

## Foreword

Libraries can be classified into several types in accordance with the diversity of their supporting bodies, and the service performed in each type differs in its contents and its aim. Such types are: the National Diet Library to support the parliamentary system; public libraries established by the governmental bodies of prefectures, municipalities, towns and villages; university and college libraries belonging to such educational institutions; school libraries of primary and junior/senior high schools; research libraries owned by enterprises, research institutes, etc; and so forth.

In this short preface we have no space to discuss all of these types. So I would like to focus mainly on public libraries, since they are the libraries that reflect most directly the mentality and the system of their society, and also since they are the type of library that have shown the most dramatic evolution in the history of Japan's modernization.

From the latter decades of the last century to the beginning of this century, several early examples of public libraries appeared in different parts of Japan to mark the startline of their development; however, their progress was soon interrupted by the suppression of thought and speech during the wartime.

Progressive at the time these libraries may have been, they were far from today's standards; in the first place the total number of such libraries was extremely few, with age restriction upon their admission, all in a closed-stack system in which the access to the books was limited to catalogue cards prior to their lending that was done manually by the libraries; thus most librarians remained a distant existence to the ordinary people.

The U.S. occupation forces stationed in post-war Japan were shocked at the poor standard of our libraries, and on the principle that Democracy cannot be realized without the promotion of public libraries, made such efforts as guiding the enactment of the Japanese Library Law. But the libraries still remained stagnant in Japan for a long time. It was the enthusiasm of many librarians through the various phases thereafter that brought about today's success of public libraries.

Remarkable progress was also seen in university and research libraries, with many having architectural value of importance to be in this book; however we must look for another chance to discuss them.

In the past thirty years the libraries in Japan have shown astonishing change and progress. In one word, they finally came to belong to the public. The open-stack system is now totally common as if it had always been so. The capacity of this open-stack system is ever growing, and also becoming rich in audio-visual material. Marked improvements were made not only in the variety and quantity of library materials, but also in the quality of every aspect of library services from opening hours, lending, reservation, copying, references to retrieval. Services for the handicapped have also been improved. Computer system has come to be widely used. And the library architecture has become incomparably luxurious than its past. Today library buildings are in their prime in diversity and attractiveness.

Such diversity and attractiveness are primarily none other than the results of the fact that the libraries are gaining maturity. It means that our understanding and awareness have deepened that libraries are the common property of the public to be shared by all, and accordingly, it means that the social demand for libraries has increased.

But at the same time, it is undeniable that all these were made possible by the increasing affluence of Japan. Now we can spend more on building libraries, and this certainly is a welcome thing.

Nevertheless, I must point out that there are different aspects of the matter. While there is this situation in which libraries seem to be in their prime, in Japan as a whole such libraries are still only but a portion, and the average of most Japanese libraries remain rather inferior among other countries. Domestically, there are large differences between the regions in the level of libraries and in the people's recognition of their role. Of course, it is natural that maturity and immaturity exist at the same time, and this indicates that we are still in progress. What worries us is something else. As we reached a stage seemingly at its

prime, enthusiasm with which we pursued the true existence of a library has gradually lost its sparks and the original intention has become rather faded. All these in short: this diversity of library buildings reflect the situation today in which our understanding of the library service has become diverse.

I have written above "in the past thirty years" because it was thirty years ago, in 1965 that the true principle of a library, which is to offer the people an easy access to the materials, came into reality for the first time in Japan. My intention here is by no means nostalgia, but recalling that "first time" I cannot help being amazed by how the situation has changed since those days.

1965 was the year the Hino City of Metropolitan Tokyo established for the first time its own library, without any facility but one book-mobile in energetic operation. The chief librarian Mr. Maekawa chose to start with only a book-mobile, declaring "a library can exist without a building, library services can be realized without it". In the situation of the public libraries at the time, this was a radical challenge to clarify the essence of the system of the library services, and the book-mobile was the best choice to him. It took only two years for the Hino library to have the most circulation in Japan. There were libraries with magnificent buildings in those days as well, but their activities were totally stagnant. Mr. Maekawa's declaration that a library needed no building was a sharp criticism against such libraries. However, I hardly know anyone who so deeply comprehends the role and the value of architecture as Mr. Maekawa. In conviction that a good facility can only be created on the basis of a precise perspective of the activities performed within, he kept on preaching "The first step is to appoint a chief librarian with excellent knowledge and insight as a professional". Today his view is finally bearing fruit and there are more libraries being designed in coherence with the program projected by the chief librarian-elect.

I must not forget to add here that the growth of these new libraries owe much to the demands of the local resident groups. To

the life of citizens the necessity of a library offering whatever they'd need has become more inevitable. Those wanting a good library would go even to remote facilities to get superior service. There they learn the essence of such services, and find out how such good libraries were realized. Based on such experience, they kept their demands to their administration, and in the spread of this movement, the principle of "chief librarian first" is gaining power, the basis of active services is hence being established, eventually setting the circumstance for good library architecture to be built. Here you can see the origin of the necessity of a true library, and if this origin is kept alive, good library architecture will continue to be born.

Today when there is no prevailing style in architecture, buildings are bound to be multifarious. Still more so when the strong personalities come across between the able chief librarian and the able architect. In the first place, their responsibilities are different; a librarian is in charge of services and an architect in charge of design the building. Services given inside the building are sometimes supported and stimulated by the building but sometimes strongly restricted and interfered. The services and the building are inseparable but in the hands of different people. Thus, the depth and the degree of mutual understanding are directly manifested in the result. Sometimes misunderstandings happen, sometimes self-righteousness is seen, and things may not go perfect.

And even when the relation between the services and the building is not perfect, the latter may look splendid. I don't necessarily find all the buildings contained in this book to be excellent library facilities. The selection was made as objectively as possible by choosing not only those I value but also those that are highly evaluated for some reasons by the society. I have done so to show the actual phase of the reality.

If designing a new library is your current task, I ask you the librarian and the architect to frankly discuss each of the works in this book. I'm confident that they have a diversity worthy of discussion, and be of help in drawing out your project.

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