

Japanese Language Education in the United States: Its Current Status and Areas of Need.

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Participating in the Kyoto Conference On Japanese Studies was a enriching experience for me. The well-organized conference brought together Japanese Studies specialists from Japan and forty-four other countries. It was not unusual to have people from three or four different countries sitting together for breakfast at the hotel. Many in attendance were scholars who had distinguished themselves through decades of publication and teaching; but there were also many younger scholars participating, a fact that points to a continuing future for Japanese Studies.

The five-day conference was held at the very impressive International Research Center for Japanese Studies ("Nichibunken"). The modern facility contained an extensive library, several large meeting rooms, and a state-of-the-art conference room and lecture hall. The tan brick building was, however, also reminiscent of a European monastery, with long maze-like passages around interior courtyards, one of which served as the site of an evening concert of Gagaku court music. Several glass walls and large windows provided beautiful views of the courtyards, the surrounding hills, and the city below.

I had the honor of taking part along with Princeton Professor Seiichi Makino in a series of three two-hour sessions on October 19 on the theme of "Japanese Language Teaching: Coping with Diversification in the Purpose of Study." The sessions were sponsored by the Japan Foundation and organized by Mr. Takashi Ueda, Managing Director of the Japan Foundation's Japanese Studies Department. The sessions were well attended, with some guests coming in from as far as Tokyo and Tsukuba to attend only this one series of sessions.

The morning session, at which I presented as a panelist, was entitled Gakush Nzu (translated "Purpose of Study" in the conference program guide). Discussions there of issues related to a diversification of learner needs served to set the stage for afternoon sessions on teacher preparation and instructional materials, on which Professor Makino has reported in another article in this issue. The morning session was chaired by Professor Munemasa Tokugawa of the Faculty of Literature of Gakushuin University. The other panelists were Professor Hugh Clarke of the School of East Asian Studies of the University of Sidney and Professor Hy-Tay Pakh of the Man-Gwang Institute for the Japanese Language and Culture in Korea.

Each of the panelists documented how Japanese language instruction has grown rapidly in his country in the last fifteen years or so. In Australia, as in the U.S., growth has been

experienced on all levels, from the elementary school through the university as well as at private language schools. Japanese is now a very popular foreign language in Australian high schools. In Korea, where virtually no Japanese was taught for the first twenty years after the war, enrollments have also skyrocketed. There all high school students must select one of five foreign languages to study in addition to English, and Japanese has become the most widely chosen.

All of us noted how public recognition in the 1980s and 1990s of Japan's emergence as a major economic power and key producer of high-tech goods has contributed both to the growth in enrollments as well as to a diversification of purpose of study. In earlier years, students of the language typically had had the goal of pursuing an academic career in the area of Japanese Studies or translation. Now, however, students taking Japanese to supplement a major in business or technology or the liberal arts far outnumber those seeking a career in academia. As a result of this shift, educational institutions must now consider the diversification of student interests and needs when designing language sequences, curricula, scheduling, and so forth. Textbook publishers must also respond with a variety of age-appropriate materials that appeal to students' interests. In the meantime, the growth in Japanese language instruction has intensified the shortage of qualified instructors and increased the need for articulation among the various levels of instruction, such as between the high schools and the universities.

Discussion periods followed each of the days' sessions. There seemed to be a high level of audience interest in two subjects that I had touched on in my report. The first was JALEX, a program funded by the Japan Foundation's Center for a Global Partnership which allows teaching assistants from Japan to come help instruct the language in American schools. Professors from universities in Japan which offer courses in teaching Japanese as a foreign languages expressed the desire to see as many of their students as possible have the opportunity to participate in teaching internships overseas. There was also a great deal of interest in the 1993 document *A Framework For Introductory Japanese Language Curricula In American High Schools And Colleges*. Many in the audience asked questions about the Framework, wondering if it was compulsory for teachers and wanting to know more about the process through which it was developed.

At the conference I met people who were working on the development of materials for use by high school students. It was good to see that there was an interest in this area and I was happy to be able to provide my feedback along with that of Professor Makino.

I benefitted greatly from the experience and would like to thank the Japan Foundation and the International Research Center for Japanese Studies for their sponsorship of the conference and for allowing me to present there.