Who Knows? Who Wants to Know? Doing Japanese Studies in the 1990s: Colleagues and Collaboration

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In the first segment of this two-part article I used the questions Who Knows? Who Wants to Know? to frame the relationship between Japan specialists and the audiences for their knowledge. The same questions can also be applied to the research process of Japanese Studies. In this case it is generally the Japan specialist "who wants to know" and someone else in Japan "who knows." This leads us to examine the relationships between Japan specialists and their Japanese research colleagues, subjects, and informants, all of whom can be considered research collaborators in the largest sense of the term.

I would like to explore these interactions with some data from our survey of American and Canadian Japan specialists,[1] plus some other observations from my own experience as a scholar and a supervisor of graduate students doing research in Japan Studies. I will look first at what kinds of research Japan specialists do, particularly in the social sciences, and then at the kinds of interactions with Japanese people such research precipitates, keeping in mind my earlier observations about the constituency and audiences for Japanese Studies in the United States and Canada.

A. Types and Levels of Research in Japanese Studies

During the first decades of the postwar development of Japanese Studies in the United States, much of the research that was done using Japanese sources was secondary, synthesizing for an English reading audience the published research of Japanese scholars or, even more straightforwardly, producing English translations of standard Japanese texts. Western scholars learned from Japanese scholars things that were already widely known in Japan, and transmitted them to western audiences as new knowledge. At that time there was so little material available in English that often the most basic background research also had to be done in Japanese sources, making even the simplest research task a formidable undertaking. Even those who did do primary research in Japan often relied heavily on Japanese scholars or research assistants to help them collect and interpret data.

The high proportion of Japan specialists who now conduct primary research in Japanese reflects the growing professionalization of Japanese Studies over the postwar decades, and that same professionalization has produced a strong body of research publications in English.

While it is now possible to do scholarly secondary research in certain fields by relying exclusively on the English language literature, the professional standard for Japan specialists at the doctoral level now requires both a display of control over the available English language literature and the presentation of original, primary research using Japanese sources. In the social sciences, these two standards must be met in addition to the disciplinary standards of competence in the theory, methods, and substantive literature in one's field.

Over 90 percent of our survey respondents reported that they do research, but as I have reported elsewhere,[2] not all of them conduct their research with the expectation of academic publication. Over half (54.9%) say they do basic research, while about 36 percent do applied research. Sixty-one percent say they do primary research in Japanese sources, and about a third do secondary research using Japanese sources. When the overlap is eliminated, two thirds of the survey respondents use Japanese sources for their research. Slightly more than a third do primary research in English materials, and the same percentage say they do secondary research using English sources.[3]

Japan specialists who are employed as academics are 2.5 times as likely to be doing basic research as those who are employed outside of academics (63.2% compared to 25.1%), but there is less difference between the two groups in the proportion who do primary research in Japanese (64.4 percent for the academics, and 48.9 percent for the non-academics, a ratio of 1.3:1). The non-academic specialists, however, were slightly more likely to do both primary and secondary research using English sources, and a bit less likely to do secondary research in Japanese sources.

The majority of our survey respondents conduct their research independently, although the overwhelming majority maintain contact both with other Japan specialists (97 percent) and with Japanese scholars (93 percent). Only 16.2 percent reported that they are doing research with Japanese collaborators, but apparently more people are at least thinking about it, since double that percentage — a third of the respondents — cited research collaboration as a reason for maintaining contact with Japanese scholars. The pattern was almost the same for research collaboration with scholars outside of Japan: about 17 percent reported that they are engaged in collaborative research with Americans, Canadians, or others who are not Japanese, while 30.5 percent reported that they maintain contact with other Japan specialists for purposes of research collaboration. Academic Japan specialists, defined as those whose current primary employment is at post-secondary institutions and who comprise three-quarters of the sample, are more likely to maintain contact with Japanese scholars in general, and are far more likely to maintain contact in order to facilitate research collaboration or to obtain research materials.[4]

While there is some variability here, the key distinctions in type of research do not necessarily differentiate between academic and non-academic Japan specialists. This may be because many of those now in non-academic employment were in fact trained as professional academic Japan specialists, while some of those currently in the sample as academics may not have been trained specifically as Japan specialists. The latter group may conduct research in

English or with Japanese collaborators because they have less language competence in Japanese. There may also be some additional crossover between the two groups because of secondary employment. There is not sufficient space to explore these questions in the present paper, and so henceforth we will concentrate on those who do use Japanese in their research, regardless of whether they are employed in academia or not.

