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Japanese Company Histories Interest Group

Maureen H. Donovan

Background

At last year's planning meeting for Japanese studies librarians in San Diego, John Campbell of the University of Michigan challenged librarians to create opportunities for more interaction with scholars during the annual AAS meetings. In a discussion about this challenge, Maureen Donovan of Ohio State University and Izumi Koide of the International House of Japan had the idea of inviting Katsuko Murahashi, a leading specialist on Japanese company histories and business information in Japan, to join a discussion forum on Japanese company histories during the 2001 AAS meetings. Ms. Murahashi, who is Manager, Information Resources Group of the Social Affairs Bureau, led the team that compiled *Keizai Dantai Rengokai gunenshi* [Fifty year history of the Japan Federation of Economic Organizations] (Tokyo, 1999; print and CD-ROM). Ms. Murahashi is the author of more than eighty articles on various aspects of Japanese business information. She is currently finishing a book about Japanese company histories that will update and expand the series of twenty articles she published on the subject in *John kanri* from May 1992 to March 1996. Ms. Murahashi gave a formal presentation on Japanese histories on Wednesday, March 21, 2001 during the meeting of the Japanese Materials Committee of the Council on East Asian Libraries. A revised form of this presentation appears earlier in this issue of the *Journal of East Asian Libraries*.

Several North American research libraries, including Ohio State and the University of Chicago, actively collect Japanese company histories ("shashi"). This meeting of librarians and scholars was organized to bring together librarians who collect Japanese company histories, scholars who use them, and anyone wanting to learn more about shashi or Japanese business information.

Meeting Report

When: Saturday March 24, 1:00-2:30 pm

Where: Colorado Room of the Chicago Sheraton Hotel and Towers

Goal: This meeting was convened in order to give librarians and scholars an opportunity to meet Katsuko Murahashi (a specialist on Japanese company histories who gave a speech at the CEAL Japanese Materials Committee meeting on Wednesday March 21) and discuss issues related to acquiring and accessing Japanese company histories, including the possibility of cooperative collection development.

Minutes:

Four faculty members present discussed their use of company histories and/or the reason for their interest in these materials.

David Wittner (Utica College) noted that familiarity with the contents of a company's published history was helpful in gaining access to unpublished corporate records. Also, he found that many primary documents that might not be available otherwise are included in appendices or "shiryō" sections/volumes of company histories.

Elyssa Faison (U Oklahoma) expressed interest in company histories published before World War II and wondered about the trustworthiness of data incorporated into those as well as in the ones published later. Ms. Murahashi commented that prewar company histories tend to be of high quality. Employees assigned to this task in those days were drawn from the elite, well-educated members of the staff. Among the classics of the company history genre is *Kao Sekken gojunenshi* (1940) written by the famous scholar, Hattori Shiso (who was hired especially for the purpose of compiling this company's history).

Sayuri Shimizu (Michigan State U) mentioned that she used the Keidanren Library when her father was a member of Keidanren, but since his retirement she had been at a loss on how to access these materials. She was very grateful to learn that libraries are collecting them, especially within the CIC consortium. Ms. Murahashi noted that the Keidanren Library is for use by members of the organization only. The small staff's time is taken up with providing services for the Keidanren. However, a scholar who has a particular need to use the library can gain access by contacting someone (such as Ms. Murahashi herself).

Michael Twomey (U Michigan - Dearborn) wondered about the availability of long-term statistical data in company histories, particularly any written in English.

In the course of this discussion the difficulties of access to archives of Japanese companies was contrasted with the extensive information readily available in published company histories. As far as archives are concerned, though, Mr. Okuizumi noted that some major archives (such as Mitsui and Mitsubishi) are run professionally and are comparatively open to researchers, although many others are not so easily accessed. The importance of approaching a company through an intermediary (librarian, scholar, etc) was noted.

Katsuko Murahashi provided more in-depth background information on how company histories are compiled, expanding on points that she made in her presentation at CEAL. Copies of her handouts (library collections of shashi; used book stores carrying shashi; major references works on shashi) were available. She noted that the most extensive collections of company histories in Japan are the ones at the Kawasaki Public Library and at Ryukoku University (Kyoto). The latter purchased the famous private collection, Nagao Bunko. She noted that the Kawasaki Public Library, which holds for the most part the same books as Ryukoku University, is much more heavily used by researchers.

The earliest company histories in Japan date from the Meiji period. Most are compiled by employees, although occasionally commercial firms (such as Nihon Keieishi Kenkyujo) are hired to write the book for the company. In some cases documents used in compiling histories were discarded after publication of the company history. While most shashi are published for distribution to employees and others at the discretion of the company, some are offered for sale, such as Shochiku, Misonoza, or the various railway companies. This is because there are many fans who are willing to pay to obtain copies. Further, despite writing "not for sale" clearly in the publications, not a few companies actually try to recover the cost of producing the book when

organizations that have no connection to their business request copies of the books.

Eizaburo Okuizumi introduced the shashi collection of the University of Chicago. A decision to collect these materials was made about twenty years ago, although without any special budget. Faculty members and the library administration are quite interested, however, so increasing attention is being paid to this area. Older bibliographic records created before 1987 (Harvard-Yenching classification) are now being changed into machine-readable format and input into the local online system (<http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/index.html>). Mr Okuizumi drew attention to the scholarly work of Takeda Haruhito, a professor at University of Tokyo, who wrote some excellent shashi (*Kao Sekken*, *Keidanren sanjunenshi*, etc). Ms. Murahashi noted that Professor Takeda is one of her good friends and that they share a low opinion of the works produced under the auspices of Nihon Keieishi Kenkyujo. Ms. Murahashi herself headed the team that produced *Keidanren gojunenshi*, succeeding Professor Takeda in that role.

Maureen Donovan introduced the shashi collection of the Ohio State University, which was initiated in 1984 with the purchase of all the shashi in the Nagatoya Bookstore (759 titles in 887 volumes) on the suggestion of Professor Bradley Richardson. Since then the collection has been continuously developed through selected purchases from furuhon'ya as well as by writing to the companies themselves and purchasing those offered for sale. A database of Ohio State's shashi collection was established in 1995, although it has not been updated in about 4 years.

<http://eas.lib.ohio-state.edu/dbase/DbaseHP.html> (bibliographies) and

<http://eas.lib.ohio-state.edu/ShashiDB/default.html> (searchable database).

The collection is probably around 2,500 volumes now and is cataloged on OCLC and in the Library's OPAC: <http://oscar.us.ohio-state.edu>

The letter writing process with regard to collecting shashi was discussed in some detail. Mr. Okuizumi read a letter that he received from a company president who expressed gratitude that U Chicago was collecting his company's history. Ms. Donovan circulated some letters, including one expressing similar sentiments in a particularly heartwarming manner. She previously discussed letter writing with Ms. Murahashi, who helped her revise the form letter that OSU sends to companies. Copies of the revised OSU letter were distributed to those in attendance, with an understanding that they should modify its contents to reflect their own institution before using it. She also circulated notebooks that she uses to keep track of requests sent out and recent receipts, so that she doesn't write for the same work twice. Techniques for learning which shashi have recently been published were also discussed. The Senmon Toshokan Kyogikai Kanto ChikuKyogikai maintains a web page listing recent shashi acquisitions at Japanese libraries specializing in this area. One can check online databases by searching "nenshi" or "shashi" and limiting to the past year or two to see which ones have been collected by libraries recently.

Action items:

1. Before closing the meeting the group made a decision to meet again at the next AAS/CEAL conference in Washington.
2. Interested librarians should come to next year's meeting prepared to take on responsibility for specific areas and reach decisions about cooperative collection development to ensure that national coverage of these materials is as comprehensive as possible. The divisions of responsibility will be based on local interests, with no mutually exclusive decisions (ie,

- more than one library can collect in a specific area).
3. Efforts to collect related materials (public relations materials, videotapes, etc) should be included in this initiative. If collection development efforts are distributed, more in-depth collecting of industry-related sources can also be pursued.
 4. The group members decided to communicate with each other freely to share information about company addresses, success in obtaining particular works, etc. Ms. Murahashi expressed a willingness to support these efforts in any way that she could.

Attendees:

Tokiko Y. Bazzell, Japan Specialist/Bibliographer, University of Hawaii, Maureen Donovan, Japanese Studies Librarian, Ohio State University, Elyssa Faison, Assistant Professor, University of Oklahoma, Ellen Hammond, Japanese Studies Librarian, University of Iowa, Michiko Ito, Japanese Studies Librarian, University of Kansas, Naomi Kotake, Japan Bibliographer/Cataloger, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Toshie Marra, Japanese Librarian, UCLA, Katsuko Murahashi, Keidanren, Mitsuo Naka, Yushodo, Haruko Nakamura, Japanese Cataloger/Subject Librarian, Washington University, Eizaburo Okuizumi, Japanese Librarian, University of Chicago, Kazuko Sakaguchi, Director, Japan Documentation Center on Contemporary Japan, Harvard University, Sayuri Shimizu, Assistant Professor, Michigan State University, Hisami Springer, Japanese Cataloging Librarian, University of Hawaii, Michael Twomey, Professor, University of Michigan - Dearborn, David Wittner, Assistant Professor, Utica College, Kuniko Y. McVey, Librarian for the Japanese Collection, Harvard-Yenching Library.

Others who expressed an interest but could not attend:

Tomoko Goto, Japanese Cataloger, University of British Columbia, Yasuko Makino, Japanese and Korean Bibliographer, Princeton University, Mark Metzler, Assistant Professor, Oakland University, Keiko Okuhara, Japanese Catalog Librarian, University of Pittsburgh, Meng-fen Su, Librarian, East Asian Library, University of Texas at Austin, Izumi K. Tytler, Bodleian Japanese Librarian, Oxford University, Keiko Yokota-Carter, Japanese Studies Librarian, University of Washington, Kate Zhou, Associate Professor, Political Economy, University of Hawaii