

A Review of Research on Social Forces' Participation in Public Library Management in China, 2008-2018: Postprint

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Abstract

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Full Text

Preamble

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A Review of Research on Social Forces' Participation in Public Library Management in China (2008–2018)

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Abstract:

[Purpose/Significance] By analyzing the current state of research on so-

cial forces' participation in public library management in China, this study reveals the research frontiers and development trends in this field, providing decision-making references for social forces' involvement in public library management in the new era. **[Method/Process]** Using papers on the theme of "social forces' participation in public library management" collected in CNKI as the data source, this study employs CiteSpace to generate visual maps of research hotspots and conducts a systematic review of relevant literature. **[Result/Conclusion]** Through analysis of literature in this field, the research hotspots for social forces' participation in public library management in China in the new era include: research on relevant laws and regulations, differentiated development of libraries, innovation in service models, equalization of grassroots public libraries, urban cultural space planning, and the "Internet + Library" direction.

Keywords: social forces; public library; socialized management; CiteSpace; visual analysis

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Public libraries, as vital components of public cultural service construction, should adhere to a "people-oriented" philosophy and make significant contributions to creating an environment for "nationwide reading." In recent years, the contradiction between the public's growing cultural needs and the unbalanced, insufficient development of public cultural services has intensified [1]. Public libraries managed solely by the government can no longer meet these demands, making the participation of social forces in public library management an emerging trend. As early as the 1980s, developed countries such as the United States, Japan, and the United Kingdom had already implemented public-private partnership models for managing public libraries, while China started relatively late. The Sixth Plenary Session of the 17th CPC Central Committee proposed actively guiding social forces to participate in public cultural services. The *Public Cultural Service Guarantee Law of the People's Republic of China*, released in 2016, provided legal safeguards for social forces' participation in public library management [2], explicitly stating that county-level and above people's governments should encourage social forces to participate in public library management and provide certain policy support. This demonstrates that social forces' participation in public library management has received widespread attention and support from the government.

Currently, domestic practice in social forces' participation in public library management has achieved certain results. For example, Beijing Xicheng District Library, Shenzhen Yantian District Library, and Hefei Changfeng County Library have all launched service outsourcing projects. Chuzhou Library, Wuxi New District Library, and Guangzhou Nansha District Library have adopted comprehensive outsourcing models for library management. The new Chuzhou Library in Anhui Province and Chaoyang District Library in Beijing have implemented government-purchase models for library management. It is evident that

attracting professional cultural service companies, civil organizations, and volunteers to participate in public library management has become a development trend.

2. Data Sources and Research Methods

2.1 Data Sources

The data for this study were obtained from the CNKI database. Since China's exploration of social forces' participation in public library management is still in its developmental stage, scholars have used varying keyword expressions in their research on this theme. To improve the comprehensiveness of the literature retrieval, the search query employed a combination of multiple keywords: SU=public library*(‘socialization’+‘social forces’+‘social participation’+‘social organization’+‘service outsourcing’+‘volunteer’+‘PPP model’+‘government purchase’). The search was conducted on November 20, 2018, covering the period from 2008 to 2018. The retrieved literature was imported into EndNote for deduplication, and invalid documents such as newspapers, conference proceedings, journal announcements, and call-for-papers were eliminated, resulting in a final dataset of 938 valid articles. These relevant documents were then imported into CiteSpace software in Refworks format for processing and analysis.

2.2 Research Methods

This study utilizes CiteSpace software to generate visual maps of keywords contained in the literature on social forces' participation in public library management, thereby identifying hotspot topics in this field. The study then analyzes, discusses, and summarizes the literature related to these hotspot topics to determine the research hotspots and trends in social forces' participation in public library management in China.

3. Analysis of Research Hotspots on Social Forces' Participation in Public Library Management in China

Visual analysis of keywords in relevant literature can reflect current research hotspots and development trends in a field. In CiteSpace, NodeTypes was set to “Keyword” to generate a keyword co-occurrence map (see Figure 1). Based on Figure 1, a cluster analysis of keywords in the literature on social forces' participation in public library management was conducted to reflect the relationships between keywords and reveal research hotspots and development trends in this field (see Figure 2). Keywords with a frequency greater than 10 were statistically summarized and compiled into Table 1 .

