

Survey of Reading Promotion of Public Libraries in China

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ABSTRACT

Reading promotion is a key service of the public library. This article investigates the current state of reading promotion in public libraries in China. There were 86 public libraries chosen as a sample. The research finds that Chinese libraries have been paying more and more attention to the importance of reading promotion. A variety of reading promotion services and programs are being carried out, including reading festivals, booklists, reading contests, reading communication and lectures on reading. Public libraries tend to apply more towards the digital platform when promoting reading. Public libraries have cooperated with NGO and business fields to promote reading. This study suggests more can be done to improve the service, including improving the librarian's knowledge of genre books, enhancing reading communication, deeply investigating measurement of reading promotion, and the influence of contracting out reading programs.

KEYWORDS

China, Public Library, Reading Advisory, Reading Promotion, Survey

INTRODUCTION

Before the 21st century, Reading Advisory and Promotion was not a main service or program in public libraries in China, though it is not new to public librarians. Wuxi, the former director of the Reading Promotion Committee of Library Society of China, once pointed out that reading promotion is a marginal service, and always a service as supplemental and occasional (Wuxi, 2015). When the 21st century arrived, the situation changed. The central government of China began to focus more and more on public culture infrastructure to meet the public's needs, and invested more on public culture facilities, including the public library. Many public libraries' space, furniture, buildings, and collection have improved greatly, which built a strong foundation to provide reading services and programs. The Library Society of China (LSC) makes a great effort to push reading services in public libraries. In 2006 LSC founded the Scientific Promotion and Reading Instruction Committee, which had 6 divisions at that time. In 2010, the Committee changed the name to the Reading Promotion Committee and there was an increase from 6 to 15 divisions. In 2015, the number of divisions increased to 22. The Committee published a series of textbooks on reading promotion, held workshops to train

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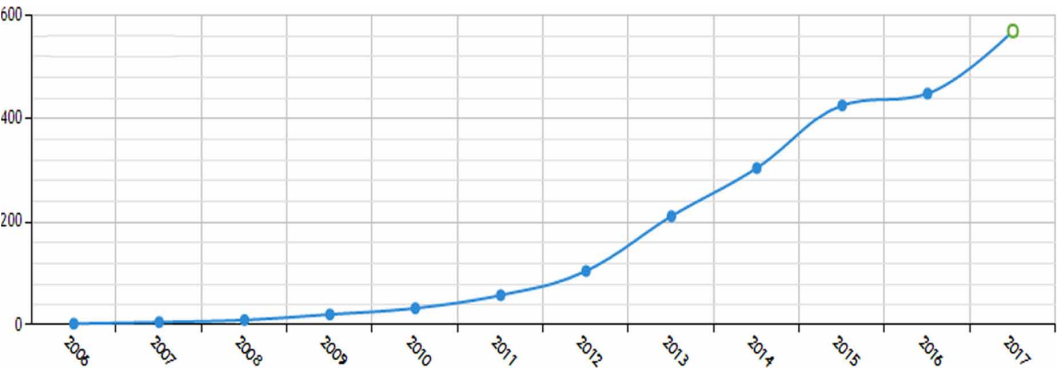
librarians, and set up awards on reading promotion. Due to the emphasis of the central government and the professional efforts of LSC, reading promotion in the public libraries of China developed very rapidly. It has become a fundamental and important service in public libraries. On the annual conference of LSC, the seminars about reading promotion are the most popular ones among all the seminars. Since 2015, the Reading Promotion Committee has held 9 training workshops on different topics about reading promotion, and more than 300 librarians took part in each workshop. In the 6th run of public library assessment which was held in 2017, indications about reading promotion weigh more. As to city level public libraries, reading promotion and social education scores 70, while reference scores 30. This is also a sign that reading promotion is more and more important in public libraries in China.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In Chinese, “reading promotion” is “阅读推广” and “public library” is “公共图书馆.” A subject search with these two words was conducted in the CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure, the largest academic article database in China). The first article was published in 2006. Since 2012, more than 100 articles were published each year, and in 2016, the number of publications increased to 442. This indicates that scholars in the LIS field are paying more attention to reading promotion in public libraries.

Chinese scholar’s research on reading promotion in public libraries focuses on three aspects. The first is about a specific library’s reading promotion practice, such as Liaoning Province Library (Meng, 2013), Hubei Province Library (Li, 2014), Suzhou Library (Xu, Jin, & Zhang, 2014), and Ningbo Library (Liu & Hong, 2017). Another focus is to investigate the reading promotion practice of public libraries in special areas, such as the Pearl River Delta region (Dai, 2017), Shanxi Province (Li, 2016), Hefei area in Anhui Province (Cheng, 2017), Guangzhou area (Li, 2014), and Dongguan area (Wen, 2017). Besides the focuses mentioned above, there is also research on special kinds of reading promotion, such as survey of story time of picture books in public libraries (Feng li, 2017), exploration on reading salons (Fu, 2014), investigation of reading journal of public libraries (Li, 2014), and book recommendations of public libraries on the web (Xu, 2014). There is also an English paper on reading promotion in public libraries in China, and it is mainly about book recommendations and reading interest of Chinese public library users (Sun & Xie, 2016). All these researches give the study information, data and ideas to further investigate the current state, characteristics and trends of reading promotion in Chinese public libraries as a whole.

Figure 1. Publications on reading promotion in public libraries, 2006-2017



RESEARCH METHOD

In China, there are more than 3000 public libraries, and this study adopted a sampling survey for these libraries. Public libraries in this study were chosen based on the Lists of Nationwide Reading Excellence Organization and Nationwide Reading Base from 2008 to 2017 (these two awards are founded by LSC). The study chose 86 public libraries that were considered for their regional (Figure 2) and administrative level (Figure 3). As to regional distribution, there is at least one sample public library in each province, and a number of sample libraries in the eastern area is a little more than the numbers in the western area. As for the administrative level distribution, there are 4 sample provincial public libraries, 55 municipal/prefectural public libraries, and 27 county public libraries. Figure 3 shows administrative level distribution of sample public libraries in the study.

After the sample libraries were chosen, the researchers collected data from the website, and WeChat from the libraries WeChat services. Researchers also searched the website of Quanminyuedu (official website of Reading Promotion Committee of LSC), and the CNKI database to find the reading promotion reports of sample libraries. As to each sample library, the study recorded the following details: first, the name of the reading service target group, second, the name of the reading program target group, and third, other content related to a reading service or program.

RESULTS

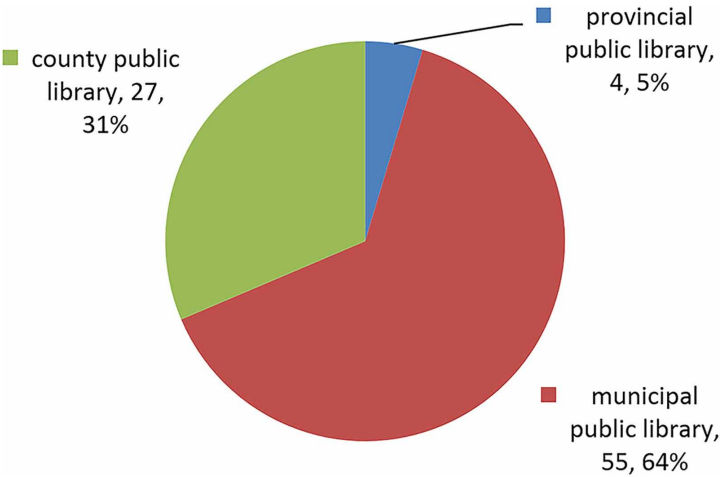
Variety of Reading Services and Programs

After thorough investigation, the authors found that the main forms of reading promotion in public libraries are reading festivals (ceremony), booklist/recommendation, reading-related contests, social reading programs (reading as a social activity, including book discussion, book groups, book

Figure 2. Region distribution of sample public libraries in this study



Figure 3. Administrative level distribution of sample public libraries in the study

