

Fifty years of Oral History of Politics in Japan: interviews with political leaders

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<<Ito Takashi (left) and Kono Yoshikatsu, the Librarian of the National Diet Library of the day, (center) are interviewing Suzuki Mosaburo (right side) in 1966>>

1 Introduction

In January, 2012¹, sound recordings and shorthand notes of “Oral history of politics in Japan: interview with Fujiyama Aiichiro” went public in the Modern Japanese Political History Materials Room of the Tokyo Main Library. The National Diet Library (NDL) interviewed from 1961 to 1987 a total of ten political leaders who had played key roles in modern political history in the pre- and post-war eras for the purpose of recording verbal evidence which is difficult to pass on to the future on a paper basis, and these interviews have been made open to the public one by one². Releasing the interview with Fujiyama means that now all of the interviews are available to the public.

Over 20 years have passed since the first interview with Machino Takema became open to the public in 1991. I have been involved in the work of releasing almost all the interviews during these 20 years. In this article, I would like to review the 20 years’ history of making public each interview and assess its significance.

2 History: planning, subject, etc.

The project of interviews with political leaders was proposed by Yamamoto Yuzo, a novelist and a former member of the House of Councillors. At that time, Yamamoto was devoting himself to writing a biography of former Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro, one of his alumni at Daiichi High School (the first old-education-system high school), and strenuously collecting related documents. Yamamoto suggested that the NDL record interviews with people who were familiar with the crucial background details of political history, especially of WWII, and archive them. In response to the proposal, the NDL drew up a plan for collecting and organizing political history materials and decided on a policy for collecting materials related to political history up to the present, including audiovisual resources, diaries, memoranda, letters, etc. which belong to political leaders, government officials, military men, academics, and business people, in addition to the same kind of materials of the Meiji-Taisho period, which the NDL had already collected. Given the situation, the NDL set up the Research Secretariat of Political History Materials which was in charge of preparation for the first interview. Machino Takema, an advisor of the warlord Zhang Zuolin in the northeastern part of China in the prewar era, was

¹ “Oral history of politics in Japan: interview with Aiichiro Fujiyama was opened to the public,” *National Diet Library Monthly Bulletin*, no.611, 2012, p.30.

(http://dl.ndl.go.jp/view/download/digidepo_3483377_po_geppo1202.pdf?contentNo=1)

² Regarding the efforts of the interviews, please refer: Ninomiya Saburo, “the History of the Research Secretariat of Political History Materials,” *Reference service and bibliography*, no.37, 1990, pp.1-90. (http://dl.ndl.go.jp/view/download/digidepo_3051294_po_37-03.pdf?contentNo=1) Regarding the first release of the interview with Machino, Hirose Yoshihiro who was a staff in charge at that time wrote up “The history and future issues of the oral history of politics in Japan,” *National Diet Library Monthly Bulletin*, no.363, 1991, pp.2-9. (NDL call no.:Z21-146)

selected as the first interviewee. The interview was conducted at Machino's house in Yugawara in May 1961. The following people put questions in the interview: Yamamoto Yuzo, Goto Ryunosuke (a brain for Konoe Fumimaro and the organizer of a study group Showa-kenkyukai in the prewar era) and Furuta Tokio (NDL expert in Chinese affairs).

Since then, the NDL continued to plan and conduct interviews of ten people by 1987 (see <<Table: List of Interviews>>). There were more people who emerged as candidates but were not interviewed: former prime minister Yoshida Shigeru, Katayama Tetsu, Ishibashi Tanzan and Kishi Nobusuke; influential statesmen from both ruling and opposition parties in the Diet such as Kiyose Ichiro, Ono Banboku, Nishio Suehiro and Kawakami Jotaro; military top brass such as Suzuki Teiichi, Araki Sadao and Nomura Kichisaburo; diplomats such as Arita Hachiro and Yoshizawa Kenkichi.

<<Table: List of Interviews>>

Speaker	Theme	Recording time (hours)	Recording date	Main questioners (*position title written in the table is as of the day of the interview)	Disclosure date
Machino Takema (1875-1968) Army colonel / Advisor of Zhang Zuolin	Zhang Zuolin Assassination Incident	6	May 14, 1961 May 15, 1961	Yamamoto Yuzo (Former Member of the House of Councillors, writer) Goto Ryunosuke (an organizer of a prewar study group Showa-kenkyukai) Furuta, Tokio (NDL)	Jun. 1991
Mutaguchi Ren'ya (1888-1966) Army lieutenant general / Colonel of First Infantry Regiment (at the outbreak of the Rokokyo Bridge Incident) / the 15th Army's Commander (commanded the operations of Imphal)	Rokokyo Bridge (the Marco Polo Bridge) Incident Operations of Imphal	4.5	Apr. 23, 1963 Feb. 18, 1965	Yamamoto Yuzo (See above, only the interview of Apr. 23, 1963)	May 1993, Dec. 1995
Imamura Hitoshi (1886-1968) Army general / Director of the Administration Bureau, Ministry of Army	Military system, especially of army troops, etc.	3.5	Dec 16, 1964 Jan 25, 1965	Imai Seiichi (Assistant Professor, Yokohama city University) Fujita Tsuguo (Professor, Sophia University)	Feb. 1995

/ the 16th Army's Commander (commanded the Battle of Java)					
Suzuki Mosaburo (1893-1970) House of Representatives member / General Secretary of the Japanese Proletarian Party / Chairman of the Japan Socialist Party	Socialist movement in prewar era , etc.	12	Dec. 8, 1966 Dec. 14, 1966 Dec. 16, 1966 Dec. 22, 1966	Ito Takashi (Instructor, Institute of Social Science, University of Tokyo)	Feb. 1997
Kido Koichi (1889-1977) Head Secretary to the Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal of Japan / Minister of Education and Minister of Welfare for the First Kono Cabinet / Minister of Home Affairs for the Hiranuma Cabinet / Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal of Japan	Hidden history related to <i>Kido nikki</i> , etc.	17	Feb. 16, 1967 Mar. 6, 1967 Mar. 13, 1967 Mar. 27, 1967 Apr. 12, 1967 May 29, 1967	Okubo Toshiaki (Instructor, Waseda University and Rikkyo University) Goto Ryunosuke (see above) Yamamoto Yuzo (see above)	Jun. 1997
Sakomizu Hisatsune (1902-1977) Head Secretary of Prime Minister Okada / Chief Secretary of the Suzuki Kantaro Cabinet	Concerning the termination of WWII, February 26 Incident, etc.	4.5	Nov. 7, 1969 Oct. 4, 1972	Kono Yoshikatsu (Librarian of the NDL, administrative director of Tokyo Institute for Municipal Research)	Nov. 1999, Nov. 2002
Kaya Okinori (1889-1977) Minister of Finance for the First Kono Cabinet and the Tojo Cabinet	Financial policy in prewar era, etc.	11	Nov. 11, 1975 Nov. 18, 1975 Nov. 27, 1975 Dec. 5, 1975 Dec. 11, 1975 Dec. 17, 1975	Aritake Shuji (Visiting critic of Asahi Shimbun) Kawahara Hiroshi (Professor, Waseda University) Shishikui Seichi (Former correspondent of Mainichi Newspapers) Hirata, Keiichiro (Former administrative vice minister of finance)	Jan. 2006
Ichikawa Fusae (1893-1981) Feminist leader / Member of the House of the	Suffragette movement, concerning woman and	6	Mar. 29, 1978 May 19, 1978	Kodama Katsuko (Executive director of Fusen Kaikan) Yamaguchi Miyoko (NDL)	Jan. 2006

Councillors	politics, etc.				
<p>Fujiyama Aiichiro (1897-1985)</p> <p>Chairman of the Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Tokyo Chamber of Commerce and Industry / Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Kishi Cabinet / Chief of the Economic Planning Agency for the second Ikeda cabinet and the first Sato Cabinet</p>	<p>Campaign to topple the Tojo government, Relations between Japan and China, etc.</p>	6	<p>Nov. 12, 1981 Dec. 3, 1981 Dec. 10, 1981 Dec. 21, 1981</p>	<p>Endo, Katsumi (Kyodo News)</p>	Jan. 2012
<p>Katsumata Seiichi (1908-1989)</p> <p>Chairman of the Japan Socialist Party / Vice-Speaker of the House of Representatives</p>	<p>Cabinet Planning Board Incident, Split and integration of the Japan Socialist party, etc.</p>	9	<p>Nov. 17, 1987 Nov. 18, 1987 Nov. 19, 1987</p>	<p>Kishimoto Koichi (Senior Specialist, Research and legislative reference bureau, NDL)</p>	Nov. 1997

3 Storage and Release

From the first interview to the interview with Fujiyama Aiichiro in 1981, an open-reel tape recorder was used to tape the interviews and some of them were cut into a record afterward. Perhaps due to the over-heated motor of the device, part of the sound in the early stage is choppy when played back. Only final interview with Katsumata Seiichi in 1987 was recorded on a cassette tape. Under the thirty-years closed policy, the records were made open to the public one after another when 30 years had passed since the interview was recorded. However, there were exceptions: interviews with Katsumata were open to the public ten years after the interview, with his consent, and ones with Ichikawa Fusae after 27 years on the basis of an agreement with the Fusae Ichikawa Memorial Association.



<<Open reel tape recorder>>

The recorded tapes were stored in a locked cabinet in the stock of the Modern Japanese Political History Materials Room. For the preparation for release, the recorded interviews were copied to cassette tapes (later to CD-R) and shorthand notes were created.

4 Looking back on the release of the sound recordings: Kido Koichi

Let's look back on the release of the sound recordings, taking Kido Koichi for an example.

The interview with Kido Koichi, the Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal of Japan (*Naidaijin*) at the time of the WWII is 17 hours of sound recordings, the longest of the series. The inside story of the collapse of the party Cabinet, the rise of the military at the beginning of the Showa era, the high level political maneuvers to end the war, were told by the closest adviser of the Showa Emperor. After the war, Kido was accused at the Tokyo Tribunal of War Criminals and was given a life sentence. In the trial, his diaries called *Kido Nikki* were used as the most important evidence. Ten years after his release, the diaries were published one after the other as *Kido Koichi Nikki* and *Kido Koichi Kankei Bunsho* by the University Tokyo Press in 1966, which provided a good opportunity for the interview. The main questioners were Yamamoto Yuzo, Goto Ryunosuke and the historian Okubo Toshiaki³, a founder of

³ Regarding the relation between Okubo Toshiaki and the Modern Japanese Political History Materials Room, please refer:
Fujimoto Mamoru, "Kono hito wo shiru: Okubo Toshiaki (Toshiaki Okubo: an essay)," *National Diet Library Monthly Bulletin*, no.606, 2011, pp.17-19
(<http://www.ndl.go.jp/ip/publication/geppo/pdf/geppo1109.pdf>)
Ninomiya Saburo , "Kensei shiryoushitsu zenshi," second and third, *Reference service and*

the Modern Japanese Political History Materials Room and working for the NDL as a part-time researcher at that time. Okubo Toshiaki is a grandchild of Okubo Toshimichi, an elder statesman who did a great service in the change from the Edo to Meiji era. Together with Kido Koichi, who was a relative of Kido Takayoshi and shared a former noble lineage, Okubo Toshiaki had a frank discussion with Kido Koichi in the interview.



<< Interview with Kido Koichi in 1967. People in the photo are clockwise from the far, Kido Koichi, Yamamoto Yuzo, Goto Ryunosuke and Okubo Toshiaki.>>

5 Relation with memoirs and primary documents

Most of the people who were interviewed published their memoirs or other documents around the time of the interview, which means the time of accepting a request for sound recordings was close to that of release of the written text of half of his/her life. In general, the sound recordings remained closed for 30 years after the recording, so in many cases, a considerable part of the content was already revealed through printed publication. In other words, by the time the shorthand notes were created, no shall amount of reference materials were available. Shorthand notes will complete the printed publication like memoirs and are well-informed in point of the accuracy and background information. On the other hand, as a fundamental problem, stories told in the sound recordings are sometimes different from those written in the primary documents including letters, diaries, documents, etc. I would like to refer to this issue later in Chapter 7 “Problems with the sound recordings”.

bibliography, no. 44, 1994

(http://dl.ndl.go.jp/view/download/digidepo_3051373_po_44-01.pdf?contentNo=1), no. 45, 1995

(http://dl.ndl.go.jp/view/download/digidepo_3051383_po_44-01.pdf?contentNo=1)



<<Major memoirs etc. written by interviewees>>

6 Other interview recordings collection held by the NDL

The NDL has made no sound recording since the “Oral History of Politics in Japan.” This chapter introduces other interview recordings in the collection held by the Modern Japanese Political History Materials Room of the NDL.



<< Audio tapes and discs of the “Oral History of Politics in Japan” on the shelves >>

First, the interview recordings made by the NDL form the “Oral History of the formulation of the Constitution of Japan.” A set of interviews was done as collecting materials about process of making the constitution from 1954 to 1957 with nine people engaged in establishing the constitution including Yoshida Shigeru and Kanamori Tokujiro. They have been open to the public since 1977. They are now CD-ROM format. The shorthand notes of a part of the interviews are also provided.

Shidankai sokkiroku, a collection of interviews with key players of the Meiji Restoration by Shidankai, a group of ex-han (feudal domains of the Edo period) officials, is famous for the interview notes in the pre-war era. While the scale is smaller compared to it, we can find *Danwa sokki*, shorthand notes in *Kenseishi hensankai shushu monjo* held by the Modern Japanese Political History Materials Room. This is a collection of *Kenseishi hensankai* made in an effort to compile Modern Japanese Political History since 1937 and includes shorthand notes of the political talks by well-known statesman of the time such as Adachi Kenzo, Ozaki Yukio, Tagawa Daikichiro, Wakatsuki Reijiro, etc (limited use of microfilm version or reprinted edition⁴).

In the post-war era, the NDL has two collections by study groups of modern history: *Kido Nikki kenkyukai kyuzo shiryō* and *Naiseishi kenkyukai kyuzo shiryō*. The former is a record of interviews with ex-military officers by a group led by the political history scholar Oka Yoshitake, and the latter is a record of interviews with mainly public bureaucrats working for the Home Ministry (*Naimusho*) by a group led by the political and public administration scholars Tsuji Kiyooki and Masumi Junnosuke. *Kido Nikki kenkyukai kyuzo shiryō* is available in CD-ROM format converted from audio tapes in addition to shorthand notes and manuscripts of two collections. Besides, *Taikakai kyuzo naisei kankeisha danwa rokuon sokkiroku* is also a valuable collection. This is a compilation of shorthand notes of round-table talks in private for the purpose of editing and publication of *Naimusho shi* by the *Taikakai*, a networking association of former Home Ministry officials. There are also some other materials, such as *Nihon kindai shiryō kenkyukai kyuzo shiryō*, *Ishii Mitsujiro kankei bunsho*, which include interview recordings in the format of audio tapes and CD-ROM.

7 Problems with the sound recordings

In recent years, “Oral history”, or interview recordings with people with inside knowledge has been a core of important primary source material⁵. The Center of Excellence Program (C.O.E), Project for

⁴ Edited and supervised by Hirose Yoshihiro, *Seiji danwa sokkiroku: Kenseishi hensankai kyuzo* Vol.1-10, Yumani shobo, 1998-1999 (NDL call no: GB631-G9)

⁵ Please refer:

Edited by Seisaku kenkyuin seisaku joho purojekuto (Policy information project, National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies), *Seisaku to oraru histori* (Policy and Oral history), Chuokoron sha, 1998 (NDL call no: EA1-G31)

Oral History and Policy Environment, National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies and the Japanese Modern Historical Manuscripts Association, which Mikuriya Takashi and Ito Takashi organized, have actively conducted interview recordings with key players in the decision making of postwar Japan, including political leaders, government officials, and journalists. With the consent of the interviewees, the shorthand notes of these interviews were published soon after the interviews, and they are valuable materials for examining modern Japanese history. Furthermore, the interviews often lead to finding other important materials the interviewees hold.

