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JAPANESE STUDIES LIBRARIANSHIP

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Introduction

In 1989 when I graduated from library school and looked around for a job as a Japanese studies librarian, I worried that I would be limited to working in one of a dozen research universities in large metropolitan areas. That was if I could convince someone to hire a Canadian librarian who was neither a native speaker of Japanese nor a Ph.D. in a Japan-related field. My goal was to be able to live in a cabin in the countryside somewhere, earn a living as a Japanese studies librarian, and still be able to dabble in research using Japanese language materials from the convenience of my own home. Twenty years later, I have realized this dream. In this article I would like to present the state of the field of Japanese librarianship in 2009 from the perspective of a physically isolated librarian sitting on my deck in Orange, Massachusetts.

Accessing Information on Japan

Thanks to more than a decade of lobbying by Japanese studies scholars and librarians in North America, and an amazing amount of hard work and collaboration by our colleagues in Japan, we no longer face seemingly insurmountable barriers to accessing academic information in Japan. Significant changes took place to make it all possible. Databases that we were denied access to in 1999 are now available for free over the Internet, and others may now be subscribed to through consortial agreements using licenses that our university lawyers have approved. Articles from journals that are not held in North America can be requested through interlibrary loan from Japan and sometimes arrive in a matter of hours. National treasures that were locked in vaults have been digitized and made available on the Internet. If I have reference questions that I can't answer, I can dash off a quick email to a listserv or the Reference Department at the National Diet Library and get help easily without all the formalities that used to be required. In the year 2009, gaining access to Japanese resources is no longer the issue. Rather, the issue facing our field now is how to keep up with all the changes happening in Japan and to find meaningful ways to present that information to our researchers and students so that they can spend their time using the information instead of re-searching it.

Buying Books

While I miss the convenience of standing in stores and browsing Japanese books, I find that I can keep up to date with new publications, awards, and popularity rankings by following the websites of Kinokuniya in Japan   http://bookweb.kinokuniya.co.jp/   and   Kinokuniya   in   the   United   States http://bookweb.kinokuniya.co.jp/indexohb.cgi?AREA=02 .   Maruzen has teamed up with Amazon to present its online storefront http://www.amazon.co.jp/gp/browse.html/?node=337252011 . However, in my opinion, the best information is found the Maruzen website itself, where you can find rankings and awards as well as links to book reviews http://zaiko.maruzen.co.jp/tenpo_stock/.

Another competitor with a good interface and service is Junkudō http://www.junkudo.co.jp/. While Kinokuniya and Maruzen provide good information about book rankings, Junkudo's catalog functions more like that of a library, letting me search by author, title, classification number or topical shelf in the store.

At one of the small colleges I work at, we use Amazon Japan for rush orders, because the faculty can just send the link through email and the Acquisitions staff can place the orders without my intervention. For small institutions, the shipping may be higher, but the books arrive quickly and payments are easy.

Even though I prefer to do my online book browsing through these online stores, occasionally I will look at the websites of particular publishers to see if there are series or sets that I should consider. Should you need publication information on paper, vendors like Japan Publications, Maruzen, and Kinokuniya still send out on request catalogs and shiny flyers advertising new publication information to libraries. These are useful for sending to faculty members.

It is good to see that a number of vendors have made an effort to reach out to libraries without Japanese language specialists. Japan Publications, for example, sends out lists of recommended titles in Excel spreadsheets with romanized entries that are easy to review and copy and paste the information into order records. Toshokan Ryutsu Center has begun to provide records for OCLC's vendor service, so it is even easier for smaller collections to select and purchase Japanese language materials.

It is now much easier to locate and acquire out of print materials by using the antiquarian book database http://www.kosho.or.jp/servlet/bookselect.Kihon to locate which dealer has the title you need to purchase. Ten years ago, even if you located a store with the title you needed, they either wouldn't have shipped overseas or would have demanded a bank transfer to pay for it. Now, many stores will accept paypal or credit cards. The ones that won't will work with an intermediary like Japan Publications Trading Company, so that the library can pay for orders using their normal university checks.