B. Japanese Research Resources and the Research Process

The most commonly used research resources in English or Japanese are print materials, either from the researcher's personal library (81.4 percent), the researcher's own institution's library (68.5 percent), or another institution's library (63.3 percent). The use of library materials is clearly central to research, and the findings suggest that much library research can be done in the United States and Canada, with about 80 percent reporting that there is a library with a Japanese collection accessible to them.[5]

The more critical issue, particularly for social scientists, is the need for research resources that can only be accessed in Japan, and therefore require some personal interaction. Well over half (60.8 percent) of the social scientists in our sample collect their own primary data in Japan, double the percentage (30.6%) of those in the humanities. If we eliminate those who do not use Japanese sources at all, fully three quarters of the social scientists who use Japanese sources for research say they collect their own data in Japan. In addition to this heavy reliance on field work or personal data collection in Japan, nearly forty percent of the social scientists use government archives and publications for research, more than double the percent of humanists who do so (17.8%), despite the fact that historians comprise a substantial portion of the humanists in the sample. Relatively smaller proportions of social scientists use data collected by their collaborators (16.2 percent) or material that is available in private or commercial databases (12.1%).[6] This emphasis on field research, the hallmark of American social science, requires fundamentally different kinds of research interaction than the types of library and archival research that are commonly found in the humanities. The contrast becomes apparent when we examine the points in the research process at which interaction is most likely to occur.

The research process for foreign scholars in Japan typically requires a) the formulation of a research problem and a research design or strategy; b) securing a Japanese academic affiliation; c) obtaining access to research resources or settings for collection of data or research materials; d) collecting data and research materials; e) analyzing data or research materials, and f) presenting research results in the form of oral presentations and publications. These steps are analytically distinct, but may overlap and interact. Anticipated concerns about the publication of research results may affect decisions about access, for example, and access issues may constrain the formulation of the research problem and research design. Let us now ask Who Knows? and Who Wants to Know? for the various steps in the research process.

a) The proposal stage

Whether one is a graduate student doing research in Japan for the first time or a scholar with many years of experience, virtually everyone these days must first produce a research proposal that is sufficiently detailed and knowledgeable to persuade some committee that the research is worthy of support. The committee may be a doctoral student's dissertation committee or the review committee for a funding source, but generally it will apply prevailing north American academic standards to the review of the proposal. Depending on whether the reviewers are oriented to disciplinary standards or Japanese studies standards, what the reviewing committee wants to know, and what the prospective researcher must display that he or she knows, may be quite different. While this disparity could arise in any field, in the contemporary United States it is most likely to affect social scientists.

Academics in a social science disciplines who do not know anything about doing research in Japan may expect a methodological precision of the proposal that is either not feasible at all, or can only be achieved after the researcher has been in the field for several months and has established a great many personal contacts. Such disciplinary reviewers may also expect a proposal that fits current theoretical paradigms, regardless of whether those paradigms and the issues they highlight are relevant to the Japanese case. Conversely, they may have great difficulty understanding why someone would want to study a phenomenon that is highly relevant to Japan, but does not relate to the hot issues of the discipline.

If the reviewers are Japan specialists, typically found in an interdisciplinary funding review panel, they may expect the applicant to situate the research problem in the English-language Japanese Studies literature rather than the general theoretical literature of the relevant discipline, as evidence of sufficient preparation to undertake research in Japan. Such reviewers may also be impatient with unrealistic methodological precision and unfamiliar theoretical language. Moreover, they will weigh heavily whether the applicant's Japanese language skills are adequate for the proposed research, a factor that disciplinary committees may seriously underestimate or ignore completely.

