

Current Status and Issues of the National Diet Library Asian Information Service

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1. Introduction

March 2002 was more than 50 years since the establishment of the National Diet Library (NDL). The Tokyo Main Library used to provide the Asian Information Service, but now an Asian Resources Room has been established at the Kansai-kan to provide better service as a national library, in a new information environment unrestricted by distance and location. Within the NDL as a whole, the Kansai-kan has a large storage facility, serves as a center for providing documents, and promotes cooperation among libraries and digital library operations. However, another of its functions is to serve as a center for the NDL's Asian Information Service.

The mission of the Asian Resources Room, and the reason it was established at the Kansai-kan, is to become a library that is very accessible to the public, providing a greater selection of Asia-related materials as a service resource and providing services to a wide range of users, including the Diet, as well as researchers on Asia, people with intellectual or other interest in Asia, and people looking for business information.

More than a year has already passed since the October 2002 opening of the Kansai-kan.

During our first year, the goals we have tried to accomplish have included, among other things, the establishment of a repository of Asia-related materials, maintaining and managing an Asian-language OPAC, retrospective conversion of bibliographical data, and operation of the Asian Resources Room, all aimed at improving the quality of the Asian Information Service in the NDL. Judging by the number of users and the volume of materials accessed, however, our information resources have yet to be adequately exploited.

Although I am repeating somewhat the sentiments you heard in the greeting by the Director General of the Kansai-kan, it is my hope that by reporting on the current status of the operations and services of the Asian Resources Room, the Asian Resources Division, and related issues, we can spread word of the Kansai-kan's Asian Resources Room to as many people as possible and increase interest in the facility. We were also able to invite many speakers active in a variety of areas, as well as the coordinator. I hope that this symposium, in which you, with your interest in the Asian Information Service, are participating, will prove an opportunity to develop the operations and improve the services of the Asian Resources Room.

2. History of the Asian Information Service in the National Diet Library

The National Diet Library was established in 1948, beginning user services on June 5 of that year. At the time there were five reading rooms, one of which was the Chinese Materials Reading Room. That room and the Chinese Materials Division that administered it were the predecessors of the Asian Resources Room and the Asian Resources Division.

We began using the designation “Asia” in 1955, when the Chinese Materials Reading Room became the Asian Materials Reading Room. Subsequent to the completion of the first phase of the Tokyo Main Building in 1961 and the second phase in 1968, the organizational names were officially changed, and the structural renovation at the time the Annex was completed in 1986 gave birth to the Asian Materials Room and Asian Materials Division. Up to that time, the reading rooms and their administrative sections had only provided book selection and user services. Materials organization and storage had been under another department, but these operations were consolidated into the Asian Materials Room.

The Asian Materials Room was closed at the end of March 2002 to prepare for the transfer of operations and materials, etc., and the resources under its administration were transferred to the Asian Resources Room. As I will bring up again later, this is why the materials administered by the Room comprise those obtained since 1986. The Asian Resources Room covers East, Southeast, South, and Central Asia, along with the Middle East and North Africa, which form the Islamic cultural sphere.

3. Using the Room and Its Services

3-1. The Asian Resources Room

I think some of you already toured the facility during the lunch break, but I'd like to give you a quick overview.

The quantity of materials available, when in terms of books, amounts to approximately 30,000 volumes. In addition to the reference library, basic books, periodicals, and newspapers are also available to allow users to obtain the basic information they need from these open-stack materials. The books are organized essentially by region, and separate areas have been set up for catalogs, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and maps. Within each area classification, books are arranged by the National Diet Library Classification, wherein Asian-language, Japanese-language, and European-language materials are mixed together.

Many periodicals and newspapers are available to users for browsing and access to current information.

A total of 840 periodicals are open for public viewing: 126 in Japanese, 91 in European languages, 380 in Chinese, 191 in Korean, and 65 in other Asian languages. The 181 newspapers on display include provincial papers from China and South Korea, papers from other Asian countries, and English-language papers.

Additionally, 32 CD-ROM titles, including the Chinese language 文淵閣四庫全書電子版

(Wen yuan ge si ku quan shu dian zi ban), 人民日报[®]文数据库[®]1946-2001(Ren min ri bao tu wen shu ju ku), and 全国报刊索引数据库[®] 1950-2001(Quan guo bao kan suo yin shu ju ku) and in the Korean language, the “National Assembly Library Literature Report 2001,” which provides an index of periodical articles and a bibliography of scholarly papers that can be searched.

