

West meets East – Epilogue

Almost a year has passed since my Horner Fellowship visit to Japan. Although I discovered that many of my assumptions about the use of technology in Japanese libraries were incorrect, I learned many valuable lessons that I continue to reflect upon.

Lesson 1: We're not alone in our struggles. Regardless of our cultural differences, libraries in both countries have to make difficult choices in the collections and services they offer their patrons. And the reasons for making these decisions are often based on economic reasons, space constraints, or perhaps the vast differences in the types of patrons using the library. East or West – library issues are library issues wherever you go.

Lesson 2 (or perhaps 1a): Students are students no matter where you find them. And they're going to research with the most convenient tools available to them. They prefer potentially unreliable information *now*, rather than credible information later. The librarians I spoke with in Japan are competing with Google and Yahoo, just as we are here in the US.

Lesson 3: There's a fine line between preserving our culture and progressing forward. The librarians in Japan seemed very hesitant to incorporate a large amount of technology in their libraries, although most westerners think of Japan as a very technologically progressive country. After spending time there, I came to understand that they have a historically extensive print culture and there is concern that this culture is slipping away.

To me, this last lesson is the most important of all. In the US, there have been stories of the all-electronic library and the demise of the printed book. In Japan, there is trepidation about offering any electronic materials, which has the risk of losing patrons. I'm empathetic to the concerns of culture becoming lost. However, we can't ignore the fact that society continues to progress forward. If librarians and libraries don't adapt and merely complain about patrons wanting convenience over reliability, we will lose touch with the very people we are trying to help. Instead, I believe that libraries should be the bridge between the two. Rather than sacrifice one for the other, there must be a way for the two to exist harmoniously.

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