The problem is not simply that the demands may be contradictory, but that they impact differentially on the subsequent course of the research. A research project that meets rigorous disciplinary standards in the United States may become impossibly cumbersome, or appear insensitive and irrelevant, when the researcher tries to carry it out in Japan. If there is a substantial language barrier, the researcher may never find out that the data do not mean what he thinks they do. On the other hand, a research project that meets high standards for Japanese Studies and is carried out smoothly in Japan may appear irrelevant and too arcane to publish if the researcher is not sufficiently attuned to the demands of the discipline.

b) the affiliation stage

A generation ago, relatively small numbers of scholars went to Japan each year, either for dissertation or postdoctoral research. Most research affiliations were managed through prior personal relationships and networks, and those happened largely to concentrate at a handful of elite academic institutions in Japan. Obtaining a research affiliation was not particularly

difficult, and the research affiliation worked wonders at opening doors in Japan, without unduly taxing the sponsors.

The current situation is fundamentally different, largely because of the sheer weight of numbers. Our studied identified over 750 current doctoral candidates in Japanese studies. If we make the very conservative estimate that 10-20 percent of them would be conducting dissertation research in Japan at any given time, that means 75-150 students requiring academic affiliation in Japan just from doctoral programs in the United States and Canada.

Estimating the number of scholars beyond the doctoral level who would be in Japan to conduct research at any one time is more difficult. Taking into consideration the frequency of sabbatical leaves, the proportion of our sample reporting that they do conduct research in Japan, and the frequency and duration of their research visits, we might reasonably assume that between 75 and 200 North American scholars require research affiliation in Japan every year. Combining these two sets of estimates, we can safely expect that somewhere between 150 and 350 graduate students and academics from North America may need a research affiliation in Japan.

These are not huge numbers when measured against the size of the academic community in the United States and Japan, but they are probably large enough to disrupt the traditional procedures for obtaining Japanese research affiliation through personal contact, especially since they represent a continuing annual level of demand. Moreover, these numbers are too large to be accommodated graciously at a small number of elite Japanese universities whose name alone will open doors.

The dispersion of foreign researchers to a broader range of institutions can be a very healthy development, but it also magnifies the difficulty of locating an appropriate affiliation match. Since Japanese research affiliation is now often built into the application and screening process for research funding, even larger numbers of applicants are forced to establish a potential research affiliation long before they are certain they will be able to go to Japan to do the research. At this stage, "Who Knows?" may simply mean "Who do you know?" and how can you at least get a name to put on the application form. The problem does not end there, however. is not that simple. Just arranging for the barest bureaucratic formalities of research sponsorship and academic affiliation in Japan may incur long-term obligations and create unexpected complications that affect the research itself. Some Japanese academic stars may find themselves besieged with sponsorship and affiliation requests from ten to twenty American scholars a year, an unfair burden even if the request is honored at the most perfunctory level. In this connection, it is worth noting that a third of the Japan specialists in our survey sample report that they maintain contact with Japanese scholars in order to facilitate research affiliation in Japan. Nearly 40 percent of the academics and only 15.6 percent of the non-academics do so, reflecting their differential need for research affiliation in Japan.[7]

c) access to research materials and sites

For some fortunate researchers, sponsorship, formal affiliation, and access to research

materials come bundled in one neat package, but often this is not the case. The foreign researcher may need to interact with scholars, officials, or other gatekeepers in order to gain access to research sites or information resources. "Knowing" in this case may mean that someone knows where the information is available, or knows who to contact in order to obtain access. But knowing and sharing are not the same; the person who knows where the information is may need first to "know" or to test the foreign scholar before he is willing to extend his own credibility on someone else's behalf.

Nearly two-thirds of academic Japan specialists and over half on the non-academic specialists maintain relations with Japanese scholars as a source of introductions and other contacts. Perhaps more surprisingly, over half of both academic and non-academic survey respondents report that they maintain contact with other Japan specialists as a source of introductions and personal references. These figures reflect clearly the necessity for personal introductions in Japanese society, and the care with which professional Japan specialists must cultivate research access.

