

THE AUSTRALIA-JAPAN FOUNDATION AUSTRALIAN RESOURCE CENTRE, TOKYO

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Brief explanation of the Australia-Japan Foundation Australian Resource Centre

The Australia-Japan Foundation Australian Resource Centre (AJF-ARC) exclusively collects and houses Australian materials. It is the only specialised library of its kind in Japan that allows the general public to view and borrow material from its collections. On 1 November 1998, the ARC was re-launched as a multi-media library.

The ARC collection currently contains a monograph collection of 8,000 books, 150 titles of periodicals, three newspapers, 100 maps, 300 music CDs, 1000 videos and 120 CD-ROMs. We also have a variety of other materials, including reports of statistics and Japanese-language academic theses about Australia.

Although the number of visitors to the ARC tends to fluctuate throughout the year, an average of 1000 people visits the library each month. An average of 280 books is lent out monthly. We also respond to 1,200 inquiries, by telephone, facsimile, mail and e-mail each month.

The ARC employs a Senior Librarian and a Research Librarian, in addition to a part-time employee who is responsible for retroactive data input for the full-text search system.

Opening hours are from 10.00 am to 5.30 pm Monday to Friday.

There are three features that make the ARC a truly multi-media environment. These are:

- 1) The introduction of a full-text search and document management system.
- 2) A resource management system that enables searches of materials and lending services via our Internet homepage.
- 3) A CD-ROM changer that allows immediate access via the computer desktop to our CD-ROM collection.

The ARC is one project undertaken by its parent organisation, the Australia-Japan Foundation (AJF), and as a consequence, it has long and close ties to the Australia-Japan Foundation Secretariat.

Activities of the Parent Organisation

The Australia Japan Foundation was founded in 1976 by the Australian Federal Government as an independent statutory body under the Australia-Japan Foundation Act. Australia currently maintains several bilateral cultural foundations, such as the Australia-China Foundation and the Australia-South Korea Foundation, but when established, the AJF was the first of its kind. As can be appreciated from this, the Australian Government made a long-term commitment to further not only economic relations between the two nations, but also promote mutual cultural enrichment.

The purpose of the AJF's activities is to foster mutual understanding between Australia and Japan through people-to-people ties and promote greater understanding about the language, culture and national identity of each nation. The Board of the AJF meet three to four times a year to decide the Foundation's activities.

One of the AJF's activities is the management and operation of the ARC. The backing from and association with the AJF creates a very supportive environment for the ARC's activities. The purpose of the AJF is to promote exchange between the two nations and the ARC is in a position to actively respond to the needs of Japanese society and library users. For those directly involved in the management of the ARC in Japan, there are great advantages in being able to have control over our activities, while monitoring the trends of users in Japan.

Aside from the ARC, the AJF undertook a diverse range of activities. With the expansion of these activities, the number of people who utilised the ARC increase and the range of its activities broadened.

The Creation of the Australian Resource Centre

The first Tokyo office of the Australia Japan Foundation was officially opened in the corner of a Minami-Aoyama building on 17 April 1980. The Australian Resource Centre (then known as the AJF Australian Library) was created within the AJF Office upon its opening. The Library was modelled on its forerunners, the American Cultural Centre (established in 1950) and the British Council (1954). When the Library opened, a 12-month plan to create the primary monographic collection was launched, which signalled the commencement of the Library's public activities.

On opening, the Library had holdings of over 3,000 English-language books from Australia, Japanese-language books on Australia (mainly social science, humanities and Japan-Australia relations), major newspapers, 150 titles of periodicals, Government publications, audio materials, early Australian prints, microfilm and microfiche.

The Library was open from 10.00 am to 6.30 pm on Monday to Friday and the material was available for borrowing. The Library was excellently located, directly above Omotesando subway station, and gradually began to gain a wide reputation throughout the community. However, at that time, Australia was not widely known by Japanese people and some people had trouble-distinguishing Australia from Austria.

The budget for the Library at the time of its opening was 58,500 AUD (at approximately 260 yen to one AUD). In those days, there were six people working at the Sydney office of the AJF and four in Tokyo. Due to staff cuts, the full-time librarian position was cut and a part-time librarian was employed.

New Premises

On 1 July 1990, the Australia-Japan Foundation Office moved from its premises in Minami-Aoyama to the Australian Embassy. The small library at the Australian Embassy amalgamated with the Australian Library.

In October 1997, a review of Australian Resource Centre operations was launched. A manager of the Commonwealth Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) Library visited the facilities in Tokyo and made an appraisal of library management over the course of four days.

A New Plan for Reform

Based on the results of the review, a new plan for reform was drafted that will be implemented in the 1998-99 financial year. The reform plans were divided into three broad categories:

- 1) Improvement of the basic layout
- 2) Printing of information about ARC
- 3) Creation of an Intranet to enable the ARC to become a truly multi-media library

Improvement of the Basic Layout

The plan for reform was conducted of all aspects of the library design, including layout, library colour scheme and miscellaneous objects, such as rubbish bins. The changes were undertaken in the constraints of the budget and hence required some inventiveness.

