

1. c)                    A VISIT TO THE JAPANESE SECTION, ASIAN DIVISION,  
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

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The Asian Division, formerly called the Orientalia Division, of the Library of Congress is housed in the John Adams building, behind the rather ornate 19th century Jefferson Building that most people think of as the Library of Congress (and which has always reminded me of the State Theatre in Sydney, at least inside).

The Division is under Area Studies and covers the South Asian Subcontinent, Southeast Asia, China, Korea and Japan, in the languages of the area. English language materials on these countries are housed in the general collections. This is a reference Division. Cataloguing is done separately in the appropriate specialist areas of the Descriptive and Subject Cataloguing sections in the Madison Building. (Like Gaul, the Library of Congress is divided into three parts. The Madison Building is the newest and houses technical services and most of the staff).

The Japanese collection comprises of more than 650,000 volumes and is regarded as the preeminent research resource on Japan outside the country itself. The collection's strengths are in the humanities, social sciences, and, in its serial holdings especially, science and technology. Included are manuscripts and early printed books, large numbers of studies on Korea, Taiwan, Manchuria, China and the Pacific Islands from the pre-war period, microfilms of pre-war censored material, publications of the South Manchuria Railway Co., Foreign Office material as well as material received currently on purchase.

There are nine staff handling the collection, of whom five are professionals and four are library technicians. Their primary function is to serve the public, though they also have a custodial role (such as shelving and labelling) which other parts of Area Studies like the European or Middle East Divisions don't have. The head of the section is Mr Hisao Matsumoto, who was kind enough to spare me his time to talk to me about the operations of the section and to show me around.

The Japanese Section consists of a fairly small reading room with desks, old-fashioned microfilm readers without printers and reference books around the walls. They hope to get printers soon but there is no space at present. Off this is the work area which includes desks for staff, the visible index for serials and Mr Matsumoto's office.

Books chiefly come in by blanket order which operates with Japan Publications Trading Co. in Tokyo (they switched from Maruzen in 1968 when they opened their Tokyo office). Now they are in the process of closing down the Tokyo office because of budget cuts and the success of RLIN/CJK. At present JPTC selects material according to guidelines given them by the Library of Congress and sends it to the LC Tokyo office to review, though this is not being done due to a lack of field director now. Information on the new material is airmailed back to the Library in Washington for review and items are selected or not selected. This information, as with the

National Library, is the Japan National Bibliography Weekly List. The Library adds 700-800 titles a week from this to its collections. The task of reviewing the Weekly Lists was described as 'a chore' by Mr Matsumoto because of lack of staff time and other priorities.

First priority are books written in English, then Japanese language material 'of value to the scholar'. Their annual intake is 10,000 titles, about a third of all new Japanese books published.

Once the Tokyo office winds down they will continue to use JPTC to carry out a similar function as, after 18 years, the firm knows what the Library wants. However, Mr Matsumoto conceded that an on-the-spot acquisitions officer would be better for keeping an eye out for not-in-trade publications and checking up on exchange partners. Many publishers of non-trade material know, after all these years, that the Library is likely to want their material and so automatically send it to the Tokyo office. But they are less familiar with JPTC so it is a case of waiting to see what happens.

They have 1000 serials on subscription.

There is a good exchange relationship with the National Diet Library which covers national and local government publications, as well as some national universities. They have exchanges with some private universities, too, and learned societies. These account for 30%. They do find some who don't want direct exchange but they constantly ask and if they get a chance, they acquire the material. They are trying to get as much as they can on gift and exchange - again, the old bugbear of shrinking bookvote.

They seldom buy formed collections and those they do are mainly from the USA. They find most formed collections contain too much material that duplicates what they hold already and it takes too much time to check. They have the same problem we do with tax incentive schemes as well.

Occasionally they go through secondhand booksellers' lists at the end of the year to use up funds. They have only a small budget for this and it is very time consuming in view of the other tasks they have to perform. They have to consider the economics of staff time spent selecting items one by one from a bookseller's list just to spend \$1,000.

They have autonomous control of their budget and sign their own orders and manage their money themselves. The budget is assigned annually. They are always overspent. Each area is given an equal amount of money. They were somewhat concerned because next fiscal year they were facing a cut of half a million dollars in their budget.

To help conserve funds, they consult NUC (National Union Catalog) to see if an expensive item is held by another library. If it is, they will not buy it.

In the collecting of Americana, they buy only material written by Japanese, not, as the National Library does with Australiana, works translated into Japanese. They have a policy not to buy translations unless it is not likely that they will have the original as with some North Korean works.

There is no duplication with purchased material but some overlap between purchase and gift and exchange.

