

THE JAPAN FOUNDATION LANGUAGE STUDY PROGRAM FOR PROFESSIONAL
LIBRARIANS: AN OVERVIEW OF THE 1991 PROGRAM

Sit-Ling Tull
Asian Studies Librarian
Murdoch University Library

The Japan Foundation's Japanese Language Study Program for Professional Librarians is run by the Japanese Language Institute. The Institute, which is located at Kita-Urawa, north of Tokyo is under the directorship of Professor Kyogoku Junichi. The Institute is divided into three sections. The accommodation wing of the Institute has about 146 single rooms and two double rooms. Each single room is air-conditioned, and furnished with a desk, television set, refrigerator, toilet and bath facilities and telephone. There is a Recreation Room with guitars, a piano, a stereo and karaoke singing equipment available for the use of students. In addition, for the sporty types there is a tennis court and volleyball court.

The administrative and teaching wings make up the other two sections of the complex. The Institute has 15 classrooms, with one Language Laboratory that is equipped for simultaneous interpreting. The self-study room is equipped with computer-aided instruction (CAI) facilities, word processors and an auto-retrieval video machine. The Institute also has a small library. The collection centres on books and teaching aids relating to Japanese language education, with a total of approximately 40,000 volumes. The collection is controlled by a bar code detection system.

The Librarian Program, which started in September, was run concurrently with three other Programs -- namely, the Long-term Training Program for Teachers of the Japanese Language; the Japanese Language Training for Overseas Diplomats (both of the latter Programs were of nine months' duration) and the Short-term Training Program for Teachers of the Japanese Language (of two months' duration). The Institute is an interesting meeting place with people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds speaking a multitude of languages. Sometimes Japanese was the only common language among us and those of us with limited Japanese had to struggle to make ourselves understood.

The nine participants in the Library Program were from the following countries: two from Australia; and one each from Canada, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, Singapore and Thailand.

The first three months of the course concentrated on teaching us basic Japanese grammar. As this was only the second time this Scholarship was offered, there were a few teething problems, and the teachers responsible for the program were very receptive to suggestions for improvements.

Classes ran from Monday to Friday from 9.10 am to 3.30 pm with a one and a half hour break for lunch, the exceptions being Wednesday and Friday afternoons, when there were no classes. The latter two afternoons were usually taken up by cultural activities such as ikebana, calligraphy and tea ceremony, or by going on excursions that were relevant to the respective programs. The excursions for the first three months included visits to the Tokyo Stock Exchange; NHK; Japanese Library Association, where we saw a demonstration of the Diet Library Collection on CD-ROM; a visit to a local library -- Kita-Urawa City Library; Kodansha Publishing Co. and the National Diet Building. In addition, on the weekends, there were occasional activities such as picnics and hiking, when we had a chance to meet the local residents of Urawa City. Some of us made some very good Japanese friends and were lucky enough to be invited to their homes for meals, which provided a good opportunity to practice our Japanese. Other weekend activities included visits to a Japanese paper factory; a Sake making factory; a pottery making factory and a weekend trip to Nikko (a tourist resort two hours drive from Tokyo). For some of us it was the first time we had stayed in a Japanese inn or ryokan. In the evening there was an enkai -- Japanese style banquet, followed by the inevitable Karaoke. On the cultural side we were also treated to Sumo and Kabuki, which delighted some and bored others.

At the conclusion of the three month course we had to write and present a speech on the topic "Watashi no Toshokan" (My Library). This was an interesting exercise - we had to write about something we know very well in a language about which we know very little. Such character building work stood us in good stead for another project in the second half of the course.

The Oshogatsu, or the Japanese New Year, is the most important festival in Japan. On a voluntary basis, most of the students from the Institute went to Oita, a city in Kyushu, for a 12 day home-stay. It was interesting to experience Japanese food and customs at first hand. We also gained an insight into the living conditions and standard of living of ordinary Japanese.

Eight more participants joined the Program in the New Year, that is, half way through the course. There were four from China, two from Russia, one each from the Republic of Mongolia and Myanmar. The number of classes were increased from two to three. For the next three months the new

arrivals and our original group studied reading comprehension and conversation based on library services and library technical terms. The excursion for the second half included visits to the National Diet Library where some of us met colleagues and friends we had corresponded with for many years but had never met; we also made many new friends and contacts. Later we visited Keio University at Mita and Tohan (Kabushiki Kaisha Tohan) -- the middle man of publishers and book buyers. But in my opinion, the most useful and informative excursions were the last two when we visited the National Centre for Science Information Systems -- Gakujutsu Jyoho Senta-- which houses the national network for the Japanese universities data base, (hopefully another article on this topic will follow) and the Japan Foundation's main office in Kioi-cho. The operation of the Japan Foundation and its various programs was explained to us. We paid special attention to the discussion of the Library Support Program

In the second half of the course, besides the daily classes, we had to do a group project of our choice. We were divided into 5 groups with 1 to 5 students in each group. The topics covered were -- the Japanese Database; Computer use in Japanese libraries; Japanese literature and Zenshu; Japanese publishing and Japanese language teaching material; ASEAN collections in Japanese libraries; Mongolian materials in Japanese libraries and the relationship between Japanese and Chinese libraries. The information for this project was gathered through interviews, questionnaire surveys and visits to libraries and bookshops. Although preliminary contacts were arranged for us, we had to confirm the appointments ourselves and to find our way there. All interviews were conducted in Japanese. So it was not only an exercise in librarianship but also an opportunity to put our most polite Japanese -- Keigo -- into practical use. Finding our way around Tokyo also tested our Japanese but mainly our stamina!

At the end of the course we were treated to a six day trip to Kansai. Places we visited included Kyoto, Tenri, Nara, Miyajima, Hiroshima, Kurashiki and Seto Ohashi (reputed to be the world's longest suspension bridge joining Honshu and Shikoku).

We were all awarded a certificate on completion of the course. All students attended final interviews with the teachers, both individually and as a group, and we were encouraged to make suggestions for improvements to the course. The following points were brought up by the participants: a short working experience in a library would be very useful (this suggestion came as a result of visiting many libraries and looking at books and book-shelves but not actually finding out how various procedures are carried out in Japanese libraries); more lessons on Japanese literature,

both classical and contemporary; more lessons on Japanese history; more intensive study of the Japanese language; and greater exposure to the current affairs and current social condition of Japan through reading activities. Basically, we all found the course so rewarding that we would have liked it to have lasted longer!

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Japan Foundation for offering us this Scholarship. In particular, I would like to thank the two teachers in-charge of the Librarian program, Fumie Yanashima and Hiromi Kijima, who did their utmost to make the course relevant to our needs and who often went beyond the call of duty to make our six months a happy and memorable time.

