

Future Prospects: How to Meet Research and Information Needs

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There has been an increasing number of interdisciplinary scholarly researches, and Japanese studies is no exception. A shift in interest from traditional Japanology topics toward interdisciplinary and comparative studies in various fields of traditionally non-Japanese studies is noticeable. A tremendous increase of interdisciplinary research as well as the broadening of users seeking diverse Japan-related information necessitates that libraries with Japanese collections think very hard how to meet with the new demands and survive this difficult time of financial restraint. Traditional Japanese studies collections certainly will not be enough and current and future Japanese collections have to serve a much wider range of users besides those of traditional Japanese studies.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Three major areas of particular concern for future Japanese collections were identified as the result of the Hoover Conference. They are collection development, improved access, and training of librarians. To build our future in a most effective way with limited resources, personnel included, the National Coordinating Committee on Japanese Library Resources (abbreviated hereafter as NCC), established by the Japan Foundation in 1991, should be the central coordinating organization for effective cooperation and collaboration among Japanese collections. The dissolution of the National Planning Team of the Hoover Conference was meant to be for the betterment of Japanese collections and we are "to work though the NCC to finish what we have started with the Hoover Conference and the National Planning Team and go beyond as far as our vision will take us," according to Hideo Kaneko's concluding words of the National Planning Team's final report. As Mihoko Miki has pointed out, currently the NCC is not functioning effectively nor moving toward the direction we anticipated after the Hoover Conference. The major reason why it is not functioning to its full capacity, nor meeting the high expectation of Japanese librarians, is the lack of understanding and clear vision and long-range plan. Projects of its subcommittees seem to be selected and operated almost haphazardly, and are not being followed through.

If the NCC is going to be the core organization for the cooperation and collaboration of Japanese collections, it is urgent for the NCC to set up the goals where Japanese collections should be heading. Then the NCC should scrutinize and reevaluate its work, prioritize the

projects to be done, and concentrate on realizing them rather than starting various projects at the same time and not being able to follow through. The members of the NCC should be kept to a manageable number in order to work effectively, efficiently, and responsibly. If the committee is too large, it takes too much time to come to a consensus or even to hold meetings for deliberation on various matters that are brought to the committee. The core members of the NCC should be experienced, capable, and committed librarians with clear visions of their goals and thorough understanding of the needs of the Japanese library field, and a few scholars with a true interest and concern for the future of Japanese studies as a whole to serve in an advisory function. Representatives of other interested organizations can be observers or consultants and called upon when the need arises.

The following are my ideas of how to tackle the problems in our field.

1. Collection Assessment

A collection assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the existing Japanese collections in the United States is of the highest priority. Both of the reports from the Japan Foundation conducted in 1991 and the Task Force for the Association of Research Libraries' Foreign Acquisition Project for Japanese Materials conducted in 1992 confirmed what we Japanese librarians have known all along, that the Japanese collections in the United States are strong in humanities, but weak in social sciences, and science and technology. But both of the reports failed to show those facts in any quantitative or qualitative way. In past surveys of East Asian libraries in North America, strengths of the collections were self-claimed and the surveyors took the reporting libraries word for it, and never questioned their validity. It is obvious that an evaluation without any actual figures is very subjective to say the least, and influenced too much by the reporter's perception. The reporters will typically say, "Our collection is strong in such and such subjects," but too often they are thinking only in a comparative manner about their own collections or the collections with which they are familiar.

The only quantitative survey divided by subject was done by Naomi Fukuda conducted between 1979 and 1980. Still, Fukuda's survey lumped all subjects in social sciences into one, "social sciences," while she divided subjects in humanities into philosophy/religions, history, and language/literature. From her survey it became clear that Japanese collections are indeed weak in social sciences, but a detailed subject-by-subject profile of social sciences has yet to be examined in another survey. So although we need to strengthen social sciences and science and technology, the first priority still has to be to conduct a collection assessment of the strengths and weaknesses in the most objective way possible. Standard subject bibliographies in Japanese language should be used as checklists where they are available. For example, to evaluate basic reference collections, Makino and Saito's new book, *A Student Guide to Japanese Sources in the Humanities* (Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 1994) might be useful.

For subjects for which standard bibliographies are not available, checklists of core collections to be used for evaluation might have to be developed by a group of Japanese

scholars and librarians first, since the existing subject categories of the Research Libraries Group for collection evaluation are too broad for this purpose.

2. National Collection Development

The next step is to work out a detailed plan of collection development responsibilities allotted to the Japanese collections. The goal must be to build a national collection and collections of special strengths so that collections of various sizes can take part and contribute to the national collection development plan. The NCC should be responsible for coordinating the cooperation of Japanese collections as well as locating funding agencies to make this plan successful. First, libraries which were identified as very strong in certain subjects must be asked whether they intend to maintain that strength and be urged to commit to the collection development of the identified subjects. For subjects important for Japanese studies of the future, but for which no particularly strong collection can be located, the NCC might find libraries which are not committed to any other subject in this national collection development, and coordinate assigning a library for each of these subjects. The NCC has to help find funding for those libraries that commit themselves to this national collection development plan. The NCC has a crucial role in these negotiations for cooperation and collaboration among individual libraries.

