

New Service Models in a Municipal Library

Li Donglai
Director of Dongguan Public Library
China

ABSTRACT: This article introduces the Dongguan Public Library (DPL) and discusses how an urban library can meet the high expectations in a rapidly urbanized environment. DPL consists of a central library and several branch libraries. Centered on user services, these libraries make every effort to provide an enjoyable learning environment for users. In order to meet various needs, DPL surveyed their users and established the first readers?self-service system in China. This system enables the library to open twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week. In addition, DPL connects the community with mobile services, digital resources, and internet communications. To stimulate the reading interest of the public, DPL sets up reading days and offers opportunities to Dongguan residents with many free classes and public lectures. To extend their services to some remote areas, DPL applies state-of-art technologies, builds up a central management platform and shares information resources with those who do not have convenient access to its collections. Recently, DPL issued a policy of one borrowing card for all libraries in Dongguan City and adjacent areas. As a result, the collections accessibilities are enhanced dramatically.

I. Introduction

Since the dawn of human civilization, a library has functioned to preserve archival materials and historical records. Today, in the age of information and urbanization, a library must present different characteristics, revealing its public aspect and accessibilities. It must frequently update its conceptions and methods of service so as to suit the rapid developments of the society and economy.

Dongguan is a city located at the southern part of Guangdong Province, also known as the Peal River Delta, which bridges Hong Kong and Guangzhou City as well as Shenzhen City and Zhuhai City in the South of China. After China has adopted the opening-door policy in the 1980s, Dongguan has been speedily transformed from an agricultural area to an international manufactory center. Economy boosts its GDP rapidly and leads Dongguan into the rank of top cities in China. Under such circumstance, Dongguan built a new library in September 2002 with a total space

about 44,654 square meters. It ranks number one among public libraries in China. The new library opened to the public on September 28, 2005.

In this new library, we are able to expand dramatically our capacity to serve our users. We explore various possibilities to meet users' needs. In the past four years, we have set up one central library, twenty-seven branch libraries, and one hundred service stations. With one library card, users can access and borrow materials from any libraries or service stations. Such a service pattern stimulates and facilitates reading activities among the citizens. Through such services we have demonstrated what the functions of a modern library should be. In this article, we will illustrate our efforts how to fit a municipal library into a modern society.

II. Strategic Planning

A major goal of DPL is to establish a digital library, containing diversified information resources to meet the needs of our clientele. Following the trends of digital library development in the world, we analyzed the challenges we are facing and noticed the following four major changes in our service environment.

First of all, the user's expectation of the library has changed. In the past, our users only came to seek intellectual resources. Now they use the library not only to acquire knowledge, but also for leisure, recreation, and communication purposes. Therefore we need to build a more efficient, comfortable, and attractive environment for users.

Second, the library collections have been changed in format. In the past, our collections contain mainly printed materials. Now our collections combine paper and electronic resources. We need to switch our focuses from single format to multi-media so that we can provide adequate resources to users.

Thirdly, our collection managing method has been changed. In the past, we only need to concentrate on collection development. Now we need to not only diversify the collection subject coverage but also manage a cartoons and toy rooms in the Children's department; and include Cantonese opera, IT, and other popular materials for different group, as well as special collections of Dongguan's local culture, and Taiwan culture for particular interests. We have also set up a users' self-service system to cater to our users.

Last but not the least, our services have been changed in scope. In the past, we only had one central library. Now we not only provide comprehensive services in the central library, but also establish a network with several branch libraries in the city.

III. Patterns of Our Services

Today, a library faces many challenges as well opportunities. We realize that we need to take the advantage of the global information network and make the library truly

service oriented. In the past two years, we focused our efforts on collection diversity, library layout, and service patterns.

1. Comprehensive Information Resources

Information resources are the most important elements to guarantee services for our users. At the end of 2002, our collections contained only about 400,000 printed volumes without any digital resources. In order to meet the needs of today's information society, we aimed at expanding our collections with various subjects in both print and electronic formats. More than ten subject areas are added to our collections, such as cartoons, daily life interests, Cantonese Opera, and local culture. In each subject area, we provide different media such as books, newspapers, magazines, and digital resources.

