The Significance of Reference Service Research

This study on reference services – the core of library information services – aims to understand the current situation of these services while at the same time making clear the level of awareness of these services among the people. Moreover, in order to derive a plan in which libraries may contribute to Japanese society in the future, this report also aims to analyze collected data and opinions and clearly identify current circumstances and future prospects.

In contemporary Japan, a rich telecommunications environment has been created, the gathering of information through the Internet has become the norm in the lives of individuals, and the transmission and sharing of information through a variety of communication tools is prevalent. On the other hand, beginning with the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 2011, Japanese society has encountered various societal crises and the current state of this information society has once again been called into question. Contemplating the idea and significance of libraries in this information society, based on future Japanese societal trends, it may be said that developing diverse practices that form the foundation for library maintenance resources and proactively and creatively contributing to this information society are all factors that have become increasingly important up to this point.

Specifically, what types of practices should we put our energies into in order to live up to these expectations? And in order to effectively carry out these practices, what kind of preparation and deliberate foresight should be pursued? This study establishes reference services as a research theme, and it may be necessary to adopt the sense that “now is the time.” Without a doubt, taking up highly original practices is one consideration. However, here we have concentrated on the possibilities of these practices without focusing on unconventionality because using the accumulated assets and knowledge of libraries as a foundation is strongly connected to their dynamic development into the future.

However, a continuous nationwide examination of reference services is not being conducted, and it cannot be denied that there is a lack of basic cross-facility data that grasps the current situation. In addition, the understanding of reference services among library staff is one-sided, and it is also difficult to say that a common understanding has been acquired. Furthermore, there is scant evidence related to how library reference services may be useful people’s information behavior and their location of these services in the everyday lives of people.

As mentioned previously, the goals of this study are grounded in the recognition of the present condition of these issues. We hope that the content of this report will, through an explanation of fundamental issues and of the structure of the investigation that was carried out, lead to a greater understanding regarding the full scope of this research.
Undertaking Research for an Awareness of the Issues

Discussion and decision-making within the investigative research team for this study took place during four research meetings and through discussions by mailing list. Through this process, four general issues were jointly recognized as related to the current situation of reference services in Japanese libraries, and these issues are strongly related to the background of the establishment of the themes of this research study.

First, it was thought that a “re-definition” of reference service is necessary. Reference services are made up of information sources based on inquiries from library users (reference questions) and on question-and-answer services that present information (direct service); also included are the formulation of content in which library users can effectively and easily access information and preparative practices that maintain information environments (indirect service). However, consulting the websites of many libraries, it is often the case that only the former can be identified. Because of this, concerns were raised of an increase only in the recognition of a bias toward the people. Also, practices such as library-specific organized information sources and the relaying of information to library users in a proactive manner have not been included, and there is a concern about passive practices such as simply waiting until approached with a reference question. For these reasons, this study was set up with an awareness of the expectation of the development of more active practices not limited to question-and-answer services.

Second, the relationship with existing reference service research was given serious consideration. As mentioned above, except for a 2003 study conducted by the National Council of Public Library, a nationwide examination of reference services has not been conducted. For university libraries, we must look back to a 1999 study conducted by Ikeya Nozomi et al. This study, therefore, aims to lay out an investigation on a national scale based on foundational practices in order to clarify the state of affairs since these previous studies. We have attempted to adjust this investigation’s data in a similar, analogous fashion in order to facilitate data comparison and processing. At the same time, due to the fact that the majority of existing studies have been quite substantive, the possibility of a qualitative investigation came into view. Because of this, in order to make clear the relationship between reference services and the informational needs of the people, it was decided after thorough consideration that the implementation of a qualitative investigation was required, and so it was planned that this study be set up as a developmental survey.

Third is the hope that there will be a shift in popular awareness toward libraries. If we follow journalistic articles and information from the Internet related to libraries, it is simple to see that among many citizens “Libraries = A place from which to borrow books (Reading Institutions).” This type of awareness is not necessarily an error; nevertheless, those affiliated with libraries have a desire to broaden a view that states, “That’s not all.” For that reason, this study aims to be a step towards the realization of that desire. In other words, the investigative research team has come to understand that, from the outset, the term “reference service” as a practice has not yet entered the consciousness of the citizenry. As a result, the desire mentioned above is connected to aim of eliminating the prevailing pattern that “Reference services = something belonging only to a specific set of people.”

Fourth is the goal of stepping into research related to people’s information behavior. Through existing investigations on libraries, it is clear that one objective has been to define
the actual conditions of library usage, the shape of library user activities, and the awareness of libraries among library users; the aim of such investigations has therefore been substantially geared towards “users.” This has not only been limited to reference services, but has also been applicable to investigations on library and information science. Without a doubt this is signifying the importance of clarifying the needs of potential users and non-users. However, it is difficult to find examples of studies that consider these points as definitive issues on a nationwide scale. For this reason, this study will treat the presence or absence of library users as unrelated; instead, we will assume that there are groups (citizens) that engage in activities requiring information, and will attempt to confirm the information needs, information behavior, and the awareness and expectations of libraries by such groups. We intentionally did not rely on so-called connections to library officials when selecting groups. We also aimed to not only include the opinions of those familiar with libraries or those having a positive awareness of libraries. However, because it is not possible to say that such techniques may be definitively established in a library-related survey, we consider such techniques to establish the informational needs of citizens as preliminary and experimental.

