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Kuniko Yamada McVey

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REPORT ON THE THIRD JAPANESE STUDIES LIBRARIANS TRAINING

The 1999 Japanese Studies Librarians Training program was held from January 18 to February 5, again at the National Diet Library in Tokyo. Twelve librarians participated, from as many countries: Australia, Canada, China, Denmark, France, Germany, Korea, The Philippines, Russia, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States.

With a couple of exceptions, the program’s format and aim remained essentially unchanged. One change is that the program identified participants as “librarians,” which I suppose reflects some downgrading of status from the “senior librarians” that appeared in last year’s program.

More important was the addition of a quite wonderful symposium on Japanese studies resources organized by Izumi Koide, which was held at the International House of Japan. Her report on the Symposium was presented at the meeting of the Committee on Japanese Materials of CEAL on March 11, 1999, and was published in The Journal of East Asian Libraries, No. 118 (June 1999):43-45.

I assume most of you are familiar with the program, which has been ably described by my predecessors, Robert Britt, Yasuko Makino and Eizaburo Okuizumi, in the Journal of East Asian Libraries (numbers 112 and 115), and which is also outlined in the appendix. Rather than covering that same ground today, I would like instead to relate what for me were the most valuable experiences.

The greatest benefit was to get to know the National Diet Library and its staff. Our passport was the little blue pins we were given on the first day of the program; these gave us privileged access and freedom that regular users can only dream of. I’ll return to my feelings of guilt later. Our only regret, as participants, was that we were too busy attending classes taught by NDL librarians to explore this entire library ourselves - 6.9 million books, 157,000 periodical titles, 851 people. It’s immense, and three weeks gave us only tantalizing glimpses of the Diet Library’s riches.

The twelve participants obviously would have different specialization and interests, not to mention expectations and, to some degree, command of Japanese (eight of the twelve were not native speakers). Hence, while the two classes on government information, which is a particular strength of NDL, were fascinating to me, others found them less pertinent. Conversely, catalogers viewed the demonstration of different formats for bibliographic databases as absolutely essential; I, not being a cataloger, found the detail redundant.

The reference class took on too much and could be expanded into two classes; as it was, it consisted of going through a long list of reference titles, with little opportunity to ask about details. I was able to learn far more over lunch with our instructor, a seasoned reference librarian. She told me that most of her clients want results, but regretted that they are less interested in learning how to get them. I don’t know that I agree with her analysis, which attributed this to the Japanese educational system. Informal meetings like this were an extremely valuable part of the program, and I would encourage future participants to get to know the librarians as well as the library resources.

A rare book class gave us a hands-on opportunity to appreciate NDL’s treasures, including the original Nise Murasaki Inaka Genji volumes. This somehow connected with a conversation I’d had that very morning with Maureen Donovan about Japan’s manga culture. NDL is developing an online database of records for 45,000 rare books created after the Edo period.
Everyone enjoyed the visit to NDL’s preservation and conservation facilities, including a room where traditional Japanese conservation is practiced on tatami mats. Only NDL and the Imperial Household Agency’s library, which is largely closed to the public, maintain in-house conservation facilities. It appears that even the National Archives of Japan and National Institute of Japanese Literature outsource their conservation of rare materials.

We learned that NDL will soon be introducing a Web-OPAC, covering 1.9 million records of Japanese-language monographs, and 102,000 records of periodicals, plus the Zasshi kiji sakuin Japanese periodicals index. We participated in a demonstration, and look forward to Web-OPAC coming on line. This is a significant step forward for NDL, considering its minimal current offerings on the Web. More lies ahead, in connection with NDL’s Kansai building, scheduled to open in 2002. NDL’s Electronic Library project is now in its second stage, from 1998 to 2002 and it involves content development, copyright clearing, and online document delivery. I might add here that NDL has just announced that it will begin a policy of collecting packaged digital materials, including CD-ROM’s.

I made a special request to visit the map room, whose collection of 370,000 domestic and foreign maps makes it one of the richest such collections in Japan. Digital format and applications like GIS (Geographic Information Systems) have not yet been introduced, however.

