Two Japanese Journal Index Databases Available through Harvard-Yenching and DCJ

Two Japanese online databases now available via the Documentation Center on Contemporary Japan and the Harvard-Yenching library will interest readers of Tsushin and other researchers on Japan. Zasshi kiji sakuin (ZKS, index of magazine articles) and Janaru indekkuusu (JI, journal index) may be accessed by individuals with Harvard affiliation through these two Harvard channels.

Zasshi kiji sakuin is Japan's sole academic journal index. It has been available on paper since 1949, and academic libraries in the U.S. have tended to stick to the print version because of technical and cost issues associated with its CD-ROM and telnet format. Nichigai's new web-based service, however, makes available at a reasonable fixed fee all the benefits of an online index, including timeliness (updated every two weeks), cross-reference capability, and efficient search through over ten years of records. Further details are available at Nichigai's website (http://web.nichigai.co.jp).

ZKS is produced by the National Diet Library of Japan and covers most of the postwar period in all academic fields, including the sciences and technology. The online version has entries for over 1 million articles drawn from over 5,607 journal titles (3,067 up to June 1996, another 2,540 were added). Many of these journals are highly specialized and non-commercial. ZKS excludes articles of less than two pages, as well as announcements, statistical information, and literary works.

Janaru indekkuusu is produced by Nichigai Associates, which from the start designed it for electronic distribution. JI has entries for some 600,000 articles from 155 popular and general journals starting in 1981, and is updated weekly. There is considerable overlap with ZKS for journal titles after June 1996, when ZKS expanded its coverage, but JI complements ZKS for many articles published between January 1981 and May 1996.

From the user's point of view, how well do these index databases perform and compare with each other?

ZKS and JI have almost identical interfaces, which are simple and easy to use. Both databases allow search by date, title, author, journal title and uncontrolled keyword. ZKS is partially searchable by publisher and ISSN. The search requires no complex strategy such as one might employ with Nexis, so that first-time users will find what they need. Yet limited search options limit their utility, as...
This short article will show you why I chose these interfaces for this review. The first interface is the "Jana-sha", and the second interface is the "ZKS". I compared the results of searching the same keywords in both databases. I found that the "Jana-sha" database returned twice as many results as the "ZKS". For example, searching for the word "uyoku" (right wing) for the last five years returned 292 articles with the "Jana-sha", but only 48 with the "ZKS". About 20% of both the "Jana-sha" and "ZKS" results were about non-Japan right-wing topics. The "ZKS" also incorrectly reported three articles that had the wrong "uyoku" (an adverb meaning foremost, right-hand side) in their titles.

A closer look at the initial results of my search helps to understand the differences between these two journal databases. Of the 48 articles reported by the "ZKS", only 2 referred to current politics. In contrast, the "Jana-sha" reported many articles on right-wing involvement in national politics, including recent prime ministers. Yet, a unique virtue of the "ZKS" is its extensive coverage of monograph series published by Japanese universities, and of other serials published by academic and research institutes.

A number of the "uyoku" articles reported by the "ZKS" appear in specialized professional and academic journals like Keisatsu jihō (Police current), Keisatsugaku ronshu (Police studies), Hyōron shakai kagaku (Review of Social Science), and Rōdō undō (Labor movement). The "Jana-sha" is likely to give more extensive results for searches on contemporary topics pertinent to the social sciences, and even to literature and history. Its ability to generate more results may owe to the "ZKS"'s two-page rule, its less aggressive indexing based on older classifications, and its small universe of indexed journals prior to 1996.

But the usefulness of both of these index databases will depend on the needs and strategies of the individual researcher.

P.S.: Nichigai Web Service can provide xeroxed copies of requested articles to registered members via fax or mail for a fee. Nichigai's own ID number follows each citation for this purpose. An electronic document delivery system is under development by NACSIS (National Center for Science Information Systems) of Japan.