The clientele is similar to Orientalia's and, like the National Library, it is governed by an Act. First in importance is Congress but they are dealt with mainly through the Congressional Research Service. Next come Federal government agencies. Even though they have their own libraries, they need more up-to-date or comprehensive information or statistics. Next is the academic community and this is worldwide. Finally there is the general public. Their requests come either in person or by letter. In theory there should be no distinction between the groups.

One group which is excluded from the Library of Congress, unlike the National Library, are students below college level, that is, the under-18s. Queries from them are usually referred to embassies or cultural centres as far as the Asian Division is concerned. On the other hand, scholars who ask questions of the embassies are often referred to the Library.

They are constantly getting questions about swords, pottery, etc. And, as with the National Library, they provide information but no evaluations. They don't do research for anyone and tend not to spend more than four hours on any question. Instead, they refer readers to books to read.

They do not have their own interlibrary loan section. All such requests are handled through the Loan Division. The Japanese section has to prepare the romanisation and information about the request. It takes a long time for requests to get through the Loans Division and there have been complaints. Another inconvenience is that anything with 'Tokyo' written on it is returned to the Japanese Section, whether it is theirs or not.

They have a very close relationship with the National Diet Library in Tokyo as the Diet Library was modelled on the Library of Congress. The then Deputy Librarian of Congress went to Japan after the war to oversee its development. They are very proud of this relationship and look on the Diet Library as a sister institute. However, they do not have the system of secondments of Diet Library staff that operates at the National Library. Nonetheless, a National Diet Library staff member did come to Washington to work microfilming postwar occupation materials at the National Archive. His wife worked at the Library while they were in Washington.

The Japanese stack occupies one whole floor. Until 1983 and the opening of the Madison Building, they had a space problem but now the technical services have moved out into the new building they have doubled the shelving available for Japanese.

Their cataloguing backlog, which they term 'arrearage' consists of old periodicals and old text books. Anyone wishing to use such material would have to come to the Library and look at it. There is no control over it. Other than this, they are quite up to date in their cataloguing.

There are three catalogues. The current one is online, RLIN/CJK. The previous two are card catalogues. The first one has all material received and catalogued in the Library up until 1958. It is arranged according to the Nippon Decimal Classification scheme. They are in the process of incorporating it into LC classification. The other one is a dictionary catalogue in which Chinese, Japanese and Korean cards are interfiled. This covers the years 1958 to 1982 when it was closed to make way for RLIN/CJK.

In addition, there is a union catalogue in card form. They would like to microfiche it some time. Meantime, they hope RLIN/CJK will become a union catalogue as they have no time to edit the card catalogue.

I then met Mr Richard C Howard, Acting Chief, Asian Division, who commented that the Library had no way to reproduce CJK cards inhouse. Taking a print off the screen and reducing it to make a card had the disadvantage that reduction blurred the characters. RLG ought to invest in a laser printer but this was unlikely as it had no extra money. It was just breaking even. The reason this lack of card reproduction facility was a problem was that the Library would like to get around sending manuscripts of cataloguing to Tokyo to be reproduced. It was too time consuming.

He had a lot of praise for RLIN/CJK. One advantage was that being a member gave access to RLG's manuscripts and archives which lists all the archival holdings on Asia and Oceania. It also held a list of libraries arranged by subject (LC classification number) with East and Southeast Asian holdings with ratings on a scale of 0 to 5 indicating collecting and acquisition strengths. This was available on-line and in hardcopy.

The idea is that the libraries can agree amongst themselves that if they rate a 4 in a field they can build on strength and be the library to collect in that field. The only problem was that the Library of Congress was being left with everyone's 'leavings' including Oceania which falls between stools. He was not too happy about this. He asked if the National Library collected Oceania aggressively; what were the difficulties of collecting from such small islands where they often had no budget for postage, and so forth.

He then ruefully added that it wasn't just underdeveloped countries that had problems with no money to pay for postage to send their government publications overseas. It had happened to no less a country than the one we were standing in - the United States. Congress cut the Smithsonian Institute's budget one year so they had no money to send out government publications to their exchange partners. The government publications piled up, gathering dust in the Smithsonian which complained to the Library about this state of affairs. The Library was supposed to despatch the books. Finally, the Library persuaded Congress to make a special grant to microfilm the books and send them out in this form as it was cheaper.

It was an interesting experience talking to one's opposite numbers in a Japanese section in a national library. After all, there are not that many national libraries around and opportunities are rare to compare notes since one has to travel overseas, as a rule. I was amused to encounter the same problems with extracting dollars, staff and space from government, the same sort of idiosyncrasies of internal communications between sections and so forth. It was nice to know we are not alone. It was also useful to see how others cope with these and other situations.