Digital Materials

As I see them, digital materials fall into three categories: keyed-in texts, scanned materials, and born digital materials. Aozora, for copyright free publications, has been around for at least a decade. Volunteers key in texts and provide the data in several different formats. Aozora provides a rich library of texts for students looking for translation projects and materials to read for Japanese class. A bonus for students using the Aozora site to read Japanese literature is that a number of the most famous texts are also available as audio files, so they can hear the Japanese read aloud. http://www20.tok2.com/home/voicelibrary/hondana.htm

The Kindai Digital Library is an example of a collection of scanned materials http://kindai.ndl.go.jp . There are currently over 156,000 volumes (over 108,000 titles), published in the Meiji and Taisho periods (1868-1926) in the Library. Each title has been microfilmed and scanned, so the texts are readable online but cannot be copied and pasted into documents or used with online dictionaries. Each title has been cataloged and the tables of contents (usually very detailed in old publications) are keyword searchable. The next stage will be to include early Showa period (1926-1945) publications. Each book has been cleared for copyright before being released. The significance of this Kindai Digital library should not be understated. Japanese language materials from that time period are often in closed stacks because of their fragility and North American libraries have very limited numbers of these Meiji and Taisho materials. By providing them free and over the Internet, scholars will be able to extract a wealth of knowledge about the Meiji and Taisho periods that they could never have gotten before.

Pre-modern Japan scholars and librarians are surely thrilled over the amount of digitization being done of national treasures and rare materials held in libraries. Students at the University of Massachusetts Amherst regularly use the Waseda collection http://www.wul.waseda.ac.jp/kotenseki/ and the Katei Bunko

collection at Tokyo University http://133.11.199.8/cgi-bin/KateiIndex to select texts for their translation projects. Many libraries, in addition to digitizing the texts, are also doing value-added work by keying in the text as an aid for people who cannot read calligraphy. Hiroshima University, for example, has done this for their collection of Nara ehon texts from the Muromachi period. One of my favorite tools is called the glass viewer, which provides mouse-over reading assistance.
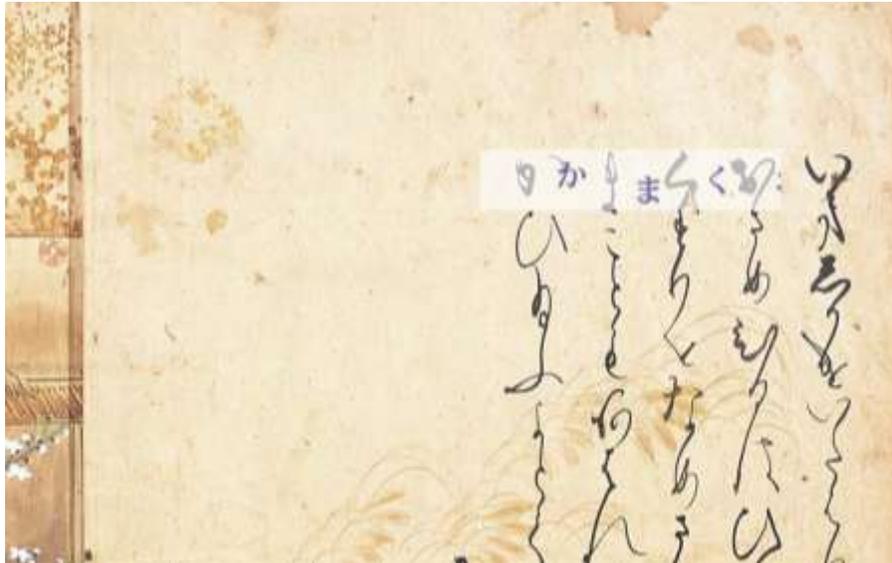
http://www.lib.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/dc/kyodo/naraehon/gv/frame_gv.html

Reading online with the use of pop-up dictionaries like Rikai http://www.rikai.com or online dictionaries like Eijiro http://www.alc.co.jp/ is much faster than looking up characters and words one by one using paper dictionaries.

One area that I am interested in exploring further is the increased amount of new material being published electronically (born digital) in Japan. Where Americans talk about using Kindle or other bigger e-book readers, many Japanese are reading novels on their cell phones. The increasing popularity of iPhones in Japan will mean that Japanese e-books and audio books are also available through Japan's I-Tunes store. I purchased a prepaid iTunes card during one of my trips to Japan. New publications are also available for sale through online stores like Junkudo's ebookbank <http://www.ebookbank.jp/junkudo/ep/top/> or Papyless <http://www.papy.co.jp/>. Papyless even offers one hour rentals of comic books, where you can purchase blocks of tickets and pay with a credit card. This means that it is possible to do research on Japanese popular culture using primary sources located anywhere so long as you have an Internet connection and a credit card.

Journals

The situation of Japanese journals is an interesting contrast to English-language journals. Compared to the rapid growth of English language e-journals and online collections like Project Muse and JSTOR, most of the important Japanese scholarly and trade journals are still only available in print.   The limited trade publications that are now starting to appear as e-journals are technology, fashion, or food related. While many American academic libraries are pursuing a policy of e-only or cutting individual title subscriptions in favor of aggregator databases, with the exception of Nikkei, most Japanese publishers have not reached an equivalent stage. Nor could most of us afford to pay the high costs for a Japanese equivalent of JSTOR even when it does become available.