For social scientists, an academic affiliation may be required to obtain funding and visa sponsorship and to establish a temporary "place" in Japanese society, but it may not be the most critical affiliation for carrying out one's research. Access to an actual research site, particularly if it is not an academic institution, is much less likely to be negotiable before one gets to Japan, but far more consequential to the ultimate success of the research. Getting such access inevitably requires personal relations, delicate negotiations, and a certain degree of luck. For many field research topics, an academic sponsor or colleague may not be a fruitful source of leads, and whatever possibilities do turn up may not fit the neat models specified in the research design.

The problem of access for social science field research varies considerably with the specific type of research one plans to do. Research in companies and other organizations requires quite generous permission from the organization, but social elites such as university professors are likely to have better networks to some kinds of organizations than to others. Access to small, non-elite companies is more often accomplished through family connections than by professorial introductions.

Research on social issues and in social movements demands very different kinds of research access, not just to one fixed locus of research, but to people and institutions that can initiate a snowballing process of continuing introductions. In one sense these networks are more open because they are not as institutionalized and do not have such fixed gatekeepers. Yet they still require personal introductions, and the very openness of the networks makes it less certain than any initial introduction can provide sustained access to all the bases one might want to touch. For this type of research it is important to understand the general structure of informal organizations and social movements in Japan.

Any social cause or issue in Japan tends to generate voluntary support groups through which the issue is pursued. Access to such a group requires an introduction from someone who belongs to it or is close to it, and also requires some indication of general sympathy with

the cause on the researcher's part. If there is a legal aspect to the issue that has generated either civil lawsuits or arrests and pending prosecutions, there with be both voluntary support groups and groups of sympathetic lawyers attached to the cases. Both are important sources of information, and through them one can gradually gain access both to obscure printed materials and to people who are more difficult to reach directly.

Research in topics related to government, mainstream politics, and large bureaucratic organizations carries a quite different set of access problems. It may be easier to obtain initial introductions for this sort of research through academic channels, but one's contacts have changing meaning and utility over time. This can be an advantage, in that research done by young scholars at the lower levels of a bureaucracy may provide much higher levels of access ten or twenty years later, if the contacts have been carefully cultivated in the interim. Over a shorter period, however, the universal practice of tenkin, or regular job rotation, means that the people you knew three years ago are unlikely to be in the same position. Not only will the new incumbents know nothing about you, the former holder of the office may have neither the power nor the inclination to grant you any access at his current work site. For those working in politics, the disarray of the past few years has created uncertainties where previously one could look forward to considerable stability in research contacts.

The problem of research access is not as formidable as the sheer volume of foreign academic researchers might imply, for the simple reason that a substantial proportion of research projects in Japan are designed around access that the researcher already possesses through personal connections. This may come about through academic ties established in the United States, or through the researcher's personal interests and prior experiences in Japan. Increasingly these conditions hold not only for experienced academics, but for graduate students who have lived in Japan previously. While still playing the role of the person "who wants to know," the researcher can also be the person "who knows" how to gain access and even how the research setting works, on the basis of prior experiential knowledge.

We should also never forget that the sort of research access we seek is far less common in Japanese academia, and places much greater burdens on our hosts than we may ever know. Every aspect of research access binds us in webs of obligation that can have unforeseen consequences long into the future. If we think about how difficult such relations are within Japanese society, it is a wonder that get any access at all, let alone the generous research cooperation with which most of us have been blessed.

d) data collection

Even though social scientists have some special access and data collection needs, they also share with Japan specialists in other disciplines the need for good working relations with Japanese academics well beyond securing an initial affiliation. The foreign researcher may need or want to tap directly into what Japanese scholars know about the subject of the research itself. This can come about through a variety of possible relationships, ranging from a consultation in which the Japanese scholar clarifies obscure points from his own store of knowledge, to a relationship in which the Japanese scholar provides general background and

interpretation of phenomena as a knowledgeable informant, to a mutually beneficial research collaboration between two scholars with common interests and perhaps complementary research skills. When it is a Japanese scholar "who knows" because of his own research and a foreign Japan specialist "who wants to know" because of a research interest in the same phenomenon, there are new dynamics and pitfalls to the relationship involving the ownership of intellectual property and the norms of Japanese academic life.

