

Historical Perspective; the Statement on Intellectual Freedom in Libraries in Japan

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Abstract:

In 1954 the all-Japan Librarians' conference of Japan Library Association adopted the Statement on Intellectual Freedom in Libraries. Internationally in those days only American Library Association adopted Library's Bill of Rights (1934) and formed the Committee on Intellectual Freedom to Safeguard the Library Users to Freedom of Inquiry. Through analysis of the social background for adopting a statement on intellectual freedom, this paper presents the missionary thought and hope of Japanese librarians on library and information services after being defeated in World War 2 and having struggled to re-construct Japanese society.

Keywords: Library History, Japan, Information Freedom

1. The Statement on Intellectual Freedom in Libraries

The present version of the Statement was revised in 1979, though the first version was adopted in 1954. Main articles of the present version are as follows¹;

It is the most important responsibility of libraries to offer collected materials and library facilities to the people who have the Right to Know as one of their fundamental human rights.

In order to fulfil their mission, libraries shall recognize the following matters as their proper duties, and shall put them into practice.

Article 1 : Libraries have freedom in collecting their materials.

Article 2 : Libraries secure the freedom of offering their materials.

Article 3 : Libraries guarantee the privacy of users.

Article 4 : Libraries oppose any type of censorship categorically.

When the freedom of libraries is imperilled, we librarians will work together and devote ourselves to secure the freedom.

However the first version in 1954 contained only three articles (1,2, and 4), and Article 3 was added later in 1979. Also the most heated discussion was focused on the sentence, "when the freedom of libraries is imperilled, we librarians will work together and devote

ourselves to secure the freedom”. First expression was ‘……, we librarians will **resist** together and hope for **cooperate with other related organizations.**’ Many participants at the conference in 1954 didn’t agree with those expressions and changed for adoption. Furthermore, the subjective sentences and interpretations have been added and adopted years later in 1979. But firstly in 1954 why did Japan Library Association adopt the Statement? An understanding of the social situation before and during the war time is required in order to understand this.

2. Short library history at modern era in Japan

In 1868 the governmental body had changed from *Tokugawa* to *Meiji*, from *Samurais*’ to the Emperor’s era. Before and after those days farmers, merchants, and low class *Samurai* youth gathered and studied by reading books and having discussions for self-uplifting or acquiring new knowledge or information to cultivate themselves. Some of those associations had small collections of reading materials which were different from ‘libraries’ established by high class *samurai* or local *han* (clans).

Young people between late teens and twenties both in rural and urban areas had been eager to read books especially during the *Meiji* era even though books were expensive and controlled by authorities. Many young farmers organized associations and gathered books and information to read in order to improve or innovate their farming. Young apprentices in cities used *Twuzoku-Toshokan*, common membership libraries. Sometimes they resisted against authorities. Thus the *Meiji* government controlled and censored the publishing of newspapers and books, but at the same time tried to settle fee-charged public libraries with controlled collections and demanded people especially young people to use them locally.

After 1931, the Manchurian Incident, Japan military government accelerated reading guidance at schools and libraries especially toward youth and young people. The government made recommended reading lists and forced youth to read. During the war, censorship officers of the Department of the Interior checked each book and controlled the publishing industry. Special political police came to check the collections of libraries, and sometimes confiscated collections from libraries. Those censored books were from popular books like mysteries or maps to medical books.

In 1945 the war ended, and the US army came to Japan and occupied. The US army also controlled and censored books and other publications.

3. Debate and adoption

In 1950 the Library Law was promulgated and all people could use public libraries free of charge. The same year Korean War began, so General Douglas MacArthur, who was the head of occupied Japan, established new police powers which became the Self-Defense Force. The Japanese government followed this trend and tried to control society. People were against this. People hated war and resisted military power. People gathered and demonstrated. One of the government’s reactions was the Anti-Subversive Activities Act. After this Act which strongly infringed on the freedom of expression or association was proclaimed, people including librarians in community felt uneasy and wanted to resist this law.

