Wider aspects of a career in entomology. 23. Japan, continued

Hugh V. Danks

This series of articles outlines some ancillary aspects of my entomological career. The approach includes information about insects and their environments, conclusions about scientific activities and their setting, and general observations. This article gives further details of my visits to Japan and cooperation with Japanese colleagues.

My contacts in Japan, including those made during the 1992 visit described in article 22 of this series, led to several collaborations, which culminated in a long stay in Kurashiki during 2004–2005. Before then, I travelled several times to the city of Kochi (Figure 1) to work at the university with Dr Tetsuo Harada (Figure 2). That location and others mentioned below are shown in Figure 3.

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Figure 1. Part of the city of Kochi. Like most Japanese cities, it is bounded inland by mountains, as shown in this view.

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Figure 2. Dr (now Prof.) Tetsuo Harada, photographed in 2005.

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Figure 3. Locations mentioned here in text or captions. Base relief map from Bourrichon (CC BY-SA 2.0).

The first stay in Kochi began with a scientific conference in January 1999, organized by Dr Harada, that was part of a joint Japanese-Czech project on seasonal

Danks, H.V. 2023. Wider aspects of a career in entomology 23. Japan, continued (pp. 1–8, 3 April 2023)

- *Available at Google Drive 23, and through* tinyurl.com/dankswider -

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adaptations in insects and mites (Figure 4). About 60 people were present, and 21 of the papers were later published in the Japanese English-language journal Entomological Science. In 2002, I went to a second meeting in the Czech Republic. Some of the colleagues met on my earlier trip to Japan were present at both events.

My stay at Kochi after the international conference, and on subsequent occasions, had two main objectives. Both were linked to Dr Harada's role in the Faculty of Education at the University.

One objective was to aid students by exposing them to both formal lectures and informal conversations in English.

Tetsuo Harada

Figure 4. Many of the participants at the International Japanese-Czech New-Year Seminar of Entomology (Kochi, 1999).

A few years later, Dr Harada and I considered the wider value of English lectures to students, and I gave three presentations (tailored chiefly to junior undergraduate, senior undergraduate, and graduate students) to test the idea of a set of special lectures by foreign experts, who would cover selected topics at an appropriate level, and speak very slowly. Simultaneous translation would be provided (at least for undergraduates) by a faculty member.

Such an approach would teach subject content, challenge the students, and broaden their view of the world, three key goals in modern education. Kochi University had recently established an award to encourage ways to meet educational challenges, and an application for funds to extend the idea of special lectures was well received. However, there were so many competing proposals that it was not the successful one.

My other objective at Kochi was to contribute to a project, supported by the Japanese Ministry of Education, to prepare a revised biology textbook for Japanese high school students, improving on the current text and incorporating international contributions. The textbook activities as well as the lectures led to contacts with other Japanese scientists and educators. The two objectives overlapped when I gave a talk in English to an audience of high school students and teachers.

All of my lectures (which normally lasted for 1½ hours) were inordinately difficult, not because of the content, but because of the need to speak very slowly—half to two-thirds of the normal speed—without gradually speeding up[1]. Several Japanese colleagues had told me that most American visitors promised to speak very slowly, but then did so for less than a minute. The slow speed was appreciated, to the extent that one of the teachers congratulated me on the clarity of my talk because he had been able, perhaps unexpectedly, to understand "the Queen's English"!

In my experience, most English-speaking scientists are not fully aware of the difficulties encountered by those who speak other languages, given that much of science, and communication about it, is most accessible to those fluent in English. I was therefore happy to see (and contribute to) the efforts being made to assist students in this arena, in Kochi and elsewhere.

Nevertheless, not every student profited fully from my lectures. A graduate student was assigned, as usual, to operate the slide projector manually for one of my talks. The slides were changed on cue until partway through … but then nothing happened when I asked for the next slide. The request was repeated in English, and then in Japanese. There was no response—because the student had fallen asleep in the darkened room! Many people in Japan are sleep-deprived.