Based on Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper], Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper], and analysis of relevant literature, the current research hotspots in the field of social forces' participation in public library management in China

mainly focus on volunteer services, government purchase, business outsourcing, Public-Private Partnership (PPP) models, grassroots public libraries, private libraries, and corporate governance structures of public libraries. After removing similar keywords and those with overly broad concepts from Table 1 (such as “volunteer service” vs. “volunteer services,” “public library” vs. “library”), the term “volunteer” has the highest citation frequency at 134 times, followed by “government purchase” at 56 times, “business outsourcing” at 20 times, “PPP model” at 16 times, “grassroots library” at 14 times, “private library” at 11 times, and “corporate governance structure” at 10 times.

3.1 Volunteer Participation in Public Library Management

During the decade from 2008 to 2018, scholars in China’s library and information science field have continuously focused on the practice of volunteer participation in public library management. Article 46 of the *Public Library Law of the People’s Republic of China*, implemented on January 1, 2018, explicitly states that “county-level and above people’s government cultural authorities should provide certain support for public library volunteer services” [3]. Cluster analysis reveals that the volunteer cluster group includes keywords such as reader activities, social support, project management, minors, parent-child reading, and incentives. Current research on volunteer participation in public library management in China mainly concentrates on three aspects:

- (1) **Volunteer Management Mechanisms.** This includes volunteer recruitment, training, evaluation, and rewards and punishments. Song Xiaorong [4] proposed that volunteer management systems, processes, and training systems should be standardized to normalize volunteer services. For example, Nanjing Library formulated the *Nanjing Library Cultural Volunteer Service Charter* in 2012, which clearly stipulates the daily management of volunteers and provides guarantees for the scientific and standardized management of volunteers.
- (2) **Volunteer Service Content.** This includes: (i) basic library work such as civilized guidance, book organization, cleaning, consultation, and order maintenance; (ii) activity-based services such as reading promotion and lectures, including event promotion, guiding public participation, and coordinating event organization to ensure smooth implementation; (iii) services for special groups, primarily for people with disabilities, children, and the elderly; and (iv) other types of services such as participation in ancient book restoration and providing translation services for foreign readers. Hu Hairong [5], taking Wenzhou’s “City Study Room” as an example, pointed out that its model of introducing volunteers to participate in the operation of the study rooms not only reduces labor costs but also cultivates civilized reading awareness among readers. Pang Xuelin [6], using the Tianjin Children’s Library as an example, noted that after introducing a volunteer team from Nankai University to assist in reading promotion activities, the program was warmly welcomed by parents and

children.

- (3) **Volunteer Incentive Mechanisms.** A sound volunteer incentive mechanism can effectively achieve stability in the volunteer service team. Zhang Yueying [7], from an “economic person” perspective, proposed that library volunteers are also “self-interested economic persons” and that libraries should establish comprehensive volunteer incentive systems. Introducing more volunteers to participate in public library management activities can not only reduce labor costs and provide more diversified services but also offer volunteers a platform for self-development.

Chinese scholars have conducted extensive research on volunteer participation in public library management, with numerous practical studies already undertaken. However, research on volunteer incentive mechanisms tends to be theoretical, with fewer studies exploring incentive mechanisms from a practical perspective. With the rapid development of information technology, how to use the Internet to attract more volunteers to participate in public library management is also a research direction, such as studies on the processes, management systems, and reward and punishment mechanisms for online volunteer participation in public library management.

