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Historical Development of Standards of the American Public Library: From National Standards to Local Planning

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Abstract: The national standards for public libraries were first published by the American Library Association in 1933 and were revised approximately once a decade in 1943, 1956, and 1966. The standards placed significant influences on the development of American public libraries. However, development of these national standards was ceased by the Public Library Association (division of the ALA) in 1966 due to the new trend from the beginning of 1970s to value the planning process of individual libraries, which encourages public libraries to develop and implement individual plans based on needs of the local community. The outcome of this trend was the *Public Library Mission Statement* which was adopted by PLA in 1979. These changes indicate the transformation from the input to output model library as well as from national standards to local standards based on the community needs. Furthermore, this shift continues with an increasing emphasis on the measurement of the effectiveness of library services. The present paper offers a new perspective for implementing public library standards in Japan and China by examining the transformation of American public library standards.

Keywords: public libraries, United States, national standards, community planning, American Library Association

1. National Standards for Public Library Service from 1933-1966

1.1. “Standards for Public Libraries” (1933)

In October 1933, in the midst of the Depression, the Council of the American Library Association adopted “Standards for Public Libraries,” which was only a two page document published in the *American Library Association Bulletin*. This simple document begins with the sentence declaring “The public library is maintained by a democratic society in order that every man, woman, and child may have the means of self-education and recreational reading” (p. 514). After defining an educational, informational, and recreational role of the public library, this 1933 document briefly explained important points in four sections: “The Staff,” “Book Collection,” “Measuring the Use of the Library,” and “The Income Needed.” The “Measuring the Use of the Library” section, while argued that “Many of the most important library services cannot be measured statistically,” also argued that book lending services can be measured statistically. The following standards on book lending services were recommended (see Table 1).

Table 1: Standards for Registered Borrowers, Circulation and Volumes

| Population Borrowers ¹⁾ | Registered (per capita) | Circulation Books (per capita) ²⁾ | Volumes |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------|--|----------|
| over 1,000,000 | 25% | 5vols. | 1.5vols |
| 200,000 to 1,000,000 | 30% | 7vols. | 1.5vols. |
| 100,000 to 200,000 | 35% | 8vols. | 2vols. |
| 10,000 to 100,000 | 40% | 9vols. | 2vols. |
| less than 10,000 | 50% | 10vols. | 3vols. |

1) A three-year registration period

2) From figures in the “Book Collection” section

3) All of the figures in Table 1 were minimum standards and different figures were employed for different population ranges.

The most important figure was the income standard in the “The Income Needed” section, declaring that “\$1 per capita is the average minimum annual income” for an adequate library service. However, small towns could not keep an adequate service at \$1 per capita and two solutions were adopted to cope with this situation. The first solution was to spend more than \$1 per capita. The second solution was to enlarge the area of service and support in order to reduce costs per unit. The \$1 per capita as minimum income and different standards for different population ranges in the 1933 standards formed the basis for the 1943 *Post War Standards*.

1.2. Post-War Standards for Public Libraries (1943)

The number of discussions on enlarging the governmental unit to support adequate library services increased in the 1930s. Joeckel (1935) emphasized in the authoritative and influential work, *The Government of the American Public Library*, the need for larger units in order to support library services. The establishment of Library Services Division in the U.S. Office of Education in 1938 stimulated the national standards and planning for public library services. The American Library Association established the Committee on Postwar Planning (chaired by Joeckel) under these circumstances in order to develop public library objectives and standards after World War II. As the result, the *Post-War Standards for Public Libraries* was published in 1943 and was approved by the Council of the ALA in October 1944. It was stated in chapter I “Introduction” of the book that 35 million people had zero access to public library services (p. 15). Chapter II “Public Library Objectives” set five objectives for post-war public libraries: (1) education, (2) information, (3) aesthetic appreciation, (4) research, and (5) recreation (p. 20). Chapter III to Chapter X presented quality and quantity standards in eight different areas: (1) service, (2) government and administration, (3) size and area, (4) finance, (5) buildings, (6) book collection, (7) personnel, and (8) technical processes. The document also indicated two minimum quantitative standards for adults and children respectively regarding the circulation of books. The minimum standard for adult books is three to ten volumes per capita for the fifteen years old age group and over. The minimum standard for children books is ten to thirty volumes per capita for the five to fourteen

