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# Expatriate Japanese Families as Unexpected Users of Public Libraries

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

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### 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
<b>United States</b> (non-permanent resident)	<b>241,910</b>

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

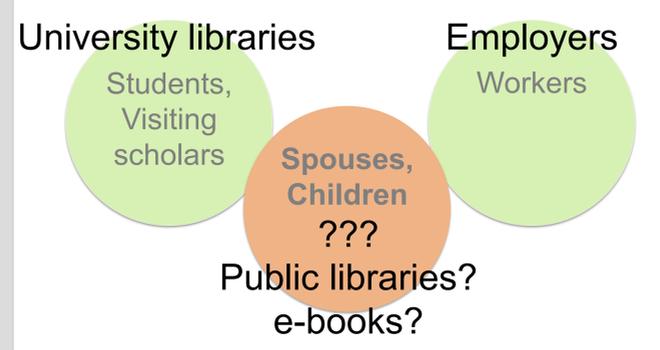
Student, scholar, educator	65,641
<b>Spouse, children of student, scholar, educator</b>	<b>16,895</b>
Corporate employee	52,093
<b>Spouse, children of corporate employee</b>	<b>70,243</b>

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 21<sup>st</sup> 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.
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- Sheller, M. and Urry, J. (2006) “The new mobilities paradigm,” *Environment and Planning A*, 38: pp.207-226.