

ASIAN STUDIES CONFERENCE IN HOBART

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For the first time since its formation in 1975 the Asian Studies Association of Australia has held its biennial conference in Tasmania. The venue was the Grand Chancellor Hotel with magnificent views of Hobart's waterfront, and close to some very good seafood restaurants. This was ASAA's 14th Biennial Conference, and was entitled "After Sovereignty: Nation and Place". It was organised by the School of Asian Languages and Studies of the University of Tasmania, and held from 30 June to 3 July 2002. Despite the fears of those attending from warmer climates, Hobart was enjoying quite mild and sunny weather. Even Mount Wellington, which towers over the city, had only a light dusting of snow on its summit.

Numbers attending were much lower than at the last ASAA in Melbourne in 2000. This was most probably because of the cost and location of the conference in Tasmania. There were very few postgraduates, secondary teachers or librarians unlike at most ASAA meetings.

East Asian studies librarians attending included Magdalen Lee from the University of Sydney, Bick-har Yeung and Michelle Hall from the University of Melbourne and Andrew Gosling from the National Library. There was no formal library session but the small but stalwart band of EALRGA members did get together for an informal discussion and excellent dinner at the "Drunken Admiral" though naturally despite the restaurant's name we all remained sober and sensible throughout. Another highlight of ASAA was the opening reception held at Government House, a magnificent convict-built structure dating from the 1840s. It is set in the Botanical Gardens overlooking the Derwent River. The Governor and Lady Green were very hospitable and were most insistent that we tour the building while sipping our drinks and munching canapés.

The most talked about topic at the conference was the ASAA's newly published report *Maximizing Australia's Asia Knowledge : Repositioning and Renewal of a National Asset* (ISBN 0 9580837 0 3). This is also accessible at www.uws.edu.au/social/asaa/report.pdf. It is the first major review of Asian studies in Australia since the 1989 Ingleson Report, and has found that despite a number of important achievements, the study of Asia in universities and schools has fallen short of targets set in earlier reports to government. Its major conclusions were that the forces of globalisation will lead Australia to interact increasingly with the countries of Asia; that Australia's long-standing Asia-knowledge base is in jeopardy and that a careful program of renewal, making imaginative use of new technologies will allow Australia to reposition, extend and deepen its Asia knowledge.

Unlike the Ingleson Report, which looked at many aspects including libraries, *Maximizing Australia's Asia Knowledge* has been prepared with limited resources and does not specifically deal with libraries. Nevertheless the report with its detailed conclusions and recommendations on Asian language and related studies will be of great interest to libraries with Asian holdings.

Conference sessions covered many topics including Australia and Asia; nationalism, regionalism and separatism; the Internet and E-Governance in different Asian nations and gender issues. Many of the panels were inter-regional. Despite the apparent decline in South Asian studies noted in *Maximizing Australia's Asia Knowledge* there was a strong South Asian stream to the conference. Indonesian, Chinese and Japanese studies were also strongly represented.

During the conference several affiliated bodies including the Chinese Studies Association of Australia, the Indonesia Council, the Japanese Studies Association of Australia and the Korean Studies Association of Australasia held their annual general meetings. All four will be having conferences in mid-2003 and it is planned to have library sessions at each. The CSAA conference will be at the University of New South Wales in Sydney; the JSAA at Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane and the Korean and Indonesian meetings at ANU in Canberra.

The next ASAA conference will be held in 2004. The location has not yet been decided but given the low numbers attending in Hobart it will most likely be in a larger city such as Sydney or Melbourne.

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