years old age group. The circulation per capita increases with the decrease in population age range. Therefore, the circulation per capita may be expected to approach or exceed the highest minimum volumes in above standards, which were 10 volumes for adult books in the case of small towns. Conversely, only three volumes were accepted in very large cities. In cities with a population of 10,000 to 25,000, adult books circulation would be near the median points in the ranges indicated in the standards, which was 6.5 volumes per capita.

Concerning the financial support, the 1933 standards asserted \$1 per capita for the average minimum annual income, and \$1 per capita continued in the 1943 statement as the national minimum. However, the following minimum per capita standards were recommended according to stages of development of library service (p. 56).

Table 2: Standards for Financial Support

| Standards | Per capita |
|--------------------------------|------------|
| For limited or minimum service | \$1.0 |
| For reasonably good service | \$1.5 |
| For superior service | \$2.00 |

This financial model was applied to libraries serving areas with 25,000 population. This document also asserted \$25,000 support to maintain basic library service. Therefore, small towns unable to afford \$25,000 had to: (1) limit its objectives and services, (2) increase its income by enlarging the area of service, or (3) obtain financial aid from other sources. It is clear that the document recommended the second option.

The 1943 statement was actually the first extensive national standards with ninety-two pages which covered all the areas of public library services. It also offered clear objectives and various standards for library administrators, policy makers, and others to plan their libraries.

Joeckel (1948) published an important book, *A National Plan for Public Library Service*, in which Dr. Joeckel emphasized not only to enlarge the service unit but also to obtain state and federal aids for public libraries. The latter was realized by federal Library Services Act in 1956.

1.3. Public Library Service: A Guide to Evaluation, with Minimum Standards (1956), Minimum Standards for Public Library Systems (1966)

Similar to 1933 and 1943 standards, the 1956 document also emphasized the education function and quality service of public libraries. However, this new document represents an innovative and holistic departure from the previous standards. The 1956 seventy-four-page document consists of two parts: (I) Background and (2) Principles and Standards. The “Background” is further divided into two chapters: (1) Functions of the Public Library and (2) Concept of Library Systems. On the other hand, “Principles and Standards” part consists of six chapters: (1) Structure and Government, (2) Service, (3) Books and Nonbook Materials, (4) Personnel, (5) The Organization and Control of Materials, and (6) Physical Facilities.

The 1943 statement was titled Post-War “Standards,” but the 1956 statement was titled Public

Library Service with the term “Standards” only appeared in the sub-title. In addition, chapter titles of the 1943 statement also began with the term “Standards” (from Chapter III “Standards of Service,” through Chapter X “Standards of Technical Processes”). Although 191 specific standards were enumerated in the 1956 document, these standards were described after some seventy guiding principles. These guiding principles are not standards, but rather the foundation to the establishment of standards (p. xvi). On the other hand, the 1956 document did not emphasize quantitative standards, but underscored the principles and ideas for good library services.

As stated earlier in this paper, both the 1933 and 1943 standards employed different population ranges for registration rate, circulation per capita, book holdings per capita, financial support per capita, and so on. These scales impose bigger burdens on smaller towns with smaller tax incomes than on larger cities with larger tax incomes. The 1956 standards eliminated not only all of these different standards for different population ranges but also many quantitative standards. As for lending (circulation), two specific standards set forth policies and procedures for lending library materials. No. 14 and No. 75 standards of the statement stated, “The libraries in a system should develop uniform lending policies and procedures,” (p. 16) and “It should be possible to take and return books in any part or agency of a library system or groups of affiliated libraries” (p. 27) respectively. Both standards include the term “library system.” The 1956 document placed the strongest emphasis on the concept of library system:

“Libraries working together, sharing their services and materials, can meet the full needs of their users. *This co-operative approach on the part of libraries is the most important single recommendation of this document.* Without joint action, most American libraries probably will never be able to come up to the standard necessary to meet the needs of their constituencies” (italics original, p. 7).