Structure of the Completed Research Study

The chart below shows the research plan envisioned at the beginning of this research study. Data on the “present condition of the study” was gathered and analyzed with reference services in mind as a theme, and we were also able to comprehend a pattern of future prospects. Various themes (such as “Issue Analysis”) are illustrated in the center of the chart and will thus not necessarily be addressed in this report.

The present condition of the investigation is summarized and explained here; however, the main point may be combined into three studies: namely, the “Base Survey,” the “Developmental Survey,” and the “Relational Survey.”

The goal of the “Base Survey” is to make clear the actual condition of reference services at Japanese libraries and was implemented through a survey of questions regarding libraries (and library organizations). Libraries targeted in this survey included public libraries, university libraries, special libraries, and the National Diet Library (branch libraries included), and all surveys were treated as “facility units.” It would have been possible to treat the parent institution as one unit in the library survey; however, this study treats district public libraries and university library annexes as separate entities, and thus surveys were sent out with this in mind. In addition, this “Base Survey” was also used to gain insight into the “interior” of these library facilities so that it could be better used as a way to clarify the current state of reference services in libraries. The results of this survey are recorded in the first section.

In contrast, in the “Developmental Survey” aimed to examine the present condition of how references are seen from the library’s “exterior.” As stated previously, because there was no heretofore-established method, a group interview survey (Listening Survey) was conducted where we inquired about people’s awareness. Specifically, groups were selected through the “3/3/3 Method” and by calling on the research team. In the end, there were a total of nine group interviews with groups of three. Group selection and interview details as well as survey results are recorded in section two.
In addition to the above-mentioned two methods, domestic and international studies were collected and recorded as the “Relational Survey.” In addition to examining preceding research documents related to reference services, this survey also examined materials that included survey methods considered for this study; in addition, existing studies were also collected and examined. Such related supplementary materials are included in appendix.

Based on the knowledge gained through these various methods, the investigative research team analyzed the issue and considered future prospects. The results of this were compiled individually by each team member and recorded in section three. However, these considerations are not intended to be proposals related to the promotion of reference services and library policies. Based on the evidence gained through the surveys that were implemented, we hope the reader will keep in mind that we aim to identify such contributions to the derivation of various proposals.

CHART: Research Structure Concept

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Summary of Survey Results

This report, which is based on the previously stated “Research Plan and Aims,” outlines the results of an analysis of written survey investigations (Base Survey) and a survey on the awareness of the citizenry through group interviews (Developmental Survey). In addition, the results of the data from domestic and international studies are published as a list in the appendix. Furthermore, in order to contribute to the ongoing development and reform of library reference services, relevant points and opinions gained from the integrated analysis of survey results are presented. The main points related to the results of such research are outlined here.

1 The State of Reference Services

1.1 Summary of Written Survey Questions

1.1.1 Organization of Question Sheet

The survey question sheet was organized into 63 questions divided into ten sections based on the aim and content of the questions. Specifically: 1) Overview of Respondents; 2) Placement of reference services; 3) Management of reference services; 4) Establishment of reference services; 5) Reference service supervising staff member; 6) Reference services’ sources of information; 7) Question-and-answer services; 8) New initiatives in reference services; 9) Issues regarding reference services; 10) Assistance during disaster.

Furthermore, in designing the question sheet, two points were kept in mind: First, the purpose of the question sheet was to ask about the “current situation” of reference services, as opposed to asking about the “awareness” of librarians. Second, the question sheet was designed to perceive reference services as the base of a theoretical framework.

1.1.2 Survey Outline

This survey is a comprehensive survey of domestic agencies endowed by ISIL (International Standard Identifier for Libraries and Related Organizations) as of the end of September 2012. The question sheet was sent to all registered facilities in their ledger (annexes and detached offices included), comprising a total of 5,258 agencies – 3,223 public libraries, 1,671 university libraries, 327 special libraries, and the 37 National Diet Library and its branch libraries. The survey period began on October 16, 2012 (when surveys were sent) and ended on January 18, 2013 (deadline for submission). Question sheets and answer forms were sent through normal post and were answer sheets were collected via e-mail and fax. However, forms for annexes and detached offices were addressed and sent to their parent facilities, and thus we relied on parent facilities for distribution. The rate of survey submission was 74.4% - a total of 3,910 facilities (3,462 public libraries, 1,265 university libraries, 152 special libraries, and the National Diet Library as well as 31 of its branch libraries.
1.2 Results of Survey

1.2.1 Overview of Respondents

In Section I – Overview of Respondents – we asked for the library name, year of establishment, size of book collections, number of staff members including full-time service staff, and the number of reference questions normally received. In regards to reference questions received in the FY2011 year, roughly one-third of libraries received less than 500 inquiries, one-third received between 500 and 5,000 inquiries, and one-third received over 5,000 inquiries. Although there are many libraries where instances of reference inquiry are few, among those libraries receiving more than 5,000 inquiries it is interesting to note that 152 of these facilities received more than 10,000 inquiries. Moreover, of these 152 facilities, 131 of them were public libraries: 41 prefectural facilities, 13 special ward facilities, 28 ordinance-designated city facilities, 46 municipal facilities, and three town/village facilities.

1.2.2 Reference Service Placement

Section II comprised questions intended to make clear to what extent respondents perceive the scope of reference services. As such, questions were asked related to the position of reference service-related duties, the method of explanation to library users, and method of compiling statistics.

