

10-7-2014

Expatriate Japanese Families as Unexpected Users of Public Libraries: A Case Study in a College Town Community in the United States

Ryuta Komaki

Washington University in St Louis

Fukuji Imai

Shirayuri College

Yukinori Okabe

Doshisha University

Follow this and additional works at: https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/lib_present



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Komaki, Ryuta; Imai, Fukuji; and Okabe, Yukinori, "Expatriate Japanese Families as Unexpected Users of Public Libraries: A Case Study in a College Town Community in the United States" (2014). *University Libraries Presentations*. 10.
https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/lib_present/10

This Poster is brought to you for free and open access by the University Libraries at Washington University Open Scholarship. It has been accepted for inclusion in University Libraries Presentations by an authorized administrator of Washington University Open Scholarship. For more information, please contact digital@wumail.wustl.edu.

Expatriate Japanese Families as Unexpected Users of Public Libraries

A Case Study in a College Town Community in the United States

Ryuta Komaki[†], Fukuji Imai[‡] and Yukinori Okabe^{††}
 Washington University in St. Louis[†], Shirayuri College[‡], Doshisha University^{††}



Highlights

- This study looks at “trailing” spouses and children of international students and workers from Japan.
- The authors interviewed families staying in a micro-urban, university-centered community in the United States.
- What and how do they read? They “travel light” and do little e-reading. They use local public libraries actively.
- Public libraries can be a great resource for them, but predicting their needs may be challenging.

Background

- Dali (2012): “Immigrant readership” is an area that needs more empirical research and attentions.
- Reading and information seeking behavior of short-term transnational residents of the United States (i.e. the Japanese families in this study) are similarly less well studied.

Number of Japanese citizens living abroad:

Worldwide	1,182,557
United States (non-permanent resident)	241,910

Breakdown by purpose of stay (U.S.):

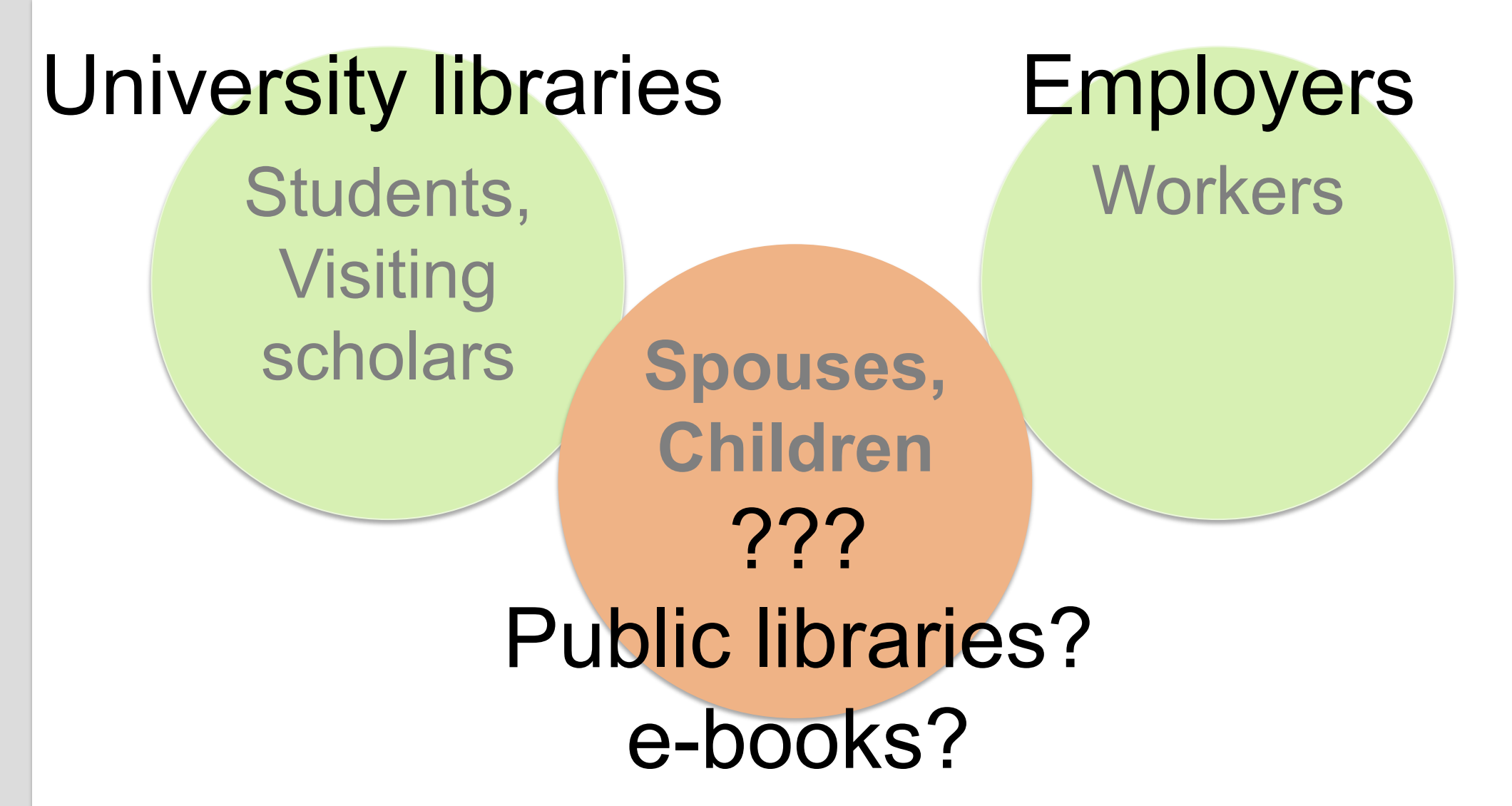
Student, scholar, educator	65,641
Spouse, children of student, scholar, educator	16,895
Corporate employee	52,093
Spouse, children of corporate employee	70,243

