

Reflections on Japanese Proposals for Reform of  
Library and Information Services

日本の図書館・情報サービスの改革案に対する感想

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要 旨

日本と英国の戦後の文献を比べると、著しい差がみられる。英国では1950年来、全国的図書館・情報サービスの最適の形に関して絶えず討議されてきたが、いずれも、効果的な図書館相互協力に依存すべきであるという認識がその共通の基盤であったのである。日本の文献はもっぱら個別の、またはローカルな困難にかかわり、これを克服するための協力計画への関心が少なかつたようである。

大学図書館・専門図書館に関する文献も個別図書館内の日常問題を強調している(大学図書館の管理方式は図書館のプロフェッショナルな主体性の確立を妨げている)。専門図書館と情報サービスの分野では、英国のそれと極めて類似しているが、日本の医学図書館や NIST の計画は、津田も指摘するとおり、基本的な図書館資源からの遊離によって弱められている。

英国では、1949年の総合プランでも、各レベルの図書館固有の役割を、相互関連においてとらえ、共通する改善要求を強調した。政府の支持が不可欠であり、これがその後の発展を規定すると考えられた。当時政府は教育および産業経済に対する関心から、図書館・情報サービスにも持続的関心を持ち、関与してきた。英国図書館協会の役員会は、プロフェッショナルな経験をより高い場で代表する接点として機能した。

戦後の西欧・スカンジナビアにおける経験は、それぞれの国情に合った有機的発展以外には全国システムは機能し得ないことを示し、かつ、図書館・情報活動における大きな部分のいずれかを無視した計画が成功した例を聞かない。日本の同僚諸氏が、図書館・情報サービスおよびその研究教育を推進し、調整し、統合するために、政府の助けを得て、真にプロフェッショナルを代表する審議会のようなものを設立するために、本稿が多少お役に立てばと希望する。(Y. K.)

There is one very marked difference between Japanese and British professional literature of the postwar period. In the latter there has

been an almost uninterrupted debate since 1950 on the optimum shape of a national library and information service, and the common ground

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has been the recognition that any plan would depend upon efficient inter-library co-operation. In fact plans were largely *for* co-operation, on a wider than national scale, and they appeared and took shape under the pressures of proven practical necessity. The Japanese literature seemed to me to reflect more exclusive concern with domestic, local difficulties, and less attention to co-operative plans for removing such difficulties; while the proposals I did find referred much more to sectional interests than to general national needs.

The literature does not in fact readily provide the overview of Japanese library and information service that the friendly professional visitor hopes for; but visits and talks confirm the impression that reading conveys. The most informative single source for me was the Japanese Library Association's *Books for all: white paper on Japanese libraries 1972*, and I am much indebted to Professor Kobayashi, who interpreted it for me. Prepared in connection with Unesco's International Book Year, this work's tabulations and international comparisons present an interesting if unflattering picture of librarianship in Japan. Direct comparisons are easiest in the public library field, and Japan is shown there as acutely deficient. Within Japan, comparisons between prefectures take in budget figures, circulation statistics, distribution of service points, percentage of cities with libraries, service for children, co-operation between main town libraries, prefecture libraries and the National Diet Library, and special services such as those for the blind. These comparisons reveal great unevenness and an overall large inadequacy. Public libraries' poor attention to specialist reading groups, and to special aspects of community life such as commercial activities and industrial productivity, doubtless increased the likelihood of their being disregarded or undervalued, in national library planning; but I found little evidence of public librarians championing their own cause in that respect. Opportunities have been lost, for Professor Nagasawa<sup>1)</sup> has reminded us that the Keio University School's earliest programmes strongly emphasised public librarianship, while Professor

Kobayashi<sup>2)</sup> has described how public libraries nonetheless remained undeveloped, though recently they have shown signs of quick growth in certain areas. Their potential has been acknowledged on occasion, however. For instance, the Japan Documentation Society<sup>3)</sup> has described as "exceptionally outstanding" the scientific and technical collections of Kawasaki Library, Kanagawa Prefecture, Osaka Prefectural Library and Aiti Prefectural Library.

