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## Strategic Tasks and Their Implementation in China's Public Libraries During the 14th Five-Year Plan: A Discussion on Guangzhou City's Recent Exploratory Practices (Postprint)

**Authors:** Fang Jiazhong

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### Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] Against the backdrop of socialism with Chinese characteristics entering a new era and the promulgation and implementation of the Public Library Law of the People's Republic of China, the formulation of the 14th Five-Year development plan for public libraries is of great significance to the development of the field. This study aims to provide recommendations for plan formulation. [Method/Process] Using planning elements as a framework and combining them with the practice of Guangzhou's "City of Libraries" construction in recent years, this study analyzes the strategic tasks, objectives, pathways, measures, and related issues in the development of public libraries during the 14th Five-Year period and the medium-to-long term. [Results/Conclusions] Public libraries in the new era, especially during the 14th Five-Year period, should regard service system construction as a strategic task. The strategic objective is to establish a public library branch system that basically covers streets, towns, and townships. The basic pathways include adopting the county-level main-branch library system construction as the fundamental model, mobilizing the entire public library industry to participate through models such as the central library main-branch system; prioritizing urbanized areas and areas with specified per capita GDP indicators. Key measures and driving mechanisms include promoting demand visualization, enhancing library service effectiveness, promoting government fulfillment of primary responsibilities, and establishing national major special projects for promotion, etc. While promoting system construction, it is necessary to properly handle its relationship with transformation and development, effectiveness enhancement, social participation, etc.

## Full Text

### Abstract

**[Purpose/Significance]** Against the backdrop of socialism with Chinese characteristics entering a new era and the promulgation and implementation of the Public Library Law of the People's Republic of China, formulating the "14th Five-Year Plan" for public libraries holds great significance for the development of the cause. This study aims to provide recommendations for planning formulation. **[Method/Process]** Using the planning elements as a framework and combining recent practices from Guangzhou's "City of Libraries" initiative, this paper analyzes strategic tasks, objectives, paths, measures, and related issues for public library development during the "14th Five-Year Plan" period and beyond. **[Result/Conclusion]** In the new era, especially during the "14th Five-Year Plan" period, public libraries should regard service system construction as their strategic task. The strategic objective is to establish a public library branch system that basically covers streets, towns, and townships. The basic path includes taking county-level main-branch library system construction as the fundamental model, mobilizing the entire public library industry to participate through central library main-branch models, and prioritizing urbanized areas and regions where per capita GDP exceeds certain thresholds. Key measures and driving mechanisms include promoting demand visualization, improving library service performance, pushing governments to fulfill their primary responsibilities, and establishing national major special projects. While promoting system construction, relationships with transformation development, performance improvement, and social participation must be properly managed.

**Keywords:** public library; "14th Five-Year Plan"; strategic task; service system construction; strategic objective; "three pillars" analytical framework

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After 40 years of reform and opening up, the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2017 announced that socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era and made strategic arrangements for building a modern socialist strong country by the middle of the 21st century. In 2018, the Public Library Law of the People's Republic of China (hereinafter referred to as the Public Library Law) was formally implemented, representing a milestone event in public library development. These major events have prompted the library community to reflect on and research what kind of public library cause we need to build in this new era. The year 2020 marks the time node for formulating the 14th Five-Year Plan and even medium- and long-term plans. Drawing on previous research and Guangzhou's exploration practices in recent years, this paper offers some thoughts from a planning perspective for reference.

Public libraries are an important component of China's basic public services. Practice, theoretical exploration, and policy research by the industry, academia,

and cultural authorities since the beginning of the 21st century have all shown that service system construction is the basic path to achieving equalization of knowledge, information, and cultural services undertaken by public libraries. In other words, the strategic task for public library development in the new era is service system construction. When cultural authorities and libraries formulate the “14th Five-Year Plan” or medium- and long-term plans, they must first implement and align with this national strategic arrangement.

The Public Library Law promulgated after the 19th Party Congress explicitly states that “the state shall establish a public library service network covering urban and rural areas that is convenient and practical,” stipulating that local people’s governments at or above the county level are the construction subjects of the public library service network. The Fourth Plenary Session of the 19th CPC Central Committee made comprehensive arrangements for promoting the modernization of the national governance system and governance capabilities, requiring comprehensive advancement of law-based governance and administration, improvement of the people’s cultural rights and interests protection system, improvement of the urban and rural public cultural service system, optimization of urban and rural cultural resource allocation, promotion of grassroots cultural benefit projects, and expansion of coverage and enhancement of effectiveness. Current major policies also include the 2015 General Office of the CPC Central Committee and General Office of the State Council’s “Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of a Modern Public Cultural Service System” and the 2016 former Ministry of Culture and other five ministries’ “Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Construction of County-level Cultural Centers and Libraries Main-Branch System.” The promulgation of relevant national laws and policies has provided strong guarantees for public library service system construction. The primary task of public library service system construction is to implement and align with national development strategies.

## **2. Strategic Task: Service System Construction**

### **2.1 Implementing and Aligning with National Development Strategies**

The 19th Party Congress planned a two-stage strategic arrangement from building a moderately prosperous society in all respects to basically achieving modernization and then to building a modern socialist strong country, clearly stating that by 2035, basic public service equalization should be basically achieved. This provides the fundamental basis for determining the strategic task of public library service system construction. The Public Library Law and relevant national policies have established the legal and policy foundation for service system construction.

### **2.2 Meeting Public Cultural and Reading Needs**

Behind national strategies are the people’s growing needs for a better life, including cultural life needs. Public cultural life and needs are influenced by

macro factors such as economy, education, science and technology, and politics, among which the economy is the foundation that determines public cultural demand and consumption levels; education is the condition that determines public cultural life capabilities; science and technology are means that continuously enrich public cultural lifestyles; and politics is the guarantee that shapes the social environment and determines public financial investment levels. Among these factors, economic and educational influences are endogenous and more fundamental.

Economic development stimulates and supports cultural demand and consumption. According to development economics research, when per capita GDP exceeds 5,000 US dollars, public spiritual and cultural demands will surge, and cultural consumption will occupy a dominant position. According to IMF data, China's per capita GDP in 2018 was 9,608 US dollars, and it is projected to reach 12,900 US dollars by 2022. These figures indicate unprecedentedly high cultural demand and huge potential for cultural consumption. According to a 2019 survey by the China Tourism Academy, cultural consumption has become an important way to improve national well-being, with 52% of respondents believing that cultural consumption can improve people's quality of life and happiness, being more important than basic needs; 39% considering it a daily necessity as important as basic needs.

Public needs related to public libraries are based on reading needs, influenced by a series of factors including reading willingness, ability, behavior, and habits, among which reading ability is a prerequisite that depends on education levels. Since 1982, China's population education level has significantly improved. The proportion of the population with high school education or above increased from 7.2% in 1982 to 29.3% in 2018; the proportion with college education or above increased from 0.6% in 1982 to 13.0% in 2018; the average education years of the population aged 60 and above increased from 5.2 years in 1982 to 9.26 years in 2018. The leap in public education levels and reading abilities, combined with a long tradition of emphasizing culture and education and a widespread attitude of valuing reading, has put forward strong demands for public library services and their system construction.

### 2.3 Supporting National Cultural Power Construction Goals

From the perspective of the national "five-in-one" overall layout and coordinated development, the public library cause should be basically synchronized with national economic and social development levels. However, whether measured by total or per capita indicators, public library service system construction lags far behind economic development levels. Comparing data from 1979-2018, China's total GDP increased from 406.26 billion yuan to 90.0309 trillion yuan, a 220.61-fold increase over forty years, while per capita GDP grew from 419 yuan to 64,664 yuan, a 153-fold increase. During the same period, the total number of public libraries (institutions) nationwide only increased from 1,651 to 3,166 in 2017, a mere 0.92-fold increase. The average service population per

library decreased from 590,000 to 440,000, with system coverage increasing by only 34%. Even including the 19,239 branch libraries and 2,135 mobile book vehicles reported in the China Library Yearbook, the total service facilities and coverage only increased by 13.86-fold and 9.35-fold respectively. These figures sufficiently reflect the basic fact that China's public library development lags far behind national economic development.

From the perspective of building a culturally strong country, it is necessary to research and determine service system construction goals commensurate with overall objectives. China has not yet clarified this goal. However, as a global undertaking, public libraries can use the service and construction levels of developed countries as a reference. Compared with developed countries, China's public library service system lags far behind in both service output and input guarantees. Table 1 shows a comparison between China and the United States. As shown in Table 1, in terms of facility coverage, China is about one-third of the United States; in terms of per capita library visits and ten-thousand-person participation in reader activities, China is one-eighth and one-sixth of the United States respectively; in terms of per capita circulation, China is only one-eighteenth of the United States. Using the United States as a reference, China's public library service system construction still has a long way to go.

#### **2.4 Seizing Historical Opportunities to Promote Public Library Development**

Public library service system construction is a basic public service policy that requires massive resource investment from the state, so its advancement requires opportunities or timing. In the new era, both the strategic arrangements of the 19th Party Congress and national legislation have provided historic opportunities for public library service system construction. Similar opportunities, in my view, include: first, the "sixth five-year plan" in 1982, which proposed and implemented the goal of "every county having a library," which played a significant role in promoting China's public library development against the backdrop of reform and opening up; second, the free opening policy for public libraries promoted by the former Ministry of Culture nationwide since 2011, which pushed public library services as basic public services into an era of public rights protection.

There may have been only two historical opportunities for public library service system construction. The first was after the implementation of the Public Library Law in 2018, but so far, overall institutional design has not been transformed into governance actions. The second, and currently most important, opportunity is to incorporate system construction into the "14th Five-Year Plan" and national medium- and long-term development plans. Based on the revenue and expenditure situation of governments at all levels in recent years, if this opportunity is missed, it will become increasingly difficult to promote system construction in the future, and the window for implementing the Public Library Law will gradually close.

### 3. Strategic Objective: Establishing a Public Library Branch System Basically Covering Streets, Towns, and Townships

Establishing a strategic objective means clarifying the development level to be achieved in terms of tasks or directions, or clarifying the degree and level of coverage in the general expression of achieving full coverage of the public library service system, to achieve precise positioning of tasks or objectives.

It should be emphasized that corresponding to the changes in China's main contradictions in the new era, the substantive task of public library service system construction is first to build more library facilities, extending coverage from the current county level to urban and rural grassroots levels, and second, to achieve systematic and efficient operation of these facilities. A public library service system is a professional system that includes five levels of connotation: facilities, capacity, efficiency, effectiveness, and value. The focus of service system construction lies in the first-level task. In my view, its objective needs precise positioning. It is recommended that by 2035, counting from the former Ministry of Culture's promotion of public cultural service demonstration zones in 2011, a total of 25 years should be used to achieve basic coverage of public library service systems to streets, towns, and townships.

