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BRIDGING SHORES:

THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE AREA STUDIES LIBRARIAN*

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International House of Japan

It is my honor to speak to my fellow librarians and faculty members this afternoon, to think about the meaning of changes occurring in our profession, and to seek a favorable future direction. I am particularly pleased to give a talk entitled "Bridging Shores" here, as Hawaii has long played an important role in bridging East and West. I am the head librarian of the International House of Japan in Tokyo. While some of you are frequent visitors to our library, others of you may not know the International House. Hence, in order to provide a background to my views, I should like first to introduce our Library.

The International House of Japan Library and Japanese Studies

The International House of Japan is a private, nonprofit organization incorporated in 1952 for the purpose of promoting cultural exchange and intellectual cooperation between the peoples of Japan and other countries. The I House Library maintains a 20,000-volume collection of English-language books on Japan and international relations that 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 and humanities. Most of the patrons of the library are people in academia who either teach about Japan or are doing Japan-related research for doctoral degrees in universities all over the world.

East Asian libraries in North America and the I House Library are closely linked because we provide services to the same clientele. We often find that researchers from Columbia University, for example, come to us and ask reference questions which were unfinished at Columbia. Or, we tell our users where in the United States they can find particular Japanese journals.

*This paper was originally presented April 11, 1996, at the "Workshop on the Global Information Infrastructure for Asian Studies," Third Session--"Electronic Resources and Information Services, Part 2" in Honolulu, Hawaii.
While both East Asian libraries in North America and the I House Library belong to a common arena, i.e. Japanese studies, our collections occupy opposite sides of it. This difference is caused by the dissimilarity of the languages of materials we collect. In contrast to East Asian libraries in North America, which collect books and materials in the Japanese language, the I House library collection is devoted to English-language literature on Japan. This has two important implications, one stemming from the function of language in area studies, and the other from the function of a local collection in its environment.

Let us consider here the relationship between the process of research and the language used in area studies. The process of research moves in a developmental spiral which begins with exploring sources and secondary works, goes on to make an original survey, observations, and 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 used for each stage, the vernacular is the language of source materials, while English is that of the secondary works. Although an increasing number of source materials such as Japanese government documents and historical documents are being translated into English and published, their quality and quantity are still limited. 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 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 conducted in the English language. Consequently, a knowledge base of area studies in English consisting largely of secondary sources is formed and accumulated.

To summarize: East Asian libraries in North America basically accumulate source materials; the I House Library collects research outcomes (secondary literature). We thus support Japanese studies from opposite ends, i.e. from their origin and their destination.

Regarding the second implication (the function of a collection in its local environment), our relation is opposite but similar: an East Asian library in North America is an East Asian-language collection in an English-language environment, whereas the I House Library is an English-language collection in a Japanese context. Its local collection in the English language is located in Tokyo where we have access to other Japanese language collections. This enables the I House Library to function as a gateway to Japanese language sources.
Recent Changes in Japanese Studies and Its Environment

Area studies are tightly bound by the history of international relations and by the place which the studied area occupies in world politics and the world economy. In that sense each area studies is unique, and too much generalization about developmental stages in area studies is inappropriate. I believe, however, it is meaningful to describe some characteristics of changes that have occurred in Japanese studies in order to consider area studies in broader terms, particularly their past, present and future course.

Recently Japanese studies has experienced a fundamental change. At a 1992 symposium on “Japanese Studies in the United States” held by the I House, Professor Patricia Steinhoff of the University of Hawaii characterized this change as “the loss of irrelevance.”¹ By this phrase she meant that American Japanese specialists have been pushed out of their cozy, distant corner of traditional Japanese studies into the academic mainstream. This phenomenon has had a profound influence on the academic structure of Japanese studies, on its economics, politics, and popularity.

