Japanese as part of a combined degree with economics, law etc., to enhance their job prospects in the private sector. Professor Coaldrake and others are concerned that Australia is producing few young academics to succeed the older generation of Japan scholars. One idea which was discussed was to broaden existing exchanges between Australian and Japanese universities to bring more Japanese students to do postgraduate work in Australia. However it was pointed out that most Japanese students coming here want to concentrate on subjects other than Japanese studies.

At the Annual General Meeting it was mentioned that the JSAA was in a healthy financial position. Possible projects were considered, and the JSAA executive would look at several including library fellowships along the lines of the former Asian Studies Library Awards (ASLA) which brought postgraduates to use the major Asian collections, particularly in Canberra.

The strong presence by libraries at JSAA was worthwhile and was much appreciated by the organisers of the conference. It was an excellent opportunity to meet and renew contact with members a prime user group, to explain relevant library services to them and answer specific queries. In particular, the lunchtime library forum was well attended and useful. It showed the continuing need to promote and explain activities such as the National CJK Service, of which most academics were still unaware.

November 1997

The presentations from this session will be published in a forthcoming issue of the EALRGA Newsletter.