#### 3.1 Demand, Guarantee, and Service “Three Pillars” Analytical Framework

I have previously proposed a “three pillars” understanding framework for public library development—demand, guarantee, and service—and now extend it to analyze public library service system construction objectives, as shown in Table 2 .

#### 3.2 Macro-Level SWOT Analysis

Based on the aforementioned framework, a macro-level analysis is conducted from four dimensions: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges of public library service system construction.

**Strengths:** Strong public demand, awakening and continuous strengthening of rights consciousness; long-term professional consciousness of librarians, especially various explorations and academic research conducted nationwide since the 21st century to promote library service system construction, forming main-branch systems, central library main-branch systems, alliance systems, and other models; consensus formed by cultural administrative departments at all levels since the state first proposed building a public cultural service system in 2005 and the former Ministry of Culture began piloting public cultural service demonstration zones nationwide in 2011; a certain system foundation formed through long-term efforts, with relatively mature service systems established in some areas; major policy guarantees formed at the national level, especially

the promulgation and implementation of the Public Cultural Service Guarantee Law and the Public Library Law, as well as legislative or administrative-level policy guarantees in some regions.

**Weaknesses:** As the competent department for public libraries, the cultural department holds a relatively weak position in the government department sequence, making it difficult to secure more public financial and human resource investment and support; public library service performance and social impact are generally low, unable to fully demonstrate the social value of public libraries and their service systems, making it difficult to obtain widespread attention and support from government and society; insufficient professional management support within the library industry, manifested in the fact that China's library community has not yet established a business statistical indicator system and working mechanism that reflects the needs and reality of service system construction, coordinates with economic and social development, meets social demands and expectations, and aligns with international library development, resulting in unclear foundations of public library service system construction, unclear inputs and outputs, lack of academic research support, absence of a unified industry voice, and inability to effectively interact with government and all sectors of society to secure support.

**Opportunities:** The new era proclaimed by the 19th Party Congress, the “five-in-one” overall layout and corresponding strategic arrangements, and the internal needs of the country's economic and social coordinated development have provided a strategic opportunity period for public library service system construction; the Public Library Law implemented in 2018 has provided a window period during which government departments and all sectors of society will pay widespread attention, making it easier to secure understanding and support; the national governance system and governance capacity construction promoted since the 18th Party Congress have further enhanced the country's organizational and implementation capabilities, and China's socialist system's advantage of concentrating resources to accomplish major tasks is also conducive to nationwide public library service system construction.

**Challenges:** Public library service system construction covers a wide range, involves multiple levels, has regional and urban-rural differences, and presents complex strategic tasks; in recent years, economic development has entered a new normal, with declining economic growth rates and fiscal revenue growth, while public fiscal expenditures have not undergone structural changes and the proportion of public cultural expenditures remains low, and uncertainties in China-U.S. relations may have long-term impacts on economic development; improved economic conditions do not necessarily lead to increased government attention and investment in public library development, and publicity for law-based administration and “library awareness” remains relatively weak, with government fiscal guarantees often absent; national guidance and encouragement policies for social forces to participate in public cultural services are insufficient; the state implements strict control and continuous reform over staffing, while

relevant service purchase policies are not yet complete, making it difficult to provide human resource guarantees for the rapidly developing public library service system; reforms of the professional qualification system in recent years are in a deepening exploration stage, with scarce research on related human resource structures, and specialized service team construction faces many difficulties; technological development has a huge impact on public reading methods and corresponding library service methods and paths, with mobile phone entertainment forming strong competition for public leisure time utilization.

### 3.3 Micro-Level Demand, Guarantee, and Service Analysis

**Demand Analysis:** Focuses on examining individual public demand and population concentration. I believe that, for the country as a whole, targeting the street, town, and township level is generally appropriate. At the end of 2018, mainland China's total population was 1.39538 billion; the average per county-level district (2,851 county-level administrative divisions) was 489,400 people; the average per street, town, and township (39,945 township-level administrative divisions) was 34,900 people; the average per village and community (605,000 administrative villages and communities) was 2,306 people; the urban permanent population was 831.37 million, with an urbanization rate of 59.58%. Based on the aforementioned national statistics on education levels, we roughly estimate that at the street, town, and township level—that is, at the population scale of 34,900—there are approximately 10,000 people with high school education or above and about 4,500 people with college education or above, which can generally concentrate considerable reading demand.

**Guarantee Analysis:** Focuses on examining government public financial guarantee. I believe that covering the street, town, and township level is largely compatible with China's current economic and social development level and local financial capacity, and is generally feasible. China has 34 provincial-level administrative divisions, 333 prefecture-level divisions (including 293 prefecture-level cities and 30 autonomous prefectures), 2,851 county-level divisions (including 970 municipal districts, 375 county-level cities, 1,335 counties, 117 autonomous counties, and 3 autonomous banners), and 39,945 township-level divisions (including 8,393 sub-district offices, 21,297 towns, 10,253 townships, and 2 district public offices). China's tax-sharing system reform in the 1990s concentrated 75% of financial resources at the central level, leaving local governments with relatively weak financial capacity, especially at lower levels. However, with continuous reform of the fiscal and tax system, local financial capacity should gradually strengthen. Therefore, while government public finance currently guarantees library construction at the county and district level, extending one level downward is feasible, but achieving full coverage at the village and community level would not be feasible at least at the national level.

