



EAST ASIAN LIBRARY RESOURCES GROUP OF AUSTRALIA

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Research report: How Japanese academic libraries are dealing with the change to electronic resources and the consequent issues?

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I was very happy to be selected as one of the participants in the “Japan specialist workshop: Access to the culture and society of contemporary Japan” in Tokyo from 14-22 February 2012. I had the opportunity to find out the present situation of electronic resources in academic libraries in Japan, and to update my information retrieval skills in Japanese. I was also looking for possible strategies to deal with the space problem in my library’s collection, and was wondering whether any Japanese publishers were selling Japanese electronic books for the academic market or not? I also wanted to find out whether academic libraries in Japan were purchasing Japanese electronic books or not?

The trend in academic libraries is towards becoming “bookless”, and Monash University library is no different. We are shifting the resource selection policy toward to “electronic preferred” and replacing volumes and holdings of print books, journals and newspapers. I can see there are many benefits in moving toward an e-preferred policy as there is no need for assigning call number and it saves floor space. The library has been dealing with many aggregators and publishers with plenty of differing packages of English electronic books. Monash now holds approximately 40,000 volumes of electronic books.

At Monash I receive many inquiries regarding ebooks at the Asian Studies Research Collection and other service points. “Why can’t I download the ebook? Why can’t I print just the page I want? Why can’t I connect and view the ebook?” Electronic resources are believed to be all viewable, printable, downloadable and emailable. Most users think that online resources means “owning” and easily forget that it is merely “accessing” and copyright conditions still apply. Access and usage conditions are all different from publishers to aggregators, and it depends on how the library purchased the resource. Price varies on whether it is for a single user or multiple users are permitted. System requirements (PDF, html etc.) for viewing are different. Permission for page printing and downloading is different. I found it very difficult and time consuming to deal with these inquiries as each ebook has different regulations and conditions of use, and users think ebooks are all the same.

However when researching Japanese electronic books, I found hardly any information. I had become curious to meet and hear how Japanese academic librarians are dealing with the change to electronic resources and the consequent issues.

The workshop

The workshop itself was very well organized with a tight schedule. It started with a warm welcoming reception opened by Mr Mitsuaki Amino, the director general of Administrative Department from the National Diet Library and Ms Izumi Koide, the director of Resource Center for the History of Entrepreneurship, the Shibusawa Eiichi Memorial Foundation. It reassured me that I will have a great responsibility to support researchers of Japanese studies when I return back to Australia. It was then followed by 4 days of seminars, 2 days research and a day for final presentations, a review session and a farewell party. All 10 participants, 5 Japanese studies researchers and 5 information specialist librarians from around the world were staying in the beautiful accommodation and a Japanese garden at the International House of Japan.

During the seminars we were picked up by a microbus and were taken safely to the National Diet Library to attend seminars. I had a chance to learn more about their service and to use databases in the National Diet Library. I was especially impressed with the introduction to information and research tools for the humanities. This is extremely important knowledge for librarians to acquire, indeed I was quite ignorant until this workshop. The importance of understanding the resource itself and regularly updating one's knowledge of it is a vital part of the librarian's job. I re-learned that connecting users to the most appropriate resource they need is the core role of a librarian.

The interviews

I visited two Japanese academic libraries and interviewed several librarians in order to find out more about the acquisition and management of electronic resources. I selected Waseda University Central Library and Keio University Mita Media Center as they both have Japanese electronic books in their library catalogues. I gained permission to interview library staff who deals with electronic resources in both libraries, and they kindly took me on tours of their library despite the high security restrictions during the entrance exam period.

It was interesting to find out that library spaces had been modernised to accommodate more student learning space. There were open areas for catalogue terminals and computers, and many powerpoints on student study tables. Books and journals seem to be disappearing from view in Japanese libraries as well. Like Monash, subscriptions to print journals generally cease once the online version becomes available. Waseda university library has an ongoing project for digitizing their rare books collection. This is nearly complete. They have an automated storage system capable for holding 500,000 items. Waseda university library is acutely aware of the need for librarians to support student research, especially overseas students. The library is also aware that there is a lack of librarians to teach information literacy classes.