Following the trends in library development nowadays, we established our own digital library. Now our digital collections contain 25,000 e-books, 9,000 online periodical titles, 1 million online full-text articles, and 1,700 Chinese rare books. In addition, we set up eight local online databases, including Dongguan Celebrities, Dongguan Enterprises, and Dongguan News. While these local databases provide mainly local information resources, we are also providing access to many major national online databases, such as the online catalogs of the National Library of China, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and Guangdong Provincial Library. Now Dongguan Municipal Library owns a mixed collection of both print and electronic sources, amounting to more than 1,100,000 volumes and 3,800 newspaper and magazine subscriptions.

2. Humanized Spatial Issues

Our users are much diversified now than in the past. They would appreciate it if we could accommodate their needs for recreation, communication, and learning. In other words, we need to deliver our services through logical spatial layout, comfortable interior design, and state-of-art technology systems. Accordingly, we set up our service window on the first floor to facilitate users' activities on checking catalogs, and reading and borrowing materials. We designed our layout logically so that users can browse our shelves directly. In the upper floors, we established subject libraries. We also set up a special aid for people who need special assistant. Not long ago, we implemented the user self-service system so users can use our collections even after the library is closed. The library also has a bookstore, a cafeteria, and a restaurant. In our daily operations, we analyze the characteristics of our users and target different groups, such as intellectual elites, migrant workers, farmers, youth, and senior citizens. With such programs, we carry out our mission of serving users much efficiently and successfully in our newly built library.

3. Diversified User Services

In order to enhance our services, we have employed different strategies and methods. In the past, we would wait for the users to come to the library. Now we organize activities to attract users. These activities include information consultation, free lectures, workshops, exhibitions, conference, and literature salon. In addition to these activities, we established the first twenty-four-hour self-service reading room in the country. In this reading room, users just need to scan their library cards and then they can enter the library and check out materials by themselves. This facility gives our users a great convenience, as they have access to partial collections twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week. Last year, more than seventy thousand users were benefited by our self-service system, and more than one hundred thousand items got circulated.

This self-service is not the only highlight in our new service paradigm. We send out library book mobiles to different places in the city and help our citizens to renew library card, request items, and provide reference services. Now we have one hundred service stations and served more than one hundred fifty thousand users. People have called such mobile services as the “library in our neighborhood”.

Among our users, there are many children. We set up a children’s reading room and placed more than seven hundred pieces of educational toys. We have also established an etiquette room and teach children age six to ten various kinds of social skills. In the last two years, we held forty-two different workshops and educated two thousand and sixteen children. In the meantime, we organized ten workshops for youth and about one hundred and twenty young people attended those sessions.

While focusing on our citizens, we also try to help the local government. Since 2004, we have opened a reference hotline for the delegates of the People’s Congress and People’s Political Consultative Congress during their annual congregations. In four years, we have compiled materials on twenty topics and printed six thousand four hundred items for these delegates. They borrowed five thousand five hundred volumes from our collections, which help them to get well informed. We not only provide a reference hotline, but also followed up for more than forty reference questions and made sure that these delegates received satisfactory answers.

While these activities are taking place in the libraries, we set up outreach programs and used the internet to provide online services and online learning programs for users. Now we have more than eleven thousand three hundred and fifty users signed up for using the digital library database and more than seven thousand and nine hundred registered students for online courses taught by ten volunteers.

By March 2007 when the library opened to the public for a year and half, we circulated one million and thirty-two thousand items. We had more than two million and fourteen thousand users, of which more than forty-eight thousand are new users.

We organized more than two hundred and forty activities for users, in which more than fifty-three and five thousand people participated. The DPL is full of vitality, and we hope that ours could be a model for public libraries in the 21st century.

IV. Consortial Management in a Cooperative Service System

Modern urbanization requires more cooperative efforts. Libraries are no exception. One library could never meet all demands of the society. Therefore, we need to broaden our perspectives from a single library to a network of libraries. Take Gongguan for example. We need to serve more than eight million people living in two thousand four hundred and sixty- five square kilometers. Obviously one central library will not suffice. We can serve our clientele better if a network of libraries is established in each town and district and managed as a group.