In general, the rate of question-and-answer-related services conducted as reference service is high. In particular, more than eighty percent of respondents understand reference services to be: “Answers to questions related to a need to search for and use various materials;” “Responses to questions that can be answered through the use of one or two volumes of materials;” and “Answers to questions that require more than one day within the survey.” On the other hand, there is a tension in the proportion of facilities that either understand or do not understand reference service to be “answering questions regarding the use of OPAC and library catalogues.” More than thirty percent of respondents do not understand reference service to be “Answers to questions related to where to return library materials,” or “Answers to questions related to how to use library materials.” Thus, there seems to be a blurring related to the understanding of question-and-answer services on the part of libraries.

As for direct support to library users other than question-and-answer services, half of respondents put reference service into practice as “Guiding/educating the way to search for materials;” “Reading consultation;” “Lending and borrowing materials;” and “Ordering photocopies of materials.” However, compared to question-and-answer services, we cannot say that these services may be placed as reference services. In addition, there is an awareness of a difference in reference services at public libraries and university libraries. For example, although many university libraries regard “general library user guides” as reference services, this is not the case at public libraries.

As for the indirect support of library users, over thirty percent of respondents carry out reference services as “the collection and maintenance of reference collections;” “the gathering and maintenance of regional materials;” and “the maintenance of the environment of reference data rooms and windows, etc.” However, the fact that there are not many facilities that consider this to be reference service allows us to consider that there is a fundamental understanding of “reference service = question-and-answer service.”
Other stated duties in the implementation of reference services included “reference example documents” by half of respondents, “the creation of statistics related to reference services” by forty percent of respondents, and “reference service publicity” by thirty percent of respondents.

As for an explanation regarding reference services, terms such as “reference service” and “inquiry/consultation” on the one hand and “assistance with searching materials” on the other are given as representative, and there are very few cases where simple terms are used for library users. Consequently, there is a limit to passing off library terminology as “reference service,” and this may be seen in the current state of libraries. In addition, explanations have tended to remain in the realm of human interaction, and so the idea of “reference service = question-and-answer service” becomes more apparent. Further, such content remains in one word or abstract terms and is not sufficient as a summary explanation of reference services.

In terms of counting questions as reference questions, responses such as “answers to questions related to a need to search for and use various materials,” “questions requiring more than one day,” and “questions easily answered through the use of one or two dictionaries, etc.” comprised over seventy percent of respondents – the highest by far. However, there is a scattering in statistical sampling and it can be confirmed that there is no unified indicator.

1.2.3 Reference Service Management

Section III consisted of questions designed to gain insight into policies and collaborative systems related to each facilities’ reference services, and inquired about issues such as the priority of tasks, manual and managing standards, public relations, and methods to promote use.

In particular, the task that tends to be prioritized most is “tasks related to lending” (49.3%). Facilities that prioritize “reference service” in particular include public libraries (36.3%), university libraries (29.4%), and special libraries (37.5%). Public libraries that prioritize reference services include a high of 78.3% at prefectural libraries, thus showing a characteristic in which reference services are highly stressed among all library tasks. Compared with special ward libraries (39.4%), ordinance-designated city libraries (47.3%), other municipal libraries (36.1%), and town/village libraries (23.2%), this is quite a high result.

Including respondents that “have mutual relationships such as municipal and university or other organizations,” facilities that possess staff manuals or managing standards include public libraries (15.3%), university libraries (13%), special libraries (8.6%), which have “facility-specific items.” Over eighty percent of university and special libraries answered “nonexistent.” At self-governing public libraries, if the extent of self-governing ability is high, the creation of such materials was also high. Limiting this to main facilities, this includes 66% of public libraries, 59.1% of special ward libraries, 47.1% of ordinance-designated city libraries, 15.8% of municipal libraries, and 4.2% of town/village libraries.

If we consider the awareness of the creation and maintenance of staff manuals or managing standards as key to the “quality assurance” or “standardization” of reference services, in general it is difficult to say that these activities are sufficient in the current state
of affairs.

As for reference service case records, if we combine the 29.5% of respondents that answered “currently documenting” with the 43% that answered “selectively documenting,” roughly 70% of respondents overall are implementing some kind of documentation of these activities. Dividing this up by facility type, we come up with 79.6% of public libraries, 58.9% of university libraries, and 69.8% of special libraries. In addition, at public libraries the ratio is higher for those that have greater self-governing abilities: limiting ourselves to main libraries, we see that 100% at prefectural, special ward, and ordinance-designated city libraries, 87.3% of municipal libraries, and 73.6% of town/village libraries are keeping records.

In regards to reference service promotion, 64% of respondents pointed to “pamphlets,” while 43.4% answered “website,” and 37.5% answered “facility bulletin boards and displays.” The use of blogs or social networking services is an issue that will continue to become important.

The most prevalent answers regarding policies aimed at the promotion of reference services included “further increase the abilities of staff members” (66.9%) and “increase publicity activities” (63.5%). Worthy of special mention is the fact that less than two-thirds of libraries recognized that the increase in the use of reference services is related to the enhancement of human resources. In addition, it is also interesting to note that less than thirty percent of libraries indicated that an improvement in “the use of web service” would increase the use of reference services, although this was not a high ratio.

1.2.4 The Establishment of Reference Services

Section IV included questions that aimed to clarify the current state of maintenance for facilities related to reference services, including reception space, the web environment, and facilities that support learning.

