

An Overview of Young Adult Services in Japan

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In 1978, a young librarian named Yuji Handa, who had three years' experience at Tokyo's Koto Ward Library, was asked to write an article about young adult (YA) services for Japan's "The Library World" journal (Handa, 1999a). At that time, Handa had noticed that there was a gap in services for young adults, but he was not particularly deeply involved in providing such services. Through the process of writing the article, Handa was able to learn a great deal about the subject, became passionate about it, and made it his life's work to develop and promote YA services in Japan.

There had been some stirrings of young adult services in Japan before the Second World War, but the momentum had not been continued after the war, so there was little evidence of such services by the time Handa wrote his 1978 article (Handa, 1999b). In fact, an American librarian named Hannah Hunt gave lectures on young adult services to preservice librarians in 1951, but there does not seem to have been a resulting boom in such services as a result of her efforts (Handa, 1997).

When Handa set out to write the article, his boss gave him several articles to read to give him a basis for his thinking. The articles were all in English, but he was not a particularly skilled reader of English at the time, so he decided to look for some articles in Japanese to get him started. However, he couldn't find any Japanese articles on the subject of YA services at the time, other than a few that proclaimed the necessity of such services, so he soldiered on through the English materials. It was through reading these articles that he came to understand that idea that public library services in the US were, at the time, made up of children's services, young adult services, and adult services, with YA services forming its own unit (although it was sometimes linked closely to the children's section or the adults' section). This was also the first time that Handa encountered the term "young adult" (he was more familiar with a word meaning "youth" in Japanese, which has a broader meaning than "young adult" and can include people much older than 18). As a librarian, he was shocked to discover such a rich area of service provision about which he was previously almost completely unaware. However, his shock was temporarily mollified when he read a contemporary book by Margaret Marshall (1975) that indicated that British libraries were nowhere near providing the same level of service as American libraries in this regard at the time.

In the 1975 book by Marshall, there were two top ten lists – one of books popular with adults, and one for young adults (Handa, 1999a). Handa noticed that while there were Japanese translations for all of the adult books, there were only two books on the YA list that he was familiar with, namely *The Pigman* by Paul Zindel (which is called "April, Sophomore Year" in Japanese) and *Owl Service* by Alan Garner ("Owl Patterned Plate"). Furthermore, in his library, one of these books was shelved in the adult collection (*Pigman*) and the other in the children's collection (*Owl*). In essence, YA did not really exist in Japan at the time as either a library service (except, perhaps, at a few forward-thinking libraries), or as a genre of literature.

Since he couldn't find any studies that had been done on YA services in Japan at the time, he decided to do a small-scale study of his own library (Handa, 1999a). He found that while there was a large number of 12 to 18 year olds registered at the library, their borrowing rates were lower than the rest of the population (based on a one-week survey). While people at the time were fond of saying "young people just don't read anymore", Handa realized that the problem wasn't that young people didn't read or didn't come to libraries anymore, but that libraries were not adequately providing services targeted to this specific group. In particular, he believed that libraries needed to think of young adults as part of their adult clientele rather than child clientele. By moving books that young adults are likely to read out of the children's section and giving them space in the adult section, the problem of young adults no longer wanting to come to the library (where they were forced to mingle with toddlers) could be solved, at least in part. The problem was not with the young adults, but with the library, and the solution was within the library's reach. He discovered that Osaka Central Library had placed its "young adult corner" in the adult section rather than the children's section, so he decided to go and have a look at it. He noticed that just moving the shelves from one part of the library to another did, in fact, make a difference.

Next, Handa turned his attention to YA materials (Handa, 1999a). He noticed that in the US, the new YA genre was being carved out with "junior novels" and "teen problem books", whereas that had yet to happen in the UK, where similar books were still classified as children's literature. Japan was even further behind, with a lack of these English books being translated into Japanese, and even when they were, they were not being marketed as books for teens. In fact, there were two series of Japanese "junior novels" being marketed at the time (by Akimoto Shobou and Shueisha publishers), but they had recently been turned into paperbacks (known as "tankobon" in Japanese) and libraries were not interested in including paperbacks in their collections at the time, so these books were generally not even considered for acquisition by most libraries.

In a later essay that Handa wrote in 1997, he was still lamenting the state of young adult services in Japan. He concluded that there were (at least) five problems that were getting in the way of the development of this area of library service: (1) there was no agreement in Japan about what to call this section of the library; (2) librarians did not have a good conceptual understanding of what young adult services entailed; (3) there was a debate about whether there should be a separate space/collection for young adults; (4) the image of young

adult services was not well-defined; and (5) there was no proof of the effectiveness of young adult services/collections.

