

Project Report

Information about recent project activities

Voices of Thai School Children —A Report from the Field Survey —

Staff of the Tokyo office paid a visit to Thailand in June to check the progress of the library project and assess the needs of the local children and adults involved. This report includes a description of the project as well as comments from the children.

The Project Site

*From an Interview
with the Children*

We visited six elementary schools in the provinces of Phitsanulok and Nan this time. It took about two and a half hours to reach one school in Nan, driving from Nan City through the mountains and unpaved roads that sometimes prevent traffic in the rainy season. When we arrived, all of the children in the school greeted us with folded palms.

All of the schools involved in our project are located in rural areas, surrounded by farm fields. Residents are mostly engaged in agriculture, and household incomes are low, often burdened with debt.

In these agricultural regions, public libraries and bookstores do not exist, daily newspapers are not available, and schools lack the money to buy books which appeal to children. The ways of getting necessary information are limited, and the urban-rural disparity is deepening.

Activities to Encourage Reading

The new school libraries, constructed as a source of information for communities, are now playing an important role in school life: children come to the library to read books during the noon recess and after school; the library is used for class research; and a fifteen-minute period is set aside every morning for reading time. Enthusiasm is present among teachers, too.

Various programs are carried out to encourage children to read books, such as the Reading Diary introduced in Newsletter No.1 and the Voice in Line program in which students announce the contents of books using broadcasting equipment in the school. When we asked children who participated, we received opinions like My writing seems to have improved, I can remember the correct spelling, I have gained the ability to speak in front of an audience, or I have learned lessons applicable for daily life. Teachers are very positive about those programs, too, as they see students comprehensively increasing various learning abilities, based on reading.

Local Residents Also Enjoy Reading

The library project is not limited to just the children: the adults also have a chance to use the books. Some of the school's books are being put into boxes and lent to shops and houses which are easily accessible to residents. The community leader in the Phitsanulok area said, During the

We interviewed 10 students from 5th and 6th grade in Baan Ping Nai Elementary School in Nan Province

Q. What kind of books do you like?

A. Stories like Aesop's fables, poetry, and educational comics.

Q. About how many books do you read in a month?

A. About 10-15 books on average.

Q. Didn't you get nervous when speaking in front of everyone for the Voice In Line program?

A. No, I didn't!

Q. What was your report about?

A. The differences in regional dialects. For example, guava in Central Thai is called farang. But in the Nan dialect, it is called makeao.

Q. What do you do on the weekends?

A. I help with housework, farmwork, or go outside to play.

Q. What do you want to be when you grow up?

A. Doctor (5), Nurse (2), Police Officer, Soldier, Monk.

Q. When you are bigger, do you want to leave for a big city or do you want to stay here?

A. If possible, I want to come back.

Nan has a unique culture and retains high community awareness. It seems reading raises local pride in children.

off-season for farming, many villagers come to read books. The information they can gain is very useful.

Understanding of our activities amongst the local residents is increasing. There has been cooperation from the people —some helped in constructing the library and some offer a place for the book boxes. Since it is not realistic to continue support forever, we aim to let the local people manage the activity on their own. During the trip, we came to believe that this might be possible in the near future.

The Georgian Ministry of Culture Offered Cooperation

In Georgia, where we have started a new library project, the Ministry of Culture has decided to support it by offering a budget to buy new furniture for the children's library for which previously funds have been lacking. Our activity prompted the Georgian Government to resume support for the libraries which had been ignored due to harsh economic conditions. Our Library Project in Georgia will be introduced in the next issue of this newsletter. This time, in the column below, we will give a brief introduction to the country called Georgia.

From the Project Site

Report on the social and educational situations of the regions with which we cooperate

The Basics on Georgia

What do you think of when you hear, Georgia? Probably the famous Sumo wrestler Kokkai (the Black Sea), Caspian Sea yogurt, the birthplace of Stalin, the bloodless coup d etat of 2003, and so on.

Georgia is situated in the South Caucasus region of West Asia, surrounded by Russia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkey, and on the west, the Black Sea. It has about 70,000 square km of land (nearly the same as Japan s Shikoku island) with a population of about 4.6 million. It shares a border of 1461 km with its neighbors.

Since ancient times, the Christian country of Georgia was repeatedly invaded by other ethnic groups and dominated for a long period of time. In April 1991 it came to independence from the former Soviet Union. Many invasions and the long period of foreign control have not had an effect on the Georgian language, which is said to possess the world s oldest preserved alphabet, and the people hold pride in its old, thriving culture.

In recent years, it has become known as the country with the highest population percentage of 100+ year-old people. The secret to health maintenance seems to be hidden in its dietary culture such as yogurt.

Messages from Local Staff: The Daily Life of Local Staff in Thailand and Georgia

From Thailand

(Bangkok: Yagi)

On July 3rd, Thailand s first subway, employing the latest technology of Japan, America, and Europe, opened in Bangkok. It will become an important mode of transportation for the people in Bangkok, along with the Skytrain which opened at the end of 1999. The development of public transportation is viewed as a symbol of a growing Bangkok city. I pray it will help reduce the infamous traffic jam, being now held up in the evening heavy traffic .

From Georgia

(Tbilisi: Rusiko)

The summer tourist season has started in Georgia. Georgia is rich with different kinds of resorts: the Caucasus 2000-4500m mountains, seaside resorts on the Black Sea, and assorted spas and sanatoriums. During the Soviet Union era, these resorts were very popular and million of tourists visited from all over the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, nowadays many facilities have been destroyed and are unusable. However, many small enterprises were established in the last few years, targeting local Georgian tourists.

From the Office

Information from the executive office

Directory of Japanese NGOs Concerned with International Cooperation

The Japan NGO Center for International Cooperation issued a directory of Japanese NGOs engaged in international cooperation. Nomad International is introduced on page 183. Contact information is as follows.

Japan NGO Center for International Cooperation
(JANIC) TEL: 03-3294-5370 FAX : 03-3294-5398
URL : <http://www.janic.org>

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Notes from the Staff

- The continuous heat reminds me of Thailand where I visited last month. I hope to get through the summer, like the energetic Thai children. (Fukatsu)
- After a short rainy season, summer has come into full swing. During the hot season, spicy food is best. Reminded of the local tastes, this summer I m going to try making Thai cuisine. (Tajima)
- It s nice to meet you. My name is Ito: I ve been working as a part-timer since July. I m mainly in charge of updating the website. Your comments are welcome. (Ito)