

## Special Collections Development and Services in UK University Libraries: A Case Study of 17 Institutions (Postprint)

**Authors:** Meng Yintao, Zhao Leixia

**Date:** 2023-04-01T16:02:51+00:00

### Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] Special collections constitute important collection resources in libraries, and their development and services play a positive role in enhancing the intellectual connotation of libraries and promoting university disciplinary development.

[Method/Process] Through a survey of 17 UK university libraries, this study analyzes six aspects: special collections resource development methods, document scope and types, standardization development, promotion and publicity, related policies, and service programs. The findings indicate diverse types of special collection documents covering multiple disciplinary themes, extensive digitization and high resource discoverability, promