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ISSUES ON JAPANESE GREY LITERATURE COLLECTIONS: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE JAPAN DOCUMENTATION CENTER

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Introduction

This paper focuses on several serious issues in handling Japanese grey literature, based on the author's experience of the past five years in the Japan Documentation Center (JDC). The Center was created as a part of the Asian Division of the United States Library of Congress (LC) and began functioning in March 1994. It was established with a special mission to collect the most current grey literature on Japan from primary sources in Japan. The collection is concentrated on policy-related information that covers the areas of politics, economics, business and industry, society, the environment and national defense. Its functions are to process this information quickly, create bibliographical access, and disseminate the information in the most timely and effective manner. Thus, the issues the Center faces may not necessarily be identical with those of academic and research libraries. However, the author believes that some of those issues on grey literature are of mutual concern.

I believe it might be helpful to consider six specific issues under three broad categories. Some issues are intrinsic to the nature of the grey literature. They would include:

1) Scope of users
2) The language of literature

Some are based on the situation in which the grey literature collection is a part of a traditional library as a whole. They are as follows:

3) Effect of political changes in need/value of literature
4) Ephemerality of literature vs. historical value of research materials

Lastly, some relate to other issues which emanate from practices of the issuing organization. In this category, the following are included:

5) Printed vs. electronically disseminated information
6) Need for archiving

There are numerous other major, as well as minor issues, a major one being copyright related matters. However, this paper will not deal with them, because such matters are dealt with in a different arena and discussion of them here would not be very productive. They will be touched upon, as related to my topics being discussed.
Scope of Users

Unless an agency is a long established one and well known for collection of grey literature, the process of reaching users and educating them about the grey literature collection can be rather difficult. In case of the JDC, which began from a zero base five years ago, developing a systematic approach to making the JDC and its services known has been a fundamental issue. In spite of the fact that there has been much expressed need for this kind of service in the United States and that the JDC was established by the directive of the Congress, once the project was started, we found it extremely difficult to locate users who needed the particular kinds of information that can be obtained only as grey literature.

Academic and most research libraries can concentrate on serving their relatively homogeneous constituents. In a Japanese studies library, for example, expected users are the Japanologists or those focusing on Asian area studies, including scholars, researchers, librarians and students. In case of the Library of Congress, however, users are not limited to the researchers within a number of special disciplines, and furthermore the JDC’s services extend to everyone from members of Congress to academics to the general public.

Characteristics of user groups, and issues

Among the various categories of user groups, academic researchers in Japanese studies were the only group the Center could target fairly effectively because they have a few established networks and can be reached through them. The JDC has utilized two major types of networks: Japan related Listserv’s, each of which include Japan scholars, researchers, librarians, and students though not limited to them; and professional associations, such as the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) and Council for East Asian Libraries (CEAL). The JDC sends messages and updates regularly to these Listserv’s to inform their members of notable activities and new developments. The JDC staff also make presentations and demonstrations at meetings of these associations and submit articles on JDC to their organizational publications. According to our informal studies, 39% of the document requests and reference inquiries came from the academic community. The majority of these researchers focus their studies on Japan in fields such as political science, sociology, business and economics.

Some 60% of the JDC’s users are non-academic and can be broadly considered under the general public category. These users are located all over the world and span a broad range of disciplines. Furthermore, they are spread in a very thin layer. The population which needs and can make use of Japanese information, particularly in the Japanese language, has never been high, and there is no easy way to effectively pinpoint who and where they are. They include lawyers, technical experts, exporters and other various people who happen to deal with matters Japanese among numerous other subjects. Because of the lack of homogeneity in the users -- some do not even think about libraries as an information source for their needs and some are not library users at all -- the JDC has considered different ways to target different user types. Once the JDC home page was established in 1997 as part of the Library of Congress home page, it was much easier for users to learn of a specialized center like JDC through their own web searching.
Another point which should be noted is that most of those users in the general public category are one-time users or extremely infrequent users, because they do not solely concentrate on Japan-related matters. Their information needs are not constant. Therefore, in a sense, nurturing and encouraging such irregular users seems wasteful, because they do not need such information until the next time (if there is a next time) that they might deal with another Japan-related matter. A particular law firm is a good example. It has learned about our services and when it deals with a case pertaining to Japan, it finds the JDC very useful and makes good use of our resources. Just when the firm takes on Japan-related cases, however, may be arbitrary. As another example, an exporter appreciated the information we supplied very much because he needed to have that specific information in order to begin exporting a certain item to Japan. Once that objective was accomplished, there was no further need to contact the JDC. Even in the Congress, the concerns with Japan are not continuous, though we regularly remind them of our services.