I would like to consider some characteristics of present Japanese studies in North America which I think particularly affect resources for research. The first is the tension between area studies and disciplines. In many American universities (this is not the case in Australia and Great Britain), professors belong to departments which are usually divided by discipline, such as history, fine arts, political science, or economics. Courses in Japanese studies, however, are often provided by entities like centers for Japanese studies, institutes for Japanese studies, and Japanese studies programs, which represent interdisciplinary activities in Japanese studies in various parts of the university. According to Professor Steinhoff, when Japanese studies gravitate toward the particular discipline, it brings changes in subject, theory, and publication of research in Japanese studies in the U.S.²

The second characteristic of present Japanese studies in North America is the increased need for research into contemporary Japanese society. Japan's growing presence on the international political and economic scene has generated interest among the general public in Japanese business and society. Japan is reported on in newspapers, TV, and other media every day. Japanese studies serves as a knowledge base on Japan and is expected to provide explanations. This tendency, particularly strong in the social sciences, intensifies the demand for current information on and from Japan.

Thirdly, new groups of consumers of Japanese studies have emerged, partly because of the mainstreaming of Japanese studies, and partly owing to the international presence of Japan. People
hitherto indifferent to Japanese studies and without specialized language skills have become interested in Japan. Scholars in various disciplines want to do comparative studies, and researchers outside of academia want to learn about Japan for doing business or negotiating with Japan. This, on the one hand, accelerates the need for English-language materials on Japan, and, on the other hand, broadens the topics of Japan studies beyond the scope of traditional area studies.

Lastly, recent developments in information technology and communications have had a vast impact on Japanese studies, as they have had on all academic endeavor. We can see complicated effects in area studies stemming from the gap in the digital environments of the studied area and of the home society of the researcher. What is common and available in electronic formats in North America is not always so in Japan, and this difference often induces frustration among researchers.

Observations from the I House Library

As the East Asian libraries in North America and the I House Library are located on the opposite shores of area studies, observations made at the I House Library may serve as a mirror reflecting the changing situation of the field. Besides its services to North Americans, the I House Library provides services to scholars from other parts of the world, and this enables me to grasp American distinctiveness compared to other countries. I will focus on four aspects here.

(1) Changing Publications

I can observe a gravitation toward disciplines in terms of library resources when looking at our journal collection. Our selection of journal titles inclusive of those in the disciplines often receives favorable comments from our users, who say that it reflects general American academic trends. This is a clear example showing that the American Japanese studies are more intertwined in disciplines than those of, for example, Europe. Since we collect books of "research outcomes," (secondary studies), the varying speed of growth in shelf space shows research trends in Japanese studies. In the 1980s the shelf space for economics and industry grew very fast; in the early 1990s the science section grew substantially owing to an increase of such books as R & D in Japan. From the topics of reference questions we receive, and by participating in seminars and conferences in Japanese studies, we learn what fields will come to the fore in the near future, and make efforts to anticipate user needs and collect materials relevant to them.

(2) Need for More Gateways

North America has been the most productive area of the world in
Japanese studies for a few decades, but recently an increasing number of books on Japan have been published in Europe. In terms of the I House library budget, the amount spent on English-language books on Japan from Europe has grown to be almost equivalent to the amount spent on books from North America. American scholars often complain that it is hard to find British publications on Japan in their university libraries in America and express appreciation of our collection in this respect. The I House Library is a meeting place for American and European Japanese studies publications and their authors.

In addition to making available English-language publications on Japan, the I House Library also functions as a gateway for Japanese language materials. We have introduced several online databases at the library. One of these is Nikkei Telecom in both its Japanese and English language versions. Because our collection concentrates on English-language materials, we expected that the English version of Nikkei Telecom would be most in demand by our users. However, the requests received have been mostly for the Japanese-language newspapers on the database. I concluded that users expect us to be a gateway to Japanese-language materials. This is confirmed by the growing number of requests for interlibrary loans of Japanese-language materials.

(3) Creating New Repositories

We receive an increasing number of requests for access to contemporary information and to the so-called gray literature. To satisfy these requests our staff heavily relies on human networks with other special librarians in Japan. We cannot confine ourselves to area studies, nor even to the traditional domain of libraries, if we hope to provide full information to our users.

Many of you are familiar with the Japan Documentation Center of the Library of Congress, on which Ms. Ichiko Morita reported earlier today. During the period leading up to the Center's establishment, a former librarian of I House, Mrs. Tamiyo Togasaki, was on the committee for making the feasibility study and was active in working to improve the information flow from Japan. In Japan it still requires laborious effort to collect gray literature, even that published by governmental bodies. The Gray Literature Detective Group of the Japan Special Libraries Association, of which I am a member, has been active in studying the situation, sharing experiences, and seeking improvement. These activities lead us out of the domain of the library toward broader issues including publishing and information policy.