Less than thirty percent of have an exclusive space devoted to the reception of reference questions. It is therefore difficult to say that sufficient “visualization” of reference service is being carried out. Among public libraries, however, a high of 80% of prefectural libraries have established such spaces, while less than half of special ward and ordinance-designated city libraries have done so. If we just consider main libraries, there is a high rate of establishment of such spaces at both public libraries and university libraries.

As for responses related to the arrangement of reference data and regional data, in total an overwhelming 73.9% answered, “lumped together in a separate arrangement,” while 17.2% said, “mixed with regular books,” showing that the majority of institutions arrange these materials separately from general collections.

In regards to the access of information via the Internet, 70.7% of respondents stated that they “offer computer terminals for internet connection.” However, it is necessary to consider the number of computers with access ability and what contents may be accessed.

One aspect showing the significance of reference services in modern society lies in the fact that the preparation of facilities to aid learning is connected to the support of the information behavior of library users. In general, the rate of university libraries that offer this type of service is high, as the rate of those that answered “do not offer this service” comprise a mere 6.4%.
1.2.5 Reference Service Staff

Section V posed questions designed to clarify the current situation among staff members engaged in reference services, asking questions related to staff in charge of and reference service-related posts, the relationship with regional materials service, as well as training for staff.

In cases where are posted in a specific space the rate of such postings of staff at public, university and special libraries is high, comprising 26.6% of public libraries, 37.9% of university libraries, and 37.5% of special libraries. However, at public libraries, 95% of prefectural libraries post staff members in such a manner, but the rate falls along with the degree of self-governing at these libraries.

Also, performing a cross tabulation of the state of library staff posting and space establishment brings about a characteristic result. Namely, libraries that post staff to established, independent spaces comprise 85.1%. Libraries that post staff at dedicated spaces shared with other tasks comprise 59.7%. Libraries that have no dedicated space comprise 15.5%. Further, 15% of libraries do not post staff members despite having independent spaces. Around 40% of libraries do not post staff members despite having dedicated spaces shared with other tasks. These point to a situation where no one occupies these spaces until a patron approaches with a question.

Staff members that deal with reference questions tend to be qualified, full-time librarians (61.9%), but there are also those with temporary qualifications or part-time staff (54.2%), and temporary or part-time staff with no qualifications (36.6%). Breaking this up by facility type, 70.1% of university library staff in charge of these services are qualified full-time staff; at public libraries the rate is 59.3% and at special libraries 41.4%. Also, at both public and university libraries the rate of full-time staff at facilities other than the main facility is lower than those at the main facility due to the high rate of entrusting staff members with these duties. Overall, it is safe to say that the preference is to entrust the handling of reference questions to those staff members possessing librarian qualifications. Libraries that entrust such duties only to unqualified staff members comprised only 251 facilities (6.4%). Consequently, it may be said that there is a strong recognition that question-and-answer services are duties that require specific skills and expertise.

More than 90% of those in charge of reference services do not have an independent post. The results of many questions have shown that energy has been put into reference service at prefectural libraries; however, despite this emphasis, the actual state of affairs shows a lack of reflection in organizational structure. In addition, among the 3,625 facilities that indicated a lack of a dedicated and independent post, less than half (44.1%) of facilities had a staff member charged with arranging reference services. From a standpoint of wishing to develop reference services further, this issue is very serious.

The relationship between reference service and regional (hometown) materials services brings up interesting results when looking at each type of facility. Among public library reference services, questions dealing with regional information are prominent: reference materials and regional materials (hometown materials) can, in theory, be thought of as being related. However, cases where staff members are successfully able to unite the two comprise only 30% of cases. In contrast to this, it is worth noting that libraries where reference staff members offer regional materials include only 40% of university libraries and 30% of special libraries.
As for the content of training for reference service staff, in all, 75% responded “training related to the Internet and electronic resources”; 68.4% answered “training related to printed materials and reference books;” and 68.1% said “rudimentary, basic training.” As for library type, approximately 80% of facilities indicated a need the following needs: at public libraries, “training related to regional materials,” and at university libraries “training related to the Internet and electronic resources.” Compared with other types of libraries, the necessity ratio for training related to electronic resources and foreign languages at university libraries is quite high. In all, training related to tools is also comparatively high. In addition, 70% of prefectural libraries are in need of training related to specific subjects.

1.2.6 Reference Service Information Sources

Section VI posed questions designed to collect data on information sources for reference services with particular attention paid to the situation of information gleaned from the Internet, and questions were posed regarding reference tools and materials issued by regional organizations and the present condition of databases.

As for the collection of materials put out by regional organizations, public libraries comprised 88.2%, university libraries 42.1%, and special libraries 65.8%; limiting these figures to main public libraries gives us a collection rate of 92.7%. Further, the content of these collections included “materials published by self-governing bodies” (93%), “materials published by regional organizations” (80.4%), and “information on regional facilities” (52%). Assertive practices taking place at public libraries can be given high praise.

In general, the creation of reference tools has been sluggish: 35.5% among public libraries, 15.7% at university libraries, and 41.4% at special libraries. However, if we limit the scope to main public libraries the rate rises to 95.7% at prefectural libraries, 68.2% in special wards, and 76.5% in ordinance-designated city libraries. There are three main types of produced content: First, so-called “composite data” comprising information files and clippings; “secondary sources” such as newspaper article databases and character profile indexes; and “guide materials” comprising guides and pathfinders to documents and information.