NDL’s significant resources are not only found in the main print collection, but also in special collections. The Modern Political and Constitutional History room (Kensei shiryo shitsu) is rich in archives on modern Japanese political history including diaries, letters, and memoranda. The Asian materials room (Ajia shiryo shitsu) collects materials on Asia and the Middle East in vernacular languages and is currently developing a digital bibliographic database of the collection. The Emigration Materials room (Imin shiryo shitsu) opened in 1981 and has been collecting materials on Japanese immigrants in Hawaii and the Americas. The Law and Parliamentary record room (Horei gikai shiryou shitsu) has an unrivalled collection of Japanese and foreign law, as well as parliamentary materials.

A word about people. NDL is a national institution and typically hires college graduates who have passed a competitive entrance exam. They are rather like elite bureaucrats. They are not required to hold library degrees or to have library backgrounds, but rather receive librarian training after entering NDL. The librarians do not necessarily remain in one specialty, but rotate among sections. Most NDL people I met have had several job experiences. For example, a monograph cataloger, at present, might previously have served five years in circulation and seven in government information. This is quite unlike the typical career path in the United States.

Unlike most workplaces in Japan, nearly half of NDL’s staff is women, many of them in mid-career positions. Gender bias stubbornly remains, I’m informed, but is far less pronounced than in most Japanese workplaces.

Most of our program instructors were at the kacho, or division head, level, and we appreciated their well-rounded knowledge. Although their teaching styles differed, they all provided substantial written material, which was useful to native and non-native Japanese speakers alike.

The Japanese Studies Librarians Training program is invaluable, and I can only urge Japanese studies librarians to make the expedition to the Diet Library. The more of us who are familiar with NDL, the better for our users and the better for NDL too. That familiarity can help us guide users to and through NDL’s thick walls and labyrinthine interior. The opportunity the program afforded for
networking, and for getting to know NDL librarians on a personal basis, probably was as important as mastering all of NDL’s procedures.

I should add, however, that NDL is not user friendly. The ordinary visitor could easily spend a full day to access information he or she sought. My experience was a privileged and unusual one. Indeed, NDL seems designed to work against productive use. Only one newspaper index is on CD-ROM and others are all in print in a huge newspaper room. No public terminal is available for accessing the Internet or any database made outside NDL. There is no public terminal for reading electronic information in the Government information room, which is a designated depository for international organizations. The library is closed about 10 days per month and waiting hall is always crowded.

NDL must be measured against its mission statement composed in 1948:

The national Diet Library is hereby established as a result of the firm conviction that truth makes us free and with the object of contributing to international peace and the democratization of Japan as promised in our constitution.

These are stirring and idealistic words. I hope this national treasure can soon be truly appreciated by regular users. Until that day comes, the value of the Japanese Studies Librarians Training program, and the tiny blue pin that comes with it, will be high.

Kuniko Yamada McVey
The third Japanese studies librarians training in Tokyo

1999 Program outline

Date: January 18 - February 5, 1999
Sponsored by: The Japan Foundation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Located at: The National Diet Library
Designed by: The Japan Foundation, The National Diet Library, The
International House of Japan, NACSIS
Participants: 12 librarians from 12 countries; China, Korea, The
Philippines, Australia, Russia, Germany, France, England, Denmark, Sweden, Canada, and the
United States

Topics in classes offered at NDL
International cooperation
Acquisition & Collection
Reference
Government information I, II
Statistics I, II
Bibliographic Databases
Digital resources
Rare books (optional)
Conservation (optional)

NACSIS (National Center for Science Information Systems)
NACSIS-CAT/ ILL
NACSIS-IR/ELS
How to access from overseas
Discussion

Field Trip
National Archives of Japan 国立公文書館
National Institute of Japanese Literature 国文学研究資料館
The Diplomatic Record Office of The Ministry of Foreign Affairs
外務省外交資料館
The Japan Foundation Japanese Language Institute in Kansai
国際交流基金関西国際センター
Kyoto University Library 京都大学付属図書館
International Research Center for Japanese Studies 国際日本文化研究センター

Symposium
February 3, 1999 at the International House of Japan
"International Flow of Japanese Information: Considering the Infrastructure
of Japanese
Studies" 「日本情報の国際流通 日本研究の基盤を考える」