

THIRD JAPAN FOUNDATION/NATIONAL DIET LIBRARY TRAINING PROGRAM FOR JAPANESE LIBRARIANS

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Overview

The training program was held in Japan primarily at the National Diet Library (NDL), Tokyo, from Monday 18th January to Friday 6th February 1999. The aim of the program was to enable course participants to discover how to access information in Japan from our respective countries, in order to assist the research needs of our students and academic staff.

The participants were invited by the Japan Foundation (JF) to attend the course which was fully funded by the JF. Participants came from 12 countries from around the world: Australia, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, China, Korea, the Philippines, Canada, the US and Russia. As the sole representative for Australia I was pleased to be able to inform the other participants of developments in Japanese Studies and information management in this country.

Program

The program was held over three weeks, and included the following:

- classes on various topics held at the National Diet Library
- visits to many libraries in the Tokyo area
- a short trip to Kyoto to visit libraries in the western part of Japan.

There was also a seminar at the end of the program entitled: "International Flow of Japanese Information".

Three Important Things

I was most honoured to have been selected to attend the training program, and over the three weeks learnt much which is useful and valuable to me in my work and to my ongoing professional development. Here below I will discuss the three most beneficial aspects of the program for me.

Networking/Access People

It was invaluable for all of us who attended the course to finally meet some of the staff at the National Diet Library with whom we had been corresponding for so long. Having many of these people as our tutors for

the classes, we were able to forge bonds and alliances which will be even more useful to us in the future in our dealings with the NDL. It is so much easier to get things done quickly when you know the right person to contact, and when you are fully aware of exactly what roles each of the NDL departments fulfils.

Not only were we able to make contact with staff at the NDL, but also at the many institutions we visited as part of the program. These contacts will be important for the future as postgraduate and research student numbers increase.

Perhaps the most valuable people to meet and get to know were the other course participants. Many came from institutions with collections of a similar size to mine, and it was fascinating (and somewhat of a relief!) to find that we shared many of the same problems and methods of solving them. Others were responsible for much larger collections; it was inspiring to learn more about them and the special problems of larger collections.

Places

One of the more interesting and valuable parts of the course was the opportunity to visit many institutions which are of interest to the staff and students who use the Japanese Collection. Having now been to these places myself, I am able to prepare potential visitors regarding the special requirements of access to these places. Many Japanese libraries are not open to the public and require a letter of introduction or some sort of identification which will allow you to gain entry.

The course participants attended lectures and had some small amount of time to wander about and examine the collections at the following institutions:

- The National Archives of Japan
- National Institute of Japanese Literature (www.nijl.ac.jp)
- The Diplomatic Record Office, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/)
- Kyoto University Library (www.kyoto-u.ac.jp)
- The Library at the Japan Foundation's Kansai Kokusai Centre, Osaka (www.jpf.go.jp)

Also valuable was the behind-the-scenes look at how the NDL operates, on all levels and in many different areas. While I would have liked to spend more time just browsing in the closed stack area, this is of course not always possible and I think that in some ways no matter how much time was allocated it would never be enough.

Reference Collection

One of the many extremely useful classes given at the National Diet Library was a two-hour session on reference items. In fact, two hours was hardly

time to scratch the surface of this topic and all of the participants would have appreciated more time on this subject.

It is interesting in these days of electronic publishing, where many institutions end up with access to the same databases, that the real defining difference between institutions is their book stock, and the reference collection is an important part of that collection. The reference collection is one area I am interested in, and I was much reassured by the class teacher. She provided us with a very detailed list of the best and most useful reference items, and I was pleased to note that many of these are already held in our Melbourne collection. My next task is to examine this list further and acquire more reference works in accordance with our collection development policy and with the help of the invaluable list.

Other classes which were extremely interesting and beneficial were those in Statistics and Japanese Government Documents. Many of these are now available on the Internet, and in the case of parliamentary debates are made available only hours later.

- Statistics: www.stat.go.jp/0.htm
- Government Documents: www.kantei.go.jp/
- Parliamentary Debates at: www.shugiin.go.jp or www.sangiin.go.jp

Electronic Library Developments

Rare books

I was privileged to be able to take part in an elective class in Rare Books. I was thrilled to be able to touch these items, see the glorious colours and read the elegant text written so long ago and yet still so beautiful to read. I feel honoured as these items are part of an ongoing plan to digitise the NDL's holdings of rare books so that they will in future only be available to library patrons through the Web. It is a great step forward to have such rare and valuable items ready to be accessed by anyone from anywhere with a Web browser, but at the same time I was sad to think that my students and staff would probably never be able to see the real thing, even if they visited the NDL in person. One of those conflicts which the development of electronic media invites?