[1] Readers might want to try this exercise for about 5 minutes to see how well they manage to stay slowed down whilst continuing to make sense!

Understanding a foreign language is greatly helped initially by hearing speech delivered at a slow speed, as in my lectures. However, Japanese people are not used to speaking their language to foreigners, most of whom know no Japanese anyway, and so never speak more slowly to aid in comprehension. Once, I used my normal conversational speed to demonstrate to my host the routine adjustment I was making in Japan, even when talking informally. He knew English, but was shocked and could not understand most of what was said.

Our discussions about the biology textbook after the Japanese-Czech conference prompted an official visit to Kochi later that year. In Kochi, I met with relevant University faculty and administrators, and with regional officials. In the Motoyama area, the arrangements included discussions with high school principals, education officials, and others; a live television interview, with translation by Dr Harada; and the talk to students and teachers noted above.

The audience for the talk comprised about 200 junior high school students, plus the teachers from district schools. The English information was repeated in Japanese after each sentence (and the translator had to be supplied beforehand with the text). The translation went smoothly, despite the difficulty of remembering to pause so frequently to allow it.

The subject of my presentation to this general audience was a broad one, characterizing Canada's fauna and environments, with little entomological detail. The account was leavened with many illustrations, and with my imitation of a white-throated sparrow (!)—but I was careful to check beforehand with my host that this would be acceptable, just in case yet another Japanese stricture existed that I did not know about…

When the event had finished, I said to the translator that it must be interesting to know about so many different subjects as part of the job. I was surprised when she replied "Hmm … it would be too much for me; I quickly forget it all again afterwards."

About a year later, an international workshop to formulate content and other features of the textbook was held in Kochi. There were Japanese scientists and educators, as well as participants from Canada, Czech Republic, and Denmark (Figures 5, 6). Reflecting the challenge of different languages, the printed program gave my name as "Huge" Danks!

Tetsuo Harada

Figure 5. Attendees at the international workshop for the biology textbook (Kochi and Motoyama, 2001).

Tetsuo Harada

Figure 6. Dr Tetsuo Harada introducing the biology textbook workshop.

Part of the workshop was held in Motoyama, where a newspaper interview, and a visit to observe students at the local high school (Figure 7), were organized.

My role as chair of the workshop discussions was rewarding because of the spirit of cooperation, but also because it gave me further insights. In particular, the Japanese participants, especially the teachers, needed extra time and encouragement to formulate their ideas and overcome a reticence to come forward. Being seen as "pushy" is not desirable in Japan (and most other Asian countries), a possibility that had not required attention during the North American meetings I was used to!

via Tetsuo Harada

Figure 7. Visit to a high school in Motoyama during the biology textbook workshop.

After the workshop, I stayed in Kochi to prepare the workshop report and recommendations, as well as to continue student interactions and lectures. Activities at Okayama University were arranged too.

Although some chapters were drafted for the new textbook, the complexity of introducing changes in Japan (a theme that will be noted in a future article) meant that the project was never completed[2]. Even so, my involvement had been worthwhile on both professional and personal levels.

In Japan, great importance is attached to getting to know people before working with them (as outlined in article 22), and these social interactions are often facilitated over meals. Before the workshop, such events helped to establish a positive mindset among the contributors. One formal occasion in Kochi was a banquet hosted by the University President.

Smaller and less formal encounters favoured specific cooperation. In particular, excellent meals accompanied by bottles of beer and generous measures of sake stimulated relaxed conversations. The companionship was enhanced by the fact that many of these occasions took place in private restaurant spaces (e.g., Figure 8).

In addition, at Kochi (as at some other Universities), a fine "farewell party" was held in the host's laboratory near the end of each visit. The day after one laboratory party, I happened to see a student who had consumed an extraordinary amount of sake the night before. "How are you feeling this morning?" I asked him. He did not understand, and looked for help to a fellow student with much better knowledge of English. That student's translation was interesting, because it reflected the context more than the words themselves: "Good party last night!", he said.

