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Present state and future of the international exchange of publications in the National Diet Library

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Abstracts:

As the “national exchange service” of Japan, the National Diet Library (NDL for short) has been conducting exchange of publications, mainly official publications, with most of the countries and regions in the world. With the change of the times, however, we are obliged to review the framework of our exchange service. The international exchange of publications is not only a means of collecting library materials but also a library cooperation activity. And, even in the digital age, its importance still remains as one of the various ways to distribute information internationally. What is necessary in the coming years is to clarify the range covered by the international exchange in our acquisition activities and to develop a more effective acquisition strategy.

Introduction

International exchange of publications is a means of collecting library materials, especially official publications that are difficult to acquire through regular commercial channels. It also has an aspect of an international library cooperation activity, in a broad sense, which promotes “the free exchange of ideas and knowledge among the peoples of the world” as written in the UNESCO Convention. When we think of the future of the international exchange in the digital age, it is imperative that we should return to these two roles and examine them further.

In this report, I will first introduce the current status of international exchange in the NDL on the basis of its history, then raise several points of contention about the present issues and what we should do in the future.

Current status of international exchange in the NDL

The NDL has exchange relations with most countries in the world, currently conducting exchanges with 895 institutions of 154 countries and 2 regions and 54 international organizations.

In retrospect, the NDL has been functioning as an international exchange center of publications since its establishment in 1948 when it took over the Japanese government's international exchange project that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had conducted since 1875. The Library was officially designated for the "national exchange service" when Japan ratified two conventions, that is, *Convention Concerning the International Exchange of Publications* and *Convention Concerning the Exchange of Official Publications and Government Documents between States*, in 1984.

In the legal framework, *the National Diet Library Law* provides that 30 copies of each official publication must be deposited, which enables the Library to keep two or three copies for its own collection and use others for international exchange purposes.

The international exchange of official publications falls into three categories, namely, "blanket exchange", "selective exchange" and "specified exchange". "Blanket exchange" is a system whereby major official publications are comprehensively exchanged based on agreements between governments or conducting institutions. Our present partners are the following six institutions:

1. Library of Congress (USA)
2. National Library of Australia
3. Berlin State Library - Prussian Cultural Heritage (Germany)
4. National Library of Canada (shipped to University of British Columbia Library)
5. University of California at Berkeley (USA)
6. National Central Library (Taiwan)

"Specified exchange" means to exchange basic official publications mutually specified according to an agreement between the governments or the institutions concerned. This exchange is more limited in scale than the blanket exchange. At present, this form of exchange is operated with these 5 institutions: the United Nations Library (in Geneva), the British Library, the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the Russian State Library, and the Royal Library of Belgium.

For exchange with many other institutions, the method called "selective exchange" is taken, that is to exchange materials selected by each other with consent.

Besides official publications, we purchase commercial publications wanted by our partners and exchange them based on the principle of exchange in equal amount or equal price. In particular, exchange of national literature is important. That is, we acquire Japonica, materials on Japan published in other countries, while to those countries we send materials on them published in Japan. This arrangement started in fiscal 1979 with the International Exchange Bureau of Denmark. Since then, the following addressees have been added: the Royal Library of Sweden, the National Library of Poland, the National Library of Romania, the Hungarian National Széchényi Library, the National Library of the Czech Republic, the National Library of Serbia, the National Library of Canada, the National Library of Norway, and the National Library of Korea.

In addition, our Library is designated as the depository library by several international organizations and receives their publications. Since the first designation by the United Nations in 1949, the number of the organizations has increased and decreased. We are now designated by 17 organizations.

The statistical outline is as follows. To begin with, in the movement in the number of exchange partners and received materials, the former has been increasing constantly. On the other hand, the latter reached the peak in the 1980s, after that, showed no fluctuations, and has been decreasing little by little in recent years (see Figure 1).

Then, as regards to the details of partners, many of them are in Europe, Asia and North America. Classified by kind of institution, the rate of academic institutions such as universities, governmental agencies, including research institutions, learned societies and associations, and special institutions is high. Especially, we have established a close relationship with the national library of each country. If sorted by country, 129 institutions are in the U.S.A., 56 in China, 47 in the Republic of Korea, 43 in Germany, followed by Britain and then India (see Table 1).

Finally, I would like to outline the NDL's acquisition of materials in fiscal 2000. The rate of publications acquired through exchange among our foreign materials is approximately 20 percent for both books and serials, about 90 percent of which are official publications. In recent years, digital materials have been increasing, especially CD-ROMs (see Table 2).

Changes in the situation of exchange

Next, I will discuss problems we face, examining recent changes in the situation of exchange.

