Japanese Materials at El Colegio De Mexico and the Latin American Information Network

Yoshie Awaihara
EL COLEGIO DE MEXICO AND THE CENTER FOR ASIAN AND AFRICAN STUDIES

El Colegio de Mexico is located in the southwest part of Mexico City. It is a small research and teaching institute with about 250 teaching and research staff members and about the same number of students, the majority of them being postgraduate students. El Colegio de Mexico was created in the 1940s by Spanish refugees who fled from Spain at the time of the Spanish Civil War. Little by little the college expanded and now it is composed of seven centers: History, Linguistics and Literature, Economy, Population and Urban Development Studies, Sociology, International Relations, and Asian and African Studies. In addition, there are two nondegree programs: the Interdisciplinary Study of Women and the program for the Formation of Translators.

The Center for Asian and African Studies was created in 1964 with four areas of study: China, Japan, India, and North Africa (Arab Studies). Around the mid 1980s, African studies was added and a sixth area for Pacific Rim Studies will begin in September this year.

The Japanese Studies area belongs to the Center of Asian and African Studies. The area offers subjects such as Introduction to Asian and African Studies, Japanese History, and Japanese Language and Literature. We regularly have visiting professors from Japan and other countries. The Masters course program we offer has a duration of three years. In this program we accept eight to twelve new students every three years.

The allocation of the teaching and research staff of the Japanese Area is as follows: two researchers dedicated to history, two to international relations, one to Japanese literature, and two to the Japanese language.

JAPANESE COLLECTION

The main purpose of our collection of books on Japan is to support the teaching and research activities described above. At the beginning, in 1970, we were aided by the National Diet Library of Japan, which sent us one of its librarians. This person laid out an acquisition strategy and started the cataloging process. Until 1982 our collection grew, though not very quickly. The following decade, however, was one of meager resources for our library, due to the economic crisis Mexico was suffering under. During this period the budget for the Japanese Collection was about 4,000 dollars a year, and half of this amount went into sustaining periodical subscriptions. A very important external contribution was
the one made by the Japan Foundation which donated around 6,000 to 7,000 dollars per year in books. After twenty years, half of these years under severe budgetary difficulties, we could count a collection of 7,000 volumes on Japan.

This unsatisfactory trend changed in 1993 when we received from the Mitsubishi Electric Building Technoservice 30 million yen worth of books about Japan written in western languages. At present we are in the process of selecting titles. At the conclusion of the project, we estimate we will have around 4,000 new titles, a more than fifty percent increase over our present assets.

Library growth has also been supported by the National Diet Library which started a permanent donation program to our library consisting of the annual publications of about ten Japanese government agencies. The Diet Library has also provided us with the services of one of its librarians, and donated a permanent service of its catalogs on compact disk with the computer to run the program.

A third source of improvement has been the donation from the Dina-Komatsu company of ten-year subscriptions to four monthly Japanese magazines.

The fourth and last important donation of 3 million yen is that from the Commemorative Association for the Japan World Exposition. With this money we bought 148 reference books.

CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM AT EL COLEGIO DE MEXICO

Our library makes use of the Dewey Decimal Classification system. In the case of books written in occidental languages, the classification takes place in the library. Until recently, in the case of Japanese-language books, however, the Japanese members of our Center had to transliterate titles and authors’ names, and to write a short description in Spanish as well as provide keywords. But now the library has a Japanese librarian.

SERVICES TO OUR READERS

Our library offers Dialog, BRS, and Questel services to researchers and students. It has interlibrary loan agreements, in particular with universities in the southern United States and in England. There is also such an agreement with the National Diet Library.

AUTOMATION OF BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ten years ago the Center for Asian and African Studies started a database of books and journal articles on Asia and Africa. The aim was to complement the information of the library index cards. Isis was chosen for this purpose and not only books but also journal articles were included. Besides the collection of El Colegio, the database includes
information from other institutions such as the National Institute for Anthropology. The database now has some 68,000 titles.

CENTER FOR INFORMATION AND DOCUMENTATION ON JAPAN AND THE LATIN AMERICAN INFORMATION NETWORK

In Mexico as well as in the rest of Latin America, there is an increasing interest in matters concerning Japan. As a consequence, the demand for bibliographical materials has increased. The aim of the Center for Information and Documentation on Japan (CIDOJ) is to gather information about present-day Japan and about her relationship with Latin America. One more objective is to keep track of publications about Japan written in Spanish.

Through CIDOJ, our library received the aforementioned 30 million yen donation from Mitsubishi. Among other initiatives sponsored by CIDOJ should be mentioned the collecting of articles on Japan that appear in three of the most important Mexico City newspapers, done for us by a private company. Also through this project a librarian was hired and trained to handle the Japanese material. In the future, CIDOJ is planning to offer automated reference searches by using databases that our library does not have. Also in the plans is the information exchange with other libraries.

One of the main objectives of the CIDOJ is the establishment of a Latin American information network. A preliminary meeting took place during the VII Latin American International Congress on Asian and African Studies, held in November 1992 in Acapulco, Mexico. It was decided at that time to set up six Internet nodes, including one at El Colegio, to ease the exchange of information on Asia and Africa. It was also decided that the first task would be the integration of a directory of Latin American specialists on Asia and Africa, now in progress. As a part of the process of integration of the network, there will also be a regional meeting in Guadalajara, Mexico, in April this year and one other in Costa Rica, for the Central and Caribbean region, in the near future.

(This paper was presented at the second meeting of the CEAL Subcommittee on Japanese Materials held on Saturday, 26 March 1994, at the Marriott Hotel, Boston.)