**Outreach to Users**

Outreach efforts at the JDC are endless. We have carried out the usual public relations steps, such as distributing printed materials and issuing announcements in Listserv’s. We routinely send out newsletters and brochures to academic and research institutions, think tanks, organizations, and agencies in various countries; we send them to individual Congressional members and their staffs as well as to committees that deal with Japan-related and international issues. We also maintain a mailing list of previous users and other notable individuals who may have even a slight interest in contemporary Japan and public policy issues.

Members of the JDC staff have presented papers on the Center, often accompanied by demonstrations, and have conducted separate workshops, at various local, regional, national, and international conferences, meetings, and discussion sessions. We made active efforts to make professional linkages to organizations to be invited to present the JDC to their members and at their meetings.

The JDC has held several international conferences at the Library (1994, 1995, 1996, 1997), reaching out to targeted and potential users through both printed and electronic means. The JDC has been successful in bringing together experts in the field to speak on themes related to how information is organized in Japan, sources, and the methods of acquiring such information.

For the reasons noted above, it is very difficult to build a satisfactory number of so-called “regular users” in a short time. Investors in the Center wanted quick results, but it took five years for the Center's existence to be recognized. We found that frequent, patient and repetitious reminders are necessary.

At the same time, there is a need to provide orientation for users on how to use the JDC collection and services effectively. Many users are experienced and utilize the JDC resources either to locate specific information on well-focused topics or as a starting point to develop their research topics. However, we frequently receive inquiries from users who expect the Center staff to spoon-feed all the possible relevant information to them as we acquire new information and documents. The JDC home page, for example, clearly explains how to request information as
well as how to search the database. All the literature about the Center states that the reference and document delivery services are free. Yet in a survey about the JDC, there were some people who said the information is expensive and they could not afford to pay for the services. This is a typical misconception. User behavior of this type encountered by the JDC staff indicates that continuous orientation is needed.

The Language of Literature

With the development of technology and subsequent capability of almost instant transmission of information in global society, the language (e.g., Japanese, English) of the literature becomes a much larger issue. There has been no conference to deal with Japanese information where the language has not been brought up as an issue, even as the issues change with the technological advances. It is important to note that it is the nature of grey literature, which is often primarily aimed at a particular group of people, not necessarily to be issued in an international language, such as English. In case of the kind of documents JDC deals with, namely Japanese documents, these are mainly for Japan’s policy makers and not particularly intended for a wider domestic or international distribution. More than 95% of the JDC’s documents are in Japanese. As mentioned in the scope of users above, users of grey literature information at the Center are not limited to Japanologists who can read Japanese. In fact, over 50% do not read Japanese.

Thus the language abilities (more specifically, language inabilities) of the users must be considered. Although the Center was established by the directive of the U.S. Congress which urgently needed Japanese policy information, we soon found out that there were very few members of Congress who can use documents in Japanese. In the Congressional Research Service of the Library of Congress where researchers investigate and prepare reports for the Congress on specific topics, there are several people in various disciplines who specialize in Japan. Even among them, not all can use JDC documents as they are. Most others need documents translated; some need them summarized; some need to wait for an English version, an availability which is arbitrary and certainly less timely.

Among JDC users, except for most of the academic researchers and a few federal government officers who specialize in Japan studies, most do not read any Japanese. However, it should be noted that some types of information are very useful for those who have some background on Japan but are not necessarily able to read Japanese. For example, some need only statistics and are able to use them with only the translation of headings.