1. Change of framework of exchange: from blanket exchange to selective exchange

The blanket exchange system, which dates from the 19th century, had the advantage of simplicity, in an age when each country was not familiar with others' circumstances of publishing. However, when we asked if those materials were actually used and the materials needed by the other were specified, the defect was that many materials for exchange did not meet the needs of the recipients. Through changes of the external environment, such as increase of official publications, addition of partners, reduction of circulation with restricted budget (decrease of deposited publications), rises in postage, and transitions of publishers of official publications to commercial companies, the institutions operating the blanket exchange with the NDL have decreased from 12 in 1959 to 6 at present. With regard to serials, we selected the Core Set Serials based on the demand of the LC in 1995, reconsidered contents sent to the partners of the blanket exchange, and virtually switched to the selective exchange.

2. Decline of importance as a means of collecting materials

As the result of easier acquisition of bibliographic information of major countries, well-organized circulation of commercial publications and increased number of purchasable materials, the importance of international exchange as a means of acquisition of materials has declined. In former communist countries, because of liberalization of the economy, activities of wholesalers and bookshops increased and we do not necessarily acquire materials via libraries. The defects of international exchange, such as unstable acquisition as compared with purchasing, difficulty in continuous and systematic collection of multi-volume publications and being time-consuming, have become noticeable.

3. Regional unevenness and a gap between supply and demand

To improve our international exchange services, in 1993, we sent out a questionnaire to 319 major exchange partners to collect data on titles we sent them, titles we received from them, whether they want Japanese language materials and their areas of interest. We received responses from 225 institutions. Many of them wanted to receive materials in English. Those who wanted to receive materials in Japanese was only 39 % (98 institutions), of which 52 were in China, Korea and other Asian regions. In Europe and the

US, only institutions of oriental and Japanese studies wanted to receive materials in Japanese.

On the other hand, there was a strong demand for materials written in English. Many institutions' requests concentrated on limited materials such as major statistics, white papers and annual reports. In response to the concentrated demand for specific materials, the NDL had been microfilming about 200 titles of government publications and sending them to 14 institutions since 1977. After seeing the result of the questionnaire, we changed that into microfilming of about 40 English titles and started to send them to the expanded number of 42 institutions.

4. Impact of digitization of materials

With the rapid increase in provision of electronic information, such as web sites and CD-ROMs, more and more book form publications are ceasing publication. There are many merits in the transition to electronic information, but libraries need facilities to ensure access to electronic information.

Future of international exchange

Today, the methods of exchanging knowledge and thoughts have transferred from the exchange of paper media to the circulation of information by electronic media. More and more official publications, such as government information and parliamentary documents, are being digitized and becoming accessible on the Internet. We cannot doubt the fact that the foundation of the international exchange of paper media is shaking.

Libraries must adapt themselves to acquisition of electronic publications and positively promote electronic information exchange. In fiscal 1998, the NDL started to operate a networked system for branch libraries in the executive and judicial agencies of the government, and it has been carrying out experiments on the preservation and provision of electronic information. We think that the role of international exchange cannot avoid being limited when methods for quicker and inexpensive circulation of information are being established.

However, as I mentioned at the beginning, the exchange service also has a positive meaning of promoting international understanding, as well as being a means of collecting materials. In view of the international information divide, there are still many countries that require exchange of materials in paper form. We have to consider this diversity and act in response to it.

It goes without saying that international exchange has the feature of being one of the most effective means of collecting government publications, doctoral theses which are left out of the commercial distribution process, national literatures, reproduced old materials and microforms. From now on, we need to clarify the areas that the international exchange service should cover and develop a more effective collection strategy.

Finally, we would like to raise the issue of the language barrier from the Japanese standpoint. Only insufficient information has been given in response to the deep interest in Japan from abroad, and the language barrier has long been pointed out. Concentration of demands for limited English government publications is structurally inevitable. The NDL intends to promote the microfilming of English materials in high demand positively as ever. Considering Japan's position in the scene of the world's information exchange, the role of the NDL is important. We will continue to make the necessary efforts to fulfill it.

Table 1 The Items of Exchange Partners

Asia	283	31.7%
North America	150	16.8%
South America	80	9.0%
Europe	272	30.5%
Africa	63	7.1%
Oceania	44	4.9%
□□□□□Total	892	100%

Table2 Acquisition of Foreign Materials in NDL (Fiscal 200)

Books			
Purchase	Gift	Exchange	Total
32,125	4,870	8,962	45,957
69.9%	10.6%	19.5%	
Serials			
Purchase	Gift	Exchange	Total
96,302	10,368	61,245	167,915
57.4%	6.2%	36.5%	
Non Book Materials			
Purchase	Gift	Exchange	Total
68,865	385	26,142	95,392
72.2%	0.4%	27.4%	
The Sum Total			
Purchase	Gift	Exchange	Total
197,292	15,623	96,349	309,264
63.8%	5.1%	31.2%	