It is not appropriate in Japan to pour your own drink, so during these events everyone constantly tops up the drinking vessels of the others[3]. At one small restaurant, a participant whose manner was normally rather formal and disciplined became particularly convivial,

Hugh Danks

Figure 8. Restaurant gathering at Okayama in 1999. Present were several of the people who helped organize my trips to Japan in 1999–2005: Dr [now Prof.] Tetsuo Harada (standing far right), Prof. Hisaaki Tsumuki (next to left), and Prof. Kenji Fujisaki (left). Standing at left is Dr [now Prof.] Morio Tsukada, who showed me around Nara in 1992 while we discussed his graduate work (when he took the photograph in Figure 12 below), and hosted me in Tsu (65 km W of Nara) in 2005.

[2] Developing other educational themes, Dr Harada later transferred his knowledge of the daily and seasonal timing of water striders to investigate daily cycles in high school students, notably the preference of different individuals for morning or evening activity. He tried to assess whether the degree of exposure to sunlight, the quality of meals, late-night television watching, alcohol consumption, or cigarette smoking, for example, might cause a phase-delay in the circadian clock and favour evening preference, with possible impacts on mental health and school performance. It is easier in Japan than many other places to enlist students, with support from parents, to complete the relevant questionnaires, and his studies were welcomed by physiological anthropologists.

[3] During small private gatherings, the only way to avoid constant topping up might be to leave the drink full without sipping. The prohibition against pouring your own drink also led to a comical scene during a large international conference in Japan. A Japanese scientist with an empty glass desperately pursued oblivious delegates from elsewhere and offered to top up their drinks, hoping in vain for reciprocation.

partly as a result of this practice. At the end of the evening, his wife came to pick him up and briefly joined us. She soon exclaimed: "What have you done to my husband?"

Great care was taken with invitations to all the meals, just as for other guest activities. For example, the restaurant and menu were meticulously chosen when some guests had religious dietary restrictions. It was disappointing that even so those guests would not try anything new.

Some kinds of Japanese food were known to me before my visits, including sushi from an excellent restaurant in Victoria, BC, and I sampled other dishes when exploring Japan for a few days on my own after the structured activities.

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Figure 9. Example of *bentō* (Japanese takeout lunch box).

"Lunch boxes" of various sizes (e.g., Figure 9) make for convenient midday meals. Ordering an evening meal is more complex, but fortunately accurate models of each dish are customarily displayed outside restaurants (Figure 10)[4]. Therefore, an order can be placed without knowing the menu items or being able to read their names.

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Figure 10. Display outside a restaurant, showing the dishes on its menu (Kyoto).

Those experiences, and the meals that served for introduction and familiarization, were an important component of my time in Japan—although sometimes I wondered if my hosts were honouring me with a delicacy or testing me instead. One dish was a unique preparation of fresh octopus. The bowl was passed to me, and indeed the food was extremely fresh, as evidenced by the fact that the many small tentacles were still writhing[5]. I ate only a little because octopus is so chewy.

Japanese cuisine (e.g., Figure 11) differs strongly from Western diets, although there is less difference between them in ordinary meals of rice, noodles, cooked fish, and chicken than in the expensive sushi and other fare of luxury restaurants[6]. Cheaper restaurant fare includes *rāmen* (Chinese-style noodles) and *okonomiyaki* (Figure 12).

Several western dishes have been adopted. My enquiry about bite-sized morsels of meat revealed that they were *hambāgā* (hamburger). Some other products were familiar, although it was unclear whether pieces of pizza should be eaten with chopsticks. One item was explained as *gratin* (pronounced as if it was English). This proved to be the Japanese version of macaroni cheese, but presented in white sauce, with shrimp, chicken, onions, and mushrooms, for example.

