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NDL'S LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN DIGITAL MATERIALS

Kunio Yamada
National Diet Library

I will begin this report on digital materials at the National Diet Library by discussing the current situation of digital media services at the NDL and then introduce some of the digital library projects the NDL has been promoting.

NDL CDROM services entered the full-fledged stage last year. In August 1996 the Special Materials Room started to provide about a hundred fifty titles of CDROMs, operated by Windows and Macintosh, in changers with a capacity of five hundred CDROMs. CDROMs for games or entertainment, and those which require downloading onto hard disks, are not collected. At the present time printouts are not available because of problems of copyright or payment.

CDROM catalogs, indexes and bibliographies for specific subjects are installed in the relevant reading rooms and catalog halls. We have, for example, J-BISC, Japanese books database of the NDL, Japanese Periodicals Index (Zasshi kiji sakuin), Legalbase, a database on the Japanese judicial precedents index, ASAX, indexes of the Asahi shinbun for fifty years, and Proquest, a CDROM database for foreign journals.

The online services of the NDL moved into a new stage when the NDL connected to NACSIS-ILL last April. At that time, requests for copy and lending services to the NDL became available by e-mail in Japan. From last August, the Japanese Periodicals Index can be searched through NACSIS-IR from abroad.

The NDL stopped publishing the Index in paper from from the 1995 issue. From the 1996 issue, the Index became available on CDROM and online databases. Because of this change, the number of journals indexed increased from about 3,000 titles to about 5,500. The amount of annual data accumulation is expected to increase by 2.2 times over the previous year. The frequency of renewal has doubled, and time lag has been reduced. However, the discontinuance of the paper version of the index caused much inconvenience, particularly abroad, and we received severe criticism from foreign users. Even though we provide a CD-ROM version of the index instead, and even though online retrieval through NACSIS-IR has become available, these services are still very expensive; furthermore, access points are insufficient for online searching. We understand that there remain several problems with the Index. One step we are planning is the distribution of CD-ROMs compatible with Windows 95, which will start from June 1996.

NDL asks for your patience and understanding during the inconveniences of this transitional

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stage. We will make the utmost efforts to improve our services from a broader and longer perspective.

Some of you may have already accessed the National Diet Library homepage, which opened in June 1996. The Japanese books database which covers the past year and a list of indexed journals for the Japanese Periodicals Index are available on the homepage. Some NDL librarians believe that we should enrich the homepage and provide a wide range of services through the Internet. But as a national institution we still have several restrictions to solve before such ideas turn into reality.

I turn to some of the digital library projects which the National Diet Library has been promoting. One of the major projects is the Pilot Electronic Library Project, an experimental project to prepare the basic technological infrastructure of a digital library system for the Kansai-kan, a new facility to be opened in 2002. Needless to say, the project is also closely related to the future strategy of the NDL.

The project was started in 1994 in cooperation with the Information-technology Promotion Agency, Japan (IPA), a special authorized public corporation under the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, founded on the Law for Information Processing Promotion. The Pilot Electronic Library Project is comprised of two parts: the Electronic Library Demonstration Experiment dealing with primary sources, and the National Union Catalog Network Project, made up of secondary sources.

The Electronic Library Demonstration Experiment has digitized about eight million pages of image data from rare books, general books and magazines, research reports for Diet members and political history documents, sampled from the collections of the NDL. The practical experiments started in October 1995. A changer that takes 3,000 CDROMs is installed in both the NDL and the IPA Center for Information Infrastructure at the Fujisawa campus of Keio University to conduct assessment tests to verify the process from digitization to online search.

The National Union Catalog Network Project is a project to develop a database which combines the bibliographic information and location information of materials scattered in libraries throughout Japan. Bibliographic databases of Japanese books held by participant libraries are collated automatically. New bibliographic data is incorporated into the National Union Catalog database automatically. Altogether twenty-seven participant libraries, including sixteen libraries which supply bibliographic records, are taking part in the experiments for verifying the system.

In conducting the National Union Catalog Network Project, we made good use of the lessons learnt from the same type of project we did in 1993. We found that it was impossible to convert the data provided by each library into the format of the host library. Therefore we prepared a common format for data supply and developed a program to convert the supplied data into the common format. For identifying the bibliographic data, standard numbers such as ISBN and national bibliography numbers are used. As of last February, we had accumulated 7.6 million
records of bibliographic and location information data.

