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Print Coexisting with Digital Collection in Public Libraries of China

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Session: **139 — *Treating print in an increasing digital collection: issues, dilemmas and directions* — Acquisition and Collection Development**

Abstract:

Many public libraries in China have become hybrid libraries with increasing digital collections. At the same time, de-selecting print is a dilemma, as print is not always covered by digital formats, digital reading may be limited by factors such as computer, internet, access right or information literacy, digital collections are usually not owned by libraries and not as complete as traditional print, and those special print recording cultural heritage are irreplaceable. Moreover, a majority of citizens appear to still prefer print, and a mass of villagers need for print more. Altogether, coexisting with digital collection, print is not forgotten, it still prevails.

Introduction

A dozen years ago, with the popularization of computers and access to the internet in libraries, electronic publications emerged, reading outside the library became a new tide, and some people predicted that print would disappear. Nowadays, libraries have come to a hybrid age when digital resources have been increasing. Then how are things with the print in public libraries in China?

Part I. A survey of hybrid public libraries

Acquisition funds in public libraries have been increasing in recent years. A list below shows total acquisition funds and annual growth rates of all provincial public libraries countrywide:

Year	Total Acquisition Funds	Annual Growth Rate
2006	231.550 million	10.31%
2007	281.006 million	21.36%
2008	310.291 million	10.42%
2009	347.387 million	11.96%

Though finances to public libraries in different areas vary greatly due to different economic progress measures, the List below shows acquisition funds of some provincial public libraries in 2010.

Neimenggu Library	Henan Library	Jiangxi Library	Xinjiang Library	Jilin Library	Guangxi Library	Shanxi Library	Chongqing Library	Shandong Library	Liaoning Library	Tianjin Library	Nanjing Library	Shanghai Library
1.2 million RMB	2.8 Million MNB	3 million RMB	4 million RMB	5 million RMB	6 million RMB	7 million RNB	8 million RMB	11 million RMB	16 million RMB	20 million RMB	40 million RMB	98 million RMB

Public libraries generally attach importance to digital resources, putting 20% or more of their annual acquisition funds to purchase digital collections. For example, Ningxia Library put 20% of its 3 million RMB in 2010; Shanxi Library put 20% of its 6 million RMB in 2010; Zhejiang Library put 28% of its 23 million RMB in 2011; and Sun Yat-sen Library of Guangdong Province put 22% of its 40.92 million RMB in 2011. Total amounts of print and digital collections of these four provincial public libraries are as follow:

Library name	Print collections	Digital collections
Ningxia Library	1.6 million items	30TB
Shanxi Library	2.6 million items	20TB
Zhejiang Library	5 million items	40TB
Sun Yat-sen Library of Guangdong Province	6 million items	50TB

We learn basic facts of digital resources in provincial public libraries through a survey of websites: for Chinese e-books there are Superstar and Apabi, for Chinese e-journals there are CNKI, VIP, Wanfang Data, Longyuan and Bookan, and more databases oriented towards public learning, enterprises, government and special groups. Public libraries purchase these digital resources in different amounts and access ways, such as via mirror database or long distance access.

Besides buying databases, most provincial public libraries have built up unique databases based on their special collections. For example, Databank of Dr. Sun Yat-sen in Sun Yat-sen Library of Guangdong Province, Databank of Silk Road in Gansu Library, Databank of Butterflies in Yunnan Library, Databank of Chinese New Year Pictures in Sichuan Library and Databank of Monarch Hills in Shanxi Library.

Both print and digital collections have their users. Generally, those engaged in recreational   reading prefer reading print while those doing research prefer digital sources. Take Sun Yat-sen Library of Guangdong Province as example, we welcomed nearly 3 million physical visitors in 2011, and they checked out 454,857 items of Chinese books and 51,256 items of Chinese journals in the main library. We can see that library users checked out more books than journals.

Actually, a great deal of needs for journal articles or other research materials has turned online. Again, take Sun Yat-sen Library of Guangdong Province as an example.   The total amount of e-documents downloaded from the three large databases, CNKI, VIP and Wanfang, reached 1,334,674 items in 2011. Following the license agreements, sixteen librarians at the Reference Department serve users online via the DRS system. In peak seasons, each librarian may deliver hundreds of e-documents each day, including journal articles, dissertations and proceedings, etc.

We understand the significance of blending print and digital collections, though examining old vs new and integrating heterogeneous data are difficult and some provincial public libraries have trials. For example, Tianjin Library, Henan Library and Sun Yat-sen Library of Guangdong Province, through Apabi or Duxiu e-books databases, are linked to an OPAC for the same titles of print books. But no library provides links from OPAC to e-books, no integration of print and digital journals either. Public libraries fall behind academic libraries on this.

Part II. De-selecting print is a dilemma

In China, 328,387 titles of books, 9884 titles of journals and 1939 titles of newspapers were published by 581 publishers in 2010. But digital formats are produced by other companies which need to get copyrights from publishers or authors, thus not all print could be covered by digital formats. For example, only about 50 thousand titles of e-books from Superstar and Apabi were published in 2010, covering about 15% of all print titles in that year. Even for those covered by digital formats, de-selecting print is a dilemma in Sun Yat-sen Library of Guangdong Province.