The NDL catalogue online

All of the course participants were delighted to hear about developments of an electronic library, which include free access from the NDL home page to:

- the entire monograph catalogue from approximately 1868 onwards;
- the full serials catalogue; and
- the entire journal index database "Zasshi Kiji Sakuin" which is currently only available in CD form and rather costly.

We were informed that all going well access would be possible from April 1st this year. Unfortunately this seems not to be the case so we are still

anxiously awaiting notification of the availability of this wonderful resource.

Information for both of these can be found from the NDL home page:
www.ndl.go.jp

The Importance of First-hand Experience

I have realised through attending the course at the National Diet Library just how important it is to have first-hand experience of this library in order to assist my students and staff. Having the experience of trying to request items which take over an hour to come back from the stacks, realising that the service points close for an hour for lunch, that opening hours are only 9.30 am to 5 pm, that the NDL is closed usually about 10 days per month - these are all necessary information to pass on to students going to Japan to research for the first time. The library does not provide open World Wide Web/CD-ROM access as we do here in Melbourne. You cannot make photocopies yourself, but must request them and even then you cannot request more than three times in one day. These things are easy enough to work around once you are aware of them, but they can be quite frustrating to even the most easygoing of library users.

Symposium

The International House of Japan, with the Japan Foundation, held a symposium on "The International Flow of Japanese Information" on the afternoon of Wednesday, February 3rd at the International House as a part of the Japan Foundation/National Diet Library training program for Japanese studies librarians.

The aims of the symposium were twofold: to show Japanese information professionals what sort of research is being done overseas, and for the training program participants to grasp the grand design of scholarly research in Japan.

The symposium consisted of two parts: a keynote speech given by Professor Patricia Steinhoff (University of Hawaii), entitled "Japanese Studies in the US.: Current Conditions and Characteristics", and a panel entitled "Considering Information Infrastructure of Japanese Studies". The sessions were held in Japanese without translation. A reception followed in the evening where approximately 100 people from libraries, archives, publishing, international exchange, etc. from Japan and overseas attended. This was an excellent opportunity to exchange opinions and form networks.

Professor Steinhoff talked about the source materials and literature used for Japanese studies. The panel covered such points as Japanese academic publications, the flow of Japanese academic information, Japanese studies

and Japan information, source materials for Japanese studies, and the roles of Japanese studies libraries.

Suggestions for the Year 2000

At the conclusion of the course there was a feedback and comments session where participants and staff gathered to talk about what changes might be made in future. While the course itself is invaluable, some areas are of more interest to Japanese librarians overseas than others, and suggestions such as the following were made in order to further develop the course for 2000 and 2001, the remaining years of the planned funding from the Japan Foundation.

- less emphasis on the NDL's local information (ie, collection policy, serials checkin methods, etc)
- more emphasis on international assistance and what they can do for us: including accepting requests for information by e-mail (currently only letter or fax is accepted), working out some way of paying for inter-library loan and photocopies which doesn't force us to pay in yen (with a ¥3500/A\$50 handling fee for cheques), more prompt responses to requests.
- more options to attend sessions which are relevant to participants. While an introductory session at the National Center for Science Information Systems (NACSIS) would have been sufficient for me, those who have a subscription to their databases no doubt appreciated the two days spent there.
- freedom to extend our stay a little longer after the course. Although we were allowed to extend for one week after the three week course, this is not much time to visit publishers and agents, browse bookshops and examine the latest offerings of the electronic publishing world; not to mention gathering photocopies and other information for students and staff here in Melbourne.

In Closing

I was extremely honoured to have been invited to take part in the program offered this year, and am very grateful to the library and my colleagues at the University of Melbourne for allowing me to take the time to make the most of this opportunity. At this point I believe that most of the Japanese librarians in the Australia-New Zealand area have attended this course, and it is planned that we (the Japanese Library Research Group of Australia) make some kind of presentation at the Japanese Studies Association of Australia Conference to be held in Queensland this December. I hope to make full use of what I have learnt on this course both in developing resources and access for staff and students here in Melbourne (and Australia), I also know that this course was a great investment in my own personal and professional development.