1. Central Library + Branch Libraries -- the Model of a Consortium

The consortial system is what we have adopted for 21st century library services. In such a system, we have a central library located in Dongguan City proper, with libraries in each township as branch libraries and supplemented with libraries or reading rooms in each district and bookmobiles. In addition, we invite libraries in schools and industrial enterprises to join us so as to form a comprehensive network in our area. To make our services more efficient, our first step is to centralize acquisition and cataloging, and promote the one-card-for-all policy. Then, we adopt the business model in our administrative management. The administrators in the central library manage the human resources, budget, and facilities of the whole network. This network enables us to deliver services to the whole society, to enterprises, and to single families. It also helps to alleviate the financial and human resources shortage in rural areas.

2. Technology + Management -- Consortial Working Strategies

In order to maximize the effect of our services, we take the advantage of modern technology and invite a software company to design the platform of “Interlib” for us. This search engine connects every library in the consortium and provides automations for the entire network. It also enables us to standardize our classification for various resources under one unique system. After the system is put into use, we compiled “Handbook of Dongguan Public Library Branches” and “Guidelines for the Development of Dongguan Public Library”. Thus, the whole library system, guided by the same charges, reveals more promising signs of integration.

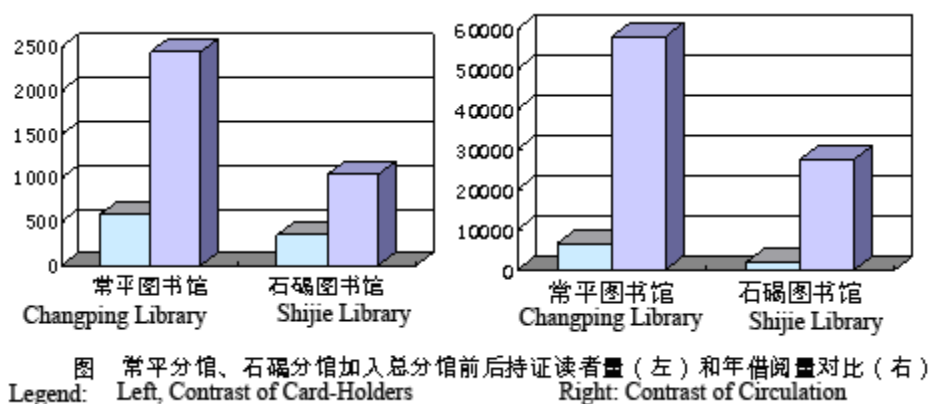
“Interlib” can also manage libraries at different level. From 2004 to 2006, our network expanded to include one central library, twelve branch libraries, four reading rooms, two school and enterprise libraries, and one hundred bookmobiles. The collections of the whole consortium have increased to more than one million and seventy-five thousand volumes. Our system and cooperative initiatives are widely adapted by more

than two hundred libraries across the Guangdong province and the nation. In January 2007, the “Interlib” system received an award from the Ministry of Culture of the People’s Republic of China.

3. Centralization + Outreach -- The Working Method of the Consortium

To establish a service enterprise is not our final goal. We aim at using the centralized information resources and making them accessible to every user in any branches or the digital library in the metropolitan and adjacent area. With one card in hand, our patron can borrow or return materials at convenient locations. Patrons can also use our online service to request or reserve materials. More amazingly, after our network is launched, more than one hundred experts on different aspects sign up for the volunteering online reference services.

The convenient network application boosted rapidly the usage of library collections. In 2005 more than one million and thirty-six thousand patrons used our central library, which was about 80 % more from the previous year. The number of card holders increased from thirty thousand in 2003 to ninety-two thousand in 2006. Especially in branch libraries, this phenomenon is more obvious. For example, in Changping County Library, the number of card holders jumped from five hundred seventy-nine in 2004 to two thousand four hundred and forty in 2006, almost a four hundred times increase. In 2004, materials were circulated six thousand six hundred and twenty-eight times, and in 2006, the number increased to fifty-eight thousand and sixty-one times. In another branch library, the Shijie County Library, their card holders increased from three hundred and forty-seven to one thousand and thirty-seven. Circulations were estimated about twelve times more, from two thousand fifty in 2004 to twenty-seven thousand three hundreds and ninety-three times. The consortial system has not only brought forward advantages in centralizations in management but also enabled us to allocate financial resources more economically. The tables below show the statistics mentioned above:



V. Assimilation into Society by Expanding Services Programs

Library activities are important components to services to the society. When organizing different activities in the library, we took the advantages of the special interiors, rich collections, and experienced human resources, and outreached to our clientele more proactively. In July 2006, we were rewarded the Best Library for Promoting Reading Activities in the Society by the Library Society of China (LSC).

1. Guide Reading Activities -- Dongguan Reading Day

On September 28, 2005, we took the opportunity of the new library opening ceremony and held the first Reading Day in the city. The theme was to build a civilized new Dongguan via reading. On that day, the central library worked together with branch libraries and organized more than three hundred reading programs for our patrons. More than two million users attended those programs and the importance of reading was recognized by our citizens. In 2006, LSC's Committee of Reading Programs held a convention in Dongguan. We took the opportunity and organized more than four hundreds reading workshops and programs. About three hundred thousand people participated in those activities. Such activities were broadcast one thousand eight hundreds' times by different TV stations, from China Central Television (CCTV) to local channels. Thus, the Reading Day served as a platform and connected tightly the library system with our society.

2. Create an Educational Center for Citizens

An educational center is a platform offering various learning opportunities. We opened series of lectures on public interests and on special interests of the migrant workers.

We offered such lectures twice a week. So far, more than one hundred lectures were offered, benefiting more than thirty thousand attendants. We not only offer such lectures in our central library but also extend our services to several branch libraries, such as Changping Branch Library, Humen Branch Library, Qingxi Branch Library, and Houjie Branch Library. By doing so, we fulfill our mission of disseminating knowledge widely and rapidly to our clientele. In the meantime, we invited experts and held several lectures on common interests, such as *The Correspondences of Chinese Government and European Union on Environmental Issues*, and *Science and China*. All these lectures are very popular and received positive feedback from audiences.

There are many foreign enterprises located in Dongguan. So we offer free language classes on Cantonese, Japanese, and English. All the teachers are volunteers. Since October 2005, we already offered one hundred and twenty-eight free classes to our international residents. More than ten thousand people were trained. These classes not only enhance their language skills but also provide more employment opportunities

for them, especially for migrant workers. Other than language classes, we added some hot topics such as accounting and civil law. These classes usually get full registrations quickly. Such phenomena attest to the success of our services.

Besides those serious topics, we organize some lectures on leisure and commercial guidance. We invite specialists from companies and enterprises to talk about investment and property rights. About four thousand people attended forty such lectures.

3. Popular Culture and Service -- Dongguan Cartoon Festival

Cartoon is very popular among our youth group. In order to promote pop culture in a healthy way, we planned the first Dongguan Cartoon Festival in 2006. The festival included an exhibition of cartoon characters, a COSPLAY show, cartoon movie shows, an exhibition on cartoon-related products, cartoon drawing competitions, and book signing by local cartoon designers. In four days, we drew more than twenty thousand people. Three-hundred artists participated in the competitions, and more than forty cartoon fans joined the COSPALY show. Those events were run very successfully. More than thirty news media cross the country reported those events. The second Dongguan Cartoon Festival was even more attractive because we added more programs to it. We have received amazingly positive reactions from the society.

Library came with civilization. A metropolitan public library symbolizes the local culture. Library and society interweave in many aspects. Services in a library must be recognized by the society. We will endeavor further and carry on our mission so as to prove that a library is not only a landmark but also an indispensable knowledge center.

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Author:

Li Donglai, Director of Dongguan Public Library, China.

Note:

Translated into English by Jing Liao, Assistant Professor, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, U.S.A. Email: jiao@uiuc.edu

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