

Developing a National Base for the Preservation of Western Historical Materials

—Initiatives by the Center for Historical Social Science Literature



Global Report

Promoting the “Project for Developing a Base and Network for the Preservation of Western Historical Materials” based at the Center for Historical Social Science Literature

The “Project for Developing a Base and Network for the Preservation of Western Historical Materials” is a three-year project that began in the 2016 academic year. The project was adopted as part of the “Preservation of Cultural and Academic Documents” project, a common policy matter established by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. It aims to raise the overall preservation standards for Western historical materials through collaboration with relevant organizations in Japan, with the Hitotsubashi University Center for Historical Social Science Literature (hereafter “the Center”) as a base.

The Center has accumulated knowledge and expertise for handling historical materials through its work on measures for preserving stored materials, the organization of various courses and workshops, and exchanges of opinions with universities and research institutes, spanning more than 20 years. In the future, the Center intends to play an important role as the “hub” of a domestic preservation network, through an initiative to provide on-the-job training in the preservation and restoration of Western historical materials to practical trainees from Japanese institutions, such as universities and libraries. This edition of HQ reports on the preservation and restoration challenges faced by these relevant organizations, and the content and results of the Center’s training program, based on interviews with officials and trainees at the Center.

“Developing appropriate preservation measures” and “training specialist personnel” are pressing issues for the long-term preservation of Western historical materials

Since the Meiji period, Japan’s universities and institutions have accumulated a large number of Western historical materials in the process of actively embracing Western scholarship and ideas. Over the years, these materials have contributed to the advancement of our country’s research and education, and they are now preserved in university libraries and other places, categorized as “rare books.” Since our founding as the Commercial Training School in 1875, Hitotsubashi University has also accumulated a collection of around 80,000 globally valuable historical materials, including the Menger Collection and the Gierke Collection.

However, while the materials have deteriorated with age, preservation measures have not progressed. Recently, in particular, there have been many cases where the staff who were in charge of the rare books for many years and were familiar with the collections have retired, and universities are worried about the lack of expert knowledge on preservation, discontinuity in techniques, and the shortage of personnel. In other words, the “development of appropriate preservation measures” and “training of specialist personnel” to undertake this task have become pressing issues in promoting long-term preservation of Western historical materials as academic and cultural legacy in the future.

Accordingly, as a base where various knowledge and expertise has been accumulated, the Center became involved in promoting the “Project for Devel-



opening a Base and Network for the Preservation of Western Historical Materials.” The Center has established four specific initiatives:

- (1) Practical training for personnel who play a pivotal role in the preservation of Western historical materials
- (2) Preservation and restoration of materials held in the Center
- (3) Field surveys on the holding/preservation state of Western historical materials in universities and research institutes throughout Japan
- (4) Sharing of knowledge on materials preservation and development of a network through the hosting of symposiums and other events

An independent, purpose-imbued base for generating a large amount of creative research

The Center, which has a central role in the project, was established in 1978, when it separated from Hitotsubashi University Library to focus on managing Western historical materials while making contributions to research and education.

It currently holds around 80,000 books. These include important, internationally prominent collections, such as the former collections of three professors (Carl Menger, Otto von Gierke, and Soda Kiichiro), the Franklin Collection, and the Bernstein-Souvarine Collection. In addition, all European language publications published before 1850, including a large collection funded through special budgetary arrangements by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (now the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) and a number of collections purchased using the Hitotsubashi University Centen-

nial Anniversary Fund, are stored under the category of rare books, and this number is increasing annually.

Work to register the bibliographic and storage information in various online databases, such as the Hitotsubashi Educational and Research Media Service (HERMES), is currently underway, and the Center is working to improve convenience for not only internal but also external users. In the 2007 academic year, the Center established an environment that allows users to view some of the materials as electronic images through HERMES-IR (the Hitotsubashi University Repository). The Center is attracting attention as an independent, purpose-imbued base for generating a large amount of creative research.

To preserve rare books, it is important to establish policy as a university before considering how to deal with the materials

The Center has also invested effort in preservation measures for original materials through the opportunity of the 1993 project to microfilm the Menger Collection, which is the former private collection of Aus-



Keitaro Tokoi



trian economist Carl Menger. It contains about 20,000 items and is one of the Center’s core collections.