Services include access to library materials, a reference service, copying, inter-library loans, and a reciprocal materials forwarding service with the Tokyo Main Library whereby users of the Tokyo Main Library can request materials held by the Asian Resources Room and vice-versa.

3-2. Usage Status

Let me share with you a little bit about the utilization of the Room over the past year. The Asian Resources Room does not have an independent reading room, so there is no accurate count of users. Let's use the number of library materials requested to make a comparison with when the Asian Materials Room was located in the Tokyo Main Library. In fiscal 2001, there were 8,600 requests to the Asian Materials Room. As was mentioned earlier, during the past year there have been 2,400 requests to the Asian Resources Room, so the number has fallen to one third. There was a sharp drop in the number of requests even disregarding the significant increase in the open-stack materials.

However, the number of repeat users is gradually growing, and requests during the first half of the current fiscal year have already increased by 1.7 times over the same period last fiscal year. I think we are getting some response from users.

A breakdown of requests by language indicates that primarily Chinese and Korean language materials are being used, with Chinese accounting for nearly 60% of the total. By type of material, periodicals and newspapers are accessed much more than books, which is almost identical to the pattern of the former Asian Materials Room in the Tokyo Main Library. While materials from a wide range of fields are being utilized, the lion's share is in the humanities, for example, academic journals on philosophy and social science in the case of Chinese-language periodicals.

As to who is making the requests, I estimate that it is mostly researchers, including students, from Kansai Region universities like those in Osaka and Kyoto. When also taking into account use of the materials on open access, I think that access by people from companies looking for business opportunities and by Asians living in Japan, such as exchange students looking for information in their native tongue, has declined significantly compared with the days of the Asian Materials Room.

4. Providing Information Resources

First I would like to provide the collection statistics as of the end of September 2003.

As I mentioned earlier, our materials comprise those that have been received by the Asian Materials Room since 1986; materials received through 1985 are held by the Tokyo Main Library. Overall, there are approximately 216,000 Chinese-language books, and of these,

approximately 170,000 volumes were formerly held by the Shanghai Xinhua Bookstore. The collection of the Xinhua store, which acted just like Japanese intermediaries, consisted mainly of samples sent from publishers in Shanghai and elsewhere in East China, and, although there are not any books we could call 'rare', included materials from a variety of fields from the 1930s to the early 1990s. I think not only each individual book but the entire collection has great potential. 170,000 volumes is a large quantity of materials, and we began preparing data on the collection in 2001. We plan to finish processing 85,000 volumes, or half of the collection, during FY2003.

In general, for the Chinese language materials we are concentrating mainly on the humanities, such as local history, geography, and literature, and the social sciences, like politics and economics, and during the last few years we have been concentrating on the general or statistical yearbooks and "Reports," "Blue Books," and "Green Books," which are frequently published during the last few years.

Periodicals cover a variety of fields, including science and technology, and number 3,728 titles, 1,600 of which are received regularly. I believe this is one of the most extensive collections of its kind in the world. There are 334 newspaper titles, of which 97 come in regularly, and even local provincial papers are collected. The most recent newspapers are on display in the Asian Resources Room.

Our two main collection channels are purchase via domestic bookstores and international exchange with 58 organizations in mainland China, including the National Library of China, and 30 organizations in Taiwan.

One of the purchases that I'd like to point out to you is the Chinese books we've bought since 2001 with the cooperation of the National Library of China. Through this method, the Asian Resources Room has been able to select from book and periodical data provided via digital media, and have our selections sent to us. Nearly three years in use, this method is working out well.

In Korean language materials, we have approximately 17,000 books, 2,091 periodical titles, 715 of which are received regularly, and 109 newspaper titles, 34 of which are received regularly. As with China, these also include provincial publications.

The fields covered are mainly in the humanities, such as history and geography, but lately we have been working to acquire materials that cover politics and economics. Collection channels are the same as for the Chinese-language materials, with the exception that the Kansai-kan and the National Library of Korea provide lists to each other, which we use to exchange Japan-related and South Korea-related materials. We also receive many government publications, like statistical materials and annual reports, from the National Assembly Library of Korea.

