Project to Build an International Collaborative Research Network for Pre-modern Japanese Texts (NIJL-NW project)

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In accordance with our project begun in 2015, we here at NIJL, along with a number of associated base universities and research institutions, continue our efforts to scan materials belonging primarily to the fields of medicine, science, and intellectual history. We are developing special collections of images for each of the more specialized disciplines, such as medicine and the various sciences. Images scanned during the 2015 fiscal year will be made public in increments beginning in April, 2016.

This project, headed by NIJL, is aimed at collaborating with universities and other research institutions both inside and outside Japan in order to digitalize our institution’s collection of three-hundred items and, by incorporating this data into our pre-existing bibliographical database, to create a comprehensive database of Japanese pre-modern texts. Ultimately, these digital images will serve as a platform upon which we may construct an international collaborative network. Such a network would promote research that transcends the traditional boundaries between academic disciplines and allow for interdisciplinary work limited not merely to the field of Japanese literature, but embracing all of the humanities as a whole.

The scheduled period of this project spans ten years, from the 2014 to the 2023 fiscal year. We are working to promote collaborative research on an international scale, and, in conjunction with this, to create a database of Pre-modern Japanese texts. The contents of this database will be made public in increments by presenting separate databases for each of the relevant disciplines in turn.

1. **The creation of a database of Pre-modern Japanese involves:**
   - Scanning the three-hundred thousand documents stored in NIJL
   - Operating a large-scale server
   - Improving the search function of the database, as well as making it accessible in a number of different languages

2. **The promotion of international collaborative research involves:**
   - Facilitating interdisciplinary research
   - Promotion and development of comprehensive bibliographic studies

3. **The creation of a network for international collaborative research involves:**
   - Organizing a system of collaborative research to be adopted by NIJL and its fellow institutions
   - Developing a leading model of collaborative research
The Center for Collaborative Research in Pre-modern Japanese Texts was established within NIJL in April, 2014, as a means of carrying out this project. To this same end, NIJL works with a number of domestic organizations belonging to the National Institutes for the Humanities, twenty domestic associated base universities and research institutions, along with the National Institute of Informatics, as well as a number of foreign research institutions. Regarding the internal operations of the Center for Collaborative Research in Pre-modern Japanese Texts, it is run by a number of committees: the project implementation committee, the network of pre-modern Japanese texts committee, the international collaborative research network committee, and the associated base universities and institutions communication committee. This project is made possible by continued cooperation with experienced scholars and the community of researchers at large.

Since the contents of these historical Japanese texts, we expect will intensify and develop various academic research activities, and additionally support the fusion of different fields. Furthermore, digitizing these texts can prevent them from damaging cultural heritage – breakage and deterioration of original materials, loss due to natural disaster, etc. As a result, it can contribute to inheritance of these heritage for future generations.

"Pre-modern Japanese texts" refers to written works produced by Japanese people prior to the modern period (up to the end of the Edo period). They are also referred to as kotenseki ‘classical texts’ or kokusho ‘early Japanese books’. Works in classical Chinese script and Buddhist texts are not included in this definition; however, annotated versions of these works by Japanese authors are counted as early Japanese books. The Union Catalogue of Early Japanese Books—compiled based on information from the Kokusho Sōmokuroku ‘Comprehensive Catalogue of Early Japanese Books’, which was brought together by early Japanese books from various collections and published by Iwanami Shoten in 1972—is already available in database form from the National Institute of Japanese Literature.
Information on Japanese classical texts is already publicly available (see figure on the top right); however, at present the details provided are limited to bibliographical information such as the collection location and the type of text. This is insufficient to grasp the content of these works. The proposed database will add digitized images of these works to allow users to access the content of each text directly.

Adding images (see figure on the bottom right) will allow users to see:

- What script the text is written in.
- What writing techniques and typesetting are used.
- How illustrations have been used alongside the text.
- The color and style of clothing, buildings, etc. depicted in the illustrations.

Clearly, there is much information that can only be obtained through images, and this information is of vital importance to research in various scholarly fields.

By making this database publicly available, information that previously could have only been obtained by physically travelling to see these works at their respective locations will now be accessible from anywhere in the world through the internet.

Through the development of this database, we expect to see not only swift advancements in research, but also a heightened interest in Japanese culture in the general public.