Minimizing language as an obstacle to access
As a partial solution, the Center provides an English abstract for each document the Center acquires and assigns English index terms. The user, regardless of language abilities, can identify potentially useful items, and can quickly grasp the content of a particular document and determine its usefulness from the bibliographic record before devoting time and effort to deal with the Japanese language document. This approach on the part of the Center requires special human resources.
The work of abstracting--going through a Japanese document, identifying the most crucial aspects of its contents mentally, and writing an abstract in English--requires quite an effort on the part of abstractors. We do not have an option of finding experienced abstractors and teaching them the Japanese language. Instead, we have to search for people with Japanese and English language capabilities and teach abstracting. One soon realizes that it is much more difficult to create an abstract than to translate verbatim. It takes time and experience to become a good abstractor. Finding the appropriate personnel who can accomplish this work is not easily achieved. The work requires a native level of understanding formal, written Japanese documents; training to extract the essence of information; and again native level of English to write clear abstracts. These steps must be done in a shortest possible time frame. For managing any grey literature collection, it should be kept in mind that this approach, while effective for the user, is nevertheless costly in terms of human resources and time.

Users' language abilities shape their needs
At the time of the review of the Center in 1996 to 1997, we found conflicting user opinions: pros and cons of providing abstracts, or the quantity versus quality issue. One opinion is that rather than spending so much effort in creating abstracts, the Center should devote those resources towards acquisition of more documents. The other is that the abstracts are extremely valuable in locating and verifying how useful the information might be before the user begins to cope with Japanese language documents. It is obvious that the former comes from the group of Japanese scholars and librarians with facility for reading Japanese. The latter from the group of non-Japanese readers and non-specialists as far as subjects on Japan are concerned. However, even among the Japanese specialists, there are voices that point out that the abstracts are useful for quick identification of documents, given the general nature or vagueness in many titles of public policy materials. Hence, it was decided by the Review Committee that we continue providing abstracts as a value added feature of the bibliographic database.

It is clear in the Center's experience that provision of English abstracts to Japanese documents improves access to the source information and considerably reduces the seriousness of the issue of the language as an obstacle. Without the abstracts, there would be many who would not even try to approach to the information. This was attested to by several users who stated that they would have otherwise had to compromise with secondary sources in English coming from English speaking areas (such as Southeast Asia) about Japan's policies, even though they realize that the Japanese source documents will give the precise information on policy matters. As the way to access this body of policy information, they found the JDC database with abstracts for each item in the collection highly valuable.

Given the present stage of the development of automated machine translation of Japanese into English and some other compromising measures, this seems to be the next-best solution. The author strongly believes that providing English abstracts of Japanese documents is a notable value of the Center's database, regardless of many problematical factors, such as scarcity of qualified abstractors, cost of abstracting, the time it takes for abstracting, interfacing of abstracts into the database and maintenance of the database.
The above two issues, namely matters emanating from the types of users (and language abilities) and from the language of the collection, are based on the intrinsic nature of the grey literature. The following issues arise from the fact that the grey literature collection is a part of the traditional library as a whole.

**Effect of Political Changes**

In general terms, this concerns the subject matter of a particular grey literature collection and how it relates to changes in need for that literature along with broader societal changes. In the case of the Japan Documentation Center, it is obvious that the need for policy information, especially the kinds that the Center collects, is affected by the political situation, as well as by economic and other factors. To mention a few examples, when the U.S. government negotiated for various aspects of deregulation with Japan, information on the topic was in great demand; and when the political focus of the U.S. government shifted from Japan’s internal policies to Japan’s economic policy towards the Asia region, the requests for the Japanese documents on private business activities, global environmental issues, economic assistance, and other related information increased. Avidly following its mission, the Center collected timely information focusing on the topics in demand politically, economically and according to stated needs at a given point in time.

As a result, the Center’s collection has not been systematically chosen on pre-determined topics in order to build a well-balanced collection for historical and fundamental research. On the one hand, to maintain a relevant grey literature collection, the collection focus must shift as needs shift. A possible shortcoming of these circumstances is that it is difficult for the Center to pursue a certain topic and collect documents exhaustively. At the time of the Center’s review, one reviewer pointed out that the Center lacks some reports in a series of report documents in a topic from the historical point of view. The Center tries as much as possible to collect all the related documents, but because of the nature of distribution of those documents, it is often impossible. For example, if policies on airport use come to be presented for revision, it is almost impossible to go back to the original policy documents and policy discussions, as well as subsequent revisions throughout the years.

The consequence of these two factors, collecting to meet changing needs and difficulties in exhaustive collecting due to the nature of how grey literature is distributed, must be understood as being both part of the strength and the limitations of a collection. It may be said that this is inevitable and stems from the nature and purpose of the collection, and therefore must be considered within the context of the institution’s whole collection.