1. Unifying the colour scheme

It was decided to make the colour theme the Australian national colours of green and gold. We used a light, rather than dark green, to make the library appear bright and welcoming. The signage within the Resource Centre was also made green and gold. Rather than purchasing new chairs, we re-upholstered the 24 chairs that are available for visitors to use.

2. The reception desk was placed on an angle as suggested in the appraisal.
3. Bookshelves were changed to Japanese-made earthquake-resistant shelving. The bottom shelf is bolted to the floor. All units are secured by a bar that runs across the top of them. The new shelves are higher than the previous units and therefore the capacity has improved.
4. Lights have been installed above each of the bookshelves and the area is significantly brighter.
5. External signage has been improved. Although the signs are still too small to read easily, they have been improved slightly. Negotiations were undertaken with Embassy management to make the signs as large as possible without destroying the balance with other Embassy signage.

Printing of information about ARC

We had planned for some time to produce explanatory materials for distribution in kit-form on the Australian Resource Centre. This proposal was also included in the review and consequently, we started production of the materials immediately.

The kits are available written in Japanese and English, and contain six pages. The contents are:

- Australian Resource Centre Client Service Charter
- Australian Resource Centre Guidelines
- Australian Resource Centre Policy
- Collections and services
- An explanation of the Australia-Japan Foundation

Creation of an Intranet

It was necessary for the Australian Resource Centre to establish its own Intranet outside of the Embassy network to achieve our objective to make the ARC a truly multi-media service in which clients could have free use of the Internet and CD-ROMs.

The process from planning to completion will take approximately six months. The stages were as follows:

- In May 1998, we requested Teijin System Technology (TST) undertake the creation of our Intranet and manage the system necessary for its operation.
- The creation of the Intranet, including cabling, purchase of equipment and creation of the system, was all undertaken by TST without any hitches.
- The ARC database was changed from the existing '4-D' system to 'Elise' (Kihara Co.)
- We installed two computers to enable ARC clients to access the Internet. We now have a total of eight computers, four of which are new.
- We increased the number of CD-ROM-specialised computers by two.
- We installed a CD-ROM changer (made by Pioneer). The changer holds up to 500 CDs that can be accessed from and used on the computer desktop.
- We created a specialised line to allow ARC office staff to also access the Internet as they please.
- We installed a TST program, 'My Quick', for full text searches and document management. We can now create electronic versions of Japanese-language theses (including colour photographs). We are in the process of entering data to enable full text searches at some stage. This will alleviate concerns of important materials being lost.
- A data entry specialist has been specially employed to undertake data entry. We decided to specially employ someone in this role, rather than out-sourcing this task, to maintain complete control over the operation. The software is of excellent quality and searches take only seconds. Data entry is also simple and we are extremely pleased with the results so far.

Future Projects

"My Quick" Search facility

As of 1 July 1999, we hope to offer a search facility for bibliographical data on the homepage using 'My Quick', to provide a similar kind of service as is currently available for books, videos and CDs. We will continue to progress with the retroactive input of data. Due to copyright considerations of publishing full texts on the Internet, we are proceeding carefully with such plans.

PR and Marketing of the ARC and Australia

Firstly, we have initiated a program to regularly encourage individuals and groups to visit the Australian Resource Centre. Under this program so far, we have invited representatives from member libraries of the Japan Specialist Library Association, which has a membership that includes the information centres of major corporations, non-government organisations (NGOs) and various foundations. We have also conducted programs to encourage people from sections of the Australian Embassy and other Australian Government agencies, major news media representatives, and major Australian private companies operating in Japan to visit our facilities. Under this program, 350 people have visited the ARC in the four months since its refurbishment.

In addition, we have also been conducting a seminar series. Called the 'Salon Seminar' series, we have been running evening seminars with guest speakers on areas of current interest. At the beginning of the Seminar, the Director of the AJF gives a presentation of 'current topics'. This is aimed to serve as vehicle to gain greater understanding of current issues in Australia, beyond the main theme of the seminar, to encourage people to take wider perspective of Australia. Two of these sessions have been conducted since the ARC re-opening. The first coincided with a general election in Australia and hence looked at political issues. At the second seminar, a world-renowned Japanese poet was invited to a panel discussion with an Australian researcher on Japanese studies. To reach a broader scope of people, we put an invitation to attend the Salon Seminar on the Internet homepage. We also published a report of the Seminar on the Internet the day after it had been held.

The next Salon Seminar will be held on 20 April 99 from 6.30 pm at the Reception Room in the Embassy. Rikki Kersten will be a guest speaker and a talk will be given in Japanese about "The Australia - Japan relationship: Australian images, Japanese images".

Adapting to constant change

Australia is required constantly to adapt to the changing world. In response to this, the Australian Resource Centre must also re-create itself constantly.

Final Comments

This reform program would not have been possible without the support of Australia-Japan Foundation Director, Mr Terry White, who financially and in all other regards, gave the projects his full support. He was also a very keen advocate of making the Australian Resource Centre a fully multi-media facility. I would like to make a special expression of gratitude to the professionalism of the people at Teijin System Technology and for the role Mr White played in re-inventing the Australian Resource Centre in its current form.