

**Centre for Documentation and Area-Transcultural Studies
Tokyo University of Foreign Studies
Tokyo**

International Conference

Creating an Archive Today: Decisions, Uses, Documentation

The Centre for Documentation and Area-Transcultural Studies at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Tokyo, founded in 2002 to work on Asia and Africa, is pleased to host an international conference on '**Creating an Archive Today: Decisions, Uses, Documents**' on the 18th and 19th of December, 2003.

The Centre aims to constructively reorganize our University -- which boasts the biggest collection of historical materials in Asian and African languages within Japan -- into a key historical materials hub and centre. It seeks to act as an archival base for promoting information-sending and information-sharing projects. We hope the Centre's multifarious research and archival activities will form the backbone of a new cross-disciplinary research in Afro-Asian Area and Culture Studies, able to meet the challenges of a highly information-oriented twenty-first century.

We are likely to organize a number of conferences and seminars in the coming years. Our vision of the Centre's role in Area Studies research the world over, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, has prompted us to hold our first international conference on the seminal issue of what kind of archive we need to create today. The term 'archive' may sometimes be used for agencies that receive documents from their own governments or corporate bodies. Even so, we use it here just as the Oxford English Dictionary defines it: 'a place in which public records or other important historic documents are kept'.

That we wish to build a non-exploitative repository, we are amply clear about. Even so, we understand that notions of hierarchy and power may be implicit and latent in any such enterprise. We all know these factors were crucial in the emergence of various nineteenth century European repositories. Hence, the word 'Decisions' in the title of our conference. What kinds of administrative and political decisions go into the making of an archive and how are they taken? What types of materials are selected for preservation by any collecting agency? What aspects of life and which segments of society get included or excluded through the materials that any such institution collects? What impact is all this likely to have on the histories that get written? Conversely, how do historiographic trends shape the evolution of an archive? We believe that as we go about our task of building a contemporary repository, we need to take these pertinent questions on board and to debate the relations of power or equity that inevitably accompany any such project.

Our conference will be conducted through three inter-related, yet distinct, thematic sessions: **Creating the Archive, Creating Non-Exploitative Networks, and Creating**

(New) Histories. Reflecting on an over-view of how archives have been put together in the past and with what purposes, the first session will focus on the different types of documents, oral testimonies and visual materials that need to be collected today. How can the histories of ordinary people and peripheral groups be represented through what we collect? Can we hope to offer materials not easily found in the world's older establishments? How can we establish relevant methodologies for data banking, digitalisation and disseminating information? The spilling of various communities beyond the geographical confines of Asia and Africa prompts us to collect material on, and explore the lives of, diasporic peoples as well. In other words, this session will be devoted to how today's repositories can come to grips with the acquisition and preservation of not only publications and documents but also unwritten and non-book materials.

'Creating Non-Exploitative Networks' will be devoted to an examination of how relationships of mutual benefit and equity can be established between librarians, archivists and scholars on the one hand and across nationalities on the other. What do we owe to the communities and societies about, and from, whom we gather records and testimonies? Along with many of our colleagues elsewhere, we are committed not to remove original copies of materials from their home locations. But how and what can we plough back into these locations is a question that merits some discussion. Equally, will Afro-Asian subalterns simply remain passive subjects of archival searches originating in the first world or will they also become comrades-in-arms, even leaders of these enterprises? It is also crucial to consider how in our age of ever-changing technologies, can a 'remote' but highly specialized library disseminate information to a global audience.

If repositories are sought to be created, it is only because we value historical consciousness and historicity. Hence the third session on **'Creating (New) Histories'**. We need to dwell on the vital necessity of a novel historiography that addresses our political predicaments more adequately than all earlier work and how we might use new types of material (or even heavily mined sources) to write such histories. What sort of new Afro-Asian histories do we require? Of marginalized peoples, of heretics and rebels, of heteroglossia, of identity and memory, of the conceptions of time, of images, of stereotypes, not just oral histories but that of orality too, of reading as well, of the body and the environment, of the routines of everyday life, of women and how *their* histories have intertwined with all these themes? So many questions! We invite you to contribute to, and to participate in, an exciting collective exploration, at once conflictual and consensual!