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[4] Japan has a thriving industry that prepares highly realistic models of restaurant meals that are made of plastic, wax, or resin.

[5] Octopus arms are innervated independently, and so can move for up to an hour after the animal is dead.

[6] A delicacy in Japan is *fugu* (puffer fish). Because these fish contain the deadly poison tetrodotoxin, which is fatal to diners even in minute quantities, they are prepared carefully. A Japanese sushi chef in Canada once told me that training to be a sushi chef takes three years—but qualifying to serve *fugu* takes a further two years. When asked what *fugu* was like, he simply scoffed. "Most people order it for some sort of fake thrill," he said, "and I could easily get it here (prepared in Japan), but it is very expensive and just tastes like snapper anyway."

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Figure 11. A few common Japanese foods. L and R from top to bottom: *Donburi* (rice bowl with assorted toppings); *Tonkatsu* (breaded pork cutlet); *Soba* (Japanese buckwheat noodles); *Yakitori* (charcoal-grilled skewered chicken); *Tempura* (rapidly fried items in light batter); *Sushi* (raw fish and other ingredients on or in specially prepared rice).

Beyond different cuisines, restaurant meals often have a distinctive structure, featuring small dishes of many kinds (Figure 13). Manners differ too. In particular, noodles are eaten quickly and noisily in Japan. Air is sucked in with them, improving the flavour and enhancing the enjoyment. In contrast, making undue noise is considered rude in the West[7].

Some of my own efforts to eat in the Japanese style proved messy because, without practice, sauce may splatter about. My faulty technique caused one colleague to worry about how I was managing to cope with laundry during my travels.

Some social events were attended mainly by graduate students (e.g., Figure 14). Another cultural and gastronomic experience in Kyoto was organized by graduate students at a restaurant specializing in *soba* (buckwheat noodles).

Hugh Danks (photographed by Morio Tsukada)

Figure 12. Serving *okonomiyaki* (a type of savoury pancake, often with shredded cabbage, to which each diner can add their own choice of seafood, meat, or other ingredients): Hugh Danks in Nara 1992, with the future Mrs Reiko Tsukada.

CC0 (needpix.com)

Figure 13. Many small dishes in the meal at a prestigious restaurant.

[7] The contrast in eating style is captured in a hilarious scene from the Japanese comedy film *Tampopo* (1985), which is available on YouTube (e.g., "tampopo eat spaghetti noiselessly + subtitles"). In a restaurant, an etiquette teacher instructs a class of elegant young ladies about Western habits, trying to get them to consume spaghetti silently. However, another patron noisily sucks down his meal in the Japanese manner, distracting the class—and causing the lesson to degenerate.

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Figure 14. A gathering with students (Kyoto, 2005), held during the week of March 17 (St Patrick's Day). This pub is known not only for its Guinness, but also for its meat stew!

Dishes were presented throughout the detailed preparation of the noodles, allowing them to be sampled at every stage, chiefly cold, of a remarkably long and intricate process.

Some of those stages were a good deal less tasty than others. Nevertheless, there were very few Japanese foods I simply could not eat. Notable among them was *nattō*, fermented soybeans customarily eaten with rice at breakfast, that to me seemed unbelievably bitter. In fact, most breakfasts (except at international hotels) were unfamiliar.

One solitary journey by train and bus took me to a small Japanese-style hotel right on the coast. I had contracted a severe cold, and after a restless night was feeling miserable at breakfast. Three large covered bowls were placed in front of me. The first contained miso soup, a welcome hot broth for my cold. The second held an enormous serving of white rice (many times my maximum capacity), so I lifted the lid of the third bowl to see what might accompany the rice. Nearly filling the bowl was a massive pile of octopus, cooked but otherwise unadorned, that was even more difficult to chew than the small tentacles in the dish mentioned above. I thanked the proprietor nonetheless, and apologized for not being hungry.

