

CURRENT TRENDS IN JAPANESE STUDIES: CHANGES AND NEW DIRECTIONS REFLECTED IN THEIR RESOURCES

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Ms. Koide's talk was given on 4th May 1995 in the Conference Room at Monash University to members of the Asia Pacific Special Interest Group of the Australian Library and Information Association, post-graduate students and academic staff of Victorian tertiary institutions.

It is my honour to speak to my fellow librarians and faculty members in the Melbourne area. I am the librarian of the International House of Japan (IHJ) in Tokyo. The International House is a private, nonprofit organisation incorporated in 1952 for the purpose of promoting cultural exchange and intellectual cooperation between the peoples of Japan and those of other countries. Its library maintains a 20,000-volume collection of English-language books which concern Japan and on international relations in general, but which is particularly strong in the social sciences and humanities. Our 450-title periodical collection includes all basic Japan-related English-language journals plus several important academic journals in the social sciences. I write columns in our quarterly publication, *IHJ Bulletin* and its Japanese version *Kokusai Bunka Kaikan Kaiho*, introducing ten to twenty books selected from our new arrivals with annotations. Most of the patrons of the library are people in academia, either teaching on Japan or doing Japan-related research for doctoral degrees in universities all over the world.

Today, I am going to speak about current trends and changes in Japanese studies and the resources supporting them. I will throw out some thoughts on the desirable direction of Japanese collections and East Asian libraries, and would like to invite you to discuss ideas for the future of our profession.

East Asian library and area studies

Housed largely in academic institutions, East Asian libraries were initiated and have developed in order to meet the needs of their parent institutions. In most cases those needs are to support the study and teaching of area studies. The Japanese collection of the University of Melbourne is one of the few examples of something originally started in order to support Chinese, rather than Japanese, studies. Their primary users are not journalists writing articles on Japan for general readers, nor government officials to be seated at a table for negotiation. Rather, area studies in academic institutions provide a knowledge base on foreign countries, on which journalists, government officials,

businessmen, and other professionals, can rely when they need to deal with such countries in their respective professions.

As most East Asian collections have developed to accompany the increasing academic research on the region, the collections themselves reflect the contemporary interests and needs of academia since the outset of such studies in the latter half of the 19th century. Influenced by changes in research interests, the fields emphasised in acquisition have also been changing: most East Asian libraries with a longer history started building collections based on language, history and culture; many have later added social sciences as a collection priority.

Recent Changes in Japanese Studies

Recently area studies, particularly Japanese studies, are experiencing a fundamental change. Professor Patricia Steinhoff of the University of Hawaii has described how American Japanese specialists have been pushed out of their distant but cozy corner of traditional Japanese studies into the arena of the academic mainstream. She termed this phenomenon 'the loss of irrelevance'. In discussing its influence, she referred to changes in conditions regarding research outcomes¹:

"There will be a growing role for American Japan specialists as the producers of primary research on Japan upon which other scholars depend. Such research has to meet certain conditions of relevance, however, which may be different from the standards by which it is judged within the American Japanese Studies community. First, it must deal with a subject that non-Japan specialists want to know about, and second it must relate to the current theoretical paradigms that non-Japan specialists are using, at least to the extent of containing useable information. And third, its publication must be positioned so that the non-specialist researcher or researcher's student assistant can find it through normal library search strategies. That in turn may push researchers toward the methods and procedures of the American academic mainstream, in order to make their work more attractive to mainstream journals."

While Japanese studies are in the process of mainstreaming, two sets of factors have increased their importance: one is the tension between area studies and disciplines, and the other is relationship between foreign research and indigenous research.

¹ Patricia Steinhoff "Japanese Studies in the United States: The Loss of Irrelevance," *IHJ Bulletin* Vol.13, No.1, Winter 1993 p.8.

