

## Book Review

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Michael K. Buckland with the assistance of Masaya Takayama. *Ideology and libraries: California, diplomacy, and occupied Japan, 1945–1952*. Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021.

The work is well produced and well written, with careful attention to narrative structuring and good supporting documentation. It is concerned with why libraries differ, a ‘difficult and neglected topic’ (p. 1) and addresses this issue through focused empirical studies, particularly the development of public libraries in California and United States – technically Allied – provision of libraries in occupied Japan, in the period following the Second World War. The relation between libraries and democracy forms a recurrent concern.

The narrative is illuminated by a number of points of individual interest. A revealing anecdote supports the role of libraries in education – ‘One grateful reader [at United States instantiated libraries in postwar Japan] was Yukawa Hideki, who is said to have stated that a CIE [Civil Information and Education section] information center enabled him to remain active as a physicist. He became Japan’s first Nobel Laureate.’ (p. 58). Robert Gitler, the founder of The Japan Library School and a United States library educator with acting experience, addressed an annual meeting of the Japan Library Association:

It caused some confusion when Gitler started by apologizing for not knowing Japanese. He explained that he felt that this speech ought to be in Japanese and so he had had it translated. He then gave his speech, spoken, not read, in fluent, eloquent Japanese. His speech was well-received, and was followed by a reception at which much sake was consumed. From then on, he enjoyed a friendly cooperative relationship. (p. 115)

I have observed analogous techniques used by United States Presidents, addressing audiences in England and Northern Ireland, by opening their speeches with locally resonant phrases. The historical perspective includes the role of the scholar librarian, enabling us better to understand Leibniz’s career. The growth of collections beyond the personal grasp of such librarians was accompanied by the further development of catalogs – ‘In effect, the library catalog becomes a surrogate for the librarian, fixing the librarian’s knowledge and culture into the technical machinery of the library.’ (p. 10). We have experienced a further transformation, in which the technical machinery has been fully embodied in information machines.

More general themes are also developed. The labor intensive nature of library work is noted, and this could be understood as part of a long historical process, where labor now remains as the user’s interpretive labor and the librarian’s labor congeals into products, such as catalog records, and processes, computational procedures for searching. President Franklin D. Roosevelt is quoted on libraries and democracy –

'Libraries . . . are essential for the functioning and democratic society' (p. 14). In contrast, Lenin and his wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya, supported public libraries in the Soviet Union, but not for Western liberal democracy. Crucially, then, libraries in the United States can be understood as 'liberal *by design*' (p. 148). Methodologically, it is noted that it is difficult to determine the effects of library use and provision, possibly as distinct from the effects of the materials they participate in providing.

Some further insights emerge. Library techniques and technology are not inherently national in character. We could see the increasing transnational standardization of library services, noted in the work, as an effect of the diffusion of modern information technologies. The driving force for the diffusion of technologies themselves has been understood as the lower costs of machine processes as compared to human labor in data transformation. Throughout there is an emphasis on individual discovery, as an inherently democratic notion and activity.

The conclusion compares commercial services, such as YouTube, where reading is repaid at the point of use, with libraries as political, rather than directly commercial, endeavors. The commercial imperative favors giving prominence to documents that immediately attract attention – 'intriguing personal attacks, startling fake news, dramatically polarized opinions' (p. 148) – and, crucially, amplifies these factors. In contrast, public libraries and their analogous descendants, such as Wikipedia, are in the Enlightenment tradition of careful human editing, respect for evidence, and openness to correction. Computational procedures can support both approaches and are not then the determining factor.

We could synthesize the perspective of the work further, by developing the emphasis on individual discovery. Recent work in information retrieval theory has adopted selection power, analogous to individual discovery, as a fundamental aim and value (Hjórland, 2015). Search engines have enabled discovery from written texts at an unprecedented combination of specificity and scale. Practice and practical understanding of value preceded theoretical articulation. Could individual discovery of intellectual material itself be a product of the earlier transition to civic and city life, where humans fully realize themselves as political animals, engaged in dialogue and debate, supported by discovery, for the public good in direct democracy. Individual discovery then becomes an underlying basis for democracy as well as enabled by libraries in democracies. The market selection of search engines which enable enhanced discovery may reveal an underlying impulse to realize still fuller humanity.

A challenge and optimism emerges, challenge in resisting purely commercial domination and optimism in the possibility of resistance, change, and development. Paths will not be easy – as Norbert Wiener noted: 'The world of the future will be an even more demanding struggle against the limitations of our intelligence, not a comfortable hammock in which we can lie down to be waited upon by our robot slaves' (Wiener, 1966, pp. 73–74). The value of the work under review, in addition to its extensive historical testimony, lies in its careful contribution towards the more informed understanding from which we can fashion those paths.

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### References

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