Should we insist on print books? We are facing space problem.
In 2005, when we had 4 million print items, we started an Enlargement & Reconstruction Project, of which the designed capacity is 8 million items. But when we finished the first stage of the project at the end of 2010, our print collections grew to 6 million items; a large part of the book collection has to be put in compact stacks or closed shelves; the volume of new books we bought in 2011 exceeds 200,000 items. Thus we predict our space will be full within a few years.

Shall we give up print books? But e-books are not popularized.
We purchased about 110,000 titles of books published in 2010. In comparison, we bought mirror data of Apabi e-books in 2007, but no update since then; and we were licensed to access Superstar e-books by long distance four years ago, but the data was fixed for ten years, no update either since then. For the e-books, users need to get online within the library or log on with reader cards. It is limited by factors such as computer, internet access, and confidence with information literacy.

Should we insist on print journals? We are paying high costs.

We purchased 8206 print journal titles in 2010 and the average price for each title was 130 RMB. In comparison, the average price for each e-journal could be much lower. For example, CNKI includes 7708 titles of e- journals in 2010, though the price differs according to the number of titles and the access methods libraries invest in, an average price from Jiamusi University Library is just 18 RMB, one seventh less the price of print. In addition, it takes other costs to bind and process print periodicals.

Shall we give up print journals? But e-journals could not be reserved.

Even though e-journals databases could provide quick searching and have covered most of print titles, and users could obtain the e-documents via the DRS system easily, thus many scientific research libraries have de-selected print journals. However, the e-journals are only licensed, usually not owned by libraries, and those holdings are not as complete as traditional print. Users commonly think the print is the authoritative original document, and they assume that they need it in that format.

Should we insist on newspapers? News online is everywhere.

According to the CNNIC, there was a half billion netizens by the end of 2011, and one billion cell phone users by the end of February, 2012. Websites of news are too many to count and news online is easily available. For example, QQ is the largest social networking site in China, and as soon as you log on a small window of Tencent news pops up. Besides, many mobile newspapers are bound and free for cell phone users; young people seldom come to the library to read newspapers.

Shall we give up newspapers? But some people enjoy reading for pastime.

We put four 3D large screen computers with 300 titles of digital Chinese popular newspapers and magazines in the library lobby. These new products always attract physical visitors to have a look. But just a short time later, visitors who intend to read newspapers still go into the reading room, sit down and enjoy reading slowly. There were 270 titles of newspapers in the reading room in 2011, and the one hundred seats were usually full of elderly readers.

Giving up print books, journals and newspapers is a dilemma, thus many public libraries hold both formats, especially for the highlight subject collections. For local and special print, which are recording cultural heritage and with high values as historical relics, they are irreplaceable though some of them are being digitized and re-organized for preservation and sharing online. More and more public libraries have set up their ancient book protection center, to organize works such as investigation, bibliography, conservation, staff training and promotion for those precious items.

Part III. Circulation in larger zones seems a direction

A majority of citizens seem still to prefer print, though they have better conditions for digital resources, computers, internet access and developing information literacy. According to the Investigation Report of Reading Status of Shanghai Citizens published on www.Chinanews.com August 12, 2011, 75% of the respondents considered that print, including books, journals and newspapers, lead to the best reading result, and only 14% and 10.5% of the respondents considered that online readings and electronic readings lead to the best reading result.

Public libraries in cities are providing creative services to get closer to citizens. For example, the 24-hour Self Service Neighborhood Library was launched in Shenzhen Library in 2006. Each library can hold about 400 books; users can borrow, return or reserve books, apply for library cards conveniently. By the end of 2011, 160 Self Service libraries have been set up in stations, communities, airports, etc; and 1,019,862 items of books have been delivered. Such 24-hour Self Service Neighborhood Libraries have been introduced in many cities in China.

Half of the 1.3 billion population in China is still living in the countryside, where conditions like computers, internet and information literacy are lacking and villagers need print more. Many provincial public libraries introduce the model of the Central-Branch Library System to improve services in grass-roots libraries. Our library, the Sun Yat-sen Library of Guangdong Province has launched 72 mobile branches jointly with county libraries between 2003 and 2011, and usually invested 10,000 new books and other facilities such as shelving, computers, printers and monitors, and the books would be exchanged between branches every half a year.

Obviously, print still prevails, and circulation in larger areas seems to grow. The Union of Capital Library launched in March 2012, and residents with an IC Card are able to borrow or return books in any of the 63 united libraries, including the Capital Library, libraries of counties, districts and streets in Beijing. Likewise, 204 libraries in Shenzhen city have united their circulation services, thus citizens can borrow or return books in Shenzhen Library or any of the 44 public libraries in different districts and the 160 24-hour Self Service Neighborhood Libraries.

(People reading print books and newspapers in Sun Yat-sen Library of Guangdong Province)

（Left: People reading digital special collections in Sun Yat-sen Library of Guangdong Province）
(Right: People reading digital popular magazines and newspapers in Sun Yat-sen Library of Guangdong Province）

(24-hour Self-service Neighborhood Libraries in Shenzhen and Beijing)

(24-hour Self-service Neighborhood Libraries in Shanghai and Guangzhou)

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