In most American universities, professors belong to departments which are usually divided by discipline, such as history, fine arts, political science, and economics. Courses in Japanese studies are provided by such organisations like centres for Japanese studies, institutes for Japanese studies, and Japanese studies programs, which represent interdisciplinary activities in Japanese studies in various parts of the university. Interestingly, this is not always so in Australia and Great Britain. The Australian National University has a Faculty of Asian Studies; La Trobe University has a School of Asian Studies; Monash University has both a Department of Japanese Studies and a Japanese Studies Centre. It seems to me that they take a comparatively holistic approach as far as organisation is concerned. I think, however, that Japanese studies in these countries are also deepening their relationship with other disciplines, and the three points that Steinhoff mentioned, namely, changes in subject, theory and publication of research, are relevant in their case as well.

While the tension between area studies and disciplines has already been noticeable for a few decades, changes in the relationship between foreign studies and indigenous studies are more recent. An increasing number of Japanese scholars write on Japan in English while more works on Japan by foreign scholars are translated into Japanese and/or discussed by Japanese scholars. This is the case even for Japanese history: decades ago, none of the Japanese scholars of Japanese history, especially those with a nationalistic bias, could have imagined that they had something to learn from foreign scholars about Japanese history. Exchange between Japanese studies in Japan and overseas has intensified, through international conferences participated in by both Japanese and foreign scholars, through collaboration in research projects, and through studying abroad. This is important because indigenous and foreign researchers often have respective innate premises, and further exchange will enhance the quality of research with broader views and deeper insights.

Another trend which has influenced resources is an increasing interest in contemporary Japan. New groups of people hitherto indifferent to Japanese studies and without specialised language skills have become interested in Japan: scholars in various disciplines want to do comparative study, and researchers outside of academia want to learn about Japan for doing business or negotiation with Japan. The increase in the number of non-Japan specialists without Japanese-language ability but with interest in Japan-related research may be partly due to Japan's expanding presence in the international scenes or to the general popularity of Japan-related research.

Changes in Demands for Resources

The change in climate of Japanese studies influences demands for research materials in some aspects. First, it creates a demand for English-language resources on Japan and for closer links of English and Japanese language

materials. The information accumulated in an East Asian library cannot be easily accessed by people without Japanese language ability. On the other hand, the more Japanese studies develops, the more it results in research accumulated in English-language publications, and this knowledge base in English is easily used for further research by non-Japan specialists. Most English-language materials on Japan, however, consist of secondary sources rather than first-hand materials for research.

Let us consider the relationship between the process of research and language ability in Japanese studies. The process of research moves in a developmental spiral sequence which begins with exploring the sources and secondary works, goes on to make an original survey and observations, an analysis, records the outcome, and starts again with this recorded outcome being used as a secondary work. Looking at the research process in area studies in terms of the language ability used for each stage, the vernacular language is the language of source materials while English is that of the secondary works. Whether researchers depend on documentary records or contemporary interviews and observations, serious students in area studies must have a command of the vernacular language in order to approach the research subject and to gather raw data. On the other hand, they usually make the results of their research public in the English language because they belong to the academic community of the West where scholarly communication between researchers is generally made in the English language. Consequently, a knowledge base of area studies is formed and accumulates in the English language, which largely consist of secondary sources. Although there is an increasing number of source materials in English published, such as Japanese government documents and translation of historical documents, their quality and quantity are still limited.

As interest in Japan rises, chances that researchers without language skills want some knowledge on Japan also increase. These non-Japan specialists often seek certain information regardless of the language it is written in, as they can usually manage to get a translation if they can pinpoint the desired material. An East Asian collection could be fully utilised along with the knowledge base in the English language even by people without specialised language skills, if there is a linked system of bibliographic information which enables the researcher to go back and forth between English and Japanese language materials. This linked system can be an expert reference librarian for Japanese studies, or an enhanced, sophisticated information system envisioned as library catalogue of the 21st century by some American librarians².