As for information utilization through the Internet, in contrast to public libraries where more than half of facilities are only utilizing free sources, approximately 80% of university libraries pay fees. Consequently, the efforts of public libraries are not sufficient when compared with university libraries. The current arrangement that “non-free services are not (cannot) be offered” is applicable to more than half of public libraries. However, even with public libraries, more than 90% of the main facilities at prefectural libraries, special ward libraries, and ordinance-designated city libraries utilize services that charge fees.

Depending on the type of library facility, there is a big difference in the utilization of online databases for business purposes. In contrast to public libraries where newspaper databases such as Kikuzo II, Nikkei Telecon 21 and “Kanpo Information Retrieval Service” are used, at university libraries the use of scholarly databases such as CiNii and EBSCOhost is high. At special libraries, Nikkei Telecon 21 is most often utilized.

1.2.7 Question-and-Answer Services

Section VII consisted of questions related to the methods of handling reference questions, in particular inquiring about the situation of reference services through digital
media and between a shift in the content of questions in recent years and cooperation with other libraries.

Top methods for taking reference questions included “oral” (98.1%) and “telephone,” (89%) as overwhelming examples, followed by established methods such as “letter” (69.6%), “fax” (68.6%). Roughly half of facilities (52%) have adopted “electronic mail” for this purpose, and some facilities (15.7%) have even adopted “web forms.” However, nearly all facilities have not yet adopted recently popular services such as blogs, social media, and live chat.

Three facts can be identified from records related to the change of question content compared to questions from 10 years ago. First, the fact that “users tend to seek information after first searching themselves” is an emblematic statement, library users conducting searches and investigations themselves is an activity that has persisted. Second, there is a necessity to carry out a redistribution of library resources in response to such changes – particularly those related to human resources. Third, there is a concern regarding the fact that there were many replies stating that the state of affairs ten years ago cannot be confirmed.

As for so-called referral services (introduction or reference) used to deal with questions that cannot easily be answered, together with the perspective of various libraries, there is an awareness of a lack of analysis from a regional perspective. Among public libraries, in addition to referral services spanning the vertical relationship from municipal libraries to prefectural libraries, there is also quite fittingly a measure of referral services that span horizontal relationships among libraries in different municipalities.

1.2.8 New Initiatives in Reference Service

In Section VIII, questions were asked regarding the current state of new initiatives beginning with web-related services and also including cooperation with external specialists, learning commons, etc.

As for web-related services, 82.3% of institutions overall have set up library websites. Breaking this down into facility type, in contrast to over 80% of public and university libraries having set up websites, the rate among special libraries is quite low: public libraries, 82%; university libraries, 85.9%; special libraries, 61.2%. In addition, among public libraries the rate rises to 90% including all prefectural libraries and, if we limit this to the main facility, special wards libraries, ordinance-designated city libraries and municipal libraries. Also, 90% of national and public university libraries have also established websites, pointing to the infrastructure of library management. However, although the setup of websites has occurred, many libraries indicated that “no special services are being utilized,” and there are few facilities using web services such as Twitter and blogs.

The reception of questions from library users through digital media occurs at 41.5% of public libraries, 59.7% of university libraries, and 42.8% at special libraries, thus indicating some progress in such initiatives. Also, although the rate is quite low, the existence of libraries using social networking services to take reference questions can be looked at as a being in the beginning stages.

As for taking reference questions by web, facilities where less than 100 cases of such practices have occurred comprise 47.9%, thus indicating that this practice is still developing. In total, there were about 200,000 total instances of this practice, comprising only 2.3% of the total number of received reference questions.
The implementation of activities aimed at specific groups of users takes place at 25.9% of public libraries, 24.4% of university libraries, and 52.7% of special libraries; the rate is quite low for public and university libraries. However, among public libraries, the rate at prefectural libraries is quite high at 77.3%; those most targeted for support included “government officials,” “those hoping to gain employment or qualifications,” and “private business or business-related persons.” Overall, it is difficult to say that this situation denotes vigorous practice, however it should be considered that in the last 10 years, there has been recognition of many service practices related to alternatively cited user groups, so it can be said that development is steadily progressing.

Exactly 25.8% of public libraries, 43.7% of university libraries, and 25.6% of special libraries collaborate with specialists, showing that the rate among university libraries is high. The type of specialist brought in for collaboration differs depending on the type of facility, the most common being “elementary school teachers” and “those engaged in government work” at public libraries, and “university teaching staff” and “university personnel” at university libraries: special libraries indicated “other.” Among public libraries, however, the rate of collaboration with “medical specialists,” “university teaching staff,” and “judicial clerks” at prefectural libraries was high, indicating a particularly peculiar trend.

Questions on learning commons were limited only to university libraries. There were 315 facilities (comprising 25.3%) that have set up spaces for learning commons (including those where such setups are in progress). Of those 315 facilities, 43.5% indicated, “personal service is not offered,” thus showing that in many cases learning commons refers only to the space. On the other hand, it can be said that more than half of facilities do offer personal service, which can be understood to be a positive.

1.2.9 Issues in Reference Services

Section IX posed questions designed to clarify issue awareness regarding reference services. Issues examined included the current situation regarding the implementation of surveys on reference service users and non-users at these facilities.

As for reference user level-of-satisfaction surveys, 20.2% of public libraries, 15.3% of university libraries, and 8.6% of special libraries have conducted such surveys in the last ten years. However, among public libraries, the implementation figure rises to 61.7% of prefectural libraries, 44.9% of special ward libraries, 40.9% of ordinance-designated city libraries; if limited to main facilities, the figure for ordinance-designated city libraries rises to 64.7%.