Contributions of university and special librarians to the professional literature also emphasise the undoubtedly urgent domestic problems they meet daily, and rationalised general remedies are, understandably enough, somewhat rare. The consequences of university practice which gives professors major control of book purchasing, and in addition allocates finances on the basis of student numbers in departments and faculties, with no specific library allocation as of right, are bound to be damaging in the extreme. For the resulting inadequacy in purely bibliographical and reference materials weakens librarians' service further, deprives them of a major means of professional vindication, and confirms their present inferior status within the university administration. Problems such as rapid staff turnover due to permanent retirement of females on marriage, with recruitment to the profession preponderantly female, also depress standards of service and preclude efficient systems of library co-operation. Koichi Nakajima's enumeration of his problems in the Faculty of Engineering Library of Keio University<sup>4)</sup> is well called "Struggle with impossibilities", though one hastens to applaud the constructive analysis and the forward thinking, which rebut the impressions of near desperation that the writer occasionally allows through. Another fully stretched academic librarian, Hiroshi Tanabe<sup>5)</sup>, writes with similar effect of experience in the University of Tokyo Library.

It is in the special library and information fields that librarians' and scientists' experiences and attitudes show closest resemblance to the British, and I have been permitted to comment on this in another reference recently. British librarians and information workers had I think

the advantage of much stronger postwar support from the scientific associations and learned societies, and from dominant personalities in the world of science. Such people's impatience with inferior service, and their personal experience of literature and information problems, helped to generate much of the momentum that rationalised the services of the principal scientific libraries, produced the National Lending Library for Science and Technology, and the parallel services of reference and loan that characterise the new British Library. It is very easy to see the same reforming and rationalising forces at work in the Japanese research library scene. There is the same impatience with conservative librarians, and similar calls for scientists and information scientists to 'go it alone'. The benefits and the penalties of doing so are evident in the medical field and in the National Information System for Science and Technology, both of which schemes are weakened by separation from the basic library resources that represent much of Japan's bibliographical richness. This line of criticism has been well developed and maintained by Professor Tsuda<sup>6)</sup>, whose sturdy pragmatic judgments are a reproach to those who, from impatience or proneness to purely theoretical thinking, disregard problems concerning access to materials, and think only of the handling of information.

British special librarians were spared some of the frustrations of their Japanese counterparts, because both public and academic librarians were thinking with equal vigour of reform and rationalisation. The problem for *all* groups was to stress their own real problems, and to oppose the unrealistic in other groups' proposals. As early as 1949 an all-embracing plan was published by a widely representative committee of the Library Association<sup>7)</sup>. It proposed separate but inter-related rôles for all classes of libraries, national libraries, 'first line' and 'second line' special libraries, major general reference libraries, lending libraries. Whatever the faults of this outline plan, it stressed the importance of all library and information services, demonstrated their inter-dependence and

their common need for improvement. The issues as between 'information' and 'library materials' were as clear then as now. Only the names of the newest apparatus were different—one talked of Hollerith machines, of the IBM Cardatype and the Bush Rapid selector.

I mention this plan because it represented an interim, timely focussing of attention on the whole problem by all concerned, including the country's government. Government support was essential, and the channels through which it was to come determined the later course of events and the shape of the now-emerging British Library organisation and its related professional structure. As now in Japan, so then in Britain, government interest in education at all levels, in commercial and industrial efficiency, and in social and economic research, brought library and information services into the area of continuing government concern and involvement. It is not necessary to describe the particular government departmental and ministerial arrangements that were made, but at the professional level the important point of contact has proved to be the Library Advisory Councils. By happy accident or design, this British expedient *has* achieved the desired ready and regular co-operation between government and professional leaders. It is now possible for librarians' and information workers' best and most recent experience to be presented in circumstances that permit it to be considered with other educational and social data, from other kinds of professionals and administrators, government officials and public figures. The minister is enabled to make library decisions conform with wider policy, and librarians know that any proposed wider policy changes can usually be examined in their formative stage, for their professional implications. The way is opened for the agreed programmes of research, regular or *ad hoc*, that the planning and maintaining of a national library, archive and information service requires. In England the funds have been provided in the main through an Office for Scientific and Technical Information, which has channelled several million pounds into grant-supported or contracted

research. When the future rôle of this unit was recently under review, a joint working party of Aslib, the Institute of Information Scientists, the Library Association and the Society of Archivists, commented in a report that 'the strength of the present arrangement is that OSTI's sphere of responsibility has not been confined to.....the Department of Education and Science, but has covered the whole field of scientific and technical information, whether library based or not. The freedom to take a synoptic view has enabled OSTI to identify activities of key importance in the development of the whole field...This freedom would be enlarged if the sphere of responsibility were extended to include all subject fields. For OSTI to continue to fulfil its functions it is vital that this wide responsibility...should be maintained.' Librarians are not often so unanimous in their view. It is pleasant to be able to add that new administrative arrangements do take care of the points made by that working party.