**Service Analysis:** Mainly analyzes the professional capabilities of grassroots library service system operation entities. According to the institutional design of the Public Library Law, the hub of the grassroots system is the county-level

public library as the county-level main library. Examining its professional capabilities, supporting one level down to streets, towns, and townships is generally feasible. In 2017, there were 2,753 county-level public libraries nationwide, with an average building area of 3,100 square meters, collections of 171,000 items, fiscal appropriations of 2.5131 million yuan, new collection acquisition fees of 323,400 yuan, circulation of 154,200 person-times, 117,600 book loans, 35 activities with 14,100 participants, website visits of 102,400 page views, and 12.02 staff members. County-level libraries with new collection acquisition fees of less than 10,000 yuan accounted for 16.09%, and those with building area of less than 800 square meters accounted for 16.24%. If coverage extends to the street, town, and township level, one county-level main library would need to operate or support an average of 15 branch libraries. The analysis shows that county-level libraries in China are generally weak in their own capabilities. Supporting about 15 branch libraries is feasible from a management span perspective, but further expanding coverage would likely be unsustainable.

Based on the comprehensive analysis of the aforementioned demand, guarantee, and service “three pillars,” the objective of establishing a public library branch system covering streets, towns, and townships is feasible. Of course, the new era should no longer promote service system construction through administrative “one-size-fits-all” approaches. If we exclude areas with low population density and particularly difficult economic conditions under unbalanced development, basically forming a public library branch system at the street, town, and township level nationwide would be moderately scaled and comparable to public library systems in countries with similar economic development levels. If we use this framework to analyze China’s unsuccessful attempts at public library service full coverage in the 1950s and 1980s, as well as current unsuccessful practices in various regions, we can generally understand that there must be problems in one or more of the “pillars.” Similarly, Norway’s public library system also has the problem of “over-distribution” worthy of China’s study and reference. According to 2002 statistics, 244 Norwegian cities with populations under 5,000 had 490 main and branch libraries, meaning an average of 2 libraries per city, resulting in many libraries being too small to guarantee comprehensive, high-quality services. In this sense, what we usually call full coverage of public library services is more precisely expressed as “moderate coverage.” Only in this way can public library service system construction break out of the cycle described by Qiu Guanhua et al. as “construction—collapse—reconstruction—re-collapse.”

### 3.4 Relationship with Existing Work Arrangements

Corresponding to the institutional design of the Public Library Law, we can understand that the ultimate objective will be achieved in two steps. The first step will be to achieve professional services at the street, town, and township level first. More grassroots services can be realized through service points or even branch forms, but without mandatory requirements. Corresponding to the objective determined in the 2016 “Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Con-

struction of County-level Cultural Centers and Libraries Main-Branch System” by the former Ministry of Culture and other five ministries, we can understand that the implementation scope will expand from “areas with conditions” to basically covering streets, towns, and townships, the timeline will be extended from 2020 to 2035, and the development level will progress from technical systems to facility systems, product and service systems, and performance systems.

If we count from the former Ministry of Culture’s promotion of public cultural service demonstration zones nationwide in 2011, China will use 25 years to achieve a fair and efficient basic coverage of public library branch systems at the street, town, and township level. Compared with China’s promotion of “every county having a library,” the new era’s system construction objective is more ambitious and arduous, the implementation period is generally appropriate, and achieving the new objective will inevitably represent tremendous progress in China’s public library services.

### 3.5 Guangzhou Practice

Guangzhou has implemented the “Guangzhou Public Library Regulations” since 2015 to comprehensively promote the construction of the “City of Libraries.” Over the past few years, progress has been smooth and results remarkable. I believe that one of the fundamental reasons for the smooth advancement of Guangzhou’s practice is the scientific and rational positioning of objectives. Guangzhou’s proposed system construction objective is to achieve professional public library service guarantees at 170 streets and towns in 11 districts. Let us try to analyze it using the “three pillars” framework.

**Demand (Population Concentration) Analysis:** In 2018, the city’s permanent resident population was 14.9044 million, with an urbanization rate of 86.38%; the average population of 11 districts was 1.3549 million; the average population of 170 streets and towns was 87,700; the average population of 2,638 communities and administrative villages was 5,650.

**Guarantee (Economic Foundation) Analysis:** In 2018, per capita GDP was 155,491 yuan (23,497 US dollars), reaching the level of developed economies and having the conditions to guarantee system construction at the street and town level.

**Service Analysis:** 11 regional main libraries support an average of 14 branch libraries. Over the past few years, system construction has achieved remarkable results. From 2015 to 2018, the number of public libraries (branches) steadily increased from 87 to 122, 156, and 191, with street and town coverage increasing from 46.47% to 57.65%, 72.35%, and 80.59%. According to plan, 170 streets and towns will be fully covered by 2020. During this period, government guarantee investment and library service performance improved simultaneously. Guangzhou’s practice proves that the objective of covering public library branch systems to streets and towns is generally feasible and sustainable. Considering Guangzhou’s population size, quality, economic strength, and other factors, as

well as the national situation, I believe it should be feasible to basically achieve similar objectives nationwide by 2035.

## 4. Basic Path

### 4.1 County-Level Main-Branch System Construction as the Basic Model

The county-level main-branch system is the statutory model. Article 13 of the Public Library Law stipulates that county-level people's governments shall establish a main-branch system based on local conditions with county-level public libraries as main libraries, township (street) comprehensive cultural stations, and village (community) reading rooms as branches or grassroots service points. Under this model, county-level people's governments bear the primary construction responsibility, cultural administrative departments bear administrative management responsibilities, and county-level libraries bear unified management or business management responsibilities.

