

# **The Japanese Historical Council's Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic**

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# I. Organization and Activities of the Japanese Historical Council

- The Japanese Historical Council was formed in 1950 as a union of Japanese historical societies.
- Currently, 82 historical societies compose the Japanese Historical Council.
- the council aims to promote interconnection among historical societies or research institutions and to discuss important topics related to historical science.

## 日本歴史学協会

[日本歴史学協会について](#)

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### 最新情報

2020年12月14日 [2020年度歴史学研究会大会特設部会「『生きづらさ』の歴史を問うII——若手研究者問題について考える」の報告・討論Tweetまとめ、本会若手研究者問題特別委員会報告資料の公開](#)

2020年11月10日 [史料保存利用問題シンポジウム「統発する大災害から史料を守る—現状と課題—」オンライン開催について](#)

2020年11月6日 [「日本学術会議第25期推薦会員任命拒否に関する人文・社会科学系学協会共同声明」の公表・記者会見・賛同学会募集、英文声明の公表・記者会見について（2021年1月6日更新）](#)

2020年10月19日 [「菅首相による日本学術会議会員の任命拒否に強く抗議する\(声明\)」の公表、賛同学会募集、英文声明の公表、歴史学関係団体の取り組みについて（声明のPDF版は\[こちら\]\(#\) \[190KB\]、45学会賛同、2021年1月6日更新）](#)

2020年10月1日 [「日本歴史学協会若手研究者問題ウェブ・アンケート最終報告&討論会～若手研究者問題の解決に向けた提言を考える～（10月30日更新、動画配信開始日の実況・感想まとめへのリンク掲載）」](#)

# I. Organization and Activities of the Japanese Historical Council

- **The Committee of the Japanese Historical Council is composed of the members recommended by the affiliated societies and a select committee organized by committee members.**
- **A standing committee is also organized under the committee of the council.**
- **Seven special committees are organized by the committee members and the commissioned members are appointed by those special committees: the National Archives of Japan; academic freedom and freedom of thought (concerning the “National Foundation Day”); historical education; conservation and use of historical documents; the protection of cultural properties; international exchange; young researchers.**

# I. Organization and Activities of the Japanese Historical Council

- **The promotion of open access historical journals in Japan has been pushed by the special committee of young researchers, as part of the debate regarding how the Japanese Historical Council should respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.**
- **This special committee, which was established in 2018, has chiefly been working on the topics of career paths and the improvement of research environment of young historians, as well as the prevention of all forms of harassment, such as sexual harassment or academic harassment.**

# I. Organization and Activities of the Japanese Historical Council

- **Expanding of the open access of historical journals has also been considered in the framework of the discussion of special committee of young researchers.**
- **Furthermore, this committee has had experience organizing online meetings.**
- **Hence, it could respond to the COVID-19-induced changes relatively quickly.**

## II. Cooperating with the National Diet Library

### Open Request concerning the NDL Digital Collections

- In April 2020, facing the COVID-19 pandemic, the special committee of young researchers held the extra online meetings and discussed the response to the new challenges.
- At first, the committee discussed problems that part-time lecturers at high schools and universities were facing.
- It was argued that the necessary information and the financial support for conducting online lectures and seminars were not enough.
- On the website of the Japanese Historical Council, the council called for proper measures by relevant institutions and issued opinions and requests of part-time lecturers.

## II. Cooperating with the National Diet Library

- **At the same time, the committee considered how difficult it would be for young researchers to continue their research activities since university libraries and municipal libraries were temporarily closed to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 infection.**
- **These individuals needed to continue with their research endeavors, despite the COVID-19 spread.**

## II. Cooperating with the National Diet Library

- In May, the Historical Science Society of Japan (歴史学研究会) asked the Japanese Historical Council to issue a request for the enlargement of the range of open access digitized books and journals available in the National Diet Library (NDL) Digital Collections (国立国会図書館デジタルコレクション).
- Several works have not been made open access because of copyright problems.
- Then, the special committee of young researchers responded to the request.
- Apparently, it was an urgent issue for undergraduate or postgraduate students writing theses that they can access literature and documents on the Internet.