It seemed that some of the smaller libraries were concerned about losing their independence and autonomy. The *Public Library Service* reduced the concern shared by many small libraries by stating that the development of systems of libraries did not weaken or eliminate the small community library. Instead, the *Public Library Service* assured that each library would be able to provide its users with greatly expanded resources and services without losing their independent nature. Since 1956 document shifted the focus from the individual library to library system, small-scale public libraries had no standards to plan and evaluate their library services. Regarding the book stock, the No. 96 standard stated “There should be at least 100,000 volumes of currently-useful printed material in a library system,” and No. 97 standard stated “4,000-5,000 separate titles should be added to a library system annually, including 400-500 children’s titles.” However, the 1956 statement did not indicate details about the number of book holding for each individual library.

After a decade, Standards Committee of the Public Library Association (Division of ALA) issued *Minimum Standards for Public Library System*. This new document was built on the former 1956 document with an emphasis not only on headquarters of the public library system, but on the state library agency. It added “Statistical Standards” for Appendix, in which quantitative standards such as hours of service, quantities of materials, and salaries were included. Unlike the 1956 document, the *Minimum Standards for Public Library System* document was unable to offer

innovative perspectives.

2. Community Standards for Public Library Service from 1979-

2.1. Social Changes and the Public library

The United States experienced tremendous social upheavals in the 1960s. Civil Rights movements, Cuba Crisis, and Vietnam War generated deadly impacts on every aspect of the American life. Michael Harrington published *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* in 1963. Medgar W. Evers (field worker of NAACP, 1963), President John F. Kennedy (1963), Malcolm X (1965), and Dr. Martin L. King, Jr. (1968) were assassinated. Black riots occurred in major cities every summer. In May 1964, President Lyndon Johnson proposed the “Great Society” plan and 1964 Civil Rights Act and Economic Opportunity Act were adopted in May and July respectively.

In the library field, *Access to Public Libraries* (1963) revealed the direct and/or indirect discrimination of black people, not only in southern states but also in major cities of the northern states. The number of books circulated dramatically decreased in some public libraries in the major cities. Under these circumstances, public libraries launched services to the disadvantaged, which is often called “outreach services” and many social responsibility movements were led by young activist librarians. However, the 1966 Minimum Standards statement was a replica of the 1956 Public Library Service statement and did not reflect on any of the above mentioned social changes.

2.2. A Strategy for Public Library Change (1972), Performance Measures for Public Libraries (1973)

As *Minimum Standards* failed to accommodate the social changes, a more social and future conscious document was needed. The Public Library Association published Allie B Martin’s *A Strategy for Public Library Change* in 1972. In chapter 4 “Critical Problems” of this publication, 107 respondents (libraries and individuals) answered questions regarding public library services and the following critical problems were identified (in order of importance): (1) finance, (2) public relations (the library images and failure for communication), (3) staffing (lack of service orientation), (4) social problems (changes and urban problems), (5) rigidity in management, (6) failure to formulate objectives, (7) failure to serve all publics (such as the minorities and deprived), and (8) insufficient performance measurement (p. 26).

To handle these critical problems, it was necessary for libraries to shift from institution based planning to community based planning, from an input to an output approach. Many respondents further stated in the questionnaire that “It should recognize that no set of goals could be universally applicable except in the broadest terms. Each library must set its own goals based on its own community needs” (p. 49). In addition, *A Strategy for Public Library Change* proposed six necessary abilities for public librarians to master (p. 52).

