

LIBRARY FORUM: SUMMARY OF PAPERS

Masako Takagaki, Asian Languages Collection
University of Auckland Library, New Zealand

"Why a Japanese studies conference at Rockhampton?" I was not the only person to remark, I presume, when the announcement was made that the Biennial Conference for JSAA this year would be held at Rockhampton, Australia. "Rockhampton," according to a guide book "known as the gateway to the Australian Outback and the Great Barrier Reef, is approximately 700 kms north of Brisbane, on the Central Queensland coast. The city which is also often identified as the beef capital of Australia, is famous for its sunny climate, tropical atmosphere, rural hospitality and leisurely lifestyle." However, right through the whole session, from arriving at the Rockhampton Airport to the last moment of the conference, I was impressed with the devotion and commitment by the organising committee of the host institution, the Central Queensland University. There was an information desk at a corner of the airport building and participants of the conference were handed a map "1999 JSAA Biennial Conference - Getting There!!", as well as an opening ceremony program upon stepping out of the plane. Conference registration followed by a wine and cheese session was held outdoors toward dusk. The opening ceremony included "Traditional Smoking ceremony" and music and dance performances by several groups of indigenous people.

The Japanese Library Resource Group in Australia (JALRGA) has been participating in the JSAA conference since 1997 by organising "Library Forums". Since I attended the previous JALRGA Library Forum at the University of Melbourne in 1997, I wanted to attend this year's forum and compare it with the previous one. The theme of the Library Forum this time was "Japanese Information Resources: Australian and Global Networking towards the 21st Century" and it was held on the 2nd day of the conference. Although the venue had to be changed at the last minute due to equipment problems, the forum was successful with more participants than expected.

The forum was chaired by Eiko Sakaguchi, Japanese Studies Librarian at Monash University. Andrew Gosling, Chief Librarian of Asian Collection at the National Library of Australia talked on "National Library of Australia (NLA) - Recent Development for Japanese Information Resources". I was impressed to learn of the size of the collection, current budget, collection development policy for Japanese material at NLA, as well as a forthcoming project by a group of Asian studies researchers, principally from ANU and Griffith University and with support from LaTrobe University. In many cases the development of Japanese resources in overseas countries is the result of strong leadership from their National Libraries. And I was convinced that Australia is no exception.

A paper "Melbourne Asian Research Libraries Consortium (MARLC) and Japanese resources" presented by Ho Chooi-Hon, Associate University Librarian at Monash University Library was timely, because the needs for library cooperation in order to maximise their limited resources was a common concern among Asian collections outside Japan. By sharing expertise and joint development of collections among relevant institutions in a region they would be able to provide and enhanced service to their respective clientele. The MARLC have definitely brought about positive benefits to the academic staff and students as well as the librarians and the libraries.

Prior to MARLC, there had been a similar consortium, a long-standing and successful agreement concerning Japanese material between NLA and ANU libraries since 1955. This agreement assigned primary responsibility for collection in the humanities and pre-1868 Japanese history to the ANU, and collection in social sciences and post-1868 history to NLA. Then MARLC, another library cooperation scheme to maximise their limited resources, was formally launched in April 1999 and comprised the Asian Languages Collection in the libraries of Monash University and University of Melbourne.

The consortia between ANL/ANU and MARLC in Australia gave me significant ideas for the development of Japanese resources in New Zealand. Library-supported Japanese research in New Zealand is normally under-resourced both in terms of the size of the collections and the financial resources required to build them up. Particularly in recent years a number of external factors eg. publisher's price rises, fluctuations in the value of the NZ dollar etc., have made the situation much more depressed. I think, therefore, sharing resources at the collection development stage among relevant institutions is a possible future project, and online information is essential in sharing the use of these resources in New Zealand.

Michelle Hall from the University of Melbourne library gave a paper entitled "A report on the Japanese Librarians Workshop and CEAL (Council of East Asian Libraries) meeting held in Boston March 1999, with comments about East Asian Libraries visited while in the US". It was a very interesting report and I was pleased to know that we share common problems and difficulties among Asian Languages Collections irrespective of the size or location. For instance, owing to the need for special scripts and input methods, information technology has widened the gap between the East Asian collection and the parent libraries in the use of available technology. Coping with this divergence in technology is one of my dilemmas at the moment. And I agree with Michelle that maintaining a good, relevant bookstock is one of the important parts of collection management, because using online and electronic databases creates a situation where all libraries are very much the same in what they offer.

The title of the paper presented by Toshio Takagi of Australian National University Library was "Aibo the Gromit conspiracy: Japan and the worldwide intelligence network". It was unique, since the topic dealt more with current issues rather than library related ones. His paper described the world's first artificial intelligent entertainment robot called 'Aibo' and a conspiracy theory of a comprehensive global intelligence network known as ECHELON. This paper had a good bibliography and also listed many Web sites.

Akiko Hisamatsu, Senior Librarian of the Australia Japan Foundation, Australia Research Center in Tokyo, who came to join the conference all the way from Japan, talked briefly about the resources and services of her institution.

Comparing this year's Forum with the first one in 1997, the improvement in terms of the organisation as well as the contents of papers presented has been obvious. The organiser of the Forum, Eiko Sakaguchi of Monash University Library and her team, did a really good job, including the preparation of flyers and feedback forms for evaluation. The contents of the presentation were much more professional than before. Since this second Library Forum was so successful, the question of whether the Forum should be established as a regular feature of JSAA conferences seems to have a clear answer.

Although I congratulated the organiser on the success of the Library Forum I could not help wondering whether this lunchtime Library Forum is the right format or not. It seems to me that it would be better to include the Library Forum as a proper conference session rather than as a lunchtime event. Even though the time allotted for the Forum this year was one and half hours (equivalent to the formal sessions' time allocation) it was still held during the lunch break. I was told the main reason for scheduling the forum at this time was to try to avoid overlapping with other sessions so that participants could attend it without missing any conference sessions. Even though participants are encouraged to bring their lunch to the Library Forum, in reality, they are unlikely to do so unless the lunch place is very close to the room where the Forum is held. And I think that the papers presented at the Forum are becoming much more professional than the mere library information presentations and deserve to be presented at a proper session. I understand that there must be many issues to be solved at the management level of JSAA if the library forum were to be included as a formal session in the conference.

The library group organised a "library dinner", besides the official conference dinner, at a Thai restaurant in the city. Not only librarians but also some academic staff attended the function. I thought the food was great in Rockhampton and I particularly enjoyed the tender and juicy beef. Remember? "Rockhampton is often identified as the beef capital of Australia".