In the social sciences there is often yet another sort of knower: Japanese people who know by virtue of simply living their lives. They may or may not be conscious or reflective about their life experience. They may "know" in the sense of "joshiki" about how things are done and what they mean, or they may know from personal memory about their own experiences or some larger phenomenon. They may know what they think or feel or believe. In all of these cases one can elicit their knowledge by asking the right questions. On the other hand, they may not consciously know, but still be participants in some aggregate phenomenon of interest to the foreign Japan specialist. It may well be that nobody knows, but that there is something to be known if one watches and listens carefully. Interaction with this kind of person "who knows" is most essential to American style social science fieldwork and perhaps the least familiar source of knowledge for some Japanese scholars, even though their own understanding may itself be based on a lifetime of immersion in Japanese culture.

e) analysis and interpretations

If we stop at this point, all of the research interactions place the foreign Japan specialist in the position of the seeker of knowledge who is dependent upon Japanese who know in order to get any answers. But at some point, presumably, the foreigner does acquire information or data, and does analyze it to his or her own satisfaction. In a traditional model, the foreign researcher then goes back home and becomes the person who knows for an American audience that wants to know. The colonial version of that model contends that the foreign scholar has exploited those from whom he learned, but some would contend that in the Japanese version it is the foreign scholar who becomes the unwitting conduit for interpretations that serve someone else's agenda. Neither side of this argument leads anywhere useful, in my opinion.

More important is the fact that in contemporary Japan, the foreign researcher also becomes a person who knows, vis-à-vis the Japanese with whom he or she has interacted and perhaps even a wider audience. The significance of that fact depends upon the nature of the foreign Japan specialist's initial relationship to the one who knows, and the sort of knowledge that has been acquired. If you have utilized someone's services or goodwill in order to obtain access to information, that relationship may carry with it a claimcheck on the results of your quest. The expectations may range from simple curiosity about what you learned and how you interpreted it, to a trust that you will not use the information in a harmful way. There may be similar claimchecks when you have obtained information directly. If you have simply sat at the feet of the master and acquired a bit of his knowledge, your knowledge may still seem trivial and the issue may be how faithfully you acknowledge its source. Increasingly, however,

foreign scholars who do their own primary research in Japan find that they have become the knower for an audience in Japan that wants to know.

I hasten to add that there is nothing uniquely Japanese about this phenomenon, and you can read about it in any current book about qualitative methods or reflexivity. There are also some good reasons that it is becoming more visible in contemporary Japan. In addition to the sheer increase over time in the number of Japan specialists who have been hanging around long enough to become visible, there is the incredible mass media saturation of Japan and the concomitant need to fill pages and airtime with something mildly novel, as well as the shrinkage of time and distance that makes it possible for us to pop back into the society we've just studied or for interested Japanese to pop over to the US and ask us a few questions. Aside from the ego boost of being celebrity for a day and the economic advantage of getting an occasional honorarium or royalty check in yen, there are two important implications of this situation for contemporary research in Japanese Studies.

The first implication concerns circumstances in which foreign researchers are able to study things that Japanese cannot easily do. There are sensitivities in Japanese society that make certain research topics academically risky or inappropriate for Japanese scholars, even though they may have considerable interest in the subject. Although we should not flatter ourselves that the attention we receive for our research is any different than that accorded to a carnival sideshow, there may occasionally be some value in displaying a three-headed calf and explaining how it got that way. Being permanent outsiders to Japanese society gives us the freedom to examine sensitive subjects and say things more directly than people who have deeper stakes in the society. That does not necessarily mean we saw something they could not see, but simply that we could say it out loud. Saying too much, too loudly, in the wrong place can of course have consequences for our own academic careers as Japan specialists, but often what we "discover" is something that many Japanese think could use a little gai'atsu. They are simply delighted that we are willing to say publicly something they would like to have aired, and will be most helpful in arranging venues in Japan to promulgate our ideas.