Most researchers appreciate the discoveries that can be made by regularly browsing journals. Still, in the face of difficult fiscal realities, libraries have had to make compromises. Many libraries are cutting journal subscriptions in order to pay for databases or simply for the pragmatic reason that it is cheaper to pay for a small number of document delivery requests than to pay for the expense and labor of receiving and binding a journal. In many libraries, space for bound volumes of journals is also an issue. At the University of Massachusetts Amherst we have shaved down our list of journals to the ones that are used regularly in classes or for research. As a further cost saving, we have checked our lists against our most common ILL partners to make sure that we are not cancelling the same titles. Libraries that belong to the RapidILL group promise to supply PDF files within 24 hours of the request, so access to articles is still available so long as citations are correct. In fact, often faculty and students prefer ILL to having the journals in their own libraries because it means someone else is doing the work of retrieving the journal and locating the article in it; furthermore, they have the document as a PDF rather than a photocopy.

According to Interlibrary loan protocol, requests should be sent domestically first, and if no library in your own country can fill the request you can send it out internationally. Because it used to be very difficult to get materials from Japan, most researchers were resigned to spending long hours at the National Diet Library waiting for journals to be retrieved and then waiting even longer for needed articles to be copied. Because of limitations on how many items one could borrow at one time, it often meant spending weeks to gather materials for a new project. Trying to request materials from Japan was more trouble than it was worth. North American librarians were used to using IFLA coupons to request and fill international requests, but few Japanese libraries were willing to cooperate. To address these barriers to access, the National Coordinating Committee on Japanese Library Resources sent a group of Librarians to Japan in 1997 with the goal of setting up a bilateral agreement for document delivery.

Waseda University was the first to open its collection to North American libraries. They were followed by a National University Library project that spawned the Global ILL Framework (GIF), and later, Keio University. Waseda and Keio are regular members of OCLC, and they have boosted Japanese studies around the world because of their willingness to supply copies and books. In 2009, the Global ILL Framework's roots are almost 10 years old. There are 152 libraries in Japan and 76 libraries in the United States who are willing to supply copies of articles and chapters of books. A subset will also lend books. But in order to get to this point, Japanese libraries had to lobby for an exemption to the copyright law so that they could scan and send documents electronically. Both OCLC and NACSIS-ILL software code had to be rewritten using the ISO

protocol so that the two systems could send and receive requests. For the story of the efforts that made the GIF Interlibrary Loan success possible, see http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~ncc/illdd/gifproject.html

The National Diet Library has always been willing to supply photocopies and lend its materials, but it used to be very time consuming and costly. Requests from North American librarians and researchers as well as a better international perspective among the administrators of the NDL have spurred huge changes in service. Now any individual can register for document delivery with the National Diet library and make payments using a credit card. The Zasshi Kiji Sakuin (journal article index) database is linked to the online request system, so it is one-stop shopping to request photocopies of articles located in the index. It is also possible to request copies of articles that are not indexed by using the request feature in the library catalog. The exemption for academic libraries mentioned above does not apply to the NDL, so photocopies are truly photocopies and arrive by air mail. But, for an independent scholar, or a researcher at a small college without good Japan-related library support, the NDL system works brilliantly.

I now tell my faculty and students "If you can get a citation we can get the item 90% of the time." That is a much better percentage than we could have hoped for 10 years ago. Given the ephemeral nature of paper, it is unlikely that we will ever be able to reach 100% success rates.

In fact, getting a citation used to be really hard. Many Japanese scholars did not provide accurate citations for books or articles because it was assumed that everyone knew what was being referred to. Subscriptions to print indexes such as Zasshi Kiji Sakuin and Oya Bunko were very expensive, and it was only the large collections who could afford them. Small collections could purchase monographs that indexed particular subjects, but they were always out of date. Now, we can access Zasshi Kiji Sakuin (coverage from 1948) through either the NDL-OPAC or CiNii for free. CiNii http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ is actually a better database for most researchers, because it not only includes the data from Zasshi Kiji Sakuin but it also includes links to the full-text articles for a number of university bulletins or articles posted in institutional repositories.

