

8th International Toy Library Conference – Japan

Tokyo, August 30 – September 3 1999

Main Theme : Play in Society

Report by Dr Noriko Minejima, Board of ITLA and JNCTL



Introduction

The 8th International Conference of Toy Libraries "Play in Society" was held in Tokyo from August 30th - September 3rd 1999. It was a great success as Freda Kim, the president of the ITLA says that the conference was well organized and friendly. It was the first International Conference to be held in Asia and very unique by two characteristics.

First, everything was done by volunteers. All the staff were also volunteers. Even accommodation was organized by volunteers, without any help from agencies. So staff who were in charge of accommodation could relax two days after the end of the conference when they said "goodbye" to the last guest.

Second, the conference was organized by not only Japan but also Asian countries such as Korea, Malaysia and Taiwan. After coming back from Zurich, Switzerland, the Japanese National Council for Toy Libraries (JNCTL) started preparation for the coming conference. Ruth Kobayashi, the Director of JNCTL thought co-operation among Asian countries would be very important and significant. Therefore, organizing meeting was held among these countries every year – in Penang, Malaysia in May 1997 and in Seoul, Korea in April 1998. In Seoul, ITLA Board Meeting was held at the same time and Board Members approved the outline of the conference which we proposed. Then the brochure of preliminary program was mailed to the world from Penang by Ruth Kobayashi with co-operation of Malaysian friends.

There was a long way to go before everything was ready for the conference. We were very busy and had a hard time, but at the same time, it was very exciting and we were very honoured to be involved in this special occasion.

The Conference

There were five hundred and ninety-two participants from twenty-three countries. Including the Japanese staff, volunteers and guests, seven

hundred and fifty-five people attended the conference. Participants from abroad were ninety-six.

The meeting places were the United Nations University, The National Children's Castle and the National Olympics Memorial Youth Centre. It was very impressive that all these places are related to the objectives of the conference, such as international, play, children, peace of the world etc.

1. Opening Ceremony

In the Opening Ceremony, Ruth Kobayashi made the theme of the conference clear by stating "unfortunately there are wars, poverty, child abuse, violence etc.. in this world. All the children are not happy. Therefore we have to try our best through play so that every child will be happy in any society".

Freda Kim, the President of ITLA proposed to have a "World Play Day" in her impressive opening address. Mr Manzoor Ahmed, Director of UNICEF supported Freda's proposal in his speech.

The commemorative lecture was given by Mrs Ritsuko Nagao, President of the Japanese Council of Social Welfare. She talked about the history of social welfare in Japan for disabled children and the important role of toy libraries in it. The keynote address was given by Makoto Yamashina, President of the Japan Toy Manufacturer's Society. He mentioned co-operation of toy manufacturers with toy library activities.

2. Regional Sessions

This was a new program started in this conference. At the regional sessions, European Session and Asia Festival were held this time.

In the European session, Renate Fuchs (Switzerland), Pat Atkinson (UK) and Leonor Santos (Portugal) reported the result of the surveillance about toy libraries in Europe. The report was very interesting and gave a lot of information to the participants. I'd like to listen to reports from all regions of the world if possible. Asian Festival was also a kind of regional session. In the beginning, Miss Prethitong gave a speech about a toy library in the slum area of Bangkok. Everybody felt sympathy with the miserable situation surrounding children and was moved by knowing that toys gave children dream and hope. After the speech, she exhibited toy dance in a group. Malaysian music and dance, Taiwan puppet show and Japanese drums etc. were performed as well. All the participants enjoyed themselves very much.

3. Handmade Toy Competition

Handmade Toy Competition was also the first program for the conference. Roma Lear (UK) was the chief judge. There were forty-nine entries in total. Nineteen toys from abroad such as Korea, South Africa, Sweden and UK and

thirty toys from Japan which passed the preliminary contest. A lot of participants visited the room for the contest and enjoyed seeing them and voting for the best toy. Four hundred and fifty-one people voted. In the closing session, judges group commented that all the toys were made so wonderfully for children that it was impossible to rank and everybody received awards.

4. Presentation

We had paper sessions, audio-visual sessions and workshops on August 31st and September 2nd. There were forty-one presentations from 20 countries. We also had eleven poster sessions from eleven countries. The content of presentation was helpful to all the participants who are involved with children and put emphasis on play and toys. I realized that there are no borders between countries as far as toy libraries are concerned and all the participants are eager to make children happy through play.

Others

During the reception on the first night and lunch cruise on Tokyo Bay which was held between study tours, I observed a lot of Japanese participants enjoying meeting foreign participants even though they couldn't speak English. They communicated with each other through their hearts. It was very impressive and the first step to understand each other.

In the closing session, Dr Roy McConkey emphasized the importance of play and said that we have to convey it to the future, to the next generation. We received it from the past. The link between generation, from the past to the present, and from the present to the future is very important. I realize that we have a strong responsibility for it.

Finally I handed the flags of the eight countries, which had held the International Conferences in the past to Natalia Pais from Portugal, the next host country. It was very moving and I was relieved by having achieved our responsibility. We, JNCTL would like to say "Thank You" to all friends who attended the conference and travelled a long distance to Tokyo. I am looking forward to seeing all of you again in Portugal.

For Memories of the 8th Conference, [click here](#) (the short report below)

"Six delegates from England were among 300 people from 28 countries from around the world who were fortunate enough to go to Tokyo..... We toured the National Children's Castle. This was a delight to behold, bursting at the seams with enchanting children engaged in a host of activities. They were able to experience almost every

fantasy imaginable- from electronic dance to making wooden musical instruments.

We vowed that every country should have such a centre..... We were all moved to tears by an emotional lecture from Rotjana Presrithong She gave us an insight into life in Thailand where instead of playing children as young as three were involved in selling drugs to support their poverty-stricken families. In a lighter vein she joined her fellow workers ...in a native dance at the Asian festival. It was a magical event that had us all enthralled.... There was a cruise around Tokyo Bay. This was another wonderful chance to meet and talk (or gesture!) to our new Japanese friends.... The afternoon visit took us to the National Rehabilitation Centre for disabled children which included the Asobimushi (Playful Worm) toy library... All Japanese toy libraries are for children with special needs and are run by volunteers. Always present are beautiful handmade toys, exquisitely stitched and perfect in every detail.... Roy Mc Conkey..... had delegates playing and laughing together before he delivered his faultless views on the value of play and its place in society. He finished with a quote from F D Roosevelt: "We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future"

(Excerpt from an article by Jenny Jones, Play Matters magazine UK Spring 2000)