With the very varied British experience much in my mind, I studied with especial care the views of the distinguished librarian and educationalist Professor Sawamoto, who wrote in 1969 about the most comprehensive plans of development in library and information work that I was able to find.<sup>8)</sup> 'Towards a national science information network in Japan' provides a lucid description of developments that led up to the proposal for a National Information System for Science and Technology. One notes the strong interest and support of the Council for Science and Technology, the Science Council of Japan and the Bureau of Higher Education and Sciences, and also the close study of postwar American work in medical, agricultural and other scientific fields which have acute literature and information problems. I was reminded very strongly of the comparable early phase of British study of these fields, which similarly involved the scientific and technical agencies of government. But whereas British studies led specifically to improvements in the science library network, and converged on more general attention to libraries and information work,

the Japanese studies clearly moved away from library connections, projecting new agencies and centres and systems, and probably found a new focal point for thought in the emerging international concept of UNISIST. The separation from library administration and planning would be emphasised, I imagine, if Professor Sawamoto's answer to the problem of top-level direction of the National Science Information Network were accepted. He found the library field in too much disarray, the scientists and technologists too incapable of making good use of library and information centres, and the government control of libraries too divided among rival agencies, councils and bureaux, to permit of any overall direction of planning and practice. He proposed a new, authoritative, 'capping agency', either within the Prime Minister's Office or at the Science and Technology Agency level. This would probably exert its authority over all the necessary science information systems through a new public corporation with a proposed name of Japan Science and Technology Information Systems Corporation. Professor Sawamoto cites past experience in Japan as arguing for a public corporation rather than an ordinary government unit.

I do not know the force of this appeal to past experience, and I have great respect for Professor Sawamoto, but I do find it hard to believe that a public corporation is likely to bring about the needed new partnership between government and professional leaders. Yet comparisons based on a study of, say, the postwar library histories of West European and Scandinavian countries would support the view that each country is a very special case, that plans should evolve in organic growth from the native society, and that national systems do not transplant very well, if at all. National systems can however be fruitfully compared for evidence of their relative completeness, and I can think of no case of a successful plan in library and information work which disregards any large section of library or information activity. I hope this will be judged to excuse my presumption, if I urge my Japanese col-

leagues to make sure that they do create, with government help, some kind of truly representative board or council or councils, to encourage and regulate and integrate the growth of all library and information services and studies. Both major and minor decisions would surely be easier, in the atmosphere of common sense, common purpose and common understanding that could reasonably be expected, if one may judge by the experience of my own country.

- 1) Nagasawa, M. "Education for library and information science," *Library and information science*, no. 10, 1972, p. 1-12.
- 2) Kobayashi, Y. "Revision of master's course curriculum, SLIS-problems and prospects," *Library and information science*, no. 10, 1972, p. 13-8.
- 3) *Science information in Japan*. Tokyo, Japan Documentation Society, 2nd ed., 1967, p. 34.
- 4) Nakajima, K. "Struggle with impossibilities; a record of development of the Matsushita Memorial Library of the Faculty of Engineering, Keio University," *Library and information science*, no. 10, 1972, p. 119-42.
- 5) Tanabe, H. "Problems of the main library of a large university; discussion centred around the University of Tokyo Library," *Library and information science*, no. 10, 1972, p. 93-107.
- 6) Tsuda, Y. "A medical information network and the Japan Medical Library Association," *Library and information science*, no. 9, 1971, p. 343-59.  
*and*  
"Education for medical librarians," *Library and information science*, no. 10, 1972, p. 19-36.
- 7) Library Association. Library Research Committee. "The co-operative provision of books, periodicals and related material," *Library Association record*, vol. 51, Dec. 1949, p. 383-7.
- 8) Sawamoto, T. "Towards a national science information network in Japan," *Library and information science*, no. 7, 1969, p. 149-73.