

A Commentary to Humphreys Report

ハンフリーズ報告に対して一言

日本の大学図書館についてのハンフリーズ報告はきわめて示唆に富むものである。とくに「全国図書館委員会」設置の所見には、多少の疑問はあるが、だいたい賛同できる。しかし、国立国会図書館の業務については誤解がある。同館が国会に所属するため、国立図書館として機能することは不十分であり、別に国立図書館を設置する必要があると主張しているが、いったい国立図書館の機能とはどんなものなのであろうか。ハンフリーズがかつてこの問題について書いた論文を引用し、これに對比させながら国立国会図書館の業務を紹介する。同館は、真の国立図書館として機能することが、同時に国会奉仕にも有益であり、この2つは同根であると考え。

A report on "University Libraries in Japan", written by K. W. Humphreys, is very interesting and instructive. It is, I believe, full of many useful suggestions for the development of activities pertaining to the university libraries. The idea of a National Libraries Board to formulate national policy is quite agreeable. Being strongly influenced by the British Library System and the U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, I hold a similar opinion that Japan should have an authority to establish national library policy which is responsible for the arrangement of national services aiming at efficient accessibility of Japan's library resources. However, I have a doubt about Humphreys' recommendation that the Ministry of Education should be responsible for such an activity, because the important libraries are not always under the jurisdiction of the Ministry.

Very useful and impressive though his Report is, I dare to give a commentary on it chiefly for the purpose of dispelling misunderstanding in several respects, with the sincere hope that my commentary will not in any way denigrate its merits.

My commentary is to be limited to the function and services of the National Diet Library.

Humphreys wrote in II, 2 of his Report;

In the pamphlet describing its organization, functions and activities it is said that its functions are as follows:

"The National Diet Library, with a privilege accorded to it by the legal deposit system, endeavours to build up a comprehensive collection, for preservation in perpetuity, of the records of the nation's cultural achievements, and also to collect as extensively as possible foreign publications that may be helpful to Japan's progress in culture and science. The large resources thus cumulated constitute the background for the multifarious services rendered by the Library.

Service to the Diet.....

Service to government agencies.....

Service to the general public.....

International services....."

Chapter VIII of the National Diet Library Law 'Services to other libraries and to the public', article 21, reads:

"The services and collections of the National Diet Library shall be available to the people of Japan either directly or through prefectural or other libraries to the fullest extent consistent with the requirement of the Diet, its committees and members and of the other branches of the government....."

To my mind the most significant point in these statements is the order of functions which, I am informed, represents the order of priority. It follows therefore that the provision of national services is not the prime function of the Library, and this is particularly disturbing since there is no other national library. In fact this lack of a national library, or at least its subordination to other needs, is one of the most important aspects of the Japanese library system.

The policies of the Library are decided by the Sub-Committee on the Library in the Diet Steering Committee in both Houses. We therefore have a situation where the national library has no control from outside the Diet. No libraries have any say in the systems which are devised or implemented except to execute the policies laid down. It

was not surprising to hear that there was no contact with university libraries.

This is particularly disturbing when the National Diet Library acts as the centre for international relations in inter-library lending, in exchanges, etc. and when it is responsible for various national services like a cataloguing card production unit and the development of an automated cataloguing project based on MARC II.

Humphreys appears to have been provided with inadequate information about the National Diet Library. It is certainly prescribed in the Law that the Library's first priority should be the service to the Diet. To my mind, as far as the Library is part of the legislature and considering the fact that the Diet is the highest organ of state power, such an expression is quite natural. It is also true that the policies of the Library are decided by the Library Management Committees of both Houses. But it should be noted that the Committees are organized by the Diet members who are democratically elected and represent the people of the nation, and that they always encourage the Library to have more effective services for the public, and never have rejected the concept of the Library's national responsibility.

Apart from this direct connection with the Diet, the National Diet Library has never neglected and will never belittle the functions of the national library in Japan which are clearly read in the National Diet Library Law. Certainly, the Library has no administrative contact with university, public and special libraries. However, the Library sponsors once or twice a year liaison meetings with such libraries at which important problems are actively discussed in order to improve overall library activities. Only one who knows the true facts can appreciate the Library's efforts so far tried to bring up the library associations in this country.

