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Komonjo Workshop

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Over the past several months members of the Yoriai have been discussing prospects for funding a workshop or series of workshops for non-Japanese Early Modern Japan specialists on reading *komonjo*. It is clear to us that more Kinsei specialists are either actively seeking more structured opportunities to develop manuscript reading skills so they can better exploit materials not available in printed form or they want to begin to learn those skills. This desire stretches across disciplinary boundaries. To date those of us who have made use of manuscripts have worked with tutors on an *ad hoc* basis and once we have returned to our home institutions, the opportunities for continued development have been very limited.

In our discussions to date, three general (not necessarily mutually exclusive) lines of attack have been discussed with representatives from the Japan Foundation, Monbusho, and the U.S. government's National Endowment for the Humanities.

- 1) Our first thought was to seek funding for an advanced training workshop. NEH does present an opportunity for this sort of activity and we are continuing to pursue it. The drawback is that NEH will only provide funds for permanent U.S. residents or citizens. If such a grant were funded, we would have to seek supplementary funding to cover the costs of non-U.S. participants.
- 2) More funding sources and larger budgets are available for joint research projects. Such applications however require, in addition to determination of a common theme and project, the selection of participants prior to submission of the application. Work on *komonjo* reading can be built into the project, but the main outcome would have to be publication(s).
- 3) Working cooperatively, we could begin to produce pedagogic materials to provide instruction in manuscript reading. The outcome would be a) text-like materials with reproduction of the original document, a *katsuji* version, a phonetic version, and an English translation; b) a digitized, machine-readable

version of the same materials. Some advanced planning would be necessary to plot out the kinds of materials that would be most appropriate as educational tools--for learning about texts as well as for learning to read them.

Regardless of which approach or combination of approaches we take, a core element of the project will be to have participants working with a Japanese *komonjo* specialist or specialists in a way that combines some group instruction with more individualized study. Our hope is to hold a six to eight week workshop, ideally in Japan at a major research site such as the Shiryō Hensanjo. This would permit participants to gather data as they study.

In thinking about these (and other) options, there is no need to confine ourselves to just one project or application; however, I would like to be able to move forward as quickly as possible. An NEH application can move ahead without further general discussion, but submission of applications for either cooperative research or a pedagogical project require some preliminary indications of interest from those of you who want to develop your manuscript reading skills.

We would appreciate answers to the following questions from those of you who are interested in working with projects such as those we are discussing:

- 1) Would you be interested in a collaborative interdisciplinary research project built on the theme "Local Perspectives on Early Modern Japan"? If so, what subject would you research? Are there useful collections in Tokyo and/or Kyoto?
- 2) Are there other themes appropriate for interdisciplinary cooperative research that you would find interesting and useful?
- 3) If we were to develop a primarily pedagogically oriented project, what kinds of materials should be developed first (*kenchi chō*, art scrolls, travel diaries, etc.)? Which materials would be most useful to you in your training of advanced undergraduate and graduate students? Which documents would you be interested in helping to develop into instructional materials?

We look forward to your suggestions and to discussing our options at the annual EMJ business meeting at the AAS