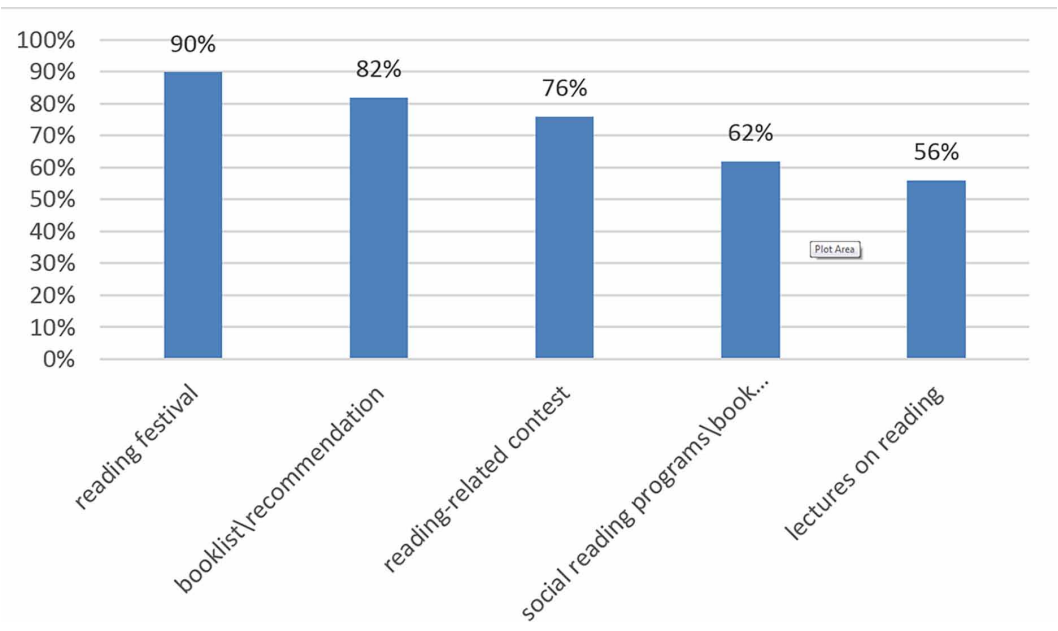


exchange), and lectures on reading (Figure 4). Figure 4 shows the main forms of reading promotion in public libraries in China.

Reading Festival

A reading festival is a large-scale promotion program. Under the situation of a low public reading ratio, there should be large programs to invoke the awareness of reading. (Wang, 2016) Fan also pointed out that at the early age of reading promotion, reading festival is the main form (Fan, 2015). In 2004, LSC undertook the program of National Reading Month. On that program, LSC introduced the World Book and Copyright Day to China, and carried out different reading activities. From that

Figure 4. Main forms of reading promotion in public libraries in China



year on, many public libraries began to hold a ceremony on the 23rd of April. It always involves a big ceremony on a large square, a government director's speech, an author-visit, large-group reciting, signature wall, lectures, and displays. The timeline of a reading festival differs among libraries, from one day to one week, one month, or even longer. Among 86 sample public libraries, 77(90%) have held a reading festival. By now, the reading festival has shown the tendency to be topical. There are many examples, including a reading ceremony about rural areas in Lanzhou library, a teen reading ceremony of ChaoYang District Library in Beijing, a children's' reading ceremony of Chancheng District in Foshan city, and a farmers' reading ceremony of Jiangsu Province Library.

With the development of the reading festival, it attracts a lot of people to take part in the event. Dongguan Library began to hold a reading ceremony annually in 2005. In ten years, the festival has operated 4785 programs and more than 39 million people took part (Wen, 2017). That means there are about 4 million people per year that attend the events. The Chengjiang River reading festival, is a large one across the Hubei Province. In 2016, public libraries in the Hubei Province took action at the same time, and held 2571 activities, 335 lectures, 110 displays, and 587 reading programs for children. Through large scales and various activities, the reading ceremony improved people's awareness and the significance of reading in their lives.

Booklist/Recommendation

Compiling a booklist to help readers find suitable books is a fundamental work of public librarians. From the survey, the authors found that about 71 (82%) public libraries provide booklists or a book display. Through analyzing the book lists of 2017, it showed that booklists in public libraries have the following characteristics.

Book recommendation are becoming regular or routine, and among 71 public libraries that have a book recommendation service, 50 (70%) have a regular time frame. Among 50 public libraries, 30 (60%) provide a book list once per month, 20 (40%) provide a book list one or more times per week.

Book recommendations have an emphasis on new titles, children's books, and classic books. According to Sun and Xie's research, 83.67 percent of public libraries display the new titles list, which can be found on the libraries' website (Sun & Xie, 2016). This study also found that public libraries place an emphasis on new title lists. Among 71 public libraries, 60 (84%) have new title lists, and besides new titles lists, many libraries put much effort on subject title lists. Similar to subject title lists, children's' book lists, and classic book lists are very common. There are 57 (80%) of public libraries that have children's book lists, recommended picture story books, popular science books, and transitional books. Subsequently, 38 (53%) public libraries provide classic book lists. A typical example is the Shenzhen Library's classic book list for families. Since 2014, the Shenzhen Library has invited experts to give their recommendations and choose about 30 titles for their list. By now, the classic book list has recommended 120 titles altogether.

It is common for public libraries to recommend books by WeChat. The study showed that 55 out of 71 public libraries used WeChat to publish their booklists. But the amount of browsing is not satisfactory, most booklists were browsed under 200 times. The authors found that the original booklist will get more attention, while the forwarded version of other lists always get less attention or browsing.

