

ACCESSING INFORMATION FROM JAPAN : REFERENCE AND USER SERVICES

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As a Japanese Studies Librarian at Monash University Library, my work area covers Japanese studies, Japanese language learning and language teaching. I provide assistance for academics, exchange scholars, exchange students, post graduate students, undergraduate students, primary and secondary language teachers and community members.

Client Needs

Inquiries by students include: the name of the Japanese Haiku master Basho's teacher; why Australia is loosing a share in Japanese tourist market; types of chocolate in the Japanese confectionery industry; how children returning from English speaking countries cope with English classes in the Japanese education system.

Researchers and many of the postgraduate students usually know what they need. My role is to locate the articles and materials; arrange them to obtain the articles/materials through ILL or to purchase them. We locate the materials using the following steps: checking local catalogues; checking Victorian holding such as Coolcat; checking national holding such as ABN and NCJK; then checking overseas holdings.

When a PhD student needed an air photo of Borneo during the Japanese occupation, all the immediate resources were exhausted and no satisfactory photo could be found. I posted a mail to EASTLIB mailing list inquiring anyone knew of a solution. My mail was forwarded to a Map librarians mailing list. The student was very pleased with the results.

Limited resources

It is necessary to ask clients when the information is required and how far they have searched already. I may ask the student what is the word requirement of the assignment. The library has limited material, human and financial resources and sometimes students only have limited time. There is of course a dilemma where we cannot supply all what student needs because of our limited resources.

Using the Internet to supplement existing resources

Although the Internet has been a great resource to find information, I was quite sceptical for some time about its use besides mailing lists and casual use. Reasons were that it took too long and the questionable credibility of

the information located. However, I had to change my attitude when I had the following experience last year.

A master's student needed articles from two particular newspapers, *Ryukyu Shinpo* and *Okinawa Times*. She was researching the assault of an Okinawa schoolgirl by United States soldiers and there was no library in Australia subscribing to these newspapers. I searched the Internet as a last resort and found a homepage on that incident which included newspaper reports. I felt then that the Internet could be a supplement to print format if one knew how to search efficiently and effectively.

Everyone agrees that the Internet is also good for up-to-date news and current topics. Election results, for example, can be found in real time.

For researchers, some Japanese information centres offer databases free through the Internet. The National Diet Library (<http://www.ndl.go.jp/>), NACSIS (<http://www.nacsis.ac.jp/nacsis.f-index.html>), National Institute of Japanese Literature (<http://www.nijl.ac.jp/>) all provide searchable databases either on a test or trial basis. Commercial information providers offer the net based databases at reasonable subscription rates.

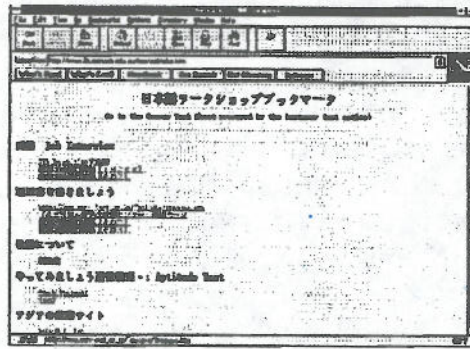
Example 1: Nichigai Web service



Other uses of the Internet

A Monash lecturer requested me to prepare a library class for his Japanese business communication course. The theme was "job hunting". His objective was to enhance students' Japanese writing and reading skills through the Internet. My objective was to find web sites to cater for these needs and compile a web page to supplement the library's print resources. The page consists of: how to write a *curriculum vitae* (CV), information on aptitude tests, job agencies, job vacancies, and so on. This page became popular among overseas students from Japan.

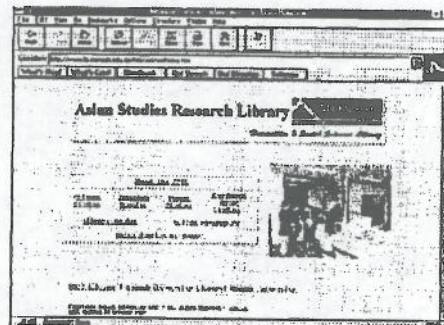
Example 2: Japanese job page



Issues on the Internet

Issues arise concerning Japanese information if one wants to search the Internet, such as: technical issues of how to read Japanese using your computer; the time consuming nature of "net surfing"; the lack of guarantee of finding anything; the credibility of documents found; lack of certainty as to what exactly is available on the Internet. To overcome these issues we refer to search engines, subscribe to Internet magazines, and watch newspapers carefully for the new developments.

Example 3: Monash University Asian Studies Research Library Homepage
(<http://www.lib.monash.edu.au/hss/asrl/asrlhome.htm>)



Conclusion

It seems so easy to rely on the Internet. Some clients tend to think that there is no information on a topic if they cannot find any information on the Internet. I advise the clients to go back to the print resources in the library, as they are more reliable and there is easy access. Whatever resources we use, the problems for me as Japanese Studies Librarian is always the question of whether I have provided the clients with the most useful and appropriate answers or not. The Japan Foundation and National Diet Library started to conduct a training programme for overseas Japanese librarians in 1997. I was fortunate enough to be selected to attend. It was extensive and in-depth training including reference tools, developments in digital information in Japan. I thought the training provided me with the confidence in what I have been doing as well as the direction we need to head for.