The project uses NTT's 25 Mbps multimedia experimental line between the NDL and IPA. The INS Net 64 with 64kbps connects each library to IPA. Based on the results of the project, the NDL is discussing the possibility of developing a national union catalog system for all prefectural and major city libraries in Japan.

I will now introduce a few more projects related to the digital library. First is the Digital Library of Children's Literature. Based on the plan of establishing the Children's Literature Center at the Ueno Branch Library, we prepared a bibliographic database with a hundred thousand records and digitized image information from seven thousand titles of children's literature published before 1950. Experiments for online search and user guidance are being conducted, incorporating multimedia elements such as pictures, sound and multiple languages.

Second is the Asian Materials Information Database Supply System. This is an experiment to digitize Asian language materials held by the NDL. At the same time we are verifying a catalog card system for books, a retrieval system for journals and a text retrieval system for Asia-related books and journals.

Third is the G7 Electronic Libraries Project, one of eleven cooperative projects proposed at the Ministerial Conference on the Information Society held in Brussels in February 1995 to accelerate the arrival of a highly advanced information society. Japan and France are operational coordinating parties. In Japan the Ministry of Foreign Affairs works as a liaison office, while the NDL conducts practical experiments.

Fourth is the construction of the Optical Disc Filing System for Diet Debates. This is a system to record texts of Diet debates onto optical disk by image information and to link them to the index databases. Texts can be displayed, printed out or sent to the clients by fax after online retrieval. These services are limited to Diet members for the moment. Concerning the services for the public, NDL in cooperation with the Upper and Lower Houses of the Diet has been promoting a four-year project to develop the Diet Debates Full Text Database System by using character codes.

Lastly, I would like to touch upon the cooperation with an association called BBCC, Broadband-ISDN Business Chance & Culture Creation, in digital library experiments that have been conducted from October 1996. This is an experiment on the mutual use of databases in the high speed network environment, using NTT's multimedia experimental line. Participants are the NDL, BBCC, Osaka Prefectural Central Library and the International Research Center for Japanese Studies.

In addition to the above-mentioned projects, the NDL has a plan to prepare a library information system and network infrastructure for NDL's branch libraries in the executive and judicial agencies in three years from FY1997.
I should like to look now at several factors that have pushed the NDL to promote further digital library projects in the information-oriented society.

CULCON, the U.S.-Japan Conference on Cultural and Educational Interchange, established in January 1995 a working group on mutual cooperation in information access between Japan and the United States. It made proposals about online access to various information resources in Japan. Some of the proposals made by the group are ones in which the NDL should be involved directly.

Japanese government agencies are not standing apart from the current changes. They have begun their own homepages to provide administrative information through the Internet. The supply of official publications in paper form has always been recognized as one of the most important roles of the NDL; thus we must respond to and keep abreast of such initiatives.

The projects I have introduced to you today are mostly still in the stage of research and experiment for technological infrastructure. Before stepping into the next stage we must first establish a future strategy of the National Diet Library which defines digital library as one important role to be played by a national library, based on the results of the experiments. In order to prepare the future strategy, we will soon call for a committee of experienced people in and out of the NDL.

Last October we selected important items which require full discussion for the establishment of the digital library strategy and decided on working guidelines for necessary procedures. The guidelines confirmed the constant role of the NDL as a depository library not only for paper publications but also for digital information. It encourages expansion and enrichment of library services as a digital library. The NDL should act as the motive power in spreading and publicizing the digital library, in standardization, in copyright issues, in preparation of the information infrastructure throughout Japan, and in international relationships.

In another direction, a research committee on the legal deposit system was established in January to discuss the question of legal deposit for digital publications. The Acquisition Planning Committee is preparing policies on digitization and microfilming of the NDL’s collections. We are now preparing the basic structure for developing a collection of digital materials.

Although the purpose of the NDL to provide published information widely in Japan and abroad has not changed, the high-speed development of technology forces it to change not only its ways of providing services but also the organizational structure itself. You can easily imagine that such drastic changes require NDL’s staff members to change their ways of thinking.

In conclusion, I would like to ask you for your continuous advice and encouragement for the NDL.