Just as government documents are an important part of the gray literature in the social sciences, art exhibition catalogs are a type of gray literature in the humanities. A patron came to me one day and complained about the fugitiveness of exhibition
catalogs of modern Japanese art. We discussed a desirable resolution to the problem and thought of creating a depository of catalogs. We have had to wait, however, for ACE Japan to take up the idea and to move toward realization of this conceived depository. It took a few years for us to find a proper home for the project, but it is very nice to see that the seed is growing thanks to the cooperation of many colleagues. In this case also networking—what I call bridging—is, I think, a key factor in the actualization of the project.

(4) Electronic Resources

The introduction of databases and electronic resources to the library world has caused significant changes in the attitudes of researchers. Especially relevant here are users' expectations of electronic resources. Computers are often regarded as almighty; databases are thought to be available everywhere; they are expected to have all the necessary data in them, and to be retrievable in the wanted ways. These expectations may be realized in some fields but not necessarily in others. Furthermore the gap between the availability of resources in electronic form in North America and in Japan is unexpectedly wide. I am not talking here about the availability of Japanese electronic resources outside of Japan, but in Japan itself. Even in Japan, the availability of Japanese electronic resources is still limited: limited in terms of data, appropriate search keys, and the range of material included. Given these limitations, in order to serve our users well, we librarians must know what is available in what format and the characteristics of each tool, including scope, precision, accuracy, and limits.

There is one issue I am particular concerned about in regard to Japanese electronic resources, which currently lies unnoticed, hidden by the conspicuous issue of hardware/software. That issue is the weakness in subject access to information. Providing subject access has never been a strong point of the Japanese, for subject catalogs have not been common in Japanese libraries. Possibly the pioneers in modern Japanese librarianship thought that the need for subject access would be satisfied by a classified shelflist. This may have been adequate in the days when the amount of material was not overwhelming. Today, however, researchers, particularly those from North America, rely heavily on subject access in seeking information.

Unlike printed media, electronic materials require special attention to the means of access, because the information content is invisible, and yet must always be retrievable. As the unit of information sought becomes smaller, from the subject of an entire book to a discrete piece of information contained somewhere within a publication, we need more sophisticated subject access mechanisms. To make an effective subject search, some kind of means is necessary to control terminology, be it thesaurus,
dictionary, or classification scheme. Many producers of Japanese electronic information resources are unaware of this, possibly because of a weakness in subject access embedded in the information infrastructure in Japan. Hence, they regard such a small improvement in access as the capability of searching every word in a title as satisfactory, and excuse themselves from developing subject analysis by saying it is too expensive. Because of this lack of subject search capability, Japanese information resources generally require more background knowledge from the user to make effective use of them than do their American counterparts, which are usually user-friendly, and which are supported by a long tradition of indexing. This difference in database structure can create frustration when American researchers, having different expectations, use Japanese electronic resources.

It has been the responsibility of librarians for a long time to organize materials for the efficient use of the information in them. That is still so even when the media have been changing. Cataloging and indexing produce an intellectual infrastructure to prepare for use of information and to provide bridges between resources and their users. How we can contribute to enhancing the quality of the information infrastructure of electronic resources? Refined search mechanisms are indispensable when we think about guiding our users to the information they need.

**Bridging Shores**

Basically area studies have the innate premise of being international studies: scholars examine societies/countries/areas foreign to themselves. That is an intellectual endeavor to bridge different shores. Changes occurring in area studies, particularly East Asian studies, and in their environments drive area studies librarians beyond their traditional territory. We need to expand the scope of our collections in terms of subject, format, and language. Cooperation and networking should be sought internationally: area studies done by other countries should be consulted, and foreign and indigenous studies of the area examined. Issues in domains outside the library, such as the publishing and software industries, may need to be settled before problems in the library can be solved. Even within the traditional library world, we need more bridges—for example, between cataloging and reference and information services, and between the East Asian collection and information services to potential users.

Because of the innate international nature of area studies, I believe we are destined to cross such boundaries as language, discipline, profession, geography, and divisions within the library, and to bridge various domains and shores in order to support, improve and encourage international scholarship.
NOTES


2. Steinhoff, p. 8