## II. Cooperating with the National Diet Library

- The special committee created a document regarding a “Request for the enhancement of infrastructure of knowledge and information through the enlargement of the range of open access of NDL Digital Collections”.

<http://www.nichirekikyo.com/statement/statement20200523.html>

- This request, dated May 23, 2020, was delivered to the minister of education, culture, sports, science and technology (文部科学省); the director-general of the Agency for Cultural Affairs (文化庁), the chief librarian of the NDL; and the other related organizations.
- The request was approved by 28 historical societies by July 31, 2020.

## II. Cooperating with the National Diet Library

➤ The request contained the following three points:

1. the problem of “orphan works”: the works of 47,943 authors in the NDL Digital Collections are affected by this issue.

2. the 1,518,968 “materials transmitted to the libraries” (図書館送信資料), which include digitized documents, articles, and books that are transmitted only to “joined libraries” approved by the NDL, and 920,565 “materials only disclosed inside the buildings” (館内限定資料) of the NDL. Regarding open access on the Internet or the personal transmission of materials, Article 31 of the Copyright Act of Japan must be amended.

## II. Cooperating with the National Diet Library

**3. the need for cooperation from historians and historical societies—as the copyright holders—to expand open access of journals: the special committee requested a temporary removal of the embargo of publications of historical journals during the period of the closing or limited access of libraries.**

- **The special committee also requested further enhancements regarding the digitization of academic journals.**
- **The “request” of May 23 also intended to promote further digitalization of academic journals and open access publishing.**

# II. Cooperating with the National Diet Library

## Cooperation with the NDL

- The NDL set up a consultation meeting with the special committee of young researchers
- Three proposals of the NDL:
  1. The NDL has already digitized many historical journals part of the preserved materials that were published by the affiliated societies of the Japanese Historical Council. The digitized journals that have not been published on the Internet could be made open access via the NDL Digital Collections service.

## II. Cooperating with the National Diet Library

**2. The NDL has digitized not only old books, but also the academic journals. The NDL would give to digitizing the previous issues of academic journals without charge, if the societies could manage the copyright of their journals and request open access for those journals in the NDL Digital Collections. In this case, each whole volume of journals must be published without exception.**

## II. Cooperating with the National Diet Library

**3. Some historical journals of the societies of the Japanese Historical Council are accessible only inside the buildings of the NDL, and are inaccessible even digitally inside the buildings of “joined libraries.” Such limitations in accessing academic journals should be suspended temporary or removed entirely.**

➤ **Furthermore, the Japanese Historical Council was asked to survey the historical societies with regards to how they have dealt with the issue of copyright in connection with articles published in their own journals.**

## II. Cooperating with the National Diet Library

- **After the meeting, the special committee of young researchers created its “announcement on the publication of academic journals on the internet through the NDL Digital Collections.”**

[http://www.nichirekikyo.com/young\\_researchers/ndl\\_digicolle.html](http://www.nichirekikyo.com/young_researchers/ndl_digicolle.html)

- **It is intended to give the societies the option to provide open access of their journals.**
- the special committee has taken charge of a liaison to receive such open access application of the historical societies and to submit these to the NDL.**

## II. Cooperating with the National Diet Library

- However, few affiliated historical societies of the Japanese Historical Societies gave a positive response regarding this project until the first deadline for applications.
- The inquiries were sent to the special committee about the management of copyright by two leading historical societies.
- Only one society, the History of Science Society of Japan (日本科学史学会), which is not part of the Japanese Historical Council, applied to publish the previous issues of the Journal of History of Science (科学史研究) through the NDL Digital Collections, under the condition of a one and a half year embargo.
- Only two societies agreed to abolish the limitation of reading inside the buildings of the NDL.

