

# **Osaka Municipal Ikuno Library: The First Public Library to Offer Multicultural Library Services in Japan**

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## **Abstract**

The Osaka Municipal Ikuno Library is one of 23 branch libraries in the city of Osaka. It is small but well known as the library which started services to Korean residents in 1988. That was the first program in Japan targeted directly at serving minority people. Ikuno-ku has a long-established Korean community. There are about 135,700 people living there now, and almost one quarter of the population is Korean. However, the library had not provided services to them until 1987.

During 1987, the issue of the alien fingerprinting system was raised, especially by Korean residents who thought it was an example of discrimination. In addition to this issue, the upcoming Seoul Olympic Games of 1988 fostered their Korean identity and drove them to visit the library for information. That was the first time that librarians became aware of the specific needs of this community. The library staff tried to get more information about the Korean community and reached a decision to set up a "Korean Books Corner" in the library. The corner started with 650 books on Korea written in Japanese and 50 picture books in Hangul; now there are 6,000 books in total.

The 52nd IFLA General Conference held in Tokyo in 1986 approved professional resolutions that libraries should promote services to multicultural populations in Japan. It had a great impact upon Japanese librarians. The Osaka Municipal Ikuno Library initiated multicultural library services in 1988. Their activities, together with the concept of multicultural library services, have been encouraging subsequent practices by other libraries in Japan over the years.

## **1. About Ikuno**

Ikuno is one of 24 wards of the city of Osaka. Osaka is in the Kansai region of Japan, and one of the country's biggest cities -- equivalent to Tokyo and Yokohama. Ikuno is located in the eastern part of Osaka and covers an area of 8.4 square kilometers. It is a town comprised of a densely built-up area, with small factories, offices, and stores. Most of the residents belong to the lower income bracket, and they are very friendly.

According to the demographic data, the population of Ikuno is about 135,700 nearly one quarter of whom are South or North Koreans. In fact, there are much more people from Korean background. Ikuno has had a long-established Korean community since the prewar period. They are called "Zainichi" or Koreans living in Japan, Now they live in Ikuno as

long-time residents, Korean descendents who were born in Japan, newcomers, and naturalized Korean-Japanese.

## **2. Relationship between Japan and Korea**

Korea is geographically adjacent to Japan, and the relationship between the two countries has a long history. This relationship was drastically changed by Japan's annexation of the Korean Peninsula from 1910 to 1945. Korean people migrated, or they were forced to migrate, to Japan as workers. Especially in 1923, the influx of Koreans into the Ikuno area was accelerated markedly because the shipping route between Osaka and Cheju in Korea was established.

After World War II, most of the Koreans who were in Japan returned to their mother country. It is said that there were 2,300,000 Korean people living in Japan at the end of the war, 1945. However, about 600,000 Koreans were not able to leave. In addition, when the Korean War started in 1950, many people returned to Japan in order to escape the war.

During the occupation by Japanese troops, Koreans had to change their true names to Japanese names; many of them in Japan still have both names. The reason that they still use Japanese names in Japan even after World War II is because they try to hide their ethnic background in order to avoid social prejudice against Koreans. Therefore, it is very hard for them to establish their self-identity. Although the issue of discrimination against Koreans still exists, it is now much better than years ago. Coincidentally, the number of people who give out their true names is increasing steadily.

## **3. Establishment of Korean Books Corner in Ikuno Library**

The Osaka Municipal Ikuno Library is one of 23 branch libraries in the Osaka Municipal Library Network System. Under the policy that each ward should have its own library, the Ikuno Library was opened in May, 1981, with an area of 893 square meters, including a staff room. It occupies the third floor of the Municipal Disaster Control Center Building. The library had 9,000 books and 5 staff members, 4 librarians and one clerk, when it first opened. At the beginning, the librarians knew there were many Koreans in the community, and the library was located near "Korea Town". However, they were not aware of the specific community needs because the librarians had not received direct requests regarding the collection from Korean residents. Therefore, the library had purchased only a limited amount of material on Korea.

During 1987, the issue of the alien fingerprinting system<sup>1</sup> was raised, especially by Korean residents, who thought it was an act of discrimination. In addition to this issue, the then upcoming Seoul Olympic Games of 1988 intensified their Korean identity and motivated them to visit the library for the information about the fingerprinting issue, Korean history,

Korean culture, and so on.

