

## Measures and Implications of University Libraries in Chengdu in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Postprint

**Authors:** Ding Hairong, Wang Jialing

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### Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] This study investigates the service measures implemented by university libraries in the Chengdu region during the sudden outbreak of “novel coronavirus pneumonia” in January 2020, and their reference value for university libraries in other regions.

[Method/Process] Focusing primarily on the emergency measures adopted by Chengdu University of Technology Library, this study collects and organizes information on the emergency service initiatives and effectiveness of major university libraries in the Chengdu region during the pandemic, and systematically reviews and summarizes the innovative measures implemented by these libraries.

[Results/Conclusion] On the basis of effective pandemic prevention and disinfection, university libraries in the Chengdu region actively leveraged their advantages in digital resources and network service technologies. Utilizing online services such as new media, email, and QQ groups, they launched special “COVID-19” prevention topics, online digital resource guides, and established online course resource platforms. They also conducted a series of cloud lectures, “information literacy” online courses, and “Book Delivery” contactless borrowing and returning services. These initiatives successfully achieved “suspended classes but not teaching,” “suspended classes but not learning,” and “suspended classes but not research,” realizing continuous reading despite library closure during the pandemic, and fully ensuring the resource needs for learning, teaching, and research for both on-campus and off-campus faculty and students.

## Full Text

# Measures and Insights from University Libraries in Chengdu in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Ding Hairong<sup>1</sup>, Wang Jialing<sup>2</sup> <sup>1</sup> Library of Chengdu University of Technology, Chengdu 610059, China <sup>2</sup> Sichuan Provincial Library, Chengdu 610015, China

## Abstract

**[Purpose/Significance]** This study examines the emergency service measures implemented by university libraries in the Chengdu region during the sudden COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in January 2020 and their reference value for university libraries in other regions.

**[Method/Process]** Focusing on the emergency measures taken by the Library of Chengdu University of Technology, this paper collected and organized data on the emergency service measures and their effectiveness implemented by major university libraries in the Chengdu region during the pandemic, systematically reviewing and summarizing the innovative initiatives undertaken by these libraries.

**[Results/Conclusion]** While implementing epidemic prevention and disinfection measures, university libraries in the Chengdu region leveraged their strengths in digital resources and network service technologies. Through online services such as new media, email, and QQ groups, they launched special COVID-19 prevention projects, provided online digital resource guides, built online course resource platforms, and offered characteristic services including cloud lecture series, online information literacy courses, and “book delivery” contactless borrowing and returning services. These efforts achieved the goals of “suspending classes without suspending teaching,” “suspending classes without suspending learning,” and “suspending classes without suspending research,” ensuring uninterrupted reading despite library closures and fully meeting the resource needs of faculty and students both on and off campus for learning, teaching, and research.

**Keywords:** COVID-19; university library; contactless service; emergency service

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In January 2020, the novel coronavirus pneumonia outbreak (hereinafter referred to as COVID-19) erupted in Wuhan and subsequently spread nationwide, thrusting a war without smoke onto the Chinese people who were preparing for the Spring Festival. On January 25, 2020, 30 provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions across China activated Level I emergency response for major public health emergencies. On January 30, the WHO International Health Regulations Emergency Committee declared the COVID-19 outbreak a Public

Health Emergency of International Concern [1]. The Party Central Committee issued a general mobilization for comprehensive epidemic prevention and control, demanding that epidemic prevention be treated as the most important task at hand [2]. The Ministry of Education promptly issued the “Notice on Earnestly Implementing Novel Coronavirus Pneumonia Epidemic Prevention and Control Work,” designating classrooms, dormitories, and libraries as key areas for environmental sanitation control and requiring all-out prevention efforts to resolutely prevent the spread of the epidemic. Minister of Education Chen Baosheng emphasized at a video conference on epidemic prevention and control in the education system that the epidemic must be resolutely prevented from spreading to campuses to ensure the safety of faculty and students. Universities quickly implemented measures to postpone the start of the semester and prohibit off-campus personnel from entering campuses, while requiring all units to prepare emergency plans before the semester began.

University libraries are characterized by dense populations, high mobility, and frequent use of public items such as books, periodicals, and computer equipment [3-4], making them highly susceptible to virus transmission and thus designated as critical locations for COVID-19 prevention and control on campuses. During the 2003 SARS epidemic, some university libraries in severely affected areas also adopted closure measures. However, 17 years ago, when the internet was not widespread and information was less developed, most services relied primarily on physical libraries. Libraries implemented measures such as limiting the number of visitors, sterilization and disinfection, and temporary closures, which effectively blocked SARS transmission and laid a foundation for responding to major epidemic events. However, the COVID-19 outbreak in January 2020 represents the fastest-spreading, widest-reaching, and most challenging epidemic since the founding of the People’s Republic of China. Consequently, the response measures and sanitation methods used during the SARS period were insufficient to address this epidemic. In light of this, university libraries in the Chengdu region, while implementing safety prevention and control measures, leveraged their resource, professional, and technological advantages to provide distinctive anti-epidemic services for faculty and students. This paper focuses on the work conducted by the Library of Chengdu University of Technology during the pandemic, collecting and organizing emergency service measures implemented by major university libraries in the Chengdu region (such as Sichuan University Library, University of Electronic Science and Technology Library, Southwest Jiaotong University Library, Southwest Minzu University Library, Southwest Petroleum University Library, and Sichuan Normal University Library) to review and summarize the innovative initiatives undertaken during the epidemic period, with the aim of providing reference for other university libraries.

## 2 Environmental Sanitation and Preventive Disinfection Measures

During the epidemic, university libraries in the Chengdu region adopted closure measures to minimize personnel contact. Before and after reopening, following the Ministry of Education's requirement that "every school must prepare for disinfection according to unified deployment and requirements," university libraries actively implemented sanitation and epidemic prevention work in library spaces.

### 2.1 Implementing Preventive Disinfection to Ensure Library Environmental Cleanliness

Library preventive disinfection measures included: public areas such as lobbies, corridors, and restrooms underwent standardized, routine disinfection; public equipment including computer keyboards, mice, and touchscreens were disinfected with alcohol cotton balls for frequently touched parts; ventilation systems [5]: for libraries without air conditioning, windows and doors were opened daily for natural ventilation one week before opening to accelerate air circulation; for libraries with central air conditioning, exhaust fans, and dehumidifiers, such as those at the University of Electronic Science and Technology and Chengdu University of Technology, professional air conditioning maintenance companies were commissioned to clean and disinfect air conditioning ducts, filters, and exhaust fan baffles before opening, and to activate ultraviolet disinfection functions in fresh air systems; books and periodicals [6]: books returned by readers after the mid-to-late January outbreak were dusted and disinfected using ultraviolet self-service book sterilizers, while books returned after reopening were centrally placed and disinfected; restrooms were equipped with hand sanitizer, paper towels, and other hygiene products to create a clean and sanitary environment. For libraries without book sterilizers before the epidemic, an "emergency project special handling" approach was adopted, using special emergency funds from universities to urgently purchase book sterilizers to address the sterilization of returned books after the semester began.

### 2.2 Optimizing Physical Library Space Layout and Expanding Contactless Services

Isolation and non-contact are the oldest and most effective measures to cut off virus transmission. "Contactless service" became a trending term during the epidemic. During the pandemic, shopping malls, cafeterias, and other facilities implemented temperature checks at entrances, maintained safe distances between people, and required one person per table in cafeterias, fundamentally aiming to separate people with barriers. Inspired by this, university libraries in the Chengdu region optimized the space layout of library reading areas based on existing conditions: increasing the distance between reading tables and reducing the number of seats; replacing some furniture in reading areas and adding more tables with partitions; through space renovation, increasing the number

of independent study rooms and small meeting rooms; installing infrared temperature measurement access control systems at entrances; developing a reader reservation app requiring online reservations before entering the library to limit the number of visitors. These measures ensured preparedness for reopening after the epidemic.