The overall percentage of facilities where surveys have been conducted in the last ten years on reference service non-users is 5.7%, including among public libraries 26.7% of prefectural libraries, 14.6% of special ward libraries, and 18.1% of ordinance-designated city libraries. Limiting this to main facilities, the implementation rate rises to 31.9% at prefectural libraries and 23.5% at ordinance-designated city libraries. In addition, libraries conducting user level-of-satisfaction surveys comprise 29.5%. The fact that these facilities are conducting surveys targeting non-users is of great interest.

As for issues in reference services, overall, “unable to take time to research” was the highest response at 45.7%; following this response were responses such as “unable to accumulate data on reference examples” (44.1%), and “experience and knowledge is not shared and accumulated among staff” (42.8%). Response trends vary depending on facility
type, with the top two responses at each facility type being as follows: At public libraries, “unable to take time to research” and “experience and knowledge is not shared and accumulated among staff;” at university libraries, “unable to accumulate data on reference examples” and “not enough staff;” and at special libraries, “unable to accumulate data on reference examples” and “insufficient reference tools.”

1.2.10 Support During the Earthquake Disaster

In Section X, questions were aimed at gaining insight into the current situation of how reference services are dealt with in times of crisis, a follow up to the 2011 report, “The Great East Japan Earthquake and Libraries.” Issues covered included questions on the provision of information in times of crisis, the response in the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake, the situation surrounding the creation of disaster manuals, the details about support to stricken areas, and the existence or absence of support planning.

As for systems for offering disaster information, when asked about the strengthening of the provision of information in times of disaster, the highest response overall was “if the facility itself is affected” at 52%, followed by “if the areas surrounding this facility are affected” at 50.7%, and “in cases where Japan has been affected on a large scale” at 33.8%.

As for the response in the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake, half of public libraries stated that they “displayed materials related to the disaster” and “expanded the scope of user registration.” Other types of facilities stated that there was “no extraordinary response,” including 43% of university libraries and 57.2% of special libraries.

As for the creation of manuals (plans) prepared for times of crisis, 64.4% of facilities overall indicated that some had been created. Content of such materials included “user evacuation guidance” (52.3%) and “fire prevention” (45.7%); 3.1% of facilities indicated a plan for “offering services post-disaster.”

In regards to coping with the outbreak of large-scale disasters, overall “expand the scope of user registration” was the highest response at 30.6%, followed by “solicit donations” at 27.5%.

Finally, as for support plans in times of disaster, including facilities where “planning is scheduled or in progress,” 10% of facilities overall are drawing up support plans regarding areas stricken in times of disaster, and only five facilities indicated that “there are support plans.”

2 Recognition of Reference Services

2.1 Survey Outline

The purpose of this survey is to understand in what ways library reference services are contributing to the mobilization of information of citizens. In order to do this, a semi-structured interview was given to specific groups.

Although the targets of the survey were “citizens”, because of the difficulty of reaching “all citizens”, citizens with specific traits were selected from the general population and grouped. Then, those groups were further narrowed down until specific persons could be selected. The groups were broken into A) Supporters in Times of Risk (Great East Japan Earthquake disaster volunteers); B) Industry Workers (Fisheries, Forestry and Agricultural
workers, farmers); C) People who were not in the area for support, researchers, etc. Within Group A were various volunteers throughout the Great East Japan earthquake disaster relief effort, including volunteers in the area, volunteers who were giving information, and people who were supporting the volunteers. Group B included people engaged in the “six-order industry (i.e. combining primary industries with secondary and tertiary industries)”, people involved in the revitalization of the area, and environmental conservationists. Those in Group C group were post-doc or part-time teaching staffs, people who were researching as a hobby, and people who were researching as their lifework.

The goal of the survey was to make public the responses of general citizens on what they conceive to be reference services, how reference services were helpful, and if reference services were helpful to society. In addition, people surveyed were asked how libraries should begin to tackle these services with restoration. In other words, on what should libraries be focusing their energy? People surveyed were also asked whether or not their general informational needs were met, how information was accessed, the usefulness of information services, the usefulness of information services (at libraries), personal experience using libraries, and knowledge of reference services.

2.2 Survey Results

2.2.1 Information Needs Specific to Attributes of Groups

Group A was made up of disaster relief volunteers in time of risk, specifically volunteers who aided in disaster relief after the Great East Japan Earthquake. This group's information and survey needs were based on the fact that they were in a time of crisis, and the environment called for specific needs.

Group B was made up of industrial and agricultural workers, specifically farmers and other agricultural laborers. The informational needs of this group were based on information needed for their specific field of work.

Group C was made up of researchers, specifically researchers who were not there for any specific purpose. This group's informational needs were based in their fields of study, such as literature, and natural and social sciences.

2.2.2 Acquisition, Management and Sponsoring of Information

According to the information from the survey, the route of accessing information was based in several different mediums. The most common was information from other people, as well as information from social media and the Internet. This was true for all groups surveyed.

In addition, the personal experiences of Group A and Group B became important information, and the information provided by Group C became important for the academic community. In parts of Groups B and C, the use of paper instead of electronic information gathering was pointed out as important. Both Groups A and B were strongly aware of information gathered from the administration.