**Ephemerality of Literature**

A common concept is to include the grey literature genre in so-called broader “Ephemeral literature” because of its being extremely time sensitive. Some information in grey literature is compiled and later incorporated into a more permanent form, such as annual volumes issued at a certain time of the year; some information becomes obsolete; while some others stay as they are.
Providing timely information in a form of grey literature is highly valued, but when evaluating it as a permanent collection of a library, quite different factors come into play. Under the current situation where many libraries are in economic straits, the retention and maintenance of collected grey literature simply come to be a matter of priority in terms of the library's broader collection development concerns. Grey literature must compete with other materials as to whether, or to what extent, efforts should be made to bibliographically control them as well as to expend costs for preservation measures.

Whether to absorb grey literature into the permanent library collection after fulfilling the role of providing timely information or to discard them is an issue that must be solved. It is important to note that this is a library dependent decision. The policy of "once collected, never throw away" is not valid any longer. Each library must make a wise decision, because the cost of retention is not nominal. In the Center's case, it has been determined that the document collection becomes a part of the library's permanent collection.

Preservation of materials
The first decision to be made is how to preserve the documents. One of the characteristics of printed grey literature documents is that none is hard-bound, since generally speaking they are not meant to be kept and maintained. Many are issued in acidic papers and require some costly preservation measures. Furthermore, the spines of the original paper materials must be cut in order to be scanned. It costs much to render appropriate measure to each document and again, it has to compete with the rest of library materials which are of highly historical value for future research.

The Center fortunately has some funds of its own and is able to place the original printed documents in acid-free folders and in acid-free boxes and to organize them for permanent storage. However, the amount of funds is not large enough to de-acidify each document.

The possibility of microfilming can also be considered. In the case of the Center, the bulk of the documents has been digitized and the information can be easily printed out from the image database file. Therefore, it is justified to use the basic measures described above for retention of the paper documents. Furthermore, the image database itself can also serve as one of the preservation measures, although digitized images have not yet proven to be permanently secure.

Bibliographic control: the online catalog versus a special file
This brings up a second decision that must be made regarding access, that is, bibliographical control. If the materials are to become part of the permanent collection, the documents in printed format must be processed, this time according to the Library's normal practice in order to be kept in permanent, regular book stacks. This means that the documents must be cataloged and the bibliographic records must be added to the Library's online catalog. For that purpose, ideally each record must be created following the current cataloging rules and must contain various access points according to the pre-established headings. A degree of duplication of processing and cataloging may be unavoidable.
It should be noted that the reason why the Center painstakingly creates bibliographic records with index terms and English abstracts is that the access to collection is to be more oriented toward specific users of the type of information as well as towards a general duration of time in which it is needed. The approach is specifically tailored for the needs of the users, the majority of whom are not regular library catalog users. The Center's database which contains bibliographic records of those documents is now on the Internet as a part of the Library of Congress Web and is searchable. However, it is not considered as a part of the permanent library collection. It is considered a special file.

Under economically stringent circumstances, it is practically untenable to catalog each document; and therefore compromise would have to be made to catalog them on a collection level cataloging basis. This raises a new issue of whether it is worth spending that much effort in view of effectiveness of limited access points. Each document contains specific information on specific topics and because of this, the document is valued. On the other hand, if many documents are grouped and given access by broad terms, it is difficult for users to have access to each document with a specific topic, unless the electronic database is maintained in some way on a permanent basis, with cross references to the location within a group of documents.

In Japan, a center, an auxiliary to Hosei University, accepts various institutional collections of grey literature for control, maintenance and preservation. If there were to be several such centers organized in various parts of the world, this would be an ideal solution for the JDC and for other grey literature collections.

When the grey literature collection is part of a larger library, then how the collection is treated, given its ephemeral characteristics, must be determined by the institution. One issue discussed above touches on collection development, while another set of issues revolve around long-term treatment of the materials. Evaluation of cost versus benefit is an inevitable factor, particularly in context of the institution's planning and the realities of competing needs amongst its departments.