Keitaro Tokoi, Assistant Research Officer at the Center, says, “When microfilming the Menger Collection, it was found that the materials might become damaged—or in some cases destroyed—during the filming. Hitotsubashi University regards the original books—including their binding, bookbinding structure, and materials—as important historical materials, and it has invested effort in keeping them as close to their original state as possible. Therefore, we tackled the issue of deterioration due to microfilming head on. And that was the starting point for our current preservation activities.”

According to Tokoi, the point of departure in the discussions that were held at that time was not how to conduct the filming.

“Before talking about those technical aspects, we prioritized drawing a grand design about what form to leave the materials in for future generations. After that, we worked with external experts and contractors to consider what steps to take in order to achieve that goal. When preserving rare books, it is essential to first establish a clear policy for materials as a university.”

Then, the Center conducted the microfilming after confirming the deterioration status of the Menger Collection on an item-by-item basis, taking precautionary measures where necessary. This development led to the establishment of a preservation and restoration studio in the Center in 1995. Since then, for over 20 years, the Center has been busy surveying the state of all of its materials, and employing preservation measures, while also receiving backup from Hitotsubashi University Supporting Foundation and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.

In addition, the Center has continued to hold several short courses, primarily for librarians, to actively share the knowledge and experience of restoring Western historical materials accumulated during this period with other universities and institutions.

Finely tuned curricula, and a focus on building post-training human networks

Building on these achievements, the Center is playing a central part in promoting the “Project for Devel-

oping a Base and Network for the Preservation of Western Historical Materials.”

Specifically, it receives two to four practical trainees per year from other universities or institutions and conducts on-the-job training related to the preservation and restoration of its materials and improvement of the preservation environment. Through this process, the Center aims to train specialized personnel in pivotal positions, who will then head the effort in each area to train others in the preservation of Western historical materials.

The training covers a wide range of content, such as surveying the state of material sets, confirming the deterioration of individual items, repair work, leather preservation, making preservation containers, sample-based training in bookbinding, preservation planning simulations, and environmental controls for preservation. In the actual training, trainees receive comprehensive instruction in the preservation of Western historical materials under curricula that are finely customized to the situation of their institution.

When the Center approached key universities and institutions with collections of Western historical materials, in the first year of the program, it successfully recruited trainees from four organizations: the



National Diet Library, Hokkaido University, Keio University, and Osaka University. This year, the second year of the project, we plan to provide practical training for a trainee from the National Diet Library again, as well as trainees from Tohoku University and Kyushu University, where large-scale library relocation is currently underway.

Moreover, the Center has decided to conduct surveys on aspects such as the holding state of Western historical materials, and their preservation systems, at universities and research institutes throughout Japan. This will involve field surveys where neces-



sary, in addition to a questionnaire survey conducted on a national level. The main goal is to confirm the holding/preservation states of Western historical materials at each institution throughout Japan, which have sometimes remained unclear, and then obtain basic data to help organizations implement preservation measures in the future.

Then, while conveying the results of these initiatives through our open courses, we plan to arrange workshops at a regional level, and build a network through which people in charge of preserving materials at each university or research institute share information and exchange opinions.

In February 2017, we also held a symposium on cultural and academic materials preservation, called “Paper as a Component of the Book: Bibliographic Analytics.” The event was attended by several university library representatives, researchers, and people involved in bookbinding and publishing. Because more people signed up for the event than expected, there was an impromptu change of venue to the larger Josuikai Centennial Hall at Hitotsubashi University’s West Campus. The symposium offered a glimpse of the high level of interest in the preservation of historical materials among the people involved.

Universities and institutions throughout Japan need personnel who can manage the overall preservation process

Tokoi commented that an interview survey for the training program revealed that, although the circumstances of each university or institution are different, there are also common themes among them.

“When we talk about preserving rare books, we imagine technicians restoring them with their hands. There is certainly a need for personnel who perform these actual procedures. But as well as such personnel, we also need people who can manage the overall preservation process. We interviewed many universities and institutions, and they perceived as major challenges the identification of problems in the overall preservation system, the formulation of improvement plans or new conservation plans to address these problems, the prioritization of the preservation procedures based on an overall understanding of the material set, and the management and administration of preservation plans, among others. The current project will conclude at the end of the 2018 academic year, so we plan to update our curriculum where necessary and continue to train the required personnel until then; however, we also intend to develop a system in which trainees can consult with us and exchange opinions so that they can continue playing key roles in each area. If we can build such a network, we can establish a base from which to address the task of preserving Western historical materials through collaboration among organizations throughout Japan.”