The Ikuno Library suddenly found itself dealing with many reference questions from the Korean population. Then librarians thus became aware of the community needs for the first time. They tried to research the Korean community, Korean associations, ethnic schools, ethnic libraries, and Korean book stores. As research was went on, they decided that the library should provide information and materials to all members of the community, and that it was time to take a step forward to finally meet the needs of Korean residents.

At the same time, the librarians submitted a budgetary request to the Osaka Municipal Main Library. The Main Library manages the entire library system, including allocating the budget and purchasing and cataloging materials. Branch libraries usually select materials, program events, and draw up service plans. Ms. Masako Miyagi, the chief librarian of the Ikuno Library at that time, urged administrators to allocate the budget for minority services, stating, "Who can provide this service except us?" The budget request was approved fairly easily and was funded to set up the "Korean Books Corner" in the library.

The 52nd IFLA General Conference held in Tokyo in 1986 approved professional resolutions that libraries should promote services to multicultural populations in Japan. The concept of multicultural library services was new to Japanese librarians. Therefore, the professional resolutions had a great impact upon them and it permeated into library society as a whole. This trend provided a true impetus to the development new services in Ikuno.

#### **4. Beginning of the Korean Books Corner**

In June 1988, the "Korean Books Corner" started with 650 books on Korea written in Japanese and 50 Korean picture books. The corner was laid out in an eye-catching and comfortable place in the library, in an area of 30 square meters. This was small, but it comprised the first multicultural library services directly targeted at minority residents in Japan. There had been no preceding practice at all in Japan. The librarians made all kinds of efforts to advertise and develop the corner. The sign for the corner, written in both Hangul and Japanese characters, was hung up on the wall. It was 50 centimeters long and 140 centimeters wide. In addition, the librarians tried to get input directly from the patrons, and they carefully utilized these comments to improve their services for the first several years. In the librarians' notes, there are some vivid users' voices, such as:

When elementary school girls found picture books in Hangul, they shouted excitedly, "Hey, they are Urimal". That means our language.

An adult woman said, "I would like to read novels in Hangul. There are many newcomers here, and they may too."

When an elderly man found a newspaper in Hangul, he commented: "I would like to borrow it." After this conversation, the library started lending newspapers except

for the latest edition.

One adult man said, "Good collection!"

An elementary school girl who borrowed picture books in Hangul said, "I will ask my mom to read these books because she is Korean".

After the Korean Books Corner was built, there was a significant increase in user registration by Korean names, rather than by their Japanese names.

## **5. Implementing services**

In the beginning, only picture books in the corner were written in Hangul while all materials for adults were written in Japanese, because it was not easy to collect books in Hangul in Japan at that time. Also, the librarians were in a hurry to create the corner. But the more Korean residents came to use the library, the more they requested materials in Hangul. The library therefore increased its acquisition of Hangul books for adults. Since no staff member knew the Korean language well enough to select and order books, some librarians were driven by necessity to take a Korean language class at his/ her own expense.

In a preliminary survey, the library expected that about 20 % of all patrons would use materials in Hangul. However, the word that the Ikuno Library had books in Hangul spread among the Korean community, and many people far from Ikuno came flocking to the library. In order to meet user requests, the library also continued to expand the collection to include books on history, culture, and arts, Korean popular novels, bestsellers translated from Japanese to Korean, cookbooks, books on child-rearing, medical books for the family, and books on Korean law. Since 1990, newcomers consisting of women married to Korean residents have increased. The library added women's magazines for them, and those magazines are still heavily used.

In 1989, the library staff published their "Book List on Korea" in handwriting which could help find books their patrons needed. It was distributed to the main public libraries in other cities of Japan. The response to this book list was tremendous. The library has accepted a huge number of requests for the list and interlibrary loans from other libraries.

The establishment of the Korean Books Corner produced an amazing reaction, and the library had to handle many visitors, including librarians, scholars, university students, ethnic school students, and TV and newspaper reporters. In 1989, Mainichi Newspaper reported on the corner in an extensive article with a picture. One of the video series on the library, produced by the Japan Library Association, included the Korean Books Corner as the prime example of multicultural library services.