How do libraries purchase Japanese ebooks?

Most of the electronic books these libraries have purchased or subscribed to were English ebooks and there was a notable lack of Japanese ebooks. Although both libraries did subscribe to some Japanese ebooks through an overseas aggregator's Japanese agent, it seems that there is not a big library market for Japanese publishers, and those that are selling are within a limited scope of subject areas.

Currently there is no particular policy for ebook selection in either library. They purchase both print and electronic versions if available. It is expected that this will change as more Japanese ebooks are being published. Library uptake will depend on the platforms and prices publishers offer.

What are the issues of dealing with ebooks?

The advantage of shifting from print to ebooks is that they do not take up space and can be accessed off campus at any time. It is also easy to collect statistics for the library. The disadvantage is that it is hard to manage and to deal with the present array of licences and conditions.

Purchasing ebooks by package is one of the popular ways for Waseda university library, and one of the benefits is that the bibliographic records are provided and linked with the Library Management System (LMS). However some titles within the package might be swapped by suppliers against the library's wishes, and when this happens the library needs to adjust the records in the LMS. Waseda university library is aware of missed and misplaced records coming into the LMS, and this takes extra time to correct manually by library staff as well. Keio university library experienced purchasing duplicated titles in different packages which had been ordered across campuses. This occurred by following the procedure for print books and they had to change the order system for ebooks by centralizing so that they can monitor and avoid purchasing duplicated titles within the university. Purchasing title by title is also becoming popular and the number of humanities titles has increased recently. However Keio university library expressed the view that it is inconvenient to use Japanese ebooks purchased through an overseas aggregator and that none of the ebooks are allowed to be downloaded to use under the regulations.

User statistics and feedback

Most users seem to be happy with using and borrowing print books. Both libraries told me that there is little feedback about ebooks. Maybe this is because most books are in print and there are not many Japanese ebooks available, and both libraries are promoting online journals and newspapers rather than ebooks. Users are becoming more familiar with online journals and newspapers. Both libraries emphasised that students tend to use online databases when it was introduced by their lecturers in classes and it appears to be high in use when students need to write reports, assignments and preparing for exams. Business and economic databases become very popular especially in June as students prepare for their job hunting, and it becomes a problem when the limit for the number of users is reached. There is a huge demand from users wishing for a federated search function across newspapers. Current Japanese newspaper databases are sold by different companies.

Conclusion

Japanese library users are becoming more familiar with online databases and libraries are finding the usage statistics increasing every year. However ebooks are in little demand as yet, possibly because libraries are not promoting them heavily. Users are still comfortable using print books rather than ebooks. To sell Japanese ebooks in the market will be a big challenge for Japanese publishers as they are still relying on overseas aggregators. However, there is a great expectation regarding how Japanese publishers will sell ebooks to libraries and other institutions in the near future.

Overall, my attendance at this workshop was very valuable and fulfilled my interest in finding out about the present situation of Japanese ebook. I found that as a librarian developing a Japanese collection in Australia, I thought I did not know any publishers selling Japanese ebooks but in fact when I visited I understood that Japanese publishers were not selling ebooks directly to library market yet. They have just established the company, Digital Publishing Initiatives Japan Co., Ltd, to expand and deliver electronic publishing business in Japan. I will keep monitoring the situation and keep contacts with my new network in order to exchange information in the future. I will cherish this precious experience as I had a great chance to meet other Japanese librarians at the workshop and they inspired me during our intensive conversations. I hope this workshop will continue and develop supporting structures for Japanese studies researchers and librarians around the world.

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Reception party opened by Mr Mitsuaki Amino, the director general of Administrative Department, National Diet Library.



Participants keenly observing items taken from the NDL's Modern Japanese Political History Materials Room.