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2012)
<http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/toko/tokei/hojin/index.html>

Literature

- Dali (2012) studies Russian immigrant readers in Canada. Dali’s analysis focuses mainly on psychological models of “acculturation” and presupposes a more traditional mode of immigration.
- Kunimoto et al. (2009) suggest that Japanese readers have multiple definitions and interpretations of 読書 (*dokusho*; reading). Readers use a wide range of physical, intellectual and emotional factors to assess if their reading experience amounts to 読書.

Research Question



- “Trailing” family members of international students and workers receive little active support from university libraries or employers. What sources do they turn to instead to fulfill their information and reading needs?

Method

- Respondents were recruited from a pool of Japanese families that temporarily live in the area with plans to return to Japan after a predetermined period of time (degree completion, termination of a corporate transfer arrangement, etc.).
- The authors conducted semi-structured interviews with adult members of the families. Total of 7 (4 female, 3 male) from 4 families were interviewed.
- Each interview lasted 60-90 minutes.

Families

	Purpose	Interviewee age, # of Children	Anticipate	Time in US
1.	Study	20s/30s, 1 (toddler)	2 years	19 months
2.	Study	30s, 2 (grade school)	20 months	6 months
3.	Research	40s, 1 (middle school)	1 year	8 months
4.	Corporate transfer	30s, 1 (pre-school)	2-3 years	11 months

Result

- Most families are “traveling light.” This also affects the size of their personal print book collections.
- **But the use of e-book is low, in spite of an apparent fit with the “pack light” approach, and the high rate of PC, tablet and smartphone adoption.**
- All of the families use local public libraries, despite originally having limited linguistic and cultural backgrounds.
- Frequency of library visit ranges from once a month to multiple times a week.
- **Highly used and desired items include children’s books (both by adults and children), films and visual-centric craft and hobby books.**

Conclusion

- The transient nature of the stay and the “travel light” mentality shapes the “trailing” members’ reading needs, goals and practices.
- Public libraries in the 21st century face a challenge of engaging patrons with differential social, physical and transnational mobilities, (Sheller and Urry 2006) but can be a powerful resource for them.
- Possible ways to reach this group include children’s services, audio-visual collections and a maker space.

Works Cited

- Dali, K. (2012) “Reading their way through immigration: The leisure reading practices of Russian-speaking immigrants in Canada,” *Library and Information Science Research*, 34: pp.197-211.
- Kunimoto, C., et al. (2009) “Tosho kōi no jigen: Seijin o taishō to shita fōkasu gurūpu intabyū” (Dimensions of reading: Based on focus group interviews with adults), *Nihon Toshokan Jōhō Gakkaishi*, 55(4): pp.199-212.
- Sheller, M. and Urry, J. (2006) “The new mobilities paradigm,” *Environment and Planning A*, 38: pp.207-226.