1. Ability to determine the library and information needs of each community
2. Ability to develop plans and then set goals—*with, nor for*, users
3. Ability to communicate what the library is doing so that it becomes truly visible for its

users

4. Ability to manage libraries effectively so that they will receive needed support
5. Ability to perform actively and not passively
6. Ability to change and help others to change

The above points were important tasks realized at the end of the decade.

In 1973 Ernest DeProspero published *Performance Measures for Public Libraries*. This study was funded by the U.S. Office of Education and it focused on measurement of the effectiveness of public libraries. Generally DeProspero focused on output rather than input. In the chapter "Research on Library Performance," DeProspero summarized from previous literature that there was little in the literature which was applicable to public libraries, or which could be understood and implemented by the practicing librarians (p. 14). This document emphasized the need not only to devise methods for measuring the performance of public libraries, but also for these methods to be easily applied by practitioners.

Both *Strategy for Public Library Change* and *Performance Measures for Public Libraries* were important studies focused on the community based planning and the measurement of the effectiveness of library services.

2.3. The Public Library Mission Statement and Its Imperatives for Service (1979), Planning Process for Public Libraries (1980)

In 1979 Goals, Guidelines and Standards Committee (Public Library Association) issued the *Public Library Mission Statement*, which focused on goals and objectives of public libraries. The "Preface" of this document stated:

"..., what is missing from the previous standards is attention to the planning process and a focus on meeting the conditions and needs of specific communities, as well as the recognition of current social needs growing out of major social changes. In addition, the 1943, 1956, and 1966 public library standards are institution rather than user-oriented, and are input rather than output oriented" (p. iv).

This statement is a clear drastic departure from all previous standard statements. The *Mission Statement* consists of two main parts: "Mission Statement" and "Imperatives for Services." The "Mission Statement" indicated four factors which American society demanded: (1) runaway social change, (2) exponential increase in the record, (3) total egalitarianism, and (4) depletion of natural resources. These four factors suggested a new focus for the mission of public libraries. On the other hand, ten services to accommodate the social needs were summarized in the latter part of "Mission Statement" (p. 6-7).

1. Provide access to the human records through collections and networking.
2. Organize the human record so that multiple direction access is possible.
3. Collect, translate, and organize the human records on all intellectual levels in print and non-print forms.
4. Dramatize relevance of the human records.
5. Develop policies for preserving the records with other agencies.
6. Take leadership in defining a new statement of ethics to protect intellectual freedom.

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7. Take leadership in coordinating acquisition policies.
8. Create and maintain a network for record access regardless of storage locations.
9. Develop flexible procedures for users.
10. Develop an easy access to human records for users regardless of education levels, languages, ethnic and cultural background, age groups as well as physical and mental handicaps.

Public Library Mission Statement transformed the librarian profession into a planning model with individualized local services.

The *Planning Process for Public Libraries* was published in 1980 to promote the planning and development of goals and objectives for individual libraries based on the needs of the local community instead of following the national public library standards. The *Planning Process* set seven steps for the cyclic planning process (p. 8).

1. Assessing community library needs
2. Evaluating current library services and resources
3. Determining the role of the public library in the community
4. Setting goals, objectives, and priorities
5. Developing and evaluating strategies for change
6. Implementing strategies
7. Monitoring and evaluating progress towards goals and objectives

Within each library, a planning committee including community members directs and coordinates each step. Several factors were stressed: the importance of gathering data, the establishment of goals and priorities, the evaluation of performance, and willingness to consider change.

The *Planning Process* was not a collection of standards. Rather, it was a set of tools or manual to assist librarians assess community needs, set objectives, develop and implement strategies, and evaluate achievements. This document was like a manual which provided practical instructions to develop and implement strategic library planning. While standards were set at the local level, data were collected nationally to assist local library movements.

Both *Mission Statement* and *Planning Process* were important milestones for Public Library Association and U.S. public libraries. In 1982, ALA published *Output Measures for Public Libraries*, which described data collection and the use of quantitative measures. This manual also intended to help librarians in planning and evaluating their community library services.