Reading-Related Contest

Contests are a common form of reading program, especially book review contests and reciting contests. The details show that 66 out of 86 public libraries in this study have held reading-related contests. Besides book review contests and reciting contests, there are also DIY picture book contests, and storytelling contests. Here are some examples: Yaan Library's classic reciting contest for kids, Jingdezhen Library's classic poem and essay reciting contest for school students, Liuzhou Library's DIY picture book contest, and Hefei Library's speech contest on reading for disadvantaged people.

Regarding contests, some scholars have expressed their worries, such as Fan Bingsi, and Zhao Junling. They argued that contests only reward those who already have a greater propensity to read

and a higher level of reading ability. Bingsi and Zhao also claim that contests do not urge those who really need reading help to engage in reading, or to read in a better way, and may even discourage their willingness to read. Many libraries have started to reform or change this model. Some libraries borrowed the model from the hot CCTV reading show---Reader. Many city libraries, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Shijiazhuang, and so on, build reading-aloud pavilions, which are small separated spaces with professional recording equipment and reading scripts. The authors learned from the sample librarian's WeChat that many people come to the library to try a professional reading aloud experience.

Social Reading Program

A library is a platform for communication and should promote reading communication (Zhao, 2013). As for public libraries, there are two main ways to achieve this goal: one way is to hold book discussions, and the other way is to provide services to book groups.

Regarding book discussions, among 86 public libraries, there are 53 public libraries that have held book discussions or book salons consistently.

As for services to book groups, there are 10 libraries that provide promotion or space. The Dongguan Library made an exhibit about 14 book groups in Dongguan to let them be known by the public. Some other public libraries, such as Binhai New District Library of Tianjin, and Dushuhu Library in Suzhou, provide a space to book groups.

Besides the two examples above, there is also another kind of reading communication, which is book sharing or a book exchange. The Capital City Library of Beijing has organized a book exchange market every year since 2008. The process is just like this: the reader takes the books they want to exchange to the library, and the librarian provides a ticket for each book. The librarian will collect and choose from all the books that are suitable to be on the market, and on the market days, the reader can choose books by using the tickets. This model makes the spare books move on to people who may be interested in them. Another example is a book sharing program in the Suzhou Dushuhu Library. The citizens may take any books to the market, recommend books to other people, or exchange books with other people. It has a ten-year history, and it is very popular among city dwellers of Suzhou.

Lectures on Reading

Lectures are very common in public libraries in China. Many libraries have distinct and diverse lecture brands, such as the "Shangtu Lecture" in Shanghai Library and the "Wenlan Lecture" in Hangzhou Library. According to the Yearbook of Chinese Libraries (2012), each provincial and prefecture-level public library held an average of 32.2 lectures in 2011. The topics of lectures cover literature, culture, health, law, and history. While some scholars put forward that lectures are a kind of reading promotion activity, this study argued that only the lectures about reading can be put into the reading promotion category. Lectures about health or law or other topics which have no direct relation with reading, therefore were not recorded as research data.

The study found that 48 out of 86 public libraries held reading lectures. Topics for reading lectures include the classic reading, book selection, reading and growing up. There are also reading lectures on a special work, such as how to read *Red Mansion*, or on a special issue, such as a poem. As for the lecture form, a library-inside lecture was the only form for a longtime. In order to extend the service, many public libraries expanded lectures to county, schools, villages, and communities. In order to increase the number of patrons, many libraries adopted live-broadcasting of lectures. Some libraries divided the lecture into several 5-8 minutes units (micro-videos), and provided them via mobile library or APP to accommodate the needs of time fragmentation. In order to share lecture resources of public libraries, the National Library of China (NLC) founded the Library Lecture Consortium. Many provinces set up a lecture consortium in the province-wide area. The national and provincial consortiums offer significant assistance to county libraries, as well as western libraries that are unable to find or afford a lecturer.

New Trends

During the research into the practice of reading promotion in public libraries, the authors found two trends, digital and cooperative.

As for digital trends, there are two meanings, and the first one is to promote going digital. Public libraries use many kinds of digital platforms to promote reading, such as WeChat, and live video platforms. The Langfang Anci District Library set up a book recommendation channel on Yizhibo (一直播, a live video platform in China). Another way is to promote digital books. The typical example is Scan QRcode and read in the whole city.