My acceptance of diverse foods proved to be significant. Although I could not understand much of the Japanese spoken to introduce me before talks and seminars, it was possible to tell that remarks such as "Prof. Danks likes Japanese food" might be included. This pattern confirms that social acceptance is especially necessary in Japan for fruitful relationships.

Another conspicuous social element is the importance of seniority. At one meal, a teacher told me that the other teacher there was his good friend, and that this was highly unusual "because he is my senior"—by one year!

There were many instances of a strong hierarchy. Exchanging business cards is a key ritual during initial introductions. Taking the proferred card with both hands, studying it, and preserving it carefully not only shows respect, but also allows each person's relative ranking to be assessed. In turn, this information may influence the depth of bowing (the normal form of greeting and acknowledgement) and the respect levels of language (noted in article 22). Therefore, I carried business cards with both English and Japanese text (Figure 15), allowing people to assess my "rank" (and remember my name), which might make them more comfortable.

The importance of seniority first became evident soon after my arrival at Hirosaki in 1992. The faculty member who had handled the documentation for that visit wanted to know my age. He was curious because the recompense for visitors (which might cover train fare and accommodation, for example) increases with age, and he had merely guessed at mine (incorrectly) to save bother. He said that the administrator became suspicious when a figure was provided so quickly, but in response to the challenge he had replied: "Don't you know about email and the internet?"!

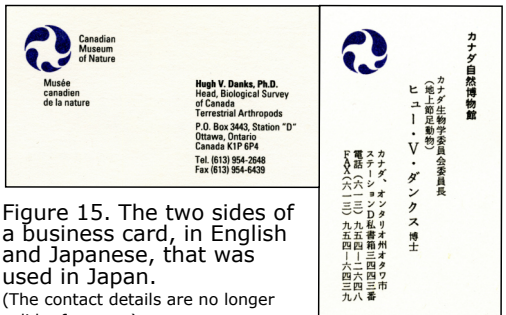

Figure 15. The two sides of a business card, in English and Japanese, that was used in Japan.
(The contact details are no longer valid, of course.)

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Junior staff pay great respect to senior people. If someone like the university president walks into an office, all the staff stand up instantly whilst bowing deeply and offering assistance in high-respect language.

Likewise, opening remarks during banquets and other special occasions were always made by the most senior person, and in addition (or instead) by the most senior guest. I was taken aback when suddenly enlisted to do this for the first time, but concluded that the only requirement was to deliver positive messages of thanks, and to emphasize the value of the current interactions.

Research Institute for Bioresources.

Figure 16. Annual photograph for 2005 of personnel at the Research Institute for Bioresources, Kurashiki, taken from the first floor.

The seniority of faculty is taken seriously. "Professor" [-*sensei*] means full professor or its equivalent, and can't be applied to less senior people [-*san*]. English sometimes uses professor to mean simply a member of faculty (whether of assistant, associate, or full professor rank), but when I referred to someone in that way, the listener quickly shot back "He's not a Professor."

Formal photographs place senior people at the front, as in the annual photograph of staff and visiting scientists at the research institute in Kurashiki (Figure 16). No instructions from the photographer were necessary, because everyone automatically fell into their group or hierarchy, and any visitor would be guided by their host.

A work transfer to that research institute was one result of my involvements in Japan, and is the subject of the next article in this series.

Hugh Danks retired in 2007 after many years as head of the Biological Survey of Canada. In that role, he helped to coordinate work on the composition and characteristics of the arthropod fauna of the country, and to summarize the results. In addition, his research studied cold-hardiness, diapause, and other adaptations to seasonality in northern regions.

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Nos. 21 onwards available at *Google Drive 21–*. Linked at ***tinyurl.com/dankswider***.

2023: 21. Further institutional adventures (10 pp.); 22. Japan (10 pp.); 23. Japan, continued (8 pp.).

Nos. 1–20 published in *Bulletin of the Entomological Society of Canada*.
Also available at *Google Drive 1–20*

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