As already stated in Chapter 5, there are sometimes differences between stories told in the interview recordings and primary source written records. The interview recordings should be examined carefully, and compared with materials already published like memoirs, primary source materials such as letters, diaries, related documents, etc., and evidence by third parties, because it is possible that the interviewees have incorrect memories, manipulate facts or intentionally make false statements. In addition, we should take into account that interview recordings and shorthand notes cannot reproduce the expression on the facial expression and body language which might be significant help to interpret their statements. In addition, if notes or memos of the meeting by the interviewers go open to the public in some way and can be examined in the future, they will be very useful for historical studies.

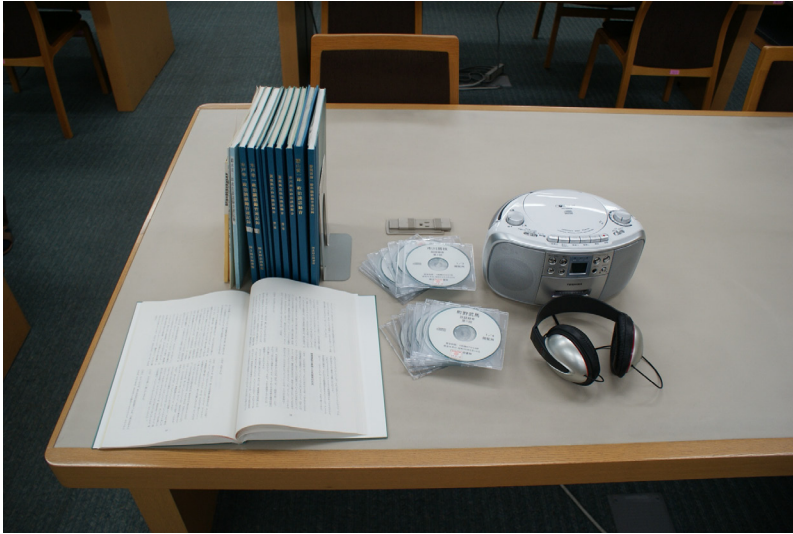
8 Conclusion

I have briefly overviewed the 50-year history of the Oral History of Politics and its issues. Indeed the sound recordings of the interviews with witnesses of history includes some slips of memory and recycled stories, but there is no arguing about their importance in that they tap a live and powerful vein of historical knowledge quite unlike that in the written records and reveal the personality of the speakers. It makes sense that these days the sound recordings are often used to supplement the visual image as the major component in TV programs focusing on modern history.

The Modern Japanese Political History Materials Room regards the sound recordings and written primary sources such as letters, diaries, documents, etc. as integrated modern history material and will continue to make efforts to make them available to the public.

Mikuriya Takashi, *Oraru histori: Gendaishi no tameno kojutsu kiroku* (Oral history: verbal evidence for modern history), Chuokoron shinsha, 2002 (NDL call no: GB561-G96)

Regarding the recent research outcome using interviews with related persons, please refer to: Hattori Ryuji, *Nicchu kokko seijoka: Tanaka Kakuei, Oohira Masayoshi, kanryotachi no chosen* (the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and China: difficult challenges faced to Tanaka Kakuei, Oohira Masayoshi and government officials), Chuokoron shinsha, 2011 (NDL call no: A99-ZC9-J80)



<< CD-ROMs and shorthand notes of Oral history of Politics in Japan >>

In the Modern Japanese Political History Materials Room, you can listen to the CD-ROMs of the Oral History of Politics in Japan on the supplied deck and its shorthand notes are also available. The use of the material is limited to registered users.

To use the collection in the Modern Japanese Political History Materials Room, an application form is required. After entering the room, please fill in your name, contact address, the purpose and theme of your research on the application form provided and hand it in to the counter. Regarding “Oral History of Politics in Japan” and “Oral History of formulation of the Constitution of Japan,” you can find a guide to search on <http://rnavi.ndl.go.jp/kensei/entry/kenseiguide.php> (Research navi > materials in the Modern Japanese Political History Materials Room > Search guide of Modern Japanese Political History Materials) (Japanese only).