Both Chinese and Korean language materials can be searched using the Asian-language

OPAC. Preparation of the data for the Xinhua Bookstore materials has been in progress since 2001. We have already entered 15,000 volumes into the Asian-language OPAC, and during the current fiscal year we plan to enter the 30,000 volumes prepared last year.

Although there are some usage restrictions for open-access materials, periodicals, and other materials, there is a lending service that can be used to order books via academic and public libraries without the need for a trip to the NDL itself, and I urge you to access the Asian-language OPAC and take advantage of this service.

As the Kansai-kan Director General mentioned in his address, unfortunately there are very few materials other than Chinese-language and Korean-language materials. For example, only the 2,126 volume Persian-language and 2,071 volume Arabic collections exceed 2,000 volumes. These are followed by the Burmese, Indonesian, Vietnamese, and Thai language collections that each exceed 1,000 volumes. When we include the Turkish, Hindi, and Mongolian language collections, the total comes to approximately 12,000 volumes. There are also 627 periodical titles, of which 150 are received regularly, and 67 newspaper titles, of which 37 are received regularly.

The Persian-language materials include part of a collection that was assembled by domestic organizations, such as Toyo Bunko, immediately after the Iranian Revolution in 1980.

Of course, our main collection channels for these materials are purchase and international exchange, but distribution problems continue to plague procurement, and in many cases international exchange has not been established, so these publications cannot be collected at the same pace as the Chinese and Korean ones. This has resulted in the overwhelming majority of the collection being made up of Chinese and Korean-language materials. However, since locally published materials provide the most basic information resources for understanding a country or region, at the minimum political, economic, historical, and cultural, along with fundamental publications covering geography, resources, etc., and specialty bibliographies, should be available in addition to reference works, bibliographies, and indexes.

One means of resolving these types of collection difficulties has been the collection program for Southeast Asian publications run through the Jakarta Office of the US Library of Congress Cooperative Acquisitions Programs, in which the NDL has been participating since 1998. This program currently targets the five countries of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, and Brunei, and sends the desired materials to requesters who specify a language and field profile. The program was affected by the domestic situation in Indonesia for a short time, but it is functioning well as a collection system. It is effective for procuring normally difficult-to-obtain government and local publications, and we want to review and expand the profile we are using.

Also, for Vietnamese-language materials, the Vietnam Corporation for the Export and Import of Publications (Xunhasaba), which imports and exports publications for Vietnam, sends a catalog directly to us, from which we make purchases. Materials for the various Southeast

Asian countries collected through such a channel are kept in open stacks, creating a distinctive atmosphere in our library.

Eventually, the data of these language materials will all be entered into the Asian-language OPAC, but for the present you will need to search the appropriate edition of *Materials on Asia* or the card catalog. For periodicals, such as magazines and newspapers, however, we are using the LC method to create transliterated data that allows users to search materials via the NDL-OPAC.

In addition to these resources, the Kansai-kan naturally carries Japanese-language materials, as well as many Western books and magazines that contain information pertaining to Asia. It also has domestic doctoral dissertations (those received since 1984) and the “Report of Research Results of Scientific Research Funded by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology” (the Library began receiving this in batches from the former Ministry of Education in 1983). Asia-related materials in these resources are also available to public users. Basically these materials, other than the Report I've just mentioned, can all be searched using the NDL-OPAC. The comprehensive collection of Asian-language materials in the NDL includes the Chinese-language books held by the Tokyo Main Library and the Asian-language materials, statutes and parliamentary documents, maps, and other materials received prior to 1985. In addition, the International Library of Children's Literature has a collection of Asian-language children's books.

Someone once told me that the Asian materials in the NDL are just Chinese and Korean. Although this is not 100% true, I must admit that currently this is nearly the case. I do not want to make excuses, but I think the same can be said of Asian materials throughout Japan, as can be seen by looking at the *Report on the present condition of the original sources of the Islamic Area found in Japanese institutions*¹ that resulted from Islamic area studies funded by Grants in-Aid for Scientific Research of the Ministry of Education. I think the strength of information requests and needs has dictated the current configuration of the collection. In terms of the number of research presentations, published papers and separate volumes, those related to East Asia, such as China and South Korea, account for the majority of the total. I do not have accurate data on the specializations and target areas of Asian researchers in Japan, but looking at Asia-related societies - for example, the homepage of the Japan Association for Asian Studies, which was the first such organization established after the war, in 1953 - the data by research target area as of January 2001 shows 42.5% for China, 52% for East Asia (including North and South Korea), 30% for Southeast Asia, and 7% for South Asia. The Japan Association for Asian Studies, which consists mainly of researchers in such social sciences as politics, international relations, and economics, shows a smaller percentage of China research than do societies that focus on the humanities, but even so, the percentages are not much different. I would even venture that the ratio is almost the same as the configuration of our collection outside of the Xinhua Bookstore materials, as well as the usage trends by language