3.2 Government Purchase of Public Library Services

Government purchase of public library services refers to a model where the government funds the procurement of services from social forces. Most Chinese scholars began researching this field after 2013. Cluster analysis reveals that the government purchase cluster group includes keywords such as grassroots libraries, community libraries, government responsibility, and stakeholders. Current research on government purchase of public library services in China mainly includes the following aspects: government purchase mechanisms, government purchase models, government purchase performance evaluation systems, and practical research on government purchase. Government purchase mechanisms include supervision mechanisms, interest coordination mechanisms, efficiency mechanisms, operational guarantee mechanisms, compensation mechanisms, citizen participation mechanisms, reward and punishment mechanisms, and legitimacy mechanisms [8]. Government purchase models include directed purchase and bidding. In research on government purchase performance evaluation systems, Mai Dubiao [9] argued that both the purchasing unit and the contracting unit should be evaluated simultaneously for government purchase of public library services, with rewards and punishments based on rating results to achieve comprehensive target management. Yi Bin, Guo Hua, et al. [10] believed that performance evaluation of government purchase of public library services should design scientific and reasonable evaluation standards and introduce third-party participation in the evaluation. Currently, many public libraries in China have adopted the government purchase service model. For example, Xiamen Library in Fujian Province and the new Chuzhou Library in Anhui Province have implemented government purchase models for operation, which not only transforms

government functions from “running culture” to “managing culture” but also meets the cultural needs of community residents.

Through investigation and analysis of relevant literature, Chinese scholars’ research on government purchase of public library services focuses primarily on government purchase models and practical research, with relatively fewer studies on government purchase performance evaluation systems. However, such studies have been gradually increasing in recent years. Therefore, research on government purchase models should be continuously improved, and studies on government purchase performance evaluation systems should be strengthened. In addition, scholars should pay attention to research on the internal drivers of government purchase services, such as how to improve the service quality of contracting unit personnel and optimize reward and punishment systems.

3.3 Public Library Business Outsourcing

Public library business outsourcing refers to libraries delegating part or all of their business operations to professional companies or organizations to improve work efficiency and service quality. Most Chinese scholars began researching this field after 2011. Research on public library business outsourcing mainly includes three aspects: business outsourcing practice research, business outsourcing quality control, and business outsourcing risk control. Business outsourcing practice research constitutes the main body of research in this field, primarily involving library cataloging business outsourcing and comprehensive outsourcing. Cai Tingjian [11] introduced the benefits and quality issues brought to Shandong Library after implementing cataloging business outsourcing. Li Hong [12] conducted a detailed analysis of the effectiveness of comprehensive library outsourcing in Wuxi New District Library in Jiangsu Province, Nansha District Library in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, and Jinghu District Library in Wuhu, Anhui Province. In research on business outsourcing quality control, Luo Wenyang [13] proposed that supervision and control should be implemented for process quality, result quality, and decision-making quality in library business outsourcing activities, while also improving quality evaluation mechanisms and implementing full-process tracking systems. Huang Ruijuan, taking Dongguan Library as an example, introduced quality issues in its cataloging business outsourcing project and proposed establishing strict quality inspection systems, reward and punishment systems, and introducing competition mechanisms. In research on business outsourcing risk control, Wang Hao [15] argued that risks exist in the selection of outsourcing vendors and the implementation process of outsourcing, and that libraries should establish risk management systems and form risk management teams to achieve effective library business outsourcing.

Through investigation and analysis of relevant literature, Chinese scholars’ research on quality control and risk control of public library business outsourcing is primarily theoretical, with fewer studies combining practice to explore the implementation status and existing problems of business outsourcing projects in public libraries. Meanwhile, Chinese scholars’ research in this field focuses

mainly on library cataloging business outsourcing, with relatively fewer studies on comprehensive service outsourcing, though such studies have been increasing in recent years. Therefore, it is necessary to continue improving the processes of partial business outsourcing in practice, innovate partial business outsourcing models on the existing basis, and continuously strengthen research on comprehensive business outsourcing.