Scan QRcode and read, in the whole city is a reading program launched by the Dongguan Library in 2016. The program chooses good books from a variety of book award lists, then they put the printed QRcodes of these books on the posters in parks, squares, shopping malls, travel sites, bus stops, and also spreads the QRcodes by the APP of the Dongguan Library. In half a year, APP installations and users of WeChat of the Dongguan Library increased by 40%. The download times by APP only, was up 6300 times. Since the program has good effects, the Reading Promotion Committee of LSC made it a national program in October 2016, and called it Scan QRcode and read in one hundred cities. The committee chose 9 digital books per season, and made it available to the public by scanning QRcodes.

The public library is becoming more and more cooperative with other libraries and other agencies. In the Anhui province, a reading promotion consortium was set up in 2014, and their aim is to integrate resources related to reading promotion, design provincial reading program, and improve service efficiency. Besides cooperation within the public library field, public libraries pay much attention to integrating resources outside of their own field.

There are many examples of cooperation between the library and other agencies. The Changjiang River reading Festival enrolled 100 reading leaders from different fields and careers, and these 100 reading leaders will lead discussions online and offline. The Hubei Province Library also cooperates with the Hubei TV Station to produce a TV show called *Reading Leaders Talk*. The DongGuan Library emphasizes the role of volunteers and NGOs in reading promotion. With the contribution of individuals, groups and organizations, the Dongguan Library's reading program reaches out to kindergartens, schools, parks and communities. The Langfang City Library cooperates with a folk reading organization to perform storytelling in the library, and the Wuxi High-tech District Library cooperated with Fandeng Reading Group (a large company) to hold book discussion sessions. Furthermore, the Beijing Chaoyang District Library purchased children reading services from the Youbei Library, an organization that focuses on children's reading.

DISCUSSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

From the investigation on the state of reading promotions in public libraries in China, the study finds that reading promotion has become the most important service in public libraries. There are five main forms of reading promotion in public libraries in China: reading festivals, booklists, contests, book discussions or book groups, and lectures on reading. The framework of reading promotion has been set up, and by now, reading promotion in public libraries has transformed from reading awareness to the recommendation of good books, reading methods, and reading communication. Reading festivals have developed very fast, and booklists have become regularly published, but needs improvement to attract more attention. Librarians should have a general knowledge about specific genre books, so he or she will have confidence to recommend books and write original book reviews. Many public libraries have regular reading programs already, such as storytelling and book discussions, but the number of those libraries is not satisfactory. The author gave a lecture to public librarians of Yunnan Province in 2017, and asked which libraries have storytelling, and only 2 out of 50 provide story telling services. Public libraries need to give more attention to the regular reading programs.

It is good that most public libraries have realized reading habits cannot be developed in one day, and instead, it is a long process. Many public libraries offer programs to help readers to develop their

reading habits, and the 21-days reading habit is such a program. Public libraries ask the readers to register everyday if they read, and after the readers read for 21 days, public libraries will give prizes to some readers. Many libraries began exploring methods that would help people develop reading habits and reading literacy, but the current research is not strong enough to give the practice a theory foundation about reading methods, reading literacy and reading efficiency.

Public libraries in China pay close attention to children, older people, and disadvantaged groups, such as blind people. Because the public library system is not well developed in some areas, it is difficult to spread the reading promotion to rural areas. There is a village library system in China, but it does not work well. How to invoke these systems to incorporate it with public libraries, is a question needing further study.

So far, public libraries adopted many kinds of digital platforms to promote reading. While there is not much known about which platform is suitable for which target groups, and what kinds of books are suitable for digital promotion, all these issues need to be studied further.

While cooperation increases the service scope of public libraries, and releases the burden of shortage of librarians, there are new issues that need to be taken into account. One issue is how to keep librarians' core competitiveness when purchasing many services from outside sources. Though the central government policy about public culture encourages the development of folk culture organizations, professional librarians must think about what kind of service may be purchased, or provided from outside the library system. Additionally, what kind of purchases should be provided from outside the library system. As the *Public Library Law* that was issued on 4th November has stated: pushing, guiding, and servicing to public reading are important tasks of public libraries, and can the public libraries contract important services out? If the answer is yes, how can public libraries ensure the reading promotion provided by other agencies is on the right track? All these issues need to have further studies.

Public libraries conducted many reading promotion activities, but the evaluation process is always very simple. When reading programs report the outcomes, there is often only one measure: the number of attendants. It is difficult to judge the effects thoroughly just by one measure, and therefore more research on the evaluation of reading promotion services or programs are needed.

Reading promotion in public libraries has developed very fast over the last ten years, and will develop even faster in the next ten years. On the way to becoming more professional, much more work needs to be done, both in research and in practice.

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