2.4. Public Library Development Program (PLDP)

After the publication of the two above mentioned manuals, the Public Library Development Program (PLDP) was launched by the Public Library Association and four books were published between 1986 and 1988 as the result of this movement. The first publication of PLDP *Planning and Role Setting for Public Libraries* was released in 1986. This manual described a step-by-step planning process and introduces the concept of role selection. The *Planning and Role Setting* reviewed existing conditions and services, defined library missions, developed goals and objectives, selected appropriate strategies, and evaluated the results of the process. It defined eight roles for

public libraries.

- | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Community Activities Center | 2. Community Information Center |
| 3. Formal Education Support Center | 4. Independent Learning Center |
| 5. Popular Materials Library | 6. Preschoolers Door to Learning |
| 7. Reference Library | 8. Research Center |

The second edition of the *Output Measures for Public Libraries* was published in 1987. This second edition described a set of measures for assessing library services as well as measures for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data.

The *Public Library Data Service* was published in 1988 and continues to be compiled annually (from 1992 edition, title was changed to Statistical Report: Public Library Data Service). PLDP collects and makes accessible a selective set of data from public libraries. It contained four kinds of data: (1) selected output measures, (2) library descriptors, including role choices, (3) Input data such as book holdings, staff, and operating expenditures, (4) Community data such as population, age distribution, and income of users. These data help librarians to formulate and evaluate their library services.

The *Public Library Development Program: Manual for Trainers* was also issued in 1988. This trainers' manual provides training guides and resources for a joint usage with *Planning and Role Setting*, and *Output Measures* (1987). The *Public Library Development Program* includes general guidance on conducting training sessions, suggested workshop schedules and arrangements, sample evaluation sheets, important journal articles, and bibliographies.

Public Library Development Program (PLDP) offers convenient and practical tools holistically to public library practitioners who wish to plan and evaluate their library services.

2.5. Results series (1998-)

The Public Library Association established a Revision Committee in 1996 in order to improve and update *Planning and Role Setting for Public Libraries*. The *Planning for Results: A Public Library Transformation Process* was published by the committee in 1998. The *Planning for Results* is a guidebook and how-to-manual which consists of two parts: "The Planning Process," and "Public Library Service Responses."

"The Planning Process" offers a more manageable planning process by reducing the original steps to six steps: (1) Prepare, (2) Envision, (3) Design, (4) Build, (5) Implement, and (6) Communicate.

On the other hand, while *Planning and Role Setting* identified eight roles for public libraries, the *Results* enumerated thirteen roles of public libraries in responding to community needs.

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- | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Basic Literacy | 2. Business and Career Information |
| 3. Commons | 4. Community Referral |
| 5. Consumer Information | 6. Cultural Awareness |
| 7. Current topics and Titles | 8. Formal Learning Support |
| 9. General Information | 10. Government Information |
| 11. Information Literacy | 12. Lifelong Learning |
| 13. Local History and Genealogy | |

In order to accommodate dramatic changes of information technology in the 1990s and 2000s, Public Library Association published, a series of manuals titled the *Results* series. The latest publication was the *Implementing for Results* in 2009.

Summary and Conclusion

The national standards for public libraries were first published by the American Library Association in 1933 and were revised approximately once a decade in 1943, 1956, and 1966. These standards placed significant influences on the development of American public libraries. However, development of these national standards was ceased by the Public Library Association (an ALA division) in 1966 due to the new trend initiated from the beginning of 1970s to value the planning process of individual libraries. This movement encourages public libraries to develop and implement individual plans based on needs of the local community. The outcome of this trend was the publication of *Public Library Mission Statement* which was adopted by PLA in 1979. These changes indicate the transformation from the input to output model library as well as from national to local standards based on the needs of the local community. Furthermore, this shift continues with an increasing emphasis on the measurement of the effectiveness of library services.

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