Some of the librarians who had visited the Ikuno Library started multicultural library services to minorities in their own respective libraries. The Ikuno Library became a model

library for multicultural services.

## **6. Present situation of the corner**

The multicultural services at the Ikuno Library at first targeted longtime residents, because many Koreans in the community have been living there before World War II. The community is now a mixture of newcomers, longtime residents, several generations of many families, and naturalized Korean-Japanese.

The library has tried to collect materials on Korea without any political or social bias from the two different regimes of North and South Korea. Now the total collection of this corner consists of 2,100 books in Hangul, including 700 children's books, 3,900 books in Japanese including 300 children's books, 11 magazines, 120 videos, 6 DVDs, and one newspaper. This corner can be used by both Korean speakers and Japanese speakers.

From the beginning, patrons' use of the corner has grown steadily, with a marked increase in numbers since 2000. There seem to be two big reasons for this surge in popularity and usage. One was that Japan and Korea co-hosted the 2002 FIFA World Cup; and the other was that a Korean TV drama became very popular among Japanese women. It was called "Halyu", or Korean boom in Japan. The circulation figures for books in the corner more than doubled from about 7,600 volumes in 1998 to almost 16,000 in 2006.

In spite of the growing circulation, the special funding for the corner was cut off a few years ago because of financial difficulties in the Osaka Municipal Government. However, the Ikuno Library continues to purchase books on Korea by allocating a yearly budget to sustain the corner. One sixth of the library's total book budget is used for the corner.

## **7. Challenges for the future**

It has been 20 years since the multicultural library services started at the Ikuno Library. The Korean Books Corner has been recognized as an indispensable service by community residents. However, the library faces some challenges to improve services in the future. The first challenge is to employ a librarian who can speak Korean and provide services such as story telling to Korean children, although hiring new staff is very difficult during the current budget shortage.

The Ikuno Library has occasionally asked for Korean volunteers to help at the library. Patrons were willing to help by translating from Japanese to Korean, planning events, and donating Korean books and magazines to the library. However, there is no established partnership between the library and the Korean community. The second challenge is to forge a closer relationship with residents, related associations, ethnic schools and school libraries, to inspire them to work together.

## 8. Multicultural library services in the Osaka Municipal Library

In 1996, the new Osaka Municipal Main Library building was completed. It is one of the largest public libraries in Japan. The main library has a spacious corner of international materials including books, magazines, newspapers, videos, and CDs in several languages. All Osaka Municipal Library catalogs are merged in the computer network called "OMLIS"<sup>2</sup>. This makes it much easier for libraries to search other library collections and request inter-library loans.

There are many foreigners living in the city of Osaka. Its population is now about 2.6 million, with about 120,000 foreign citizens. Nine branch libraries recently started multicultural services, depending on the needs of their various communities. For example, the Abeno Library collects materials in English and Chinese; the Higashi-yodogawa Library provides materials in Chinese; and the Nishi-yodogawa Library has materials in Portuguese. The librarians work together to publish library guides in Korean, Chinese, and English. Also, they frequently exchange information on users' needs and have a staff training course to improve their services.

### Conclusion

Akiko Yano has had an unforgettable experience when she worked at the Ikuno Library. Since the very beginning, the library has had many exhibitions and events to inform residents of the existence of the corner. Every year, the library exhibits Korean books and sometime provides lectures or musical performances to introduce Korean culture. At one of the ethnic cultural events, the library provided a program to present Korean traditional music using an instrument named "Jangu", a kind of drum. At a librarian's invitation, a Japanese man in his 60s, a frequent library user, joined the event. He later told the librarian that he had never known of such tremendous performing arts in Korea because he had had no contact with Korean residents in the community. If the library had not organized this event, he would have had no opportunity to learn about Korean culture.

The same thing could happen at any time and in any place. If minority culture is not preserved and introduced to their neighbors, people will never know other cultures. The library has a huge role to play in bridging cultures between the majority and various minority populations living in the same community.

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<sup>1</sup> Alien fingerprinting system in Japan started in 1955, and it became defunct in 1999.

<sup>2</sup> OMLIS in Korean is available at <http://www.oml.city.osaka.jp/korean/index.html>. Accessed 2008/07/03.