Furthermore, in relation to the management and sponsoring of information, the evaluation of information was pointed out to be important by many of the groups. In addition, there was a need to organize the information being received. In relation to
transmission of information, the awareness of who was sponsoring the information was very high, and there were groups that were aware that the more information being transmitted, the more information could be gathered. This means that information sharing was very important, especially to Group A, which indicated a worry about information gaps in a time of crisis.

2.2.3 The Roles and Resources of Libraries

In terms of the role of libraries, there was an affirmative opinion on the practicality of libraries and library facilities reported in the survey, and there were a variety of reasons for such usefulness. Also, in Groups B and C, there was a high demand for browsing of library bookcases. From this, it can be seen that the need to be able to find and research materials (which is indirectly reference service) ranked high in the needs of those surveyed.

Because of this, the role of libraries as information resources is important. Specifically, the ability to locate resources within the books and find articles and materials can be confirmed to be very important. Especially for Group A, the availability of information on their places of birth was noted to be very important. In addition, in relation to information resources, the accumulation of materials was very important to Group C.

In all of the groups surveyed, the lookup function of the current online public access catalog (OPAC) was rated as very low. However, communication and intra-use of libraries was highly hoped for by Group C. In addition, the desire for open access and digitalization of resources was characteristic of respondents in Group C, whereas in Groups A and B wished to have an archive of resources available.

2.2.4 The Personal Service of Libraries and the Direction Hereafter

The personal service of libraries, librarians, “know-who” information, employment support, question-and-answer services and other services related were also inquired upon.

In regards to librarians, opinions that they were both unreliable and that they can be relied on for their specializations were recorded. Also, the ability of libraries as a platform for introductions to specialists in specific fields, in other words “know-who” information, was shown to be a strong need. This was especially true for Group B, who remarked that they often require support for people looking for employment.

The general knowledge of reference services was low. Conversely, the need to raise the functionality development of reference services, and the stationing of employees and in question-and-answer areas was noted as important.

In addition, in regards to the direction that libraries should take from here on, Group A noted the importance of diversifying libraries based on the individual needs of the areas around them. Group B pressed for the reform and reformation of libraries.
Issues and Perspectives on Reference Services: 
Concluding Remarks

Discussed here are the summary and significance of the four articles in Section Three that shaped discussions for the future (hereafter referred to as “developmental discussions”). We also highlight issues for identifying future perspectives based on the current situation of reference services. Finally, we provide remarks to conclude this report, which presented the full results of our investigative research.

Significance and Summary of Developmental Discussions

Reading the entire content of this report is not an easy task. The same is true for the members of this investigative research team. Discussions in Section Three are based on analysis results in Sections One and Two, but do not necessarily utilize the overall findings. Furthermore, the authors set their viewpoints and subjects in respective discussions. Therefore, there exists a space for examination from other distinctive viewpoints. If future studies emerge to widen and deepen studies on reference services from viewpoints and subjects not referred to in Section Three, this investigative research has reached well beyond its objective.

Although developmental discussions in Section Three indeed pursued issues on reference services, they are also significant as “catalysts” that stimulate further research. In other words, these articles illuminate aspects that are not discussed here and help spur new studies. Prospects for future studies are exactly where the significance of articles in Section Three are found.

Given the above considerations, we summarize the main arguments of respective developmental discussions.

First, “The Correlation Between Service Practices and the Number of Reference Questions” by Tuji Keita is a comparative analysis of data obtained through surveys. He understands the number of reference questions as performance indicators of reference services, and examines correlations with other related elements. Tuji was able to analyze the large amount of data with a nationwide survey containing a full range of questions, covering multiple types of libraries. Hypotheses identified in the conclusion encourage future studies for further examination.

In “Services that Libraries Can Provide,” Watanabe Yukiko progressively points out types of services that libraries may expand through an analysis of surveys on the current situation of reference services as well as interviews on citizens’ informational needs. She provides remarkable insight on feasible services, categorizing them into services for the informational needs of specific fields, services to enhance information literacy, services on information systems, and services related to the library as a “place.”

In “Approaches to Renew Awareness of Libraries”, Mabe Yutaka discussed why it is necessary to renew citizens’ awareness of libraries from survey results, and pointed out elements to be considered for practice. In particular, he pointed out public relations, librarian skills, service provision, and development of new services. Suggestions here have
been pointed out in the past, but we should keep in mind Mabe’s contribution in highlighting them in the context of reconsidering reference services based on survey results.

Lastly, Kanematsu Yoshiyuki’s “Contributions to Supporting Risk Society” is a valuable piece based on continuity of the research studies series of the National Diet Library. As a follow-up study to the FY 2011 research titled “The Great East Earthquake and Libraries,” he examines how the reference services of libraries can contribute to disaster responses. While the study merits independent attention, we are certain of synergistic values that emerge when integrated with other research results. In particular, Kanematsu reviews trends of library services in times of disasters, and analyzes the relationship between information needs and library services. Both discussions include several suggestions for future recommendations.

**Issues on Reference Services**

Based on the results and analyses of surveys, interviews, as well as developmental discussions provided in previous sections, we identify the following issues on reference services as future perspectives.

**Issue 1: Integrated Approach**

To avoid trivializing reference services to question-and-answer services, and to integrate them within the overall library operation.

Of course, this means not only recognizing question-and-answer services as a direct service to users of reference services, but also to include the development of reference resources as an indirect service. Also related is the establishment of environments for reference services including organizing space for reference services and enhancing access to the Internet. However, it may be difficult to predict the connection of these services to reference services clearly and demonstratively.

