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Digital Information and Electronic Library Services in the National Diet Library and Other Libraries

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I. INTRODUCTION

The second Japanese Studies Senior Librarian’s Training Program, sponsored by the Japan Foundation and NDL, was held in Tokyo for three weeks from January 19th to February 7th. Twelve librarians from twelve countries attended, including two CEAL members, Mr. Okuizumi from the University of Chicago and I. Lectures were given by NDL staff and the topics covered were Digital information, Government documents, Cataloguing, Reference and so on. In addition, we spent two days at the National Center for Science Information Systems (NACSIS) and received training on NACSIS-CAT, ILL and IR. In between lectures, we visited several information related academic institutions such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Diplomatic Records Office (Gaimusho Gaiko Shiryokan), National Literature Institution (Kokuritsu Kokubungaku Kenkyujo), Waseda University, The International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Nichibunken), and others.

All the lectures and visits were extremely informative and interesting for Japanese studies librarians from abroad. However, I found the lectures on Digital Information and Electronic Library Services the most interesting and shall focus my report on them. The core of my report is based on the first lecture we had at NDL, which was given by Mr. Yasue and Mr. Uetsuki from the Planning Division and was titled “NDL’S plan for Electronic Library and Access Service for Information on Japan.”

II. NATIONAL DIET LIBRARY’S PLAN FOR ELECTRONIC LIBRARY

1. The significance of the electronic library

I am sure that you are all aware of the importance of the electronic library. Most, if not all North American academic institutions have entered the new age in some way or another, from OPACs to full Internet World Wide Web services. The same is happening in Japan.

2. Undertaking of the Electronic Library of the NDL in three stages.

The first stage of the Electronic Library was the preparation stage which lasted from 1994 until

1998. This was the foundation period in terms of establishing the technology, contents and systems. “The Pilot Electronic Library Project” was started in 1994 with the cooperation of IPA (Jyohoshori Shinko Jigyou Kyokai), an organization affiliated with the Ministry of Industry and Trade.

This pilot project consists of two parts: The first stage is the Japanese bibliographic database project. Forty-four prefectural and government designated city libraries are participating in this project and inputting their catalogue data to the on-line union database. After completion of the pilot project, and once all technical difficulties have been ironed out, the National Diet Library will move to full implementation of the bibliographic database, easily accessible through the internet.

The other part is an investigation of the feasibility of digitalizing a total of 10 million pages of rare materials collections, materials published in the Meiji Period and of government documents and other materials, with the eventual aim of making them accessible to the general public through the World Wide Web.

The second stage is the preparation and partial operation period from 1998 to 2002. This will be the time for system development, producing the contents, clearing copyright, networking and cooperating with other libraries or related institutions such as NACSIS, which already has an extensive on-line union catalogue database with 580 participating university libraries, special libraries and others. At this stage, some of the services will be available such as the new NDL homepage, WebOPAC, on-line union catalogue, Electronic Library Service for the International Children’s Library and the G7 Project and so on.

The third stage is the time for full operation, which is targeted for implementation by the year 2002 onwards. The bibliographic database of Japanese books, national union catalogue and periodicals index such as Zasshi Kiji Sakuin will be made available on the internet. The Document Delivery Services for journal articles may be available on a fee-for service basis.

The NDL homepage will provide newsletters and outlines for the various projects. Their internet homepage may have a navigation function and provide LINKs to other Japanese information sources.

The full operation of Electronic Library Service is to coincide with the scheduled opening of Osaka-based National Diet Library West, in 2002. By this time, the Electronic Library should be the norm in our rapidly developing information society.

However, there are some issues that the National Diet Library has to deal with for the successful implementation of the Electronic Library Service. Firstly, copyright issues have to be cleared through the authors before digitizing the materials in order to make them available on the web. The depository enforcement law might have to be changed to accommodate digital materials. It will also be necessary to develop the technology to preserve digital materials. Moreover, the constant evolution of hardware has to be taken into account; how can we preserve the hardware in order to run older software to read data stored in older forms of disk and tape-storage?
III. OTHER LIBRARIES AND INSTITUTIONS: NACSIS, KYOTO UNIVERSITY AND NICHIBUNKEN

1. National Center for Science Information Systems (NACSIS)

NACSIS was founded in 1986 as a center for joint use by universities in accordance with the National School Establishment Law. Its function is to gather, organize and provide scholarly information and relevant systems. NACSIS-CAT union catalog databases cover the whole country with an on-line network.