The second major change in demand for resources is a rising need for the so-called "grey" literature. The need for primary research among Japan specialists

² See Carol Mandel, "Library Catalogs in the 21st Century," *ARL: A Bimonthly Newsletter of Research Library Issues and Actions* 164 (Sept. 1992), pp.1-4.

and a mounting interest in contemporary Japan contribute to this tendency. As you know, grey literature consists of publications which are not available through regular commercial channels, including government documents, reports of various organisations such as think tanks and industrial associations, exhibition catalogues, and so on. Usually they are not collected so comprehensively by university libraries in Japan, and perhaps the situation is similar in Japanese collections overseas. Librarians search such kinds of publications often on demand. They have difficulties in finding them, because bibliographic control of grey literature is not well organised in Japan, even for the government documents which comprise the major component of grey literature.

The third change is that of the increasing need for electronic resources on Japan. This expectation has been intensifying along with the prevalence of electronic media in English language materials. Yet there is a big gap between what is expected and what is available. There are hardware difficulties and software problems. The University of Melbourne is the first outside Japan to have installed Japanese CD-ROMs in the local environment. Ms. Sakaguchi, who made great efforts for their installation, explained the process as a "nightmare". Even the Library of Congress in the United States uses a Japanese machine and softwares for J-bisc, which is a Japanese national bibliography on CD-ROM.

There is another issue of particular concern regarding Japanese electronic resources, which currently lies unnoticed behind the larger issue of hardware and software. It is the weakness in availability of subject access to information. Subject catalogues have not been prevalent in Japanese libraries. I suppose the pioneers in modern Japanese librarianship thought that the need for subject access might be satisfied with the shelflist which was organised by classification. It might have worked effectively when the number of materials were not overwhelming. Today, however, researchers rely heavily on subject access in seeking information. In contrast to printed media, electronic materials require special attention to the means of access, because the information content cannot be seen at a glance, and it should be always retrieved. The weakness in subject access has been so deeply embedded in the information infrastructure that I doubt most people are just satisfied with a small improvement. When the materials are digitised, it is possible to search on every word besides the first word in the title. As you know, if you would like to make an effective subject search, some means of terminology control is necessary, be it thesaurus, dictionary, classification, or whatever. Many producers of Japanese electronic information resources are unaware of this fact, saying subject analysis costs are too expensive, or they have other excuses. As the unit of information sought becomes smaller from an entire book to a piece of information contained in a publication, we need more sophisticated subject access mechanisms. Generally speaking, Japanese information resources require more background knowledge for the user to make use of them than American counterparts, which are

usually made user-friendly. I hope this situation in Japan may be improved somehow.

A new direction for the vernacular collection: a window for international scholarly communication

There is a mounting need for information on East Asia as the world becomes smaller and interdependence between countries becomes crucial. More particularly, there is a need for information on developments and experiences in East Asia, as it is a most active region for innovations in many areas, such as environmental issues and alternatives to the Western path of modernisation. This latter sort of information is not easily found in the East Asian library because it collects books on East Asia, rather than research done in East Asia or East Asian scholarship on other countries, which may be of interest to other researchers rather than to East Asian specialists. This is a possible additional sphere of the East Asian collection of the future.

The East Asian library has traditionally housed research source materials on East Asia in the vernacular languages and serviced scholars in East Asian studies. It can potentially be a clearing house for information on East Asia available in any language, with enhanced retrieval measures integrated into the main search system operated in the English language and easily used by the ordinary researcher; then its users can also include those who are interested in East Asia, regardless of language ability. Furthermore, it can be an indispensable repertory of useful information and knowledge originating in East Asia and only available in East Asian languages, if collections be so strengthened, sophisticated retrieval made available, and access guaranteed through networks. The future East Asian library will then reach a much wider range of potential users outside of area studies.

Neither a repository of materials in exotic languages nor a ghetto of area specialists — the East Asian library has a great potential for being a gateway of scholarly information exchange in support of an international scholarly communication made across discipline, language and culture boundaries. The East Asian library will then be one of the important constituents of the social infrastructure for human learning.