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**BUNKO: A private children's library in Japan".  
A Short Introduction to Bunko**

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**Abstract**

*In this paper, I will try to introduce Bunko, a very unique type of private children's library in Japan. Numerous articles have been written on bunko, but many of them are presented in Japanese and only a few papers were written in English (1). Therefore, firstly, I plan to sketch out general characteristics of bunko. Secondly I briefly describe the history of bunko, especially the period from the 1960s and the 1980s when the number of bunko rapidly grew.*





## 2-2: Katsura Bunko

As mentioned above, many children's writers have been interested in bunko, Hanako Muraoka, Tomiko Inui, Miyoko Matsutani, Teruo Teramura, to name a few. And Momoko Ishii, a famous children's writer, translator, and editor, is one of those writers.

In 1958 she opened a bunko named *Katsura Bunko* in her house and it was just one example of writer's bunko at first, but after she published a book about this bunko, it was known by many people and the bunko became a special and symbolic existence in the history of bunko.

In this book entitled "*Kodomo No Toshokan* (The Children's Library)" Ishii introduced the first seven years' experience of *Katsura Bunko* while describing daily activities of the bunko with many photographs. This book was never found on the best-seller list after its publication, but it was widely read among many women who were concerned with the reading of the young. After reading this book, many of the women, in turn, began to open a bunko at their home and other places as Ishii described in *Kodomo No Toshokan*.

But it was not completely Ishii's intention to spread the idea of bunko throughout the country. Ishii opened *Katsura Bunko* not just for fun (of course, as a children's writer, she loves children) and not for promotion of bunko. *Katsura Bunko* was a kind of lavatory for Momoko Ishii to observe at first hand what books children would take from the shelf, why some books were chosen many times by children and why other books were not favored by them. Ishii reported the result of her observation in the book with detailed lists of books lent by twelve children while describing in detail the characteristics of each child. And she analyzed the elements that "best-sellers" in *Katsura Bunko* commonly possessed.

In the last half of the book, she turned the topic and began to spent pages to introduce the library services for children in America, Canada, and Europe where she visited from 1954 to 1955 to investigate juvenile publication and public library services. Ishii, as a children's writer and editor, was greatly impressed by the public library in those countries to observe that they functioned as a good channel between children and good books and that they were a good and stable market for children's books of good quality, thus keeping the quality of children's literature. Ishii insisted the necessity of public library, not bunko, as a distributor of good writings to children.

On the other hand, in the last chapter, she emphasized the difficulty of maintaining a bunko because she felt herself that it required a great deal of self-sacrifice and that it could be a burden to keep a bunko for an ordinary people. Ishii stressed that it was urgent necessity to build more public libraries, which is supported eternally by tax, to promote good books to children (according to 1965 statistics, there were only about 750 public libraries in the country).

In spite of these comments, however, the book provoked many women's imagination, driving them to star a bunko. I cannot say for certain why this book aroused their enthusiasm for bunko in spite of Ishii's warning. Maybe her vivid and lively description of daily activities of the bunko was so attractive that it conveyed to readers only interesting aspects of bunko, contrary to Ishii's expectation. Whether Ishii hoped it or not, anyway, this book became one of the crucial factors to bring about the rapid development of bunkos after the 1960s.