3.4 Application of PPP Models in Public Libraries

The PPP model refers to the partnership between government and private enterprises and is currently a very popular management model for public libraries in China. The *Guiding Opinions on Promoting Public-Private Partnership Models in the Cultural Field*, issued by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Ministry of Finance in November 2018, states that “experienced enterprises should be encouraged and supported to participate in cultural field PPP projects, and the return mechanisms for PPP projects should be continuously improved” [16]. The *Public Cultural Service Guarantee Law of the People’s Republic of China* explicitly states that the state supports social organizations’ participation in the management of public cultural facilities [17]. Additionally, the implementation of documents such as the *Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of a Modern Public Cultural Service System* and the *General Contract Guidelines for Government and Social Capital Cooperation Projects* also provides legal support for PPP models in public libraries. Most Chinese scholars began researching this field after 2015. Through analysis, this cluster group includes keywords such as private enterprises, social capital, brand marketing, and innovative development. Shi Yujuan [18] analyzed the necessity and feasibility of implementing PPP models in public libraries, pointed out potential obstacles, and proposed that the government should establish a detailed legal system for PPP models and that libraries should actively guide social capital to participate in public library construction. Guan Sisi [19] conducted a specific analysis of the early construction and operation management of Jiangyin Library’s “Sanwei Shuka” and Hefei Library’s “Yue Shufang,” noting that after adopting the PPP model, both libraries not only reduced government financial pressure but also effectively utilized library resources, and finally proposed that the government should establish specialized PPP management agencies and improve supervision and performance evaluation mechanisms. Currently, many public libraries have introduced PPP models, such as Shandong Nishan Academy adopting a “library + academy” model, Shenyang Heping District Library adopting a “library + community” model, and Yuhuan City Library in Zhejiang Province adopting a “library + bank” model.

Through investigation and analysis of relevant literature, current research in this field mainly summarizes and improves the structure and processes of PPP model library management from practice. Since the PPP model requires enterprise participation in public library management, and enterprises are profit-oriented, how to protect enterprise interests and maintain long-term cooperation between

enterprises and libraries has become a research focus in this field. At the same time, research on the supervision and performance evaluation of cooperative enterprises, as well as profit distribution and risk sharing between both parties, is also essential.

3.5 Social Forces' Participation in Grassroots Public Library Services

The *National Public Library Development Plan During the 13th Five-Year Plan Period*, released by the Ministry of Culture on July 7, 2017, explicitly proposed to “promote the construction of township (street) and village (community) reading rooms” and encourage social forces to participate [20]. The grassroots public libraries referred to in this paper include county-level and below libraries, encompassing county libraries, community libraries, and rural libraries. Most Chinese scholars began researching this field after 2014, with main research content including supply models and practical research on social forces' participation in grassroots public library services. Li Juan [21] believed that supply models for social forces' participation in grassroots public library services include charitable donations, self-established libraries, cooperative construction, volunteer participation, and developing library service industries. Ou Liang [22] believed that supply models include social donations, foundations, volunteers, councils, and private libraries. In practical research on social forces' participation in grassroots public library services, Shen Lihong [23], through an introduction to the library construction methods of 12 grassroots public libraries in Hangzhou, proposed four countermeasures for social forces' participation in grassroots public library management: the government should make good plans, implement funding guarantees, improve librarian capabilities, and perfect assessment mechanisms. Lu Hejian and Wu Fan [24], through an analysis of the current situation of social forces' participation in Jinghu District, Wuhu City, proposed three countermeasures: the government should strengthen supervision, enterprises should establish incentive mechanisms, and third-party evaluations should be conducted for contractors. Li Yang and Lu Hejian [25], through an introduction to the implementation of the library-store integration model in Hefei's urban reading spaces, proposed four countermeasures: urban reading spaces should establish digital service platforms, constructors and operators should coordinate and communicate, the government should refine legal policies, and publicity channels should be broadened. Lu Hejian and Jiang Fengwei [26] conducted in-depth research and analysis on the construction paths, implementation concepts, and effectiveness of socialized management of three community libraries in Hefei, proposing that future community libraries should implement a “community library +” model and build cross-community cultural exchange platforms.

Grassroots public libraries are characterized by small scale, limited funding, and fixed, concentrated service targets. Research directions vary for grassroots public libraries with different local characteristics, reader groups, and scales. Research on social forces' participation in grassroots public library management in impoverished areas should focus on charitable donations, private operation,

and volunteer participation models, while research on grassroots public libraries with more abundant funds should mainly focus on volunteer participation and cooperative construction models.

