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AURORE YAMAGATA-MONTOYA, MAXIME DANESIN & MARCO PELLITTERI

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AESTHETIC JOURNEYS AND MEDIA PILGRIMAGES IN THE CONTEXTS OF POP CULTURE AND THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES FROM AND TO EAST ASIA

EDITED BY

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The Values in Numbers: Reading Japanese Literature in a Global Information Age – Hoyt LONG

Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2021, 376p.

Review by Vicky YOUNG | University of Cambridge, UK

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The Values in Numbers: Reading Japanese Literature in a Global Information Age by Hoyt Long (Columbia University Press, 2021) sets out with two aims: to ask what computational methods might bring to the acts of reading and studying Japanese literature; and to open up the Digital Humanities, which in the United States have been dominated by the English language, to alternative insights, challenges, and solutions that arise when the objects of analysis are Japanese texts. The book's opening sets the tone by outlining a debate that unfolded in the Académie de Médecine in Paris in 1837 between the "numerists", who saw the future of medical science in new concepts such as the average, and their detractors for whom medicine was an art in which the imposition of numbers could never match the powers of observation and experience. This may seem a curious point of entry for a book on Japanese literature. However, as this brief account sets up a dichotomy between statistical advancements and the reservations held by "antinumerists", it establishes Long's optimistic position that digital methods hold the future for (Japanese) literary studies.

Mindful of the reader who might be unfamiliar, or even unsympathetic, to the notion of applying statistical methods to literature, Long begins by asserting that numbers are already a part of Japan's modern literary history. The opening chapter maps out key debates among Japanese writers and scholars who since the Meiji era (1868-1912) have wrangled with what it means to "think with numbers". These include Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916), who underwent a "numerical turn" (p. 33) motivated by the question of how to quantify emotion within literature, and Hatano Kanji, who sought to determine the relationship between a writer's style and his psychological make-up by measuring textual

attributes such as sentence length. This historical overview presents a narrative of writers caught in the conflux between the need to understand what distinguished modern Japanese fiction at a time of nation-building, and an interest in how new technologies of science and measuring could help dig into those features. Hatano's case also brings into focus how linguistic difference might shape statistical possibilities. While in English, the word can be considered a single, countable unit of language, Japanese complicates that presumption due to its composition through unspaced strings of kanji – each of which carries its own meaning – and phonetic scripts.

These examples provide a bridge across which *The Values in Numbers* seeks to lead the uninitiated reader from traditional literary studies into more numerical thinking. Long weaves into this chapter an introduction to Digital Humanities as they have been developed in North America and trained on English-language works of literature. This context provides comparative touchstones for the Japanese examples given and allows Long to set out the toolkit of key concepts and methods that he will apply and develop in his subsequent chapters.

Long's methodologies are rooted in frequentist statistics that measure the recurrence of certain traits within a sample to draw conclusions about the whole and sometimes make predictions. In Chapter Two, Long sets out this approach in reference to his primary archive, Aozora Bunko, the greatest online repository of more than 16,000 titles (although this number is continually growing). Aozora makes for an interesting case study. Titles can be created once they are out of copyright – which in Japan means waiting until seventy years after the author has died – and they are input manually by volunteers without recourse to digital scanning. Long makes no reference to the possibility of human error here, but his discussion of Aozora acknowledges its constraints in such a way that expresses the biases inherent in any kind of sampling.

Long argues that a key to Digital Humanities is to uncover what kinds of questions they can be deployed to answer. In Chapter Three, he considers how to "diagnose" the *shishōsetsu* ("I-novel"), a genre known for "defying and demanding definition" (p. 128). (Long frequently repurposes medical terms that recall the opening Parisian debate). Efforts to pin down the I-novel have a long history in modern literary studies. Long's quest is to see what answers might result from a "scaled-up reading" (p. 13) across multiple texts. Building on the I-novel's dominant image as a confessional mode that expresses the focal character's descent into psychological despair, Long computes the repetition (which

he equates with "redundancy") of personal pronouns and terms that connote emotional qualities within both literary works that have been considered to epitomise the I-novel and those that have not. Long's textual evidence suggests that some more popular works that have been rejected from the I-novel pantheon in fact carry just as many, if not more attributes that would warrant their full inclusion. This raises many questions, but the most salient is to ask why there is still a need to defer to this mode of literary categorisation that emerged in its own social, and historical milieu, and which seems out of joint with this new, digital apparatus. The limitations of Aozora's archive makes it inevitable that Long should focus on pre-war texts, but this application of new technologies fails to address why those debates still matter.

The "global information age" in Long's title suggests a context and opportunity for this research to forge new conceptual ground. Long begins by locating the texts under his analysis amid the tides of a global literary modernism in the 1930s. Through his computational analyses in later chapters, he traces the influence of stream-of-consciousness narrative techniques, that spread like a "virus" following the translation into Japanese of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (Chapter Four), and the preponderance of racial characterisations in literary works written against the backdrop of rising imperialism (Chapter Five). Long also appeals to the global to connect his work to a burgeoning discourse of world literature that has developed in the United States and Europe in recent decades. Given Long's goal to address the asymmetry by which Japanese literature finds itself marginalised, it might have been productive to tap into how Japanese writers throughout the past century have debated world literature (*sekai bungaku*) concomitant to the texts under analysis.

This reader set out to be sympathetic with Long's claim that there is a space within which digital methods and traditional literary studies can meaningfully collaborate. However, in its effort to shuttle between these contexts and across myriad conceptual, historical, and theoretical divisions, *The Values in Numbers* is a challenging read. Most chapters run to between fifty and sixty pages, inclusive of graphs and charts that each demand different reading skills. Added to this are extensive footnotes, an Appendix, and an open-access weblink to a repository containing Long's original data and codes in full. While this appeals to the perceived transparency of Digital Humanities, only the most fastidious and accomplished reader will navigate this distribution of printed and online information. There are also several inconsistencies and inaccuracies, such as the pairing

of *junbungaku* ('pure literature') in Japanese with "popular literature" in English, without acknowledging the complexities of defining and translating these terms; Japanese names listed in Excel spreadsheets under "first names" and "second names" in a way that inverts the standard Japanese order; and a failure to report actual sample sizes in the legend, for example Fig. 3.1 (p. 143). While these individual points are small, collectively they run the risk of misinforming readers unfamiliar with either Japanese Studies and/ or statistical analysis.

The Values in Numbers arrives at a time when Digital Humanities is being elevated within Asian Studies as an opportunity to quell the widespread sense of crisis within higher education, and to "radically reshape our profession".[1] It seems logical in this climate, exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic, that more data and digitisation could be the answer. This conclusion also follows Long's suggestion that his findings could be developed through an expanded archive. However, as this book also acknowledges, the inputting of texts is already a form of selection, and thus conditioning. It is an inevitable outcome of a frequentist approach that more can be deduced with large sample sizes than can be said about minorities. What the current enthusiasm does not address is how these methods of statistical analysis might accommodate writers who deploy strategies rooted in multilinguality, non-standard dialects, and hybrid orthographies, without imposing upon them codes of conformity or altering their materiality. This includes writers from Okinawa whose visibility is already under threat within the globalising literary marketplace. *The Values in Numbers* has value as the first book to question how digital methods and Japanese literary studies might learn from one another. However, before co-opting digital methods fully as the future of Japanese literary studies, we should also value those voices and textual practices within Japanese literature that enable us to challenge those methods, and consider the wider impacts of the current rush towards data.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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[1] https://www.asianstudies.org/making-it-count-the-case-for-digital-scholarship-in-asian-studies/