Not everything is free by any means. A subscription to Nikkei Telecom is expensive, not excessively so when compared to Lexis-Nexis Academic from a North American perspective. But at a small institution with a limited number of Japanese readers the cost per use is prohibitively high. Web Oya Bunko would be a wonderful resource to have because it indexes popular magazines and subculture topics not traditionally covered in Zasshi Kiji Sakuin. Subscriptions to the Asahi and Yomiuri newspaper databases are also high on the wish lists of faculty and librarians at smaller institutions.

Some subscription databases are within the budget of even the smallest collections. JapanKnowledge http://www.japanknowledge.com contains a number of important dictionaries and encyclopedia, atlases, e-books, audio and video files. The newest player is Koseisha, which has begun marketing the prewar equivalent to Zasshi Kiji Sakuin http://zassaku-plus.com/. For a modest subscription fee, it is now possible to locate accurate citations for most scholarly Japanese articles published between 1868 and now, so that document delivery requests will be even easier.

While most Japanese studies librarians have traditionally focused on the Humanities and later the Social Sciences, I have begun to receive more requests for Japanese research in the Sciences. Fortunately for me, I do not have to think about building a print collection for the sciences, because the Japanese government has invested a significant amount of money into digitizing and making the information available over the Internet. Journal@archive http://www.journalarchive.jst.go.jp/english/top_en.php , an effort funded by the Japan Science and Technology Agency, includes over 730,000 articles as of August 2009. The content is particularly strong in the sciences, and the complete run of many journals back to the early 20th century is impressive. Current journals are available in J-STAGE http://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/browse/ which includes journals, reports and conference proceedings.

Outstanding accomplishments have been made by Japanese academic librarians over the past decade. From being simply "keepers of the book" they have begun to build new collections and coordinate their efforts in ways that benefit all of us. The Open Access movement spread to Japan by 2004. The Open Access Japan group keeps a blog and publications on its website at http://www.openaccessjapan.com/

Also beginning in 2004 The National Institute of Informatics (NII) helped a number of national universities to develop institutional repositories. In most cases the librarians took the lead in setting up the structure and soliciting material from researchers at their institutions, seeing institutional repositories as a new form of collection development.   Background to this movement can be found in the following article: http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue49/suzuki-sugita/   As more repositories were established it became apparent that a union catalog was needed so that users wouldn't need to search dozens of institutional repositories.   Thanks to the National Institute for Informatics, a portal has been created as part of the .nii.ac.jp suite of products called JAIRO (Japanese Institutional Repositories Online). http://jairo.nii.ac.jp/en/ This is where I go when I want to begin exploring new topics, since it includes books, articles, conference reports, research findings, and even images. Of course, it isn't complete because contributions are voluntary, but it provides a wonderful hunting ground in addition to the article databases (CiNii) and book catalogs (Webcat Plus).

How to keep up?

My biggest challenge these days is not gaining access to materials. As I have said, thanks to the work of the NCC, the path breaking efforts of Japanese academic librarians, and the funding support of the Japanese government, we can now gain virtual access to materials that would have been blocked for our senior colleagues. I would like to stay one step ahead of my faculty and students who are also Internet savvy and do not have to cast as broad a net as I do in trying to do "environmental scans" of Japanese resources, but things continue to change rapidly for the better. Fortunately I don't feel like I have to "cover" Japan all by myself. The NCC and the Japanese Materials Committee keep me apprised of new trends and possibilities. In addition to scattergun searching using Google, I can easily follow new resources at the National Diet Library through PORTA http://porta.ndl.go.jp/ because it covers national institutions and prefectural libraries. Another place to check for new resources is the National Institute of Informatics through GeNii http://ge.nii.ac.jp/genii/jsp/index.jsp , where I can search for academic information in one spot. I like Okamoto Makoto's Academic Resource guide http://www.ne.jp/asahi/coffee/house/ARG/ because Mr. Okamoto does a wonderful job of reviewing academic resources and providing information on upcoming events. He has given talks at CEAL conferences and invited some of our CEAL librarians to participate in meetings in Japan. No doubt there are blogs that would be very helpful as well because of their thoughtful reviews of the resources.

Unlike it was twenty years ago, my biggest challenge these days as a Japanese studies librarian working full-time and living in a beautiful log house in the countryside is not access to materials. My biggest challenge is finding the time to read and think about all the wonderful materials that I am now able to access. Like many others, I became a librarian because I enjoy reading and doing research. Now that it is easy to get the materials, I want to be able to use them. Information without critical inquiry does not produce knowledge. My goal for the next decade is "slow librarianship." I see a groaning table of delicacies and I want to be able to savor some of them myself, and not just point them out to others. Come join me in the feast. You choose a few of your favorites, and I'll choose a few of mine and we can share our findings with others.