3.6 Private Libraries

The *Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of a Modern Public Cultural Service System* explicitly states that “social forces should be encouraged and supported to participate in public library construction through investment and other means” [27]. Private libraries are public welfare libraries established by non-governmental organizations such as social groups or individuals through donations, joint ventures, and other means, and are important components of the public cultural service system. Currently, Chinese scholars’ research on this field mainly includes relevant laws and regulations and practical research. Fu Baozhen [27], through an analysis of the crowdfunding model and operation management of Cangnan “Half Study Room,” concluded that private libraries should optimize management and introduce professional talents, while the government should provide certain policy support. Ruan Yinbo [28], through an introduction to the operation process of Sanmen County Youwei Library, proposed that private libraries can conduct social donation activities to stimulate enthusiasm for library operation and reduce partial burdens. Although some Chinese laws propose encouraging social forces to establish public libraries, specific implementation methods remain imperfect and require further research by scholars. Additionally, how to promote the sustainable development of private libraries, maintain stable funding streams, and improve internal management capabilities are also research priorities in this field.

3.7 Corporate Governance Structure of Public Libraries

The Second Plenary Session of the 17th CPC Central Committee first proposed implementing corporate governance structures in public institutions. Subsequently, the Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee identified corporate governance structures as a key focus for the development of public cultural undertakings. The core of public library corporate governance structure is the establishment of a council. Council members include government representatives, library professionals, and social representatives, with main responsibilities including providing decisions for the sustainable development of libraries and supervising daily library management. By March 2017, 23 public libraries at the sub-provincial level and above had established councils [29]. Feng Jia and Wang Shanshan [30], through a survey of seven national-level pilot institutions for public library corporate governance structures, found that current corporate governance structures exhibit unbalanced regional development, lack of institutional innovation, and low participation of social forces. He Qian [31], through a survey of ten public library corporate governance structures, pointed out that China’s public library corporate governance structures should increase council decision-making power and enhance social force participation.

4. Future Research Trends

Currently, social forces' participation in public library management in China is in a stage of rapid development. The successive promulgation of laws and regulations such as the *Public Cultural Service Guarantee Law of the People's Republic of China* and the *Public Library Law of the People's Republic of China* has provided guarantees for the Chinese government to attract more social forces to participate in public library management in the new era. Future research hotspots in this field include:

4.1 Research on Relevant Laws, Regulations, and Implementation Measures

Currently, most laws, regulations, and implementation measures promulgated by the Chinese government encourage and guide social forces' participation in public cultural services and public library management from a macro perspective. However, as China's practice of social forces' participation in public library management continues to evolve, specific regulations and implementation details regarding access mechanisms for enterprises and individuals and other social forces, risk prevention in the socialized management process, project return mechanisms, and post-performance evaluation and supervision have not yet been formulated. Therefore, research in this field needs to be further refined and deepened.

4.2 Diversified Development of Social Forces' Participation Models

The main models of social forces' participation in public library management in China include volunteer services, government purchase, business outsourcing, and PPP models. Although these have achieved certain results, the models still need improvement and innovation. For example, urban reading spaces have encountered a series of problems during operation, including excessively high human resource costs, lack of consumption concepts among community residents, monotonous activities, and excessive government intervention in social forces. The construction of Guangzhou's "City of Libraries" has faced issues such as low cooperation from some enterprises, monotonous activities, and high personnel turnover rates [32]. Therefore, China's public libraries should formulate targeted recruitment standards to increase the proportion of professional talents, understand the real needs of the public to provide more precise and personalized services, and innovate models of social forces' participation in public library management, such as establishing foundations, implementing council systems, and issuing cultural lottery tickets, to stimulate more social forces to participate in public library management [33].

4.3 Grassroots Community Libraries as a Future Research Focus

Future community libraries and urban reading spaces will be key research directions. The *Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Construction of Grassroots*

Comprehensive Cultural Service Centers explicitly encourages social forces to participate in grassroots public cultural service management through investment, crowdfunding, and other forms [34]. For example, the “Yue·Study Room” 24-hour urban reading space project created by Hefei Library has achieved good results. The preliminary design and construction of these reading spaces are completed by enterprises, while later operations are realized through government purchase, which not only alleviates government financial pressure but also provides the public with a place for leisure and learning, achieving equalization of public reading facilities.