**Format of supplied information: printed versus electronic**

The Center is finding that an increasing number of documents in the grey literature category appear on the World Wide Web. Starting in the mid 1990s, Japanese government agencies have been making efforts that aim for wider distribution of their information, both for the Japanese public as well as the broader international public. Specifically, government documents of Japan on fairly specialized topics can be obtained in full text on the agencies' website. This is a very welcome phenomenon. It would be extremely useful if the following information could be provided along with the reports and documents, even as a rough guideline:

1) Categories of the organization's information that are made available on the Web;
2) Timing of posting and how long the information will remain on the Web, preferably in respect to the issuance of the printed format; and
3) Whether the information can be freely copied and disseminated for research purposes, or
is copyrighted.

It would be helpful to know which agencies are trying to put some information on the Web, and if possible, types of reports, whether full text or summary, presentation of graphs and charts, whether or not there are any restrictions, etc. Knowing this would eliminate redundant searches and the chase for printed versions on the part of the Center. At least the guidelines would give us a clue to decide whether or not to seek out the electronic version. If we know the timing of information being on the Web (in relation to the time of issuance of the printed document), that will give us a good sense of whether we can locate information on the Web in a timely way. This would also affect the decision of whether or not to seek printed materials, and yet be positioned to deliver the needed information to users within the time limits. Needless to say, it is also important to know how long a particular document stays on the Web.

This brings up a related issue. Most Japanese government agencies issue English translations of some documents. It should be noted that some are abridged versions or are short summaries. It helps to know the same information as above, such as which documents are translated, whether it is an abridged version, and how late this version is after the issuance of the original documents in Japanese. Those English translations are much sought after internationally and, therefore, Japanese government agencies must realize and respond to the needs accordingly. The author wishes to know other countries' practice in regard to providing translations and abridged versions.

The Center's practice is certain to benefit users. When the Center provides a copy of a certain document, it sometimes finds an English summary prepared by the issuing agencies and listed on the Web. We attach the print-out of those summaries to our original documents, and make a note in the bibliographic record of its availability as an attachment.

Japanese government documents are, with or without copyright notice, considered automatically copyrighted at the time of issuance. As for electronically disseminated information by the Japanese government agencies, an oral response to our inquiry was that it is open for everyone and may be freely copied. The Center, when finding information on the Web, refers users to it but does not necessarily make a copy for them.

Archiving

The author has urgently expressed the need for the Japanese government agencies to archive what they have put on the Web. While most individual organizations and companies do archive what they put on their websites, there are fewer chances to see their full texts in comparison to the websites of the government agencies. If reformatted to an electronic format, the information is mainly for their organization's own use and is usually not available to the public.

So far, the Center has found that the full text documents of Japanese government agencies on the web are the electronic version of the printed documents. It seems that no documents have been issued as yet in electronic format only. The author suspects that information that is available
only electronically is put on the Japan's special government local area network, such as the Kasumigaseki LAN, and thus is not available for the public, at least at the beginning. This is natural because those reports are, after all, issued mainly for the government's use to carry on the nation's business.

Again the author's speculation is that under the current circumstances, provision of the electronic versions of various documents is an additional service to the public on the part of the agencies. The logic follows that since the printed version is the basis, the electronic version as a duplicate does not have to be archived. This assumption would have to change once the information is issued only in the electronic version, and it would be essential to provide archives and appropriate indices. For the time being, whether to make a printed copy in a sense of archiving for our own collection is something to be decided internally by the Center.

Conclusion

These are the current issues the Center faces. Some are particular to the Center but others are of a universal nature. In the ideal world, an information provider would be able to meet users needs by being able to obtain and provide information in a timely way. The Center's users have proven to be diverse, with no major geographical concentration nor particular disciplines, and having varying language abilities. Because the collection is predominantly in Japanese, an approach was developed to maximize access to the collection and accommodate English-speaking users through creating English language abstracts and indexing, and also by putting the database on the World Wide Web. In order to reach users, and potential users, the Center continuously makes outreach efforts utilizing a variety of methods.

The Center collects the most recent public policy information in order to meet many researchers' need for timely information. The Center tries also to adapt its collecting focus to the political, economic and other changes in Japan in order to meet changing research trends. Thus these characteristics of the grey literature collection bring up issues of how it will be treated, both bibliographically and physically, by the library institution of which this collection is a part, particularly on a long-term basis.

Finally, the Center has certain limitations stemming from the practices of the issuing organizations. The challenge is to work with these outside factors so as to maximize those sources while minimizing redundant processing of the information.

There are other issues and the author wishes that they should be discussed vigorously in various forums so that better solutions could be brought to us.