China is a unitary state with four administrative levels: province, prefecture-level city, county-level district, and township/street, where the jurisdiction of higher-level administrative divisions overlaps with lower-level ones (see Table 3). Through county-level main-branch system construction, full coverage of public library facilities and services can be achieved at the grassroots level nationwide.

### 4.2 Mobilizing Whole Industry Participation Through Central Library Main-Branch Models

Building regional library systems with central libraries as the main body has a huge driving effect on realizing the basic model of county-level main-branch systems, where prefecture-level, sub-provincial, and provincial libraries can all assume central library responsibilities. The advantage of this model is that it utilizes the relatively rich resource advantages of prefecture-level and above libraries to undertake regional business main library responsibilities as much as possible, sharing the responsibility of relatively weak county-level libraries in system construction. Successful practices in Jiaxing, Guangzhou, Shanghai, and other places have proven this model to be highly feasible.

Prefecture-level and above libraries, as main entities in central library main-branch system construction, have significant practical importance. According to statistics, in 2018, China had 298 prefecture-level and above cities covering 965 municipal districts, accounting for about 34% of county-level administrative divisions, meaning that central library main-branch systems can cover one-third of the country's regions.

I further suggest that through central library main-branch models, industry forces can be integrated to fully mobilize participation from national, provincial, and prefecture-level libraries at all levels, forming industry synergy to jointly complete the strategic task of service system construction. In other words,

since it is a strategic task, it should mobilize resources from the entire industry, and libraries at all levels should participate. Prefecture-level and above libraries should adjust their responsibilities and tasks accordingly, making service system construction a strategic task for a certain period and allocating relatively sufficient human, financial, and material resources to accomplish it. Among them, prefecture-level, sub-provincial, and provincial libraries, as important participants in county-level main-branch system construction, can directly assume business management responsibilities (planning, supervision, standards, funding, support, etc.) and some business construction responsibilities (network services, technology platforms, service platform construction, etc.) in regional system construction besides administrative management. Provincial public libraries, as participants in county-level main-branch system construction, can also strive to establish and manage provincial-level system construction funding projects. The National Library assumes the responsibility for overall coordination of national public library system construction, including: cooperating in formulating national system construction plans, organizing the formulation of national system construction business standards, striving to establish and manage national-level system construction funding projects, organizing the compilation of annual reports on national system construction and promoting information disclosure.

### 4.3 Prioritizing Urbanization Areas

In large and medium-sized city districts or county-level cities—that is, areas primarily urbanized—due to relatively high economic development levels, abundant resources, high population density, high education levels, and good public library basic conditions, they can be required to take the lead in achieving main-branch system construction. If this path is implemented, the service system will cover most regions and populations. In 2018, China had 672 cities at all levels, with 1,345 county-level city districts, 8,393 sub-district offices, and 21,297 towns; China’s permanent population urbanization rate was 59.58%, and it is predicted that by 2030-2035, China’s permanent population urbanization rate will reach about 70%. Prioritizing urbanization areas means that public library services can first cover 74.33% of township-level administrative divisions and about 70% of the population.

Prioritizing urbanization areas has another advantage. According to the Legislation Law of the People’s Republic of China (amended in 2015), China’s 282 cities with districts enjoy local legislative power, making the strongest policy guarantee for system construction—local legislative guarantees—possible.

The idea of prioritizing urbanization areas is also the internal reason why the aforementioned system construction objective is specifically expressed as “establishing a public library branch system basically covering streets, towns, and townships” when the target is to cover all township-level administrative divisions nationwide, and why one of the aforementioned paths is the county-level main-branch system specifically expressed as “county-level main-branch system

construction as the basic model.”

#### **4.4 Prioritizing Areas Where Per Capita GDP Exceeds National Average or 10,000 US Dollars**

China’s economic development levels have east-west regional gaps and urban-rural gaps, while China is also an administratively-led development country. Therefore, using economic development level as the main standard and economic foundation as support to propose higher requirements for basic public services is more reasonable, relatively easy to incorporate into the vision of local decision-makers and into local economic and social development master plans and annual plans. At the same time, because there are universal indicators and standardized annual statistical data for technical docking, it is feasible. This is also the internal logic for China’s basic public service levels, such as social security, to continue to improve dynamically with economic development, but public library services have not yet been connected with it.

This standard can be used to define the “areas with conditions” proposed in the 2016 “Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Construction of County-level Cultural Centers and Libraries Main-Branch System” by the former Ministry of Culture and other ministries. Chinese local governments have large differences in levels, categories, economic conditions, and population sizes; based on practical experience, economic conditions have a greater impact on basic public services than population size. Public library service system construction can consider using government levels and categories plus per capita GDP levels as classification standards for requirements, that is, areas with per capita GDP reaching a certain level are required to establish public library branch systems covering the street, town, and township level.

#### **4.5 Guangzhou Practice: Central Library Main-Branch System**

The system model adopted by Guangzhou in building the “City of Libraries” is the central library main-branch system. The “Guangzhou Public Library Regulations” stipulate that the Guangzhou Library established by the municipal people’s government is the central library for the city’s public libraries, district-level libraries are regional main libraries, and town and street public libraries are branches.