4.4 Urban Cultural Space Planning as a Future Research Trend

Urban cultural space planning is an important component of urban construction, specifically referring to the strategic and overall arrangement of urban cultural space resources by the government. Urban cultural spaces have diverse founders, mainly including government, social organizations, enterprises, and individuals. With continuous economic development, issues such as urban development overload have become increasingly prominent, making the utilization of limited space resources for benign urban planning a key urban concern. Against the backdrop of actively building a “scholarly society” and continuously developing the public cultural service system, urban cultural spaces have attracted widespread attention from scholars. Currently, research in this field mainly focuses on the construction of cultural spaces themselves, with fewer in-depth studies combining cultural spaces with urban construction from a macro perspective. Some Chinese cities have made progress in cultural space planning. For example, under the guidance of the *Hangzhou Cultural Facilities Special Plan (2012–2020)*, Hangzhou has actively promoted social forces’ participation in urban cultural space construction, forming multiple themed reading spaces. The Hangzhou Library Environmental Protection Branch, jointly built by Hangzhou Library and Hangzhou Environmental Group, is China’s first library built on a landfill site [35]. Under the guidance of the *Suzhou Urban Public Cultural Facilities Layout Plan (2015–2030)* [36], Suzhou has continuously improved its main-branch library system, adhered to market-oriented principles, and attracted numerous social forces to participate in urban cultural space management. By the end of 2018, 363 library branches and 60 self-service libraries had been established. Currently, China’s urban cultural space planning is not yet perfect, with a series of problems such as unbalanced regional planning layouts, non-specific implementation measures, mismatch with overall urban construction, and failure to integrate with local characteristics. Therefore, research on urban cultural space planning needs to be further deepened.

4.5 Differentiated Development as a Future Research Hotspot

Public libraries with different local characteristics, scales, and natures should adopt different methods to introduce social forces to participate in public library management. For example, public libraries with more abundant funds

can outsource partial business to focus on developing core businesses; community libraries should introduce large numbers of volunteers to participate in daily management to solve staffing shortages; and libraries at the county level and below can adopt social capital crowdfunding with government assistance to implement library socialized management and solve funding problems.

4.6 “Internet + Library” as a Future Research Focus

With the arrival of the “Internet +” era, public libraries have begun implementing “zero-distance” services. In recent years, public libraries have cooperated with Internet enterprises to develop O2O service models, which not only provide more precise and convenient services for the public but also attract numerous social forces to participate in public library management. For example, libraries in Shanghai, Suzhou, and other places have cooperated with Internet enterprises to launch Alipay “credit deposit-free” borrowing services, achieving “online borrowing, community delivery” [37]. Currently, China’s public library deposit-free borrowing service model is not yet perfect, and the service model is still in the exploration stage. With the continuous development of information technology, public libraries should continuously improve the public cultural service system and achieve deeper integration with Internet technology to effectively gather more social forces to participate in public library management.

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Author Contributions

Lu Hejian: Determined the research 思路, revised the article's topic selection, overall framework, and content, reviewed the paper, proposed revision suggestions, and finalized the manuscript.

Zhao Jin: Proposed the research 思路, collected and organized data, wrote and revised the paper.

Visualization Analysis of Social Forces' Participation in Public Li-

brary Management in China During 2008 to 2018

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Abstract:

[**Purpose/significance**] By analyzing the current state of research on social forces' participation in public library management in China, this paper reveals the research frontiers and development trends in this field, providing important references for social forces' participation in the socialized management of public libraries in China in the new era. [**Method/process**] The data for this paper comes from papers on the theme of "Socialized Management of Domestic Public Libraries" in CNKI. Using CiteSpace and EndNote software, the annual publication volume, journal publication volume, and research hotspots in this field were visualized. [**Result/conclusion**] Through research and analysis of literature in this field, it is concluded that the research hotspots of socialized management of public libraries in China in the future include: differentiated development of libraries, innovation of service mode, equalization of grassroots public libraries, and Internet + library.

Keywords: social forces; public library; social management; CiteSpace; visual analysis

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

Source: ChinaXiv — Machine translation. Verify with original.