Unfortunately, Handa passed away quite suddenly in 1998. It is clear, however, that the concept of young adult services was starting to gain a bit of momentum by that time. Two broad studies have been done on young adult services in public libraries by the Japan Library Association: one in 1993 and one in 2003. By comparing the results of these two studies, it can be seen that a great deal of progress was made over those ten years, and hopefully, there will be an even bigger gap in evidence if a third study is done in 2013.

In the 1993 study (Japan Library Association, 1993), of the 1792 public libraries that responded, it was found that 460 (25.7%) offered young adult services in some way, while 1332 (74.3%) did not. In the 2003 study (Japan Library Association, 2003), of the total number of 2530 responding libraries, 1031 (40.8%) now offered YA services, while 1499 (59.2%) did not. In addition, while 79.8% of responding libraries that did have a YA collection did not have a separate space for the YA collection in 1993, by 2003 that number had been decreased to 31.9%. Furthermore, only 27.3% of libraries had put a staff member specifically in charge of the YA section in 1993, but by 2003, this had increased to 51.2%. However, it should be noted that very few libraries indicated in either study that they had librarians who were in charge of the YA collection on a full-time basis. In 1993, 0.6% of responding libraries had a dedicated YA librarian, and by 2003, that number had only increased to 1.8%. (Libraries often do not have dedicated staff for any sections in Japan. The philosophy is that all staff should be able to work in any section, which is an admirable goal, but the lack of specialization does have a deleterious effect on the quality of service that libraries can provide, in my opinion.)

In both studies, the top three reasons for not offering YA services were:

1. Lack of space (74.6% in 1993, 30.9% in 2003)
2. Lack of human resources (55.7%, 25.4%)
3. Lack of budget (42.3%, 22.1%)

In addition to these three, Handa gave the following reasons for the lack of widespread adoption of YA services in Japan.

1. Lack of professional staff assigned only to YA
2. Libraries haven't thought deeply about their contribution to solving teen problems
3. Libraries don't think of themselves as educational entities
4. The staff may not understand teens, or may not try to understand them
5. There is not a long history of YA services in Japan, so there is a lack of examples to follow and a lack of professional knowhow in the library community.

In a more recent article, Inoue (2010) indicates that some libraries are starting to lead the way towards a more robust offering of services to young adults. She notes that YA book selection is improving, there are more volunteer opportunities available to young adults, and some libraries are starting to offer space on their websites dedicated to their YA clientele. Also, while the majority of libraries still do not have a separate section for a YA collection, Inoue believes that few libraries in Japan could be said to have no YA materials at all.

In a special edition of *The Library Journal* (Japan Library Association, 2009) dedicated to young adult services (the existence of which is, in itself, a good indication that YA services are gaining ground), three libraries are spotlighted as exemplary models of young adults services in Japanese libraries.

Toyonaka City Senri Library in Osaka is a public library with a very high rate of usage by the local residents, with around 2000 books being lent out each day, and closer to 3000 on weekends (Furumori and Hakui, 2009). This library, which was established in 1978, started to offer YA services fairly early in its history. In addition to its collection, it offers lectures by YA authors, discussion groups, collaboration with local schools, meetings with teacher librarians at local schools, volunteer programs for teens, internships for teens, and YA newsletters (with the support of YA members), including book reviews. (Library website: <http://www.lib.toyonaka.osaka.jp/>)

Hiroshima Prefectural Library has a volunteer program, teen internships, book reviews written by young adults displayed in the YA section, posters made by young adults recommending various books displayed in schools, a newsletter with contributions from young adults, and a YA page on their website (Masai, 2009). (Library website: <http://www.hplibra.pref.hiroshima.jp/>)

Kajiki High School Library in Kagoshima is located in a bright, open space, and features light background music to the eternal surprise of new students (Iwashita, 2009). Older students give new students an "adventure tour" of the library and library volunteers are put in charge of selecting a portion of the books for the library. New arrivals are announced on a bulletin board and in newsletters in order to help students understand that the library is continually changing and to offer them a reason to visit. They also offer a book point card (one point per book borrowed), original book covers, and library totebags. Furthermore, once a school term, the library hosts an event called "Joy of Books" where the students, parents, and teachers are given a chance to use the library as a space to showcase their skills (e.g. music performances). (Library website: <http://www5.synapse.ne.jp/library/>)

If Yuji Handa was correct and the progress of YA services in Japan was being impeded due to a lack of good examples to follow, there are now at least three libraries that are ready to lead the way in this regard, and they presumably have skilled librarians who might be engaged as librarian educators in the future. From the dark days of YA services in the late 1970s, there have been obvious signs of progress in Japan, but it is clear that we have yet to see YA

services reach their true potential in this country. It may also be said, however, that some libraries are heading in the right direction.

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