## II. Cooperating with the National Diet Library

- Recently, the number of members of most historical societies in Japan has been decreasing, and the primary reason for this seems to be the declining birthrate and aging population of Japan.
- As a result, the financial foundations of many historical societies have become quite unstable. Hence, it is financially difficult for such societies to digitize previous issues of their journals.
- Therefore, the NDL project of the digitalization without charge and publications with one or two years of embargo must be attractive for these societies.
- As a next step, the special committee of young researchers has organized a consultation for the management of copyright for the providing further open access to academic journals.

# III. Obstacles in the Development of Open Access for Japanese Historical Journals

- **Currently, only 29% of journals in 79 journals of the affiliated societies of the Japanese Historical Council implemented open access publishing.**
- **Journals or bulletins of societies organized by history departments or courses of universities are being published via the open access repositories managed by the universities themselves.**
- **Historical societies independent of universities mostly use the service of J-Stage for open access publishing.**

# III. Obstacles in the Development of Open Access for Japanese Historical Journals

- **Many historical societies in Japan have hesitated about open access publishing because of financial concerns.**
- **These societies usually provide their members the right to one printed version of their journals and the right to contribute articles in exchange for the annual fee.**
- **They are afraid of a decrease in revenue due to the declining number of members, since one of the main incentives to join societies would be lost if anyone can read the previous issues of journals for free after the embargo period of one or two years.**

# III. Obstacles in the Development of Open Access for Japanese Historical Journals

- **The leading and influential societies of the *Journal of Historical Studies* and the *Historical Journal* have developed especially in close connection with the grass-roots movement in the Japanese postwar society.**
- **They have strong concerns about a decrease in annual revenue because of open access publishing.**
- **They have endeavored to develop “opened” historiography for postwar Japanese society.**
- **There is a conflict between the Japanese postwar historiography oriented toward an open civil society and the establishment of an open and public history through the open access publishing.**

# III. Obstacles in the Development of Open Access for Japanese Historical Journals

- **These societies do not have sufficient staff to respond any legal proceeding concerning copyright.**
- **It would be impossible for these societies to contact all authors of previous issues and receive consent for the transfer of copyright for all articles for open access publishing.**
- **Especially, regarding the previous issues of the *Journal of Historical Sciences* and the *Historical Journal*, many comments on current topics that were written by authors who were not supposed to read these on the Internet.**
- **Societies such as the Historical Science Society of Japan are concerned about legal cases stemming from a violation of the copyright law.**

## IV. Challenges and Prospects

- **The discussion of the open access publishing of academic journals may remind us of the international problem of the “serials crisis,” wherein university libraries face the rapid price increase of academic journals.**
- **There is a difference between the task of the open access publishing of Japanese academic journals and the “serials crisis” faced by the university libraries worldwide.**
- **Currently, it is difficult for major societies that engage in Japanese postwar historiography to sufficiently respond to the advent of open access publishing.**

# IV. Challenges and Prospects

- Under the COVID-19 pandemic, the special committee of young researchers of the Japanese Historical Council proposed the alternative option of open access publishing using the services of the NDL Digital Collections to those societies.
- The Japanese Historical Council shall endeavor to support diminishing such concerns.
- For this purpose, it would be useful for these societies to share their suggestions on how to solve the problem of the current Japanese copyright law.
- Concrete examples of historical societies that have proceeded with open access publishing shall be shared among societies that have not yet adopted such an endeavor.
- The special committee of young researchers may propose a format of the copyright provisions for the historical journals in Japan.

# IV. Challenges and Prospects

- **The promotion of open access publishing by historians and historical societies concerns both academic journals and academic publications in general.**
- **Currently, the business conditions for the academic publishers are very severe in Japan. Therefore, academic books and collections are rarely reprinted.**
- **Discussions should be held on how academic contributions can be shared as open access publications on the Internet.**
- **Japan is lagging in terms of providing digital versions of the academic books and collections, especially for the humanities subjects. A business model for the publication of digital versions of academic books must be established. Perhaps, the digitalization of academic books would also greatly help university libraries in saving space.**