This integrated approach relates to the “re-definition” of reference services, which was one of the thoughts for undertaking this investigative research. As was revealed in analyses of research results and developmental discussions, it is obvious that “reference services as question-and-answer service” is a widely accepted notion. Names and descriptions of reference services also follow such notions. The “re-definition” of reference services is part of the process to reconsider the services in an integrated approach.

**Issue 2: Organized Activities**

To provide reference services as an organization and in organized manner.

Research results revealed that reference services are not provided as an organization and in organized manner. Even though question-and-answer services are widely provided, they are not based on a robust foundation. For example, written manuals and guidelines exist but are insufficient. As to the organizational structure, not all libraries have a specific section responsible for reference services. Furthermore, it is not a standard practice to record questions-and-answers for future services, which might draw criticism such as “lessons are not learned” or “not well planned.”

Taking current situations into account, practices must be improved to encourage a shift in citizens’ awareness.
Issue 3: Support as a Library Community
For the entire library community to support reference services.

While surveys were conducted only on individual libraries, analysis results highlight issues not only pertaining to individual libraries but also to the entire library community. For example, what can be done to promote the “re-definition” of reference services mentioned above? There are huge variations among libraries in how reference services are named and described. There is no standard in the coverage of statistical data. While such a situation may be positively evaluated as a flexible response by individual libraries, it also leads one to understand that word usage is not unified throughout the entire library community. Such a situation might even lead to the misunderstanding and distrust of library activities.

As observed in many fields, definitions of terminology are products of research, unifying one or more choices. Commenting and understanding definitions is also a basic task of library and information science education. However, referring to textbooks currently published for librarian education, one can be confused with the wide selection of definitions. It is ironic that one even feels the need to define what definition means. Thus, a fundamental solution is required. One important issue for the future is to provide several opportunities for those in the library business to exchange ideas and to bring together their wisdoms.

Issue 4: Focus on Exploratory Activities
To focus on comparatively new activities and innovative methods in reference services.

Another issue related to shifting popular awareness toward libraries is a focus on comparatively new activities and innovative methods as reference services. Although it is important to spread traditional services and methods, we should also direct our attention to emerging activities and to consider adopting newly developed technologies to broaden the possibilities of reference services. Survey results showed that practices are emerging in a limited number of libraries such as use of SNS in reference services. Exploratory practices do exist; we must therefore spread and enhance quality of these practices.

Issue 5: Service Models for Each Type of Library
To build distinctive service models and to examine their validity in the future.

Survey results revealed that public libraries, academic libraries, and special libraries all have different attitudes and activities related to reference services. Such differences have been addressed in the past, but this investigative research provided evidence that supports such discourse. Among public libraries, differences were extreme in various types of local authorities. In particular, the current status of reference services was distinct among prefectural libraries and other libraries, as well as among prefectural libraries/libraries in ordinance-designated cities and other libraries. We must keep in mind the limitations and constraints in discussing reference services without considering differences in library type.

Taking this idea a step further to research awareness, one must establish reference service models according to specific types of libraries. For example, in Europe and the United States, libraries are often categorized as reference libraries and circulation libraries. It is hard to say that such a categorization is pervasive in Japan, but based on survey results,
it is possible to say that prefectural libraries are reference libraries. We must build distinctive service models and examine their validity in the future.

**Issue 6: Continuous Data Accumulation**

To conduct surveys to obtain further data on reference services with support from library associations and the National Diet Library.

One achievement our investigative research is its completion of nationwide survey that covered various types of libraries. As was pointed out in our research background, survey questions were compiled with an emphasis on existing reference research. This made it possible to compare the outcome with published data, setting a base for time series analysis of reference services. Investigative research team members, therefore, plan to conduct some sort of comparative study in the future. However, we must continue to accumulate data beyond this investigative research. Although it is impossible to conduct annual large-scale surveys, the library community should conduct surveys to obtain similar data after a certain period of time. The Japan Library Association, as a nationwide library association, as well as the National Diet Library could play a key role.

**Issue 7: Deepening Investigative Research**

To deepen research on citizens’ information behavior through field research and case studies.

This investigative research revealed the condition of citizens’ information behavior through the method of group interview. Adopting this method itself was experimental, but we believe that we obtained a certain degree of success. However, groups chosen as subjects for this study were an extremely small portion of the entire Japanese population, and selection of individuals was not systematic. Therefore, in order to obtain a concrete perspective on citizens’ information behavior, we must conduct research utilizing more structured and robust methods and subject selection. In particular, we must deepen investigative research through field surveys on citizens’ information behaviors and conduct case studies of libraries engaged in activities that contribute to such information behavior.

**Issue 8: Discussions on Future Recommendations**

To create opportunities to facilitate discussions on recommendations that bring together the wisdom of individuals associated with libraries.

As mentioned above, the purpose of this investigative research was to provide suggestions that enable discussions on future recommendations, as opposed to making specific recommendations. We believe that survey results and analyses in Sections One and Two, as well as developmental discussions in Section Three, are in accordance with this goal. The next step is to create opportunities for discussion to draw up recommendations based on the contents of this report. We expect that individuals associated with libraries will bring together their wisdom, create practical solutions, and implement them in practice.

In concluding this report, we pointed out eight issues for the future of reference services. The investigative research team certainly hopes that these issues will contribute to enriching the evolution of library reference services.
Note:
