

TRAINING PROGRAM FOR SENIOR JAPANESE STUDIES LIBRARIANS: REPORT FROM ONE OF THE ORGANISERS

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Program outline

The Training Program for Senior Japanese Studies Librarians, jointly sponsored by the Japan Foundation (JF) and the National Diet Library (NDL) in cooperation with the National Center for Science Information System (NACSIS) and the International House of Japan (I-House), was held for three weeks from February 17 to March 7 1997 in Tokyo. Eleven participants were invited to take part in the program from eight countries: — Australia, Brazil, China, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, and the United States. All of them stayed at International House, and NDL provided transportation from the House to the training sites.

During the first two weeks, the following sessions were held at the National Diet Library:

- Japanese academic publications
- Statistics
- Preservation
- Classical materials
- Japanese reference books
- Books on Japan in foreign languages
- Digital information and electronic library services of the NDL
- Acquisition of Japanese publications
- Networking activities of overseas Japanese studies libraries
- LC Japan Documentation Center and its Tokyo Acquisition Facility
- International services of the NDL at NACSIS
- NACSIS and NACSIS-CAT
- NACSIS-IR
- and at Hitachi System Plaza Shinsuna (this was arranged by the Japan Library Association, the publisher of J-BISC)
- J-BISC

The third week was devoted to visits to the following institutions:

- National Archives
- Diplomatic Record Office
- National Institute of Japanese Literature
- Japan Science and Technology Corporation JICST Library
- Institute for Dissemination and Research of Government Data
- Mita Media Center of Keio University

Networking and Sharing: A Major Feature of the Program

This program was characterised by networking and the sharing of experience, both in the planning as well as in the carrying out of the program, and I would like to mention three such aspects here.

Firstly, this was a joint program of the four organisations which formed the planning committee: the Japan Foundation, NDL, NACSIS, and I-House. All came from very different types of background; the JF is a governmental foundation, NDL is a branch of the legislature, NACSIS has a ministerial background, and the I-House is a private organisation. I think it was the first program of such a cooperative nature, particularly under the joint sponsorship of the JF and NDL. It could not have been realised without the support of all the members of the Planning Committee. The four organisations each provided what they were best at: the JF provided funds and administrative work, including carrying out the cumbersome invitation procedures; NDL greatly contributed in terms of lecturers, classrooms, study materials, and other resources necessary for training; NACSIS provided facilities and staff for the NACSIS part of the training; and I-House helped with the coordination of the program, particularly in conveying the needs of Japanese studies librarians. This teamwork produced a most desirable outcome.

Secondly, networking and sharing were very important keys not only in organising this program, but also for the participants themselves. The eleven trainees from eight countries had varying backgrounds and diverse expertise in Japanese studies librarianship. This diversity and expertise in various aspects helped in mutual learning among the trainees. All the trainees were serious and active professionals faced with various difficulties in dealing with Japanese information resources and in providing information services on Japan, and are struggling with them, often in a local environment without colleagues. Now they have found colleagues and friends who are willing to share various experiences and expertise in dealing with Japanese materials in a local environment.

Thirdly, networking and sharing occurred not only among the trainees, but also between the trainees and Japanese librarians who gave lectures and/or had chances to attend various sessions and receptions during the program. Japanese librarians learned about the activities and services in which overseas Japanese studies librarians are involved in their respective home environments, the difficulties facing them, and their needs. The trainees in turn became acquainted with real experts on Japanese information resources in Japan and made contacts for the future.

Language Ability - A Focal Point of Discussion in Reviewing the Program

The working language used during the training was Japanese. This was determined considering the following practicalities: 1) Japanese is THE common language among Japanese studies librarians in a multinational setting; 2) using Japanese as a working language expands the availability of lecturers, which is a very important point in this kind of special program, and broadens choices for visits; and 3) information on Japan in Japanese is much more direct and ample both in quality and in quantity than information on Japan gained through the filter of translation/interpretation, and this is what the Japanese studies librarians require.

There were two non-native speakers of Japanese among the trainees. They commanded the language well enough to participate in the discussions after the lectures. Their good command of Japanese sometimes, I suppose, made the lecturers forget that they were non-native speakers, and it may have caused some difficulties for trainees: lecturers spoke too fast or talked unclearly, for example. The trainees and committee members discussed the language issue, and agreed on the importance of the distribution of written outlines and other materials to supplement lectures in order to facilitate understanding.

Conclusion

The program went well, actually much better than the Planning Committee had expected. This success confirmed the need for such training, and brought confidence to the four organisations on the Committee, each of whom had had some reservations at the beginning because of their unfamiliarity with the environments in which Japanese studies librarians were working. There will be another program in the next fiscal year, I believe, although nothing concrete has been decided as yet. Through organising this program, I have also learned that networking greatly facilitates our professional work. It makes what had seemed to be very difficult or impossible possible. EALRGA is an excellent network for the various parties dealing with East Asian library resources in Australia. I hope your activities see more such successes in the future as well.