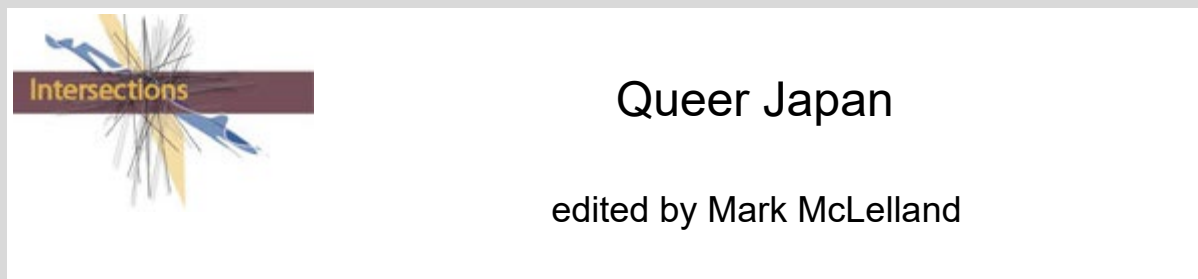


## Building Bridges to the World

[Taniguchi Hiroyuki](#)

My first encounter with Mark was at Sexualities, Genders, and Rights in Asia: 1st International Conference of Asian Queer Studies in Bangkok in July 2005. The following month, I was given the opportunity to accompany my friend, Hitoshi Ishida, a leading sociologist on LGBTQIA issues in Japan, on his overseas research at the University of Queensland, where Mark McLelland was a postdoctoral fellow. I specialise in law, and although our research areas were different, Mark and I connected through our mutual interest in queer-related research. Because Japanese law and precedents are not well understood in the English-speaking world, Mark encouraged me to publish on this topic as it relates to queer issues in English. As a result, I published my first paper in English, 'The legal situation facing sexual minorities in Japan,' in the special 'Queer Japan' issue of *Intersections*, edited by Mark McLelland in 2006.<sup>[1]</sup> At the time I was a postdoctoral research fellow funded by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) and was concerned about my future career. It was Mark's advice to publish on LGBTQIA issues in English and the submission and subsequent publication of this first paper, that formed the basis of my research for more than fifteen years and continues to the present day.



**Figure 1.** Mark McLelland (ed.), 'Queer Japan,' special issue of *Intersections* 12 (January 2006).

I think many people can agree that one of the major barriers to conducting research on Japan is language. For example, in the field of law, to write about any given legal issue, it is essential to accurately interpret laws that are full of specialist vocabulary, to understand difficult judgments that cannot be understood just by reading the surface meaning of the text, and to study relevant books and articles. In law, the interpretation of a single word can determine a verdict, or greatly increase or decrease the amount of monetary damages awarded. In addition, there are many minor nuances that cannot be understood from the conclusions contained in the verdict alone. These cannot be explained without a familiarity with the associated evidentiary materials and historical background. At the time of my first stay in Australia, and even today, English-language academic papers on Japanese laws and precedents related to LGBTQIA issues frequently contain errors at the level of detailed legal interpretation. In addition, it is not uncommon to find articles on Japanese law in peer-reviewed academic journals that make no reference to relevant articles written in Japanese, including articles that have received significant attention in Japanese.

Part of the reason for this problem lies on the part of Japanese researchers. Japanese laws and legal precedents have not been disseminated into other languages very accurately. Since the late nineteenth century, Japanese legal research has frequently involved studying English, German and French laws and precedents, and interpolating theories written in these languages into Japanese law. It is no exaggeration to say that this is still the mainstream process of research among Japanese legal academics. However, research in the opposite direction—from Japanese to English—has been slow in coming. It continues to be difficult to obtain accurate primary information about Japanese law in English, not only in the area of queer issues, but in all fields of law. Two years after I returned to Japan from the University of Queensland, I was hired by the Institute of Comparative Law at Waseda University to work on a project to disseminate information about Japanese law in English, and I had the opportunity to be involved in starting up the project. Through this project, the latest and most accurate information on Japanese law continues to be systematically disseminated by Japanese researchers, albeit very slowly.<sup>[2]</sup>

There is another reason for the lack of dissemination of information on Japanese law in English. There is a structural barrier for Japanese university students, graduate students and young researchers making it difficult to establish direct connections with overseas universities and researchers. The public budget for education, including university education, is significantly lower in Japan than in other OECD countries, and scholarships for education, including private ones, are wholly inadequate. With one in seven children living in relative poverty, factors other than individual effort and ability play an extremely important role in the ability of students at all levels to study abroad as well as to develop the ability to communicate in English at a level that would facilitate engagement with scholars overseas. As a result, there is a lack of upcoming researchers with sufficient potential to take on work, and even for those lucky enough to be able to become researchers, there are still structural barriers to entry into academic exchange in international forums where English is the language of communication.

I am one of those people who has been plagued by these barriers, but I was very fortunate to have met many English-speaking researchers such as Mark who were willing to communicate with me in Japanese. Particularly during my time as a postdoctoral fellow, the opportunity to conduct research overseas in Japanese was of vital importance in that it allowed me to overcome one of my structural barriers. Last year, I was able to conduct overseas research with Vera Mackie at the University of Wollongong, where Mark was based, too. I still regret that, due to various factors involved with the timing of my research, including the Covid-19 pandemic and Mark's worsening health, I was not able to meet him in person while I was there. Nevertheless, I continue to hold in my heart the thought that Mark and I were both in the same city while I was there and thus geographically close even if we were unable to meet in person.

Although our research fields are different, meeting Mark taught me the importance of helping Japanese researchers to disseminate the results of their academic research in English as well as of removing the structural barriers faced by typical young researchers in Japan. Once again, I would like to express my ongoing gratitude for the opportunity to meet and learn from Mark.

## Notes

[1] Taniguchi Hiroyuki, 'The legal situation facing sexual minorities in Japan,' in 'Queer Japan,' special issue of *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context* 12 (January 2006), URL: <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue12/taniguchi.html>, accessed 8 Dec. 2021.

[2] English-language explications of Japanese laws written by Japanese legal scholars are published several times a year on the 'news' feed of Waseda University's *Institute of Comparative Law* website, URL: <https://www.waseda.jp/foLaw/icl/news/?tag=legislation,precedent,recent>, accessed 18 April 2021.

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