Then, what are the functions of a national library? Humphreys once described them in his article¹⁾ as follows:

Fundamental functions

Outstanding and central collection of a nation's literature

Legal deposit of national publications

Coverage of foreign literature

Publication of the national bibliography

National bibliographical information center

Publication of catalogues for use in other libraries

Desirable functions

Inter-library lending

Collection of manuscripts

Research on library techniques

Other functions, not necessarily of the national library

International exchange service

Distribution of duplicates

Books for the blind

Professional training

Assistance in library techniques

As Japanese librarians all know, the National Diet Library has a legal deposit system of publications, governmental as well as non-governmental, produced in this country and maintains a large collection of the nation's literature. The Library also collects foreign materials, either by purchase or through international exchange, and it is also designated a depository of several international organizations. Foreign materials thus acquired have at frequent intervals been publicized through several kinds of accession lists and catalogs. Information on current national publications acquired is disseminated weekly and the national bibliography is compiled and published annually by the Library. As a national information centre, the Library cooperates with Unesco and other institutions abroad in sending bibliographic data on national publications. In these circumstances and with the consent of other organs in this country, it has recently accepted to function as the national centre of the International Serials Data System, one of the world projects of the Unisist. The Japanese periodicals index, not only for humanities and social sciences but also for science and technology, is compiled monthly. This index will soon be cumulated annually by computer. Printed catalog cards are prepared and distributed to libraries. Many catalogs of books and serials are also printed for the Library's

reference service as well as for use in other libraries in and out of Japan. The electronic data processing system is installed and now operates for bibliographic purposes. The Library has had success in developing computerization of more than 5,000 characters, including those of 4,000 Japanese, and, with this success, the Japan MARC system will soon be launched.

All library resources, national and foreign, possessed by the Library are to be loaned out at the request of domestic and foreign libraries. The photocopying service is also very active. Some 4,500,000 pages are copied yearly. As to the research on library techniques, it is enough to state that the Library staff consistently plays a leading part in almost all of the technical committees of the library associations.

Being the exchange centre of Japan, the National Diet Library is very active in the international exchange of government publications. Foreign government publications thus acquired are listed for use by government agencies and researchers in general. Besides, the Library acts as an intermediary transmitter of publications to help individual international exchange between national and foreign universities and learned societies.

Duplicates are distributed, especially with emphasis on strengthening newly started or damaged libraries. Service for the blind is now out of the Library, but in cooperation with certain library for the blind, the Library will be able to assist in making talking books for the blind next year. Several training programs, as a matter of course, are arranged every year for the sake of the Library staff and others as well.

The National Diet Library almost faithfully renders its services in accordance with the functions Humphreys enumerated. The Library thinks of itself as a real national library, believing that the advantages of being a national library would at the same time be beneficial to the service to the Diet. Thus, the two branches of the service are from the same root and there is no contradiction between the two. I cannot understand what Humphreys

should find "disturbing" in this context.

Humphreys further wrote in his Report:

It will immediately be objected that a National Library already exists in the National Diet Library, but to my mind it would seem that that Library does not fulfill the many functions which a country's National Library should undertake. It is unfortunate that it is primarily a library for the Diet and that its national role is almost incidental.

As I already mentioned, the national role of the National Diet Library is not incidental at all. To me it seems that Humphreys insists much too strongly that Japan should establish an independent national library responsible for a full-scale inter-library lending scheme similar to the British Library Lending Service and he did not have enough time to explore the national role of the National Diet Library. The Library has no separate collection only for lending use, but the whole collection is ready for inter-library lending, for photoduplication, for reference service, etc. Are these sufficient reasons for Humphreys to be disturbed? I think not. Although at international meetings functions of a national library are often discussed, it is very difficult to arrive at absolute international criteria, since the functions must be viewed to some extent in the light of the social and political background of the nation served.

The idea of the national lending library is rather new. It was not discussed at the Unesco Symposium on National Libraries in Europe held in Vienna, 1958, nor at the Unesco Regional Seminar on the Development of National Libraries in Asia and the Pacific Area held in Manila, 1964, in which I participated as one of the discussion leaders. In the United Kingdom, in order to take over and develop the postal lending service which the Science Museum Library was operating in South Kensington, the National Lending Library for Science and Technology became operational at Boston Spa in 1962. Later, according to the Dainton Report, together with the main operations of the National Central Library, a comprehensive national lending service is to be organized under the British Library System. In the United States, the National

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Commission on Libraries and Information Science recommended development of certain Library of Congress programs in 1974. In the list of its recommendations²⁾, first priority was given to expansion of lending and lending management function of the Library to that of a National Lending Library of final resort. The principal reason to promote such national lending services both in the United Kingdom and in the United States was of course to answer the extensive demand for the informational resources. However, at the same time it was considered that no part of the most comprehensive collection held by the national custodian should be jeopardised and damaged by being lent. It is noticed therefore that the idea of two separate national libraries, one for conservation and reference and the other for lending and photocopying, was supported at the IFLA General Council held in 1973 at Grenoble.

Do we need at present such facilities in Japan? Before reaching a definite conclusion, the practical, non-ideological, discussion will be necessary among Japanese librarians and those who are connected in this regards. On this point, I fully agree, as mentioned before, with Humphreys' opinion that a National Library Board should be set up for the betterment of our overall library services in this country.

- 1) Humphreys, K. W. "National library functions," *UNESCO bulletin for libraries*, vol. 20, July-Aug. 1966, p. 158-69.
- 2) National Commission on Libraries and Information Science. *NCLIS recommendations for development of Librcry of Congress programs*. Washington, D.C., [1974], p. 2.

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