The second concerns the hall of mirrors effect of such mini-celebrity on one's capacity to continue doing the same sort of research. I think we all know by now that one cannot observe a phenomenon without in some way affecting the thing you are trying to study, but it is still unnerving to find that your interpretation has become a subject of discussion in the internal debates of your research subjects. Sometimes you can incorporate that interaction into the research process. I discovered a while back that every time a certain very sophisticated political prisoner published yet another commentary about the mistakes I had made in my interpretation of a particular event, he was dribbling out a little bit more information about what really had happened — information he couldn't just tell me because it would compromise his own legal case. Joseph Tobin and others have elevated this technique to a deliberate methodological tool in which the researcher's preliminary observations and findings are fed back to the subjects for a discussion that then becomes an integral part of the research.

On the other hand, a foreign researcher who becomes too famous or high status may find

that certain kinds of social science research are no longer possible because the researcher's own image distorts the research situation. Chalmers Johnson probably could not study a government ministry the way he did twenty-five years ago, and Ezra Vogel could not as easily spend a year studying a dozen young white collar workers and their families. Perhaps neither man would want to do that sort of research again, but to a certain extent I think the social dynamics of research in Japan may also consign them to studying elites whose own celebrity nullifies the effect of their own.

In this two-part paper I have explored the various relationships that Japan specialists have with their constituencies and audiences in North America, on the one hand, and with their colleagues, collaborators and research informants in Japan, on the other. In order to focus on the working aspects of these relationships I have framed them with the simple questions Who knows? and Who wants to know? These turn out not to be such simple questions after all, because we no longer stand in a stable position in either situation. While it is probably more important in the long run to get on with our work of trying to understand Japan and to communicate that understanding to others, I think it is useful periodically to stand back and reflect on how we go about trying to understand Japan, and what we are communicating to whom on the basis of that hard-won understanding.

Notes

1 The data reported here are derived from a large-scale survey carried out in conjunction with the production of a revised edition of the *Directory of Japan Specialists and Japanese Studies Institutions in the United States and Canada.* The new edition was published in 1995 as Japan Foundation, *Directory of Japan Specialists and Japanese Studies Institutions in the United States and Canada.* Japanese Studies Series XXIV, 3 vols. Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 1995. There are entries for 1,853 Japan specialists in the directory. The study received 1,406 responses to the survey section of the questionnaire (defined as material that was not printed in the directory entry), including some from graduate students and other persons whose entries were not selected for the directory. The survey data reported in this paper are restricted to respondents who were included in the directory. Not all directory entrants completed the survey section of the questionnaire, and some respondents did not complete all questions.

2 Steinhoff, Patricia G. "Who Knows? Who Wants to Know? Defining Japanese Studies in the 1990s: Audiences and Constituencies," which appears elsewhere in this volume. As reported there, two-thirds conducted research for academic publication, and about half as preparation for teaching. For the set of questions concerning the general aim and form of research the number of usable cases was 1,147. This was a multiple-response variable on which respondents could select as many answers as they wished, and the mean number of responses was 2.26. All percentages are based on the number of respondents, not the total number of responses.

3 The series of questions concerning specific types of research was also a multiple response set, with a usable sample of 1,044 and an average of 2.67 responses per person.

4 Questions concerning contact with Japanese scholars in Japan are based on 1,150 cases with a mean of 4.56 responses per person. Questions concerning contact with other Japan specialists are based on 1,145 cases with a mean of 4.37 responses per person.

5 The set of questions concerning types of research resources used was based on a sample of 1,058 cases with an average of 3.2 responses per person. The question on accessibility of a library with a

Japanese collection had a slightly lower response rate of 961 cases.

6 The cross-tabulation by discipline groups places 50.5 percent of the survey respondents into the humanities, including those in history, languages and literature, and the arts. The social science category, comprising about a third of the sample, includes professional fields closely related to the social sciences as well. Excluded from these two categories are interdisciplinary studies, sciences, and other disciplines not readily codable into these categories. Ten cases were lost in this process, for a total of 1,048 cases.

7 See note 4, above, for relevant numbers of cases.