Its characteristics include: the status and relationships of central libraries, regional main libraries, and branches are determined by local legislation, giving them authority; central libraries leverage resource advantages to maximize their responsibilities as the city’s business main library, undertaking digital libraries, book delivery, and other affairs that break away from traditional path dependence; the regional main-branch system is driven by institutional innovation, that is, local legislation creates district-level governments as the construction subjects for regional main-branch systems, giving regional main libraries management authority over branches with institutional and administrative manage-

ment system support and a solid legal foundation; it achieves functional division among libraries at all levels and systematic operation mechanisms for publicity and promotion. Specifically:

The central library is responsible for guiding and coordinating public library business throughout the city, including six statutory duties: formulating and organizing the implementation of unified business standards and service specifications for public libraries throughout the city; coordinating the city-wide interlibrary loan service network, information management systems, and digital library construction; organizing professional training for public library staff throughout the city; conducting domestic and international exchanges and cooperation in the library field; establishing a city-wide unified general digital information resource database to achieve joint construction and sharing of Guangzhou's digital library and universal, equal digital library services throughout the city.

Regional main libraries are responsible for unified management of public libraries within their regions; town and street branches are mainly responsible for providing basic services. Under the business guidance of the central library, regional main libraries perform the following duties: responsible for unified management of affiliated branches; responsible for procurement, cataloging, and logistics distribution of literature and information resources for their own libraries and affiliated branches according to city-wide unified business standards; responsible for formulating service specifications for their district's public libraries (rooms) and service outlets according to city-wide unified service specifications; responsible for overall allocation of staff for their own libraries and affiliated branches; conducting domestic and international exchanges and cooperation in the library field.

Since 2015, Guangzhou's "City of Libraries" systematic management framework has been basically formed. The city and district-level government cultural administrative departments have actively performed their statutory duties. The central library has fully played its role as the core of business management and service systems, promoting two key aspects: comprehensively performing statutory duties, including assisting in formulating and implementing supporting systems, promoting city-wide digital library resource sharing and service coverage, and promoting city-wide service standardization and equalization; establishing business statistical analysis and information disclosure systems as foundational systems for implementing systematic management, participating in organizing and promoting systematic publicity and promotion; guiding and supporting regional main-branch system construction; leading the city's service performance to achieve leapfrog growth, including promoting the formulation of performance indicators and promoting reading promotion activities city-wide; building exemplary service systems, with 14 branches, 20 mobile library service points, and 7 self-service libraries in 2018, gradually accumulating experience in branch construction, management, and service, and then promoting the standardization and specialization of branch construction city-wide; promoting service innova-

tion, including expanding book delivery, “Guangzhou-Foshan integration” services, etc. The 11 district libraries have steadily advanced their functions as regional main libraries, all achieving unified procurement and cataloging of paper information resources, unified logistics, interlibrary loan, and standardized services. Six districts have partially achieved unified staffing, seven have set up functional departments and work teams, and eight have set up special funds; system operation efficiency has significantly improved. In addition to substantially increasing exchange activities, since 2015, literature loan service efficiency has increased by 23.19%, and reader reception service efficiency has increased by 14.77%.

## 5. Key Measures: Establishing Driving Mechanisms

Based on the aforementioned demand, guarantee, and service “three pillars” analytical framework, achieving the system construction objective requires promoting a “three-wheel drive” mechanism for the “three pillars” to achieve sustainable development of system construction.

### 5.1 Promoting Demand Visualization

Demand is the endogenous driving force for public library service system construction, and demand guidance is the primary prerequisite for sustainable development of system construction. Therefore, making demand perceived often becomes a key link in driving system construction. Making the public, especially the mass media, feel the demand to form a supportive social environment; making leaders at all levels, especially decision-makers, feel the demand has particularly practical significance.

Promoting demand visualization includes stimulating demand, such as building good new libraries. The establishment of new libraries in cities like Guangzhou, Changsha, Taiyuan, Pudong New Area, and Foshan has greatly stimulated public demand for reading, learning, and cultural exchange. It also includes manifesting demand, such as conducting social demand surveys and releasing survey reports, compiling annual development reports, and formulating promotional materials to quantify, visualize, and continuously display demand. It also includes making stakeholders and decision-makers feel demand, such as guiding them to visit libraries with strong public demand. Since its full opening in 2013, Guangzhou Library has seen continuous growth in visits, receiving 4.27, 6.20, 6.15, 7.40, 7.95, and 8.39 million visitors annually, becoming widely recognized as a “city cultural landmark” and the best advertisement for meeting public reading and learning needs and demonstrating the social value and role of public libraries. It has played a fundamental role in promoting local legislation and the smooth advancement of the “City of Libraries” construction. Since its opening, the new library has received about 1,000 batches of domestic and international visitors, playing a prominent role in making leaders everywhere perceive public demand and promoting new public libraries or system construction.

## 5.2 Improving Library Service Performance

This is mainly the main responsibility of the library industry. Improving performance is not only an increasingly strict performance management requirement for governments at all levels but also the only way to play the library's social role, secure social support, and especially secure increased government investment. In the “three-wheel drive” mechanism, because it can be independently controlled by the library industry, it often becomes the first driving force. The performance improvement process is inevitably also a service and management specialization process, during which it is necessary to define the scope of public services and priority groups, service resource needs and priority guarantees, diversified service means and priority choices, and promote a series of work including performance indicator system construction, business statistical analysis, annual reports, and information disclosure.

