

The National Diet Library in Japan: Unchanging Mission, New Services

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"The National Diet Library is hereby established as a result of the firm conviction that truth makes us free and with the object of contributing to international peace and the democratization of Japan as promised in our Constitution." This is the preamble to the National Diet Library Law of 1948 (hereafter referred to as "Law"), enacted not long after the end of World War II.

Following the preamble, the objectives of the library are described as "collecting books and other library materials for the purpose of assisting the members of the National Diet in the performance of their duties and also for the purpose of providing certain library services as hereinafter specified for the executive and judicial agencies of the national government and for the people of Japan" (Law Article 2).

The National Diet Library (NDL) collects all types of publications produced in Japan through a legal deposit system, and produces the national bibliography. It also collects publications from foreign countries through purchasing and international exchanges. NDL uses this collection to assist the legislative activities of the Diet by providing information and research and also offers a variety of library services to the entire nation, including, executive and judicial agencies, libraries and the general public.

The Deposit System and Electronic Publishing

Publishers are required to deposit copies of their publications with NDL. According to Law Article 24, publications issued by or for agencies of the government "shall be deposited immediately with the National Diet Library for its official use or for its use in exchange for the publications of other gov-

ernments and in other international exchanges," whereas publications by the private sector (one copy for each) shall be deposited "in order to contribute to the accumulation and utility of cultural goods" (Law Article 25). The system differs in nature from the pre-war system in which publications were deposited with the Ministry of Internal Affairs to ensure its control over content. The current deposit system allows the NDL to make official government publications available to the Diet and the general public, as well as to collect and preserve national cultural heritage in the form of publications for future generations and to contribute to their official and general use.

When the Law was first enacted, the term "publication" was defined as books, pamphlets, serials, maps, motion picture films, and other material. A revision in 1949 added "music scores," "phonographic records and works produced by machines designated to reproduce sound mechanically," and "works (besides those mentioned in the foregoing items) reproduced as documents or charts by printing technique and other mechanical or chemical processes." With the emergence of the CD-ROM, a new form of publication, the Law was revised in 2000 to add "texts, images, sounds, or programs recorded by electronic, magnetic, or other methods which cannot be directly perceived by human senses."

Network system electronic publications, including websites, represent the most recent area requiring the NDL's attention in "the accumulation and utility of cultural goods" or "official use." It is not uncommon for paper or CD-ROM publications that exist one day to disappear the next, becoming available only on the Internet. The content of Net publications is frequently revised and updated or, conversely, elim-



National Diet Library, Japan, complete view (photos pp.3-5 courtesy of © National Diet Library)

inated altogether. There is no doubt that the NDL should be collecting them in some form.

Many questions arise, however, when attempting to devise a deposit system that would work. How extensive should the category be? How should one (and who should) deposit or, alternatively, what method should be used for collection? What about copyright, use of material and monetary compensation? A council comprised of knowledgeable outsiders was established by NDL and is currently deliberating on these issues in order to devise a deposit system for web publications. (http://www.ndl.go.jp/jp/aboutus/deposit_council_book.html) (Japanese language only)

There is also the technological concern of how to ensure that electronic data produced by a particular application will be readable in the future and, before that, there is the issue of whether it will be possible or not to collect materials through automatic data retrieval. The Web Archiving Project (WARP), which was launched to address this issue, is experimenting with collecting and accumulating websites and online periodicals, having obtained permission individually. (<http://warp.ndl.go.jp/>)

Expansion of Services and New Developments in Infrastructure

Two new facilities of NDL opened in 2002. One was the International Library of Children's Literature, which opened in May (it partly opened in May 2001), and the second was the Kansai-kan, which opened in October. The Tokyo Main Library, Kansai-kan and International Library of Children's Literature are organically linked in a unified system that provides various services to the Diet and the general public.

The International Library of Children's Literature

The International Library of Children's Literature located in Ueno Park, Tokyo is "a branch library of the National Diet Library that provides, through international collaboration,

library services concerning books and other library materials whose main readers are assumed to be proximately eighteen years of age or less (Law Article 22)." Its objectives are to provide services to children, accumulate children's literature from Japan and other countries and related material (about 200,000 books and 1,600 periodicals, etc.) and support research on the publishing and culture of children's books. Its activities also include the hosting of exhibitions and the development of a union catalogue database of children's books in cooperation with libraries in Japan that own major children's book collections. (<http://www.kodomo.go.jp>)

Kansai-kan of the National Diet Library

Located in Seika-cho, Kyoto prefecture in Kansai area, the Kansai-kan of NDL was established in the central library (Law Article 16-2) to provide services to the entire nation and handle specific NDL responsibilities. Exclusive lines connect the Tokyo Main Library and Kansai-kan to the same information system, and access by users and daily business affairs can be carried out regardless of physical location.

In addition to providing regular library services for users who visit the facility, the Kansai-kan offers remote services, such as mailing photocopied materials on request, Asia-related data services based on documents in various Asian languages, collaboration with other libraries in the production and management of a union catalogue and training programs, and implementation of the electronic library project including developing the framework and content and the abovementioned WARP. The Kansai-kan, which will eventually have a total storage capacity of twenty million titles, is also designed to accommodate increases in NDL holding. (<http://www.ndl.go.jp/jp/service/kansai/index.html>)

Electronic Library Services

The Electronic Library provides information access to anyone, anywhere, anytime which includes both secondary information (bibliographical data such as authors' names, titles,



Stocks of the main building, National Diet Library



Annex well, National Diet Library

etc.) and primary information (the actual contents of books). With regard to secondary information, the NDL-OPAC System is the first to be mentioned. The system which was launched in October 2002 provides an online catalogue of 2.6 million Japanese titles from 1876 to the present and an index to 5.4 million periodical articles from 1948 to the present, and registered users can apply for copies of materials, etc. (<http://opac.ndl.go.jp>) The NDL-OPAC system also makes available a catalogue of 110,000 magazines and newspapers produced in Japan and 280,000 doctoral theses that are kept by the NDL. Korean and Chinese newspapers, magazines and books from 1986 in the Diet Library can be retrieved at Asian Languages OPAC. (<http://asiaopac.ndl.go.jp/>)

In November 2002, the National Diet Library Database Navigation Service (Dnavi), a pilot project, was launched on the library's website. Users can search about 5,000 domestic Internet databases by name, author, category, etc. to find links to appropriate databases. (<http://dnavi.ndl.go.jp/>)

The Digital Library from the Meiji Era is an important source of primary information. An image database of approximately 30,000 publications from the Meiji period, the copyrights for which have been cleared, is available on the website (<http://kindai.ndl.go.jp/index.html>). Digitization of publications will be extended as far as possible within the limits of copyright law.

A database for Diet meeting minutes, developed jointly with the House of Representatives and the House of Councilors, is also primary material. It is possible to search and retrieve the plenary sessions and questions and answers from committee meetings in text and image form from the first Diet session (May, 1947) to the present.

Other primary information includes The Gallery, which displays colourful images of priceless picture scrolls, and colour woodblock prints from the Edo period, and WARP.

Unchanging Mission, New Services

NDL's mission mentioned at the beginning of this article, has not changed since enactment of the National Diet Library Law fifty years ago. The significance of the preamble has increased with the evolution of political, economic and social conditions in Japan and developments in the surrounding international environment. The NDL's roles as a library and a research agency for the Diet and its duty to provide library services to the general public remain unchanged. In order to fulfill these obligations, it must strive to collect and preserve publications appropriate for the times and enrich its services, fostering close communication with other libraries and related institutions.

(translated by Cathy Hirano)

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