It is worth noting that recent epidemics such as SARS and H1N1 influenza have impacted university library operations. Particularly during the 2003 SARS period, some university libraries in severely affected areas adopted closure measures. However, 17 years ago, the internet was not as widespread and information was less developed, with most services relying on physical libraries. The test of this epidemic and identified deficiencies in environmental sanitation and preventive disinfection measures suggest that the library community should follow President Xi Jinping's call to "improve major epidemic prevention and control mechanisms and perfect the national public health emergency management system" [7], strengthen public health legal construction, and put these issues on the agenda. As special public places for knowledge dissemination, libraries should establish library sanitation and epidemic prevention systems, which should be incorporated into library laws when relevant national laws and regulations are revised and improved.

### **3 Using Digital Resources and Online Services to Comprehensively Develop Online Digital Information Services**

While physical libraries were closed, university libraries in the Chengdu region promptly adjusted and deployed business systems, strengthened digital resources and network service technology support, and comprehensively developed online information services. During the epidemic prevention period, university libraries in the Chengdu region implemented a "national chess game" holistic approach, including Sichuan University Library, University of Electronic Science and Technology Library, and Chengdu University of Technology Library, which maintained close contact with relevant university departments (such as Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Graduate School, State-owned Assets Management, and Information Centers) while proactively contacting digital resource service providers, network equipment companies, and technical maintenance service companies to uniformly allocate resources and collaborate to ensure normal operation of information systems and related service platforms [8]. This approach coincided with Harvard University Library's crisis response practices [9] and achieved excellent results in this emergency, providing valuable reference for other university libraries.

### **3.1 Opening Multiple Channels for Faculty and Students On and Off Campus to Access Library Resources and Strengthening Network Service Technology Support**

In the early stages of the epidemic, university libraries in the Chengdu region immediately activated a rapid network response mechanism, arranging dedicated personnel for remote duty to monitor electronic resource operation, promptly repair various network failures, and ensure 24-hour normal operation of online electronic resources and related service platforms. To ensure off-campus faculty and students could access library digital resources, measures included: increasing VPN access authorization quotas to the equipment's maximum capacity; providing VPN services to all faculty, doctoral students, master's students, and full-time undergraduate students; to avoid overloading school servers due to large numbers of users simultaneously accessing the VPN, university libraries comprehensively optimized and enhanced off-campus VPN access services for digital literature resources with support from university network information centers, launching CARS services (China Education and Research Network Authentication and Resource Sharing Infrastructure, currently joined by 559 universities nationwide, including 21 in Sichuan Province). With technical support from the CARS alliance, they expanded off-campus access to 57 domestic and international literature databases including CNKI, VIP, PQDT, Elsevier, and Springer, ensuring that during the epidemic, faculty and students on and off campus could access purchased library resources through VPN (university VPN, library VPN) and CARS pathways, providing more convenient and smooth services for digital resource usage.

### **3.2 Expanding Service Paths and Using New Media, Email, QQ Groups, and Other Methods to Conduct Online Services**

To meet readers' learning and research needs during epidemic prevention and control, university libraries in the Chengdu region promptly transformed service methods, expanded service paths, and improved online service efficiency. Libraries released "epidemic prevention and control period service reminders" and library network service guides through their homepages, WeChat, and Weibo channels. Librarians provided online consultation, document delivery and inter-library loan, scientific novelty search, citation search, and online literature information resource recommendations to faculty and students via WeChat, email, QQ, and other channels. To help readers promptly grasp innovative services and resource developments during the epidemic, the University of Electronic Science and Technology Library leveraged its technical advantages to continuously optimize its official WeChat platform, adding an "Anti-Epidemic Services" column where readers could quickly access the latest service information released by the library. Services at university libraries in the Chengdu region were not affected by epidemic isolation; in fact, they served more readers with richer content, fully demonstrating the information service functions of university libraries. During the epidemic prevention period, electronic resource browsing and download vol-

umes at university libraries reached historic highs. Taking Chengdu University of Technology as an example, as of May 23, the library's electronic resources had approximately 2.38 million downloads, 1.87 times that of the same period in 2019, and its official WeChat visits reached 72,595, 1.63 times that of the same period in 2019.