One Guangzhou practice is to refine a “seven-step method” for performance improvement and promote it city-wide. Key points include: conceptual level—clarifying concepts and responsibilities; principle level—implementing basic principles of public library services; functional level—accurate and moderate positioning; service level—service refinement is specialization; management level—performance improvement is not automatic and requires management; support level—the core is mobilizing human enthusiasm; guarantee level—securing support from all parties.

Another Guangzhou practice is to formulate performance objectives for the city's public library service system (see Table 4 ) and continuously promote their achievement.

## 5.3 Promoting Government Fulfillment of Investment Guarantee Responsibilities

Enjoying basic public services is a citizen's right, and guaranteeing basic public services is the government's responsibility. The Public Library Law clarifies a government-led, socially participatory guarantee mechanism. At the current stage, the main work of public library service system construction is to build a large number of new urban and rural grassroots library facilities and allocate corresponding resources, thus requiring huge financial, human, and building investments. It should be said that the current stage is primarily construction-focused, so government fulfillment of investment guarantee responsibilities and increased factor investment is actually the most important driving force for system construction. China's library system construction practice can also prove that there is a positive correlation between government investment and service output—large investment in system construction leads to system formation and large output in service performance.

Paths to promote government fulfillment of investment guarantee responsibilities include economic and social coordinated development driving, cultural consciousness, demand guidance, law-based administration, model demonstration,

and legislative promotion. Shenzhen and Dongguan are urban cases driven by economic and social coordinated development; Jiaxing is a representative case of cultural consciousness; Guangzhou is a model of both cultural consciousness and legislative promotion; Suzhou and Foshan are representatives driven by demand guidance.

Guangzhou has achieved the highest level of institutional guarantee for system construction through local legislation. Its characteristics are quantified standards for the four major factor investment guarantees (see Table 6 ), with three standards being internationally aligned. Its advantage is that it can mobilize all relevant local entities to participate in system construction, including people's congresses, governments at all levels, government competent departments, relevant departments, libraries, and social entities. At the same time, because local legislation has long-term effectiveness, its guarantees are sustainable.

When designing the system through legislation, Guangzhou conducted cost calculations, estimating that from 2015 to 2020, completing system construction tasks would require about 2.1 billion yuan in investment city-wide, including about 600 million yuan at the municipal level and about 1.5 billion yuan from various districts.

The People's Congress, as the highest organ of state power, has the powers of legislation (including institutional creation), supervision of law enforcement, budget approval, and appointment and removal of senior government officials, and can effectively supervise the performance of duties and law-based administration by system construction entities. Since the implementation of the regulations, in 2017 the Standing Committee of the Municipal People's Congress required the municipal government to make a special report on implementation, and in 2019 the Standing Committee conducted law enforcement inspections on implementation, strongly promoting library system construction. Table 7 reflects the substantial increase in government guarantee investment in recent years. Comparing Guangzhou's input-output with national averages also shows a strong positive correlation between government guarantee investment and system performance (see Table 8 ).

#### **5.4 Establishing National Major Special Projects to Promote Development**

Developing urban and rural grassroots library services requires following the basic logic from facility systems, resource systems, product and service systems, to performance systems. Forming a service system with professional service capabilities that can generate service performance and play a social role requires massive investment in funds, human resources, buildings, and other factors. China's basic national condition is that it has the institutional advantage of concentrating resources to accomplish major tasks, but grassroots governments have weak financial capacity. Therefore, corresponding systems can be considered to subsidize and support local public library service system construction

with national finances. Provincial and lower-level local governments can also establish special funds to support grassroots library system construction. For example, a design could be: central subsidies with local matching, unified standards with applications accepted upon meeting standards, and joint central-local resolution of the three factor guarantee issues of buildings, literature, and personnel. If the central government invests 10 billion yuan over 5 years and local governments match 10 billion yuan, with each library applying for 500,000 yuan in subsidies, about 40,000 grassroots libraries could be funded, basically covering existing street, town, and township-level administrative divisions. China has many cases of central government funding local public cultural undertakings, such as ancient book protection, Republic of China literature protection, the sharing project, and rural book houses. There are also many foreign cases for reference, such as Canada's Department of Culture and Communications providing funding to small libraries in Quebec serving populations under 5,000; the New South Wales government in Australia providing 1:1 library subsidies to local governments in the 1980s; and the U.S. IMLS has always played a leadership and coordination role in national libraries through funding.

Guangzhou's practice is that from 2015 to 2016, the municipal finance invested 100 million yuan in special funds to support new library construction and literature resource acquisition in various districts; from 2017 to 2019, the municipal finance invested 16.7 million yuan as special funds for system construction; it is now promoting the establishment of a social development fund for public libraries as stipulated in the regulations to give it the function of funding grassroots public library construction.

## 6. Handling Several Relationships

In the new era, while promoting public library service system construction, from the national perspective, it is also necessary to promote key reform tasks such as improving library service performance, reforming corporate governance structures, improving grassroots comprehensive cultural station service performance, and social participation. From the perspective of public library's own development, it is also necessary to promote the socialization and transformation of library functions, digital, networked, and intelligent services, and service and management specialization. Therefore, new-era public library development must properly handle several relationships: system construction must simultaneously improve performance; digital library services must be developed synchronously; library functions must be socialized, which is also one of the necessary conditions for improving performance; system construction must create conditions for social participation. As a strategic task, system construction must lead the work of improving performance, digital library services, transformation development, and social participation.

