

# A Study of Library Policy in Japan : Current Status and Future Prospects

By Tsutomu SHIHOTA  
(St. Andrew's University, Japan)

## Abstract :

This article describes and discusses 1) library affairs in Japan in the latter 20 th century, 2) library affairs in the first part of the 21st century, focusing mainly on public libraries and school libraries, and 3) library affairs and laws concerning Japanese libraries in the first part of the 21st century, including future prospects.

## Introduction

The organization and administration of libraries in a nation is usually built under a pyramid system with the national central library at the top. In Japan, however, library rules and administration have been separately established according to the type of library. The types of libraries in Japan are listed below.

1. The National Diet Library (an organ of the national assembly) was established by the National Diet Library Law in 1948.
2. Public libraries (belonging to the Ministry of Education and Science ; MEXT) were established by the Library Law in 1950. Most public libraries fall under the financial organization of local governments. In turn, local governments are under the administration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC).
3. School libraries (which belong to MEXT and MIC) were established by the School Library Law in 1953.
4. University libraries are established, though not through any specific law.
5. Special libraries that focus on various fields are established, though not through any specific law.

The National Diet Library is not immediately concerned with the other types of libraries. Here, I discuss the Japanese laws and policies concerning libraries in the last 20 years, focusing on public libraries.

## 1. Library affairs in Japan in the latter 20th century

In the second half of the 20th century, Japanese public libraries were hit hard. In 1998, they were said to suffer a “swarm earthquake” as a result of de-regulation politics by the Japanese national government concerning the Library Law and its enforcement rules.

1. Abolition of the article of subsidization of public libraries by the government.
2. Abolition of the article granting license for head librarians to be given subsidies to build libraries
3. Abolition of the article on minimum standards for libraries, including librarian placement criteria

These changes were seen in revisions made to the Library Law and its enforcement rules in 1999. The Act on the Promotion of Private Finance Initiative, called the PFI Law, was enacted in July 1999. This law changed the Local Autonomy Law to allow the privatization of some public services, including library services. Further reforms of public services were introduced in the Competition Law issued in 2006. Thus, market tests began for Japanese libraries.

## **2. Library affairs in the first part of the 21st century : Focusing mainly on public libraries and some school libraries**

2001

### ①Desired standards for the establishment and operation of public libraries

Library Law, Article 18 was amended. However, the article did not describe concrete standards.

### ②Law for the Promotion of Children's Reading Activities

The government set the promotion of children's reading activities a basic goal for the country and obligated local public groups, etc., to pursue this objective. The new law said that local groups should clarify ways to promote children's reading activities as well as develop relevant policies, since reading contributes to children's healthy growth. Public libraries were included in these groups. Yet the law called for new efforts without any financial assistance.

2003

### ③Grace period for assigning of a teacher librarian added to the School Library Law, Supplementary provisions

Supplementary provisions were added to the School Library Law, declaring that every school with more than 12 classes had until April 1, 2003 to employ a teacher librarian in its school library.

2005

### ④Act on Character Culture Promotion

Aiming to promote character culture, Article 7 of the law stated that each city, town, and village must build a library based on its needs.

### ⑤The library as an information hub in the area (Libraries aimed at problem-solving, January 28, The Institution for Network Making the Library a Hub, in MEXT)

The Lifelong Study Policy Bureau wrote this report. The objectives were to ensure people had opportunities for lifelong education and to consider the status of public libraries in the near future.

2006

⑥Act on the Reform of Public Services Through the Introduction of Competition

National government agencies and local governments should reexamine public services and select certain services to be attended to by private mechanisms, and for these, introduce competitive bids and opportunities for market tests, such as in the library industry.

⑦Cooperator meeting for state consideration of a future library

Intellectual Consulting Conference in MEXT. It issued Future library status as case study text, in March.

⑧Revision to the Fundamental Law of Education

Abe's Cabinet (inaugurated 2006-2007) amended the law. The main change was the introduction of ethics education.

2008

⑨Revision and Supplement added to the Library Law

This revision is according to the Fundamental Law of Education revised.

⑩Parliament voted to declare 2010 "National Reading Year"

2009

⑪Fundamental Law for Public Service

The law required duty sharing among the national government agencies and local governments for public service.

2010

⑫Grants to shine a light to residents' lives (Cabinet decision, Oct. 8)

Mr. Yoshihiro Katayama, Ministry of MIC, reached an agreement with a member of Naoto Kan's Cabinet for a grant, as a supplementary budget, consisting of 100 billion yen (1000 billion won). It covered the three fields below.

1) Local Consumer Affairs

2) DV measures, Weak measures of suicide prevention, etc., Self-support

### 3) Regional development of knowledge

Field (3) included the “Enrichment of school libraries.” The grant money was divided among the educational boards of all the prefectures. Each prefecture used its portion of the budget to enrich its school libraries. For example, Shimane Prefecture employed a school librarian at every school.

2012

⑬Amendment made to the desired standards for the establishment and operation of public libraries, Dec. 19

Article 18 was amended such that it became applicable also to private libraries.

2013

⑭The third standard plan for improving children’s reading activities (MEXT notice, No.172)

2014

⑮Amendment made to the School Library Act

This amendment aimed to make school librarians full-time employees at every school with a teacher librarian. It went into effect as of April 1, 2015.

2016

⑯Curriculum for training school librarians (Notification by the Director-General, Elementary and Secondary Education Bureau, MEXT)

A model curriculum was created for training school librarians.

### **3. Library affairs and laws concerning Japanese libraries in the first part of the 21st century : Estimations and limits**

Changes were made to the desired standards for the establishment and operation of public libraries. For example, the Library Law, Article 18 was amended. However, the article did not describe concrete standards. This is only efforts target but duty for every local government. Because here it have not any fond by the state.

In 2012, revisions were made to the desired standards for the establishment and operation of public libraries. Article 18 was changed to apply also to private libraries. This caused some anxiety about governmental control of private libraries.

The Law for the Promotion of Children’s Reading Activities was implemented to address reading. Public libraries were affected by the law. The Cabinet decided to provide 130 billion yen each year for five years, starting in 2003, for a total of 650 billion yen, to be divided as a local allocation to

each prefecture.

The grant intended to shine a light on residents' lives, given through a Cabinet decision on Oct. 8, 2010, affected school libraries. For example, Shimane Prefecture employed school librarians for all its schools.

Public libraries and private university libraries have been suffering a storm of changes in the designated manager system. Hino City Library has become famous as a citizen library that adopted the system this spring. Many public libraries have been built in the compound. In some cases, this is said to aim at MLA (Museum, Library and Archives) cooperation.

(This is an edited version of the report issued on the KLISS 2017 2nd International Conference, Nov. 10-11, 2017, Dong-eui University, Busan, Korea, in the Proceedings of Korean Library and Information Science Society, 2017, No.2, p.13-18)