### **3.3 Launching Online Thematic Activities for “COVID-19 Prevention” and Anti-Epidemic Columns**

To help faculty and students quickly understand the latest knowledge about the novel coronavirus, prevent the epidemic scientifically, and provide anti-epidemic columns, university libraries in the Chengdu region recommended the latest epidemic prevention books and lectures such as the “Novel Coronavirus Pneumonia Public Protection Guide,” “100 Questions on COVID-19 Prevention and Control in Collective Places,” and “COVID-19 Mental Health Guidance Manual.” They organized online activities including “Virus Science Knowledge Competitions” and “Fighting the Epidemic with Love” announcements, migrated the “Scientific Epidemic Prevention—College Student Prevention Knowledge Science Exhibition” online, and conducted series of science exhibitions on COVID-19 prevention knowledge including “Basic Knowledge of COVID-19,” “College Student Return-to-School Knowledge,” and “College Student Physical and Mental Health Knowledge” through WeChat posts at libraries including Sichuan University Library and Southwest Minzu University Library. Through these online thematic activities, they vigorously popularized scientific epidemic prevention knowledge, helped faculty and students distinguish truth from falsehood and think rationally in the information flood, and helped alleviate anxiety and fear during the epidemic, enabling positive psychological adjustment and a quick return to productive learning, working, and living states.

### **3.4 Launching “No Suspension of Learning” Special Topics to Guide Readers in Resource Utilization and Recommendation**

University libraries in the Chengdu region launched a series of “No Suspension of Learning” special topics, including “Anti-Epidemic Tools: Free Resources and OA Resources,” “Free Access to Massive Master Lectures,” “Online Reading Check-ins,” and “MET English Speaking Online Competitions” through new media posts. The University of Electronic Science and Technology Library forwarded WeChat posts such as “65 Publishers and 118 Quality Digital Resource Platforms Open Free Access to University Faculty and Students,” providing effective resource guidance for readers. Some libraries also migrated offline reader recommendation activities online. For example, Chengdu University of Technology Library launched a “You Choose Books, Library Pays” online book borrowing service, meeting faculty and student resource needs during the epidemic through borrowing and home delivery. The University of Electronic Science and Technology Library launched a “You Choose Books, I Buy” foreign language paper book online selection activity, with over 5,000 books exhibited in the cloud,

allowing faculty and students to complete online recommendation activities by scanning QR codes to enter the main page.

### **3.5 Building Online Course Resource Platforms and Opening E-Textbook Express Lanes to Fully Support Online Teaching Resource Needs**

In accordance with Ministry of Education notices and university spring semester teaching arrangements, and to fulfill the requirement of “no suspension of learning, no delay in studies” during the epidemic, university libraries in the Chengdu region responded quickly, collaborating with university functional departments (Academic Affairs, Graduate School, etc.) to urgently build online course resource platforms and open e-textbook express lanes based on the 2020 spring semester syllabi, providing strong resource support for normal online teaching and learning activities. For example, the “2019-2020 Second Semester Online Course Resource Platform” officially launched by the University of Electronic Science and Technology Library on February 14 currently includes over 1,100 undergraduate and graduate textbooks and more than 1,200 teaching reference materials. Readers need to log in via VPN to access the platform, select “undergraduate” or “graduate” based on course attributes, find their school, and enter the corresponding course to view relevant textbooks and references. The platform also collected and organized 24,000+ free open courses from 22 online platforms organized by the Ministry of Education, including China University MOOC, Xuexi Online, and Zhihuishu. Some university libraries provided links to publisher resource platforms that matched their institutional disciplinary development, enabling direct access to electronic teaching resources. For example, Southwest Jiaotong University Library and Southwest Petroleum University Library collaborated with 15 publishers including Peking University Press and China Railway Publishing House to provide links to these publishers’ resource platforms, helping readers directly obtain free electronic teaching resources. The University of Electronic Science and Technology Library, responding to actual online teaching needs, actively contacted various e-textbook database providers to launch trial services for a batch of Chinese and foreign digital resources, including “Yuedu” e-books from Electronic Industry Press, “Science Library” from Science Press, “Wenquan Academy” from Tsinghua University Press, Cambridge University Press textbooks, Cengage Learning Group textbooks, Wiley e-textbooks, and De Gruyter. To address special needs for paper resources, university libraries in the Chengdu region actively innovated service models. For example, Chengdu University of Technology Library established a teaching business consultation group with dedicated personnel responsible for collecting online textbook resource information. For paper books owned by the library or teachers without corresponding electronic resources, the library organized dedicated personnel to digitize and scan them into PDF files, which were then sent to faculty and students via email while simultaneously updating the textbook database. As of May 1, the library had completed digitization scanning of over 500 teaching references and textbooks, fully supporting faculty and student

online teaching needs for textbook resources.