3. Retrospective Conversion of Pre-1983 Materials

Since we know that Japanese collections in the United States are weak in the social sciences, we can start working on the retrospective conversion of the Hoover Collection, which specializes in the social sciences and is known for its excellence. Karen Smith-Yoshimura of Research Libraries Group conducts an annual survey of Chinese, Japanese and Korean vernacular materials in the RLIN Database. According to her, materials published before 1982 are weakest in the database due to the fact that many major Japanese collections have not conducted retrospective conversion of card catalogs of materials published before the days of online catalogs. The lack of information of these resources is detrimental to the ability of scholars and researchers to conduct effective and thorough research, and also limits our ability to share information among Japanese libraries in the United States. The NCC should urge large Japanese collections such as University of California at Berkeley, Harvard-Yenching Library, and Columbia University to do retrospective conversion of card catalogs which have not been converted into machine readable format. This could be accomplished by a collective effort, or individually with the NCC seeking government funding. Many smaller collections can derive their cataloging records once the converted catalog records are made available online through national bibliographic utilities, or search online for interlibrary loan items which will result in tremendous savings of money and time for individual libraries. Among the major Japanese collections, the Asia Library of the University of Michigan and the East Asian Library of the University of California at Los Angeles have already completed retrospective conversion of their entire collections. The retrospective conversion of card catalogs should be an essential step toward a national database so that the materials which exist in the United States can be accessed before interlibrary loan requests go out of the

country. The lack of pre-1983 publications in online national databases is a very serious problem which could be remedied by the national retrospective conversion project of Japanese materials. Access to unpublished records, such as archival materials, local histories, and personal papers are also important, and access to these should be made available by preparing catalogs, checklists, and indexes, either in paper form or in electronic format at some point in the future for those normally hidden primary sources. When I conducted a survey for the Task Force on Retrospective Conversion of the Cataloging Records of the Hoover Conference at the beginning of 1992, 93.3 percent of the responding libraries already had both local online catalogs and access to the national bibliographic utilities such as OCLC or RLIN. Therefore, retrospective conversion of the major Japanese collections is the most effective way to have everyone's collections online quickly and economically.

4. Improving Access

The national collection development plan includes both monographs, and serials, including backfiles of newspapers, of course. Once the retrospective conversion of the major collections is completed, we will have information on serials both current and ceased. Newspaper holdings will also be available since back issues are likely to be in microfilm format or reduced-size edition. Retrospective conversion of major Japanese collections will greatly facilitate many of the important national cooperative projects, particularly any concerted project for improving access to materials, such as compiling a union catalog of serial publications.

The development of new methods of document delivery will support new resource sharing systems and this technology will shape the future of Japanese collections. With the widespread use of electronic mail, the Internet, and online catalogs, the speed of access and communication for interlibrary cooperation will be improved dramatically. Of course it is not possible nor is it practical to try to acquire all materials for libraries in the United States even after the retrospective conversion of all the Japanese collections are completed, and the systematic national collection development plan is in place. International cooperation is crucial for improved access of information. The speed of national and international interlibrary loan services can be speeded up by digitally scanning the text using Arial and sending it through the Internet. Perhaps we can work out ways of faxing articles rather than sending them by regular mail. The NCC can be a powerful intermediary to negotiate with Kokuritsu Kokkai Toshokan and other Japanese libraries as the advocate for the Japanese collections in the United States.

What Japanese collections of the future need most desperately will be electronic information from Japan. There are several excellent academic information centers such as Kokusai Nihon Bunka Kenkyu Senta, Kokuritsu Minzokugaku Hakubutsukan, Kokuritsu Kokubungaku Kenkyu Shiryokan besides NACSIS, and JICST as well as various commercially available online databases. If we can access through the Internet the databases in these centers, that will greatly increase the amount of information available overseas to meet the growing need in a very timely manner. We need the cooperation of Japanese

government to lift restrictions and to ease hindrances such as rigid copyright law for accessing databases through the Internet. Certainly the establishment of the Japanese Document Center at the Library of Congress is a big step forward in the right direction. We need generous assistance, technical support, and cooperation from Japan to strengthen the pipeline of information transfer. Traditionally, many Japanese collections in the United States are not especially known for their strength in Western language publications related to Japan, particularly publications from Japan and Europe not published by well-established university presses. As a matter of fact, most of the academic libraries in the United States maintain Western language publications on Japan separately from Japanese language collections. This condition has to change, and here again, we need cooperation from Japan to make English-language materials published in Japan widely available.

