Miss Miwa Kai, 12 years old  
Tokyo, 1925

The C.V. Starr East Asian Library reading room has a selection of items on display concerning Miss Kai. These include a sign from the Japanese Language library at the Topaz War Relocation Center in Utah, The Order of the Precious Crown, Wisteria – a medal and hanging scroll she received in 1995, a Waseda University certificate of appreciation, and a collection of first day issue cachets donated to Starr Library in Miss Kai’s honor by Janet Parks, Curator of Drawings & Archives.

https://ojs.lib.byu.edu/spc/index.php/jeal/

Front photograph courtesy of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute, Columbia University.  
Back photograph courtesy of Susan Kai.
Miss Miwa Kai (1913-2011)

Celebrating Her Life

Friday, April 20, 2012
11:00am - 1:00pm
C.V. Starr East Asian Library Reading Room
300 Kent Hall, Columbia University
Miss Miwa Kai

Miss Kai, former Head of the Japanese Collection at Columbia University Libraries, was 98 years old when she passed away on December 10, 2011. She was born in San Francisco in 1913, and was living in San Francisco at the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. The following year she was sent to the Topaz War Relocation Center, an internment camp in Utah. In 1944, after being released from the camp, she was hired by the Columbia University Library as a typist. In 1945 Miss Kai catalogued and then became Head of the Japanese Collection. She served as librarian from then until 1983. She worked strenuously to develop the Japanese Collection, succeeding in making it the superb collection it remains today. In the years that followed she worked with and trained many Japanese librarians sent to Columbia by their home institutions in Japan, including the National Diet Library and the Waseda University Library. Miss Kai’s work as a librarian left a profound impact not only on the Columbia community but on all librarians and scholars who worked in Japanese Studies before and after 1945.

In 1983, to mark her almost four decades of service, a metal plaque was dedicated to Miss Kai in the reading room of C.V. Starr East Asian Library, and a cherry tree was planted in her honor outside Kent Hall. Despite her official retirement that year, she continued to work tirelessly, serving until very recently as researcher and bibliographic assistant to the University Committee on Asia and the Middle East and carrying on many projects of her own at the same time. She continued to assist visiting scholars with their research and attended special lectures whenever possible, always sitting in the front row. After retirement, she published several catalogs that have been great resources not only for librarians but also for researchers. Almost until the last day of her remarkable life she was writing a comprehensive history of the Japanese Collection in the East Asian Library.

In 1995, the Japanese Government conferred on Miss Kai the Order of the Precious Crown, Wisteria. Before she became a librarian, Miss Kai was a talented pianist. Starting from the Beethoven Prize she received at the Piano Playing Tournament in San Francisco in 1927 at the age of only fourteen, she went on to win first prize at the Music Concourse in Japan in 1932. In 1937, she represented Japan as a participant in the Third International Frederick Chopin Piano Competition in Warsaw, Poland.

We will all dearly miss Miss Kai for her energy and wit, and we will remember her fondly with a glass of her favorite drink, Wild Turkey.
Memorial Service Program

The Life of Miss Miwa Kai

Sachié Noguchi
Japanese Studies Librarian, C.V. Starr East Asian Library

Tributes

Robert P.W. Hymes
Chair, Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures,
H. Walpole Carpentier Professor of Chinese History

Wm. Theodore de Bary
John Mitchell Mason Professor Emeritus and Provost Emeritus

Paul J. Anderer
Fred and Fannie Mack Professor of Humanities,
Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures

Damon E. Jaggars
Associate University Librarian for Collections and Services

Noritada Otaki (remarks read by Damon Jaggars)
Librarian of the National Diet Library of Japan

Makoto Nakamoto
Administrative Director, Waseda University Library, Japan

Beate Sirota Gordon
Former Performing Arts Director of the Japan Society and of the Asia Society

Jim Cheng
Director, C.V. Starr East Asian Library

Kenneth Kai
Nephew of Miss Kai

Susan Kai
Niece of Miss Kai

Reflections

guests of the memorial service

Reception

Following the remarks, please join us for light fare in the C.V. Starr East Asian Library reading room

Memorial donations in Ms. Miwa Kai's honor to support the Japanese Studies Collection may be sent to The Trustees of Columbia University in the City of New York c/o Butler Library Room 6M59, 535 West 114th Street, New York, NY 10027 with “Miwa Kai Fund” on the memo line.