ARIYAMA Takashi, the executive director of the JLA at that time, wrote an article in *Toshokan-Zasshi*ⁱⁱ(Library Journal) and suggested a discussion on libraries and neutrality in

1953 because at the all-Japan conference some participants tried to introduce a resolution against the Anti-Subversive Activities Act.

‘Neutrality’ has been strong keyword for librarians in Japan since this time. What is public library for? Why do we librarians select, organize, and provide books? What are library services for whom?

ARIYAMA insistedⁱⁱⁱ “collection development and made them to be used based on ‘neutrality’, and kept on going to work at this stance. When the community inclined toward excessively left or right or became ideologically biased, ‘neutrality’ will be more hard to do. It is your own decision what you were doing outside of library, but a professional librarian needs to be ‘neutrality’.”

Several answered and expressed their opinions^{iv}. Some expressed fear against Red Purge, or some insisted this was just expression without any reality. Some local chapters of the library association sent supportive agreement. The Saitama Library Association suggested that the JLA draft a Library manifesto like ALA’s Library’s Bill of Rights. The year after a working group of JLA published a draft^v on ‘freedom to read; Library’s Bill of Right’ in *Toshokan Zashi*. Many librarians all over Japan sent opinions and discussed this topic through this Journal.

In May 1954 at the all-librarians’ conference in Tokyo, participants debated whether or not to adopt the manifesto or make amendments. Especially some from rural area strongly insisted not to adopt or change the content widely. Because as far as Library Law was not a legal obligation to build and manage libraries by local government, many cities and towns had (...and still have now) no libraries and no librarians. So in those days the financial budget of libraries were so poor and local government tried to decrease. Librarians from rural area accused JLA council members and librarians in Tokyo. If they adopt this Statement which included the expression ‘resist’ or ‘cooperate with other organizations’ might suggest local government as libraries were against local authorities.

After a few days’ discussions the Statement on Intellectual Freedom in Libraries was adopted without amendment. Also the committee on Intellectual Freedom was suggested to have established to do act in real incidents, but not started.

4. After the Adoption

After the adoption of the Statement, librarians have twice reviewed and recognized its missionary idea. But those interpretations were adopted and the committee to act was established were not done until 1979. Without active committee or office several points including risky reading guidance for children were discussed among librarians with the Statement, but no real action was done and most librarians didn’t know the existence of this Statement.

The year 1979 was the big change for Intellectual Freedom in Libraries for librarians and communities, but the more important year was 1954. Librarians discussed about library’s missionary significance and its activities keenly connected to society. Librarians themselves realized then that they didn’t work anymore in an old castle of books, but collect, manage, and provide books for the people who are eager to read freely.

ⁱ The Statement on Intellectual Freedom in Libraries, revised in 1979. Japan Library Association. <http://www.jla.or.jp/portals/0/html/jiyu/english.html> (05.01.2013. accessed)

ⁱⁱ ARIYAMA, Takashi, "suggestion to discuss on library and neutrality", *Toshokan Zasshi* 46(8) p214-215. 有山崧 "図書館と中立についての討論を提案する" 図書館雑誌 46(8)(1952.8)p214-215

ⁱⁱⁱ ARIYAMA, Takashi, "How you treat a chestnut in a fire", *Toshokan Zasshi* 48(5) (1954.5) p158-159. 有山崧 "火中の栗をいかにすべきか" 図書館雑誌 48(5)

^{iv} *Approvement of the Statement on Intellectual Freedom in Libraries*. (Library and freedom No.1) ed. and published by Japan Library Association., 1975.

『図書館の自由に関する宣言 図書館と自由・1 <<復刻版>>』日本図書館協会、2004

^v "Freedom to read; Library's Bill of Rights draft by committee" *Toshokan Zasshi* 47(10) (1953.10) p298. 「読書の自由」図書館憲章(委員会案) 図書館雑誌 47(10)