5. Training of Future Librarians

Lack of qualified personnel is one of the major problems facing the immediate future of Japanese librarianship. The problem of how to train and where to find qualified Japanese librarians who possess the prerequisite expertise in a wide range of subject matters, extensive bibliographical knowledge of the field, and a commitment to the profession is a serious problem which the field is already facing. For example, at the Library of Congress Japanese Division, 70% of the Japanese librarians are nearing retirement. Although recruiting the next generation of Japanese librarians is crucial, recruiting is extremely difficult because there is not enough incentive nor monetary advantage for students to become librarians since libraries are not financially competitive with other fields. While the training and recruitment of Japanese librarians are certainly urgent matters, I know it is difficult to retain good library school graduates in the profession even in Japan. Extending scholarships or fellowships to become Japanese studies librarians for those able and devoted support staff who are already working in the East Asian libraries in the United States as non-professionals might be one way of securing able personnel. Come to think of it, many of the Japanese librarians currently in the field are self-taught including the three of us here. How did we learn our job? We learned from our seniors, or even from the younger ones with more experience on the job. We learned by working, thinking and trying harder. At the same time, we ourselves have trained many new librarians and interns who were to become next generation of the Japanese librarians. What is the most important and effective way of securing the next generation of Japanese studies librarians is that each one of us Japanese librarians who are currently working in the field continues to do this.

CONCLUSION

Today's librarians function within an environment of rapid change. The driving force behind this change is constantly changing technology, of course. I remember very clearly how librarians in some smaller Japanese collections reacted when the subject of cooperation among East Asian libraries was brought up in a regional meeting several years ago. Many

were so desperate and so pessimistic about any cooperation using electronic media because their university either did not have any plans for using national online databases nor developing online systems for their local use. Some East Asian collections were totally excluded and ignored from the automation of their parent libraries at that time. They felt helpless. But the situation has changed now. The tone of desperation in these Japanese librarian's voices has slightly changed nowadays. The main reason for the cautious optimism is the impact of new advanced technology in use in the libraries. Some portion of the crisis of Japanese studies collections will be overcome with the help of new technology. The administrators of many libraries, particularly those of smaller libraries, realized that connecting online cataloging databases is the most economical way to catalog their library materials. As a result many of the Japanese collections in the United States are now connected to national online databases. As a matter of fact, most small- to medium- size Japanese collections have all their collections online, and many of the major collections are now the ones which have the majority of their pre-automation-days cataloging records not available online. The new information technology has given all of us unprecedented equal chance to be world-class libraries. With the technology available to all, the hierarchies between various sizes and types of libraries are breaking down.

We the librarians have to realize the inevitability of institutional interdependence and must support national programs in order to survive. There will be an increased level of requests for resources from outside of the institutions. Without some infrastructure — some type of reciprocal arrangement or compensation — it will become extremely difficult to continue cooperation because major Japanese collections in the United States will explode with increased burden. Each component in a national cooperative system must do its share to make the cooperation work.

The major theme of the future will be access. Increased reliance on access rather than on ownership requires more access providing bibliographic information about items within the local collection as well as to materials owned by other libraries through the retrospective conversion of cataloging records of pre-automated catalogs.

Cooperation in all areas of library services is the key to everything. Also, growing global interdependence is inevitable. We have to define our own future directions and roles in the Japanese studies community. The Japanese librarians, particularly those who are in administrative posts, have to take an active role in university-wide long-range strategic planning as a strong advocate for Japanese studies. If research libraries, including Japanese collections, are to have a prosperous future, the librarians will have to create it. Our future will be an exciting time of change. The future of Japanese studies collections depend on how effectively we cooperate and use limited resources, both material and human, to the maximum. We need to renew our commitment to resources sharing, not only library materials, but, reference services, facilities and human resources as well. We need to explore and define future directions for Japanese collections and articulate roles in the Japanese studies research community.

How the Japanese collections in the U. S. will be maintained and developed would not be the decision of Japanese librarians alone. Scholars in the field of Japanese studies and related fields and the administrators of the institutions where they belong will play a significant role in characterizing and influencing the future of Japanese collections. The function of the librarians will have to change, also as well as the organization for services. Librarians are no longer serving only as the key to the particular collection. Librarians are there to assist, consult and act as a gateway or switchboard operator to help users in navigating electronic information scattered in numerous databases.

Mihoko Miki has laid out the current status of Japanese collections and Kenji Niki has pointed out that Japanese studies have become interdisciplinary and the users have diversified. There are many challenges facing Japanese studies collections of the future: dramatic increase in the volume and variety of formats, and costs of acquiring needed information; the difficulty of maintaining acquisition levels given financial restrictions; responding to broadened user demands; growing global interdependence among libraries. It is apparent that none of these problems has easy answers. What is needed most is intelligent insight as well as the concrete means to fulfil our duties as Japanese studies librarians. We must train ourselves to become competent Japanese studies librarians who have the insight to foresee the direction the field is heading and to prepare for it. We must find ways to accomplish this goal through cooperation both national and international.

We believe that the Kyoto Conference is an unprecedented opportunity to contemplate the best method to carry on Japanese studies librarian's tasks internationally and to lay the foundation for a meaningful future endeavor for Japanese studies scholars outside of Japan.