In April 1997, NACSIS-ELS started an information service that enables users to retrieve a page image database containing academic journals and magazines along with bibliographic information via the Internet. International operation of NACSIS services is given via international leased circuits to the USA, Thailand and the UK. It is also enabled for telecommunications with other countries.

2. Kyoto University: Digital Library “Encyclopedia of Kyoto University”

Kyoto University started digital library functions in the fiscal year 1997 with the support from the Ministry of Education. The Digital Library “Encyclopedia of Kyoto University” offers through the Internet results of various research and studies conducted by Kyoto University.

Presently, “Encyclopedia” includes an OPAC bibliographic database of their library collections, table of contents for scientific books, the 12 century classic “Konjaku Monogatari”, important cultural properties and the like. In the future, these contents will be expanded to include dissertation abstracts and more.

The head of Kyoto University Library, Mr. Michihiko Mannami, gave us demonstrations of digitizing a classical text using Optical Character Recognition software. In an interview in the Kyoto Shinbun, he also expressed the hope that more Japanese materials would be digitalized for easy access on the Internet.

Mr. Mannami believes that a day will come when each user’s desktop will be his/her own virtual library.

3. The International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Nichibunken)

The International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Nichibunken) was established by the Ministry of Education and Science and Culture in 1987 as a research institution. Its function is to offer assistance to scholars and to support academic research on Japan.

They provide graphic databases such as a database of old photographs dating from the end of the Edo period to the beginning of the Meiji Period, and a Japanese Art database, that is, a database of images and text on various kinds of Japanese art that are owned by overseas museums. In addition to the graphic databases, many text-based databases on Japanese studies are available. This information can be accessed via the Internet from anywhere in the world. However,
institutions must apply to use these public database services.

IV. CULCON (US-Japan Conference on Cultural and Educational Interchange) STATEMENT ON “ACCESS TO THE INFORMATION HIGHWAY”

At Mr. Yasue’s lecture, he touched on CULCON briefly. CULCON was initiated by an agreement between President Kennedy and Prime Minister Ikeda in 1962. CULCON has served to focus official and public attention in both the United States and Japan on the vital cultural and educational underpinnings of the bilateral relationship.

By reading the 1997 CULCON 18th meeting’s statement, I have realized that all the above mentioned efforts to achieve easy access to Japanese information through an Electronic Library are in response to the statements made by The Japan Chair of the Access to the Information Highway Working Group.

The followings are the seven action statements presented from the Japan chair of CULCON Access to the Information Highway Working Group. These abbreviated version of seven statements are directly related to the rapid development of technology in electronic resources in Japan.

1. Japanese Bibliographic Databases
To make essential Japanese bibliographic databases, especially JMARC, Zasshi kiji sakuin, and the NACSIS union catalog databases, easily accessible through the Internet and other channels with fee structures and payment mechanisms supportive of use outside of Japan.

2. Government Documents
To make available on-line through the Internet and other channels, government-related documents, such as statistics, ministry and committee reports and policy papers that are publicly available.

To make efforts on both the US and the Japanese sides for developing user-friendly systems for referencing, and for archiving, governmental and other useful data that is publicly available on-line, through the Internet and other channels.

3. Document Delivery Services
To improve the document delivery services for overseas requests by libraries and information service Institutions in Japan and the United State.

4. Training Program for Users of Japanese-Language Resources

5. Reading Japanese Text on Non Japanese OS Hardware

To add to the information available through the Internet and other channels a menu of services of indexes and the full texts of newspaper and journal articles. This information should be made
available under fee structures and a payment mechanism supportive of use outside the country of origin.

7. Translation of Japanese to English

V. HOW WILL THE JFT AND OTHERS BENEFIT FROM THE ELECTRONIC LIBRARY?

At the Japan Foundation Library Toronto, we are excited about the efforts being made in Japan toward the Electronic Library. The level of access to Japanese information comprehended by the NDL’S plan would mean that Japanese studies libraries abroad would be significantly less handicapped by our physical distance from the wellspring of Japan related information.

We will be able to tap world resources for our patrons. For example we would take advantage of document delivery service and provide a very useful Internet access service as well as automated translations. For the present, we plan to take advantage of NDL’s CD-ROM products.

I would like to add that the importance of the human network in all this cannot be stressed enough, for behind all this electronic library development are countless individuals.