¹ Miura Toru, Hemmi Yukiko. Tokyo : Islamic Area Studies Project , 1998. (Islamic Area Studies working paper series ; no. 4). See also, <http://www.lu-tokyo.ac.jp/IAS/6-han/97-98/LibReport/LibReport.html>

for our branch.

As a national library, we cover a wide range of fields rather than specific ones, and our collecting of Chinese-language and Korean-language materials is well rounded. At the beginning of my speech, I said that our service targets a wide range of users, and this is because as a national library we cannot look only to specific groups. However, as for materials besides Chinese and Korean, when we consider how to support Asian studies researchers, who make up the bulk of users, I think we need to build our materials collection in view of what kind of roles we should play in organizing information resources on a country level and what is expected of us.

To accomplish this requires cooperation not only with other libraries but also with researchers and academic societies. The Cooperative Acquisitions programs of the US Library of Congress Jakarta Office that I mentioned follows the US accounting year, so during the first half of next fiscal year I would like to review our activities in some way, in consultation with scholarly societies and researchers, so as to improve and expand the profile we are using by October.

Further, in addition to materials on paper, we naturally must study the use of digital information that can be provided by both the Tokyo Main Library and the Kansai-kan, with particular attention to the information needs of the Tokyo Main Library. We are also seeking to make use of external sources such as pertinent information sources posted on the Internet. The Asian Resources Room launched a website in October 2002, which provides links to legislative organs and government organizations, libraries, universities, research organizations, publishers and media, and other sites by region, and in the future it will also carry secondary information databases like publication catalogs, and links by subject, such as statistical information, to provide a wider range of content in an easy-to-use format. In December we plan to add a list of periodicals and newspapers and a list of CD-ROM resources held by the Asian Resources Room.

5. Cooperation with Related Organizations

Recognizing that alliances and cooperation among domestic related organizations are indispensable for expanding Asian information resources for the entire country and promoting distribution of Asian information, in 2001 we held the Asian Resources-related Organizations Roundtable at the Tokyo Main Library, to serve as a forum for forging personal relationships and sharing problems and issues. Last fiscal year a second Roundtable was held at the Kansai-kan, attended by a total of ten organizations, five from the Kansai region and five from the Tokyo Metropolitan area.

We felt that the first step in cooperation would be to share what collections each organization holds and what services it provides, so at the 2nd Roundtable the Kansai-kan proposed as a concrete activity the elaboration of a directory of related organizations. As we entered the current fiscal year, sufficient action had not yet been taken, but we are working on

accomplishing this project because it is fundamental to further cooperative activities.

Asia-related librarians associations include the Council on East Asian Libraries (CEAL) and the Committee on Research Materials on Southeast Asia (CORMOSEA) in the United States, the East Asian Library Resources Group of Australia (EALRGA), and the European Association of Sinological Librarians (EASL). CEAL enjoys a particularly close relationship with a scholarly society, being a sub-organization of the US Association for Asian Studies, so once a year it does a survey of statistical data on the holdings and services of member organizations, and makes this information available to the public. If I am not mistaken, CEAL also played a major role in converting the bibliographical data on Chinese-language materials in North America to the Pinyin system.

We intend to study the activities of CEAL and organizations in other countries in determining how we will proceed with cooperative activities in the future.

6. Conclusion

The Asian Resources Room is charged with expanding the NDL's Asian Information Service inherited with the opening of the National Diet Library. In addition to accompanying the opening of the Kansai-kan with the provision of the Asian-language OPAC, launch of a website, and arranging of a roundtable of Asian information-related organizations, we have been working on new activities since last fiscal year, including training dealing with Asian information and publishing the Bulletin of Asian Resources Room . Of course, starting up is important, but continuing and expanding takes more energy than starting. It is our desire that the collection with which we are associated closely every day will contribute to the furtherance of research and understanding on Asia.