## 6.1 Handling the Relationship with Social Transformation Development

The motivation for transformation development is the change in public reading methods and the resulting weakening of traditional library functions and decline in library “popularity.” The goal is to achieve thriving “popularity” in physical libraries, using new media and new technologies to avoid institutional obstacles, break away from traditional path dependence, and promote greater regional and higher-level universalization and equalization of services. The path is the introduction of public libraries as society’s “third space” theory and communication functions. The result is the large-scale introduction of reading promotion activities, cultural activities, and public exchange activities into libraries, changing the structure of library services, making exchange activities and network services basic components of public library services, and correspondingly transforming libraries’ social roles into knowledge centers, learning centers, cultural centers, and exchange centers. Library management inevitably introduces social participation, and the reform of corporate governance structures forms endogenous driving forces, making it a natural outcome. Transformation development also inevitably brings new services, management, and demands for personnel specialization.

In the process of building the “City of Libraries,” Guangzhou has taken systematization as the guiding principle, comprehensively promoting socialization and digitization, establishing a new service structure, and achieving a good organic combination of new and traditional functions. The service structure of Guangzhou’s library system can be reflected in the setting of the aforementioned service performance indicators, which include both traditional service indicators such as library visits, paper information resource loans, and registered reader rates, as well as new service indicators such as public participation rates in library activities and digital information resource utilization. Through several years of effort, results have been significant, initially achieving transformation of library social functions and organic combination of new and traditional functions. If traditional libraries are book-centered and new libraries are people-centered, we can try to use the “people-to-book ratio” (visits/loans) indicator to reflect the relationship between new and traditional functions, as shown in Table 9 .

## 6.2 Handling the Relationship with Performance Improvement

Performance improvement is essentially the exertion of libraries’ social functions and roles, the ultimate goal of service system construction, the main path to securing support from government and all sectors of society, and an inherent part of system construction that should be planned, implemented, and achieved simultaneously. In the process of promoting the “City of Libraries,” Guangzhou has paid special attention to improving grassroots library service performance to gain recognition and support from relevant parties and jointly promote street and town branch construction. In 2018, the top 20 grassroots branches in terms

of service performance had a combined circulation of 1.6 million volumes, averaging 32,000 volumes per library.

### 6.3 Creating Conditions for Social Participation

According to the Public Library Law and a series of national institutional designs in recent years, the main construction entity for public libraries is the government, while social participation is encouraged. However, social participation requires preconditions, including the development of market economies and private economies in the region, historical and cultural traditions of being enthusiastic about public welfare and charitable giving, encouragement through tax reduction policies for charitable donations such as corporate income tax, individual income tax, and inheritance tax, and recognition mechanisms such as naming libraries or their internal facilities and projects. The motivation for social participation often combines commercial motives and motives to fulfill social responsibilities. Currently, the most important influencing factor may still be economic, with the main participation motive being commercial. For example, in Guangzhou's Huangpu District, social forces have participated in building 12 branch libraries and 7 co-built service points, which is closely related to the district having nearly 150 Fortune 500 companies, over 400,000 employees, and numerous enterprise parks.

In practice, we have found a significant positive correlation between social participation, government investment, and library service output. A library system that receives government attention, demonstrates significant performance, thrives, and increasingly attracts social attention and influence has a strong appeal to various social entities such as enterprise parks, residential communities, and social education institutions.

Guangzhou has also made outstanding progress in social participation. As of July 2019, social forces participated in co-building 55 branch libraries, accounting for 25% of the city's 216 public libraries (branches); they have cumulatively invested 33,400 square meters of building resources, equipped 87 full-time staff, and invested over 67 million yuan in funds; service performance has also initially emerged, receiving more than 1.45 million readers and loaning over 500,000 volumes in 2018. It can be said that in the process of building the "City of Libraries," government, society, and the library industry have all played active roles, constructing an ideal path for building a public library service system.

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## The Strategic Task and Realization of Chinese Public Libraries' "14th Five-Year Plan"—With a Discussion on Guangzhou's Recent Exploration and Practice

Fang Jiazhong

Guangzhou Library, Guangzhou 510623

**Abstract:** [Purpose/Significance] Against the backdrop of socialism with Chinese characteristics entering a new era and the promulgation and implementation of the Public Library Law of the People's Republic of China, formulating the "14th Five-Year Plan" for public libraries holds great significance for the development of the cause. This study aims to provide recommendations for planning formulation. [Method/Process] Using the planning elements as a framework and combining recent practices from Guangzhou's "City of Libraries" initiative, this paper analyzes strategic tasks, objectives, paths, measures, and related issues for public library development during the "14th Five-Year Plan" period and beyond. [Result/Conclusion] In the new era, especially during the "14th Five-Year Plan" period, public libraries should regard service system construction as their strategic task. The strategic objective is to establish a public library branch system that basically covers streets, towns, and townships. The basic path includes

taking county-level main-branch library system construction as the fundamental model, mobilizing the entire public library industry to participate through central library main-branch models, and prioritizing urbanized areas and regions where per capita GDP exceeds certain thresholds. Key measures and driving mechanisms include promoting demand visualization, improving library service performance, pushing governments to fulfill their primary responsibilities, and establishing national major special projects. While promoting system construction, relationships with transformation development, performance improvement, and social participation must be properly managed.

**Keywords:** public library; “14th Five-Year Plan”; strategic task; service system construction; strategic objective; “three pillars” analytical framework

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

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