

Japanese literature

Congress seeks more translation

Washington

US SCIENTISTS are concerned that the flow of technical information between the West and Japan — whose scientific research establishment has now reached third place in the world — is a one-way street. Only a small number of Japanese journals and technical reports are readily available in the West, even in abstract form. Conversely, most Japanese scientists understand written English.

"A very large part of the Japanese output is concealed from us because of the language barrier", says William Budington, librarian of the John Crerar Library in Chicago, an independent research library. Testifying before a House of Representatives subcommittee last week, Budington said that fewer than one-fifth of Japanese scientific and technical journals are surveyed by the major abstracting and indexing services in the West (such as *Chemical Abstracts*). And 75 per cent of the Japanese publications are wholly in Japanese, compared with only 28 per cent of those covered by the Western abstracting services. It is estimated that there are more than 9,000 Japanese scientific and technical journals.

Budington says that there is a demand in the United States for Japanese publications; his library, which receives a few hundred Japanese periodicals, finds them in "fairly heavy" use. He adds that 20–25 per cent of all publications translated from foreign languages that his library receives are from the Japanese. "It's about to outstrip Russian", he says.

Dr Eleanor Westney, acting director of the MIT–Japan Science and Technology Program at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, says the problem is not only that few Americans can read Japanese, but that even fewer can both read Japanese and evaluate technical material. And the lack of information about Japanese research thus engendered feeds on itself: "there is a widespread belief that all important scientific information will be published in English". Dr Westney says that while this may be true for the basic sciences, it is far less so in applied fields. The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) has recently given some credence to that view; its Magnetics Society announced plans to publish complete translations of two Japanese journals on magnetics and a number of special proceedings — a total of 1,500 pages per year. The service, available by subscription, will begin in January 1985. Clark Johnson, president of the Magnetics Society, says that the Japanese counterpart to IEEE publishes 27 journals, many of which would probably also be worth translating.

The programme that Dr Westney directs at MIT is one of only two in the United States aimed at encouraging scientists and

engineers to learn Japanese. MIT is sending six students each year to spend one year working in universities, government laboratories and companies in Japan. (Dr Westney, "to lay to rest any lingering suspicious of Japanese 'secretiveness'", says that the MIT programme receives more offers from Japanese companies than it can fill with qualified students.) North Carolina State University runs a similar programme through its "Japan Center", established in 1980 largely to encourage Japanese investment in the state.

Although Dr Westney says that suspicions of "secretiveness" are unfounded, she acknowledges that the Japanese handling of their own literature does make for a certain impenetrability, even to foreigners fluent in Japanese. She says that the Japanese publications are not as well

abstracted or indexed, even in Japan, as are Western publications in the West. Further, many researchers in Japan publish in the house organs of their university or company — journals which tend to be deservedly obscure because of their uneven quality. Informal contacts, Dr Westney says, while obviously of importance in the West, become "critical" in Japan if one is to learn about recent important publications.

Representative Doug Walgren (Democrat, Pennsylvania) has introduced in Congress a bill that would allocate \$750,000 to the Department of Commerce next year for abstracting, indexing, translating and disseminating Japanese technical information, through either the National Technical Information Service or the Office of Productivity, Technology and Innovation. Some independent efforts in Congress are under way to allocate funds for improved teaching of Japanese, as well as other foreign languages. **Stephen Budiansky**

Applied embryology

No surrogate British mothers

THE use of surrogate mothers to bear children for infertile women now seems unlikely to expand on any organized scale in Britain. The council of the British Medical Association (BMA) last week told physicians that it would be unethical for them to become involved in such schemes, and a private member's bill now being promoted in the House of Commons aims to make it illegal for agencies to offer "womb leasing" services.

The use of surrogate mothers impregnated through artificial insemination by donor has been practised rather clandestinely in Britain, but the improving availability and success rate *in vitro* fertilization is expected to increase the demand for women willing to bear a child for payment of a fee. In the United States, where the practice is more widespread, several states have made it illegal to sell children, but agencies get round such laws by claiming fees as "medical expenses".

In Britain, the government's Warnock committee, set up to advise on the implications of new developments in the field of human fertility, is experiencing difficulties in deciding what it will say on the matter. BMA's decision last week will provide a strong lead: although its recommendations are not binding, they are likely to be accepted by British physicians. The association's central ethical committee received no submissions in favour of encouraging physicians to practise surrogating, and the major national associations concerned with fostering are opposed to its use.

The area is an ethical and legal minefield. Despite the initial appeal of surrogate motherhood as a solution to infertility due to inability to sustain a pregnancy, BMA's ethical committee decided that the probable damage to the child through being

born into an unorthodox and perhaps damaging emotional and legal environment should outweigh the desire of the parents for a child.

In Britain the law is not clear on the status of an agreement to bear another's child if the pregnancy is started artificially: in the case of any dispute over such an agreement, it would be for the courts to decide the outcome. The offspring of a surrogate mother is however definitely illegitimate under British law, and it is for the genetic parents to adopt it should they choose to do so. As this entails going through the courts, the affair comes into the public domain.

Dr James Appleyard, who supported last week's recommendation to BMA's council, says the use of surrogate mothers is fraught with difficulties. In Britain the situation has already arisen where a surrogate mother refused to part with the child she had carried, and a court ruled that she had the right to do so despite a previous agreement that the child would be handed over. Even more harrowing scenarios are easily envisaged: what, for example, would be the position if money was paid and then a child was born handicapped?

The parliamentary bill aimed at preventing "womb-leasing" clinics from establishing themselves in Britain may be debated this week but is not being actively supported by the government and so will probably have to be rescheduled. The government, while not opposed to the measures the bill advocates, is inclined instead to await the Warnock committee's recommendations, which are expected in June. But, already, Miracle Programmes Inc. of Washington DC has been approached with a view to opening a surrogate clinic in Britain. **Tim Beardsley**