### **3.6 Actively Cooperating with New Online Teaching Forms, Innovating Service Models, and Helping Students Improve Self-Directed Learning Abilities**

In conjunction with various teaching methods currently being implemented, including MOOCs, blended teaching, and live/recorded broadcasting, university libraries in the Chengdu region coordinated and integrated high-quality curricular and teaching resources both on and off campus. Relying on database resources and online teaching platforms, they organized series of cloud lectures and online information literacy education courses to help students improve self-directed learning abilities. To help homebound students “not suspend teaching” and better conduct self-directed learning, libraries fully utilized technological advantages to innovate service models and migrate offline lectures online. For example, to meet the needs of graduating students, major university libraries released series of cloud lecture forecasts in advance through WeChat posts and conducted lectures via Tencent Group Live, Tencent Classroom, and Tencent Meeting platforms, covering topics such as “Complete Guide to Thesis Writing and Defense,” “Introduction to Accessing Scientific Papers,” and “How to Access Off-Campus Resources—Interlibrary Loan and Document Delivery.” Additionally, libraries in the Chengdu region invited e-resource database providers including Springer, Nature, IEL, and EBSCO to organize professional trainers for online database usage training through WeChat mini-programs and QR code access to live broadcast rooms. To further advance the “Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning” curriculum program, university libraries in the Chengdu region seized the opportunity of increased demand for online resources among faculty and students conducting research and learning at home, organizing information literacy course teachers to conduct online lesson preparation via video conferencing and targeted online information education for readers. They collaborated with professional teachers to conduct embedded information literacy education, effectively improving faculty and student literature retrieval skills, helping students enhance self-directed learning abilities, and providing strong resource and skill support for faculty online teaching and student online learning.

### **3.7 Continuously Upgrading “Book Delivery” and Contactless Borrowing/Returning Services**

To meet the information needs of faculty and students during the epidemic, university libraries in the Chengdu region continuously innovated service methods. For example, to address the learning needs of on-campus faculty and students for borrowing paper books, libraries at the University of Electronic Science and Technology, Sichuan Normal University, Southwest Minzu University, and Chengdu University of Technology pioneered warm services such as paper book “book delivery” and contactless borrowing/returning. Faculty and

students submitted borrowing lists, campus card numbers, and contact information by adding a “book borrowing contact” QQ account, agreed on pickup times and locations, and completed contactless borrowing procedures. Staff delivered books to designated locations within 24 hours. To ensure safety, libraries disinfected all books leaving the library and delivered them to faculty and students in sealed plastic bags. The University of Electronic Science and Technology Library continuously upgraded its “book delivery” service based on faculty and student needs, extending service from on-campus to off-campus readers, who could apply for home delivery through the library’s WeChat official account for in-library books. Meanwhile, all university libraries in the Chengdu region extended book loan periods and waived overdue fines, eliminating concerns for faculty and students.

