A Symposium on "The International Flow of Japanese Information: Considering the Infrastructure of Japanese Studies"

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A SYMPOSIUM ON "THE INTERNATIONAL FLOW OF JAPANESE INFORMATION: CONSIDERING THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF JAPANESE STUDIES"

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During the third Training Program of Japanese Studies Librarians, a symposium entitled "The International Flow of Japanese Information: Considering the Infrastructure of Japanese Studies" was held on the afternoon of February 3, 1999, at the International House of Japan. It was organized by the Japan Foundation and the International House of Japan, with the cooperation of the National Diet Library and the National Center for Science Information Systems. The language of the symposium was Japanese.

The purpose of this symposium was two-fold. The first aim was geared toward Japanese people in information professions. Contrary to what might be expected overseas, Japanese studies is not well known in Japan, particularly as to those who are involved, and what are their topics and methodology, as well as general trends in the field. This is one of the causes of indifference in Japan about the international flow of Japanese scholarly information: the Japanese people just don't expect or imagine how extensively and how precisely they are studied abroad.

The second aim of the symposium was intended for the participants in the JF-NDL Training Program. As Ms. McVey reported, there were twelve Japanese studies librarians invited from twelve countries. In their usual working situation at their respective home institutions it is difficult for them to grasp the grand design of scholarly communication relevant to Japanese studies. Thus, the second aim of the symposium is to help the participants understand the information infrastructure of Japanese studies.

The symposium consisted of two parts. The first part was a keynote speech by Professor Patricia Steinhoff of the University of Hawaii, entitled "Japanese Studies in the U.S.: Its Conditions and Characteristics." The second part was a panel discussion entitled "Considering the Information Infrastructure of Japanese Studies."

In her keynote speech, Professor Steinhoff gave a summary of the survey of Japanese Studies done by the AAS in 1993-94, the analysis of which was published as Japanese Studies in the United States: The 1990s in 1996. As she is a sociologist, she observed Japan specialists as a group and analyzed the organization and conditions of Japan studies. She pointed out changes and characteristics in scholarship on Japan, particularly specialization, internationalization, and the spread of Japan specialists.

Regarding issues concerning research materials, including primary-source materials, she described a recent tendency as follows: As doctoral candidates and active scholars choose new themes of research on Japan, such as women, minorities, environmental issues, and internationalization, they require new types of materials for their research. Patterns of acquiring and accessing research materials differ in the humanities and the social sciences. As the field of Japanese studies develops more, the necessity for research materials gets more complicated, particularly because of the changes in theme and methodology in the
various disciplines of Japanese studies. Several questions were raised, mostly about research materials, after the speech.

The panel discussion was moderated by Mr. Shozo Nakano of the NDL. The first speaker was Mr. Hidetoshi Takenaka of the University of Tokyo Press, who gave a talk on academic publishing in Japan. He mentioned that publishing plays a role in placing a study in the history of human knowledge, so it is a future-oriented endeavor. Although academic publishing accordingly can be said to transcend time and space, it is a reality that Japanese scholarly publications will not easily cross national borders, mainly because of the language of the publication.

The second panelist was Prof. Hitoshi Inoue of NACSIS, who suggested that Japanese studies in the U.S., for example, should be considered in a pair with American studies in Japan. Referring to his own experience of doing research on Ruth Benedict, an American anthropologist, he emphasized the importance of the inspirational power that real objects or actual sites (fields) exercise over the researcher. He argued that researchers need "library plus something" for their research, and that this "something" may be field work or archives.

The third panelist was Mr. Takayasu Miyakawa, formerly with the Mitsubishi Research Institute. He focused on Japanese studies and Japan information, and pointed out the breadth of so-called "Japanese information," spanning from newspapers, books, and journals, to music CDs, movies, and television programs. Consumers of Japanese information also range from students to businessmen. Although access and document delivery of Japanese research materials has been improved, the speed and degree of improvement is still very low. He understood that recent trends in search of research materials by Japan specialists has extended to highly specialized materials including micro data such as a list of the salaries which are actually paid in a factory. This kind of data is, and perhaps will continue to be, hard to access.

The fourth panelist was Ms. Kuniko Yamada McVey of the Reischauer Institute of Harvard University, who discussed organization of and access to materials. Although there exist vast amounts of documents in various institutions such as the NDL, National Archives of Japan, National Institute of Japanese Literature, International Research Center for Japanese Studies, Diplomatic Record Office and Kyoto University's Library, there is no standard way of cataloging the documents, and no archivists nor bibliographers at such a level. The conflict between use and preservation of documents may be alleviated by using electronic media, as we can see in the American Memory Project. If there were to be developed a good and effective system of information supply to people in Japan, Japan specialists overseas could almost instantly enjoy the fruits of it also. Overseas Japan specialists want effective tools to search for information and a plain system for access.

The fifth panelist was Ms. Misako Wakabayashi-Oh of the University of Heidelberg. There are in Germany twenty-four Japanese collections in twenty-one universities, and about 3,600 students at the master's level take Japanese studies. These collections focus on the subjects in which their faculty members specialize, and thus libraries coordinate according to subjects in collection building. The students heavily rely on collections elsewhere through InterLibrary Loan.
The last panelist was Mr. Tsuneharu Gonnami of the University of British Columbia. He explained about the UBC Library showing some slides. His presentation gave an actual image of a Japanese studies library to the audience, most of whom were unfamiliar with such libraries overseas.

Several questions were raised. They concerned the amount of export of Japanese publications, types of necessary information infrastructure besides the library, similarities and differences between archivists and librarians, and the relationship between Japan information for top political leaders and Japanese studies.

The proceedings of the symposium are scheduled to be published in Japanese by the Japan Foundation.

There were altogether about one hundred participants. Many were librarians from national, academic, and special libraries, also library science professors; some participants came from archives, others from publishers, book dealers, and the press. A reception following the symposium provided a wonderful occasion for both trainees in the JF-NDL program and people in information professions in Japan to meet and exchange opinions in person.

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