It is worth noting that university libraries still face some issues in enhancing online service capabilities during the epidemic. With physical libraries closed, all readers migrated online, resulting in explosive growth in online user numbers and sudden changes in reader information needs during the special epidemic period, overwhelming library staff. Although university libraries in the Chengdu region quickly adopted active response measures to ensure “closed libraries but non-stop services” during the epidemic, these measures also exposed many defects and deficiencies in library network service technology and digital resource construction, including: insufficient network service technology support. Particularly in the early stages of epidemic prevention and control, the sudden surge in off-campus visitors posed a huge test for the network service systems of university libraries in the Chengdu region. Even libraries with better information infrastructure conditions, such as the University of Electronic Science and Technology and Sichuan University, urgently contacted VPN providers to increase VPN access authorization quotas to the equipment’s maximum capacity to ensure all faculty and students on and off campus could access library resources. While library homepage visits reached historic highs and networks operated under overload, this brought new considerations: do existing library networks, fiber optics, and other hardware infrastructure need upgrading? urgent need to strengthen e-textbook database construction. Under the new situation of vigorous online teaching, faculty and student demand for digital teaching resources has grown exponentially. For example, the textbook database platform launched by Sichuan University on February 16 had reached 480,000 total visits by May 1. Currently, only a few university libraries in the Chengdu region, including Sichuan University Library and the University of Electronic Science and Technology Library, have officially released WeChat posts about textbook database construction platforms. These two libraries’ textbook database platforms were built during the epidemic emergency period: the University of Electronic Science and Technology built its platform in five days, currently holding approximately 2,300 teaching references and textbooks; Sichuan University’s textbook database platform currently holds approximately 1,566 Chinese and foreign electronic teaching references and textbooks, with construction ongoing. This reflects the urgent demand for digital teaching resources from faculty

and students under the new situation of vigorous online teaching, but also indicates that the quantity, disciplinary coverage, and carrier forms of teaching resources such as teaching references and textbooks held by university libraries in the Chengdu region are still insufficient, and e-textbook database construction should be prioritized.

#### 4 Conclusions and Implications

Facing the epidemic, university libraries in the Chengdu region migrated all business and services online, providing diverse characteristic services for faculty and students and fully leveraging the advantages and roles of digital libraries. While implementing epidemic prevention and library disinfection, these libraries capitalized on their strengths in digital resources and network service technologies. By opening multiple channels for faculty and students on and off campus to access library resources, using online services such as new media, WeChat official accounts, email, and QQ groups, launching special COVID-19 prevention projects, providing reader recommendations and online digital resource guides, building online course resource platforms, and offering characteristic services including cloud lecture series, online information literacy courses, “book delivery,” and contactless borrowing/returning, they achieved the goals of “suspending classes without suspending teaching,” “suspending classes without suspending learning,” and “suspending classes without suspending research,” fully supporting the resource needs of faculty and students on and off campus for learning, teaching, and research. Although the emergency measures during the epidemic prevention period exposed issues such as insufficient public health facilities, inadequate network service technology support, and insufficient e-textbook database construction, the emergency measures taken by university libraries in the Chengdu region can provide reference for other university libraries currently undergoing epidemic prevention and control. Moreover, the emergency measures and their deficiencies during this epidemic have provided many insights for librarians and prompted reflection on how to further improve and optimize library development and management models.

With the application of concepts such as “contactless smart libraries” and technologies including internet, cloud services, 5G, big data, and artificial intelligence in university libraries, libraries will leverage their advantages in digital resources and network service technologies to comprehensively develop online digital information services during and after the epidemic. Contactless smart libraries will be the future development trend of smart libraries, achieving non-contact service management through new equipment and facilities such as infrared temperature measurement access control systems, self-service borrowing/returning systems, self-service disinfection systems, and reading seat reservation management systems to maximize non-contact service management. In 2003, physical libraries activated emergency closure plans due to SARS; in 2020, physical libraries activated emergency closure plans again due to COVID-19. If contactless smart libraries become a reality, can physical libraries remain open

during the next sudden major public health event? After this epidemic, internet industries such as online education, remote work, and online shopping will experience explosive development, primarily because these industries can conduct business services normally via the internet unaffected by time and space during special epidemic periods, with surging user numbers. In fact, university libraries also possess these two characteristics: surging reader numbers during the epidemic and migration of all offline business online to achieve “non-contact” services throughout the process. “Closed libraries but non-stop services”—during this extraordinary epidemic period, the function of libraries as information service centers has been particularly prominent. This also strengthens librarians’ belief that since the concept of digital libraries was proposed in 1988 and has developed to today’s digital libraries, the construction concept has been very successful and correct. Facing future development, libraries need to deploy 5G in advance and vigorously develop digital library construction.

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### Author Contributions

Wang Jialing: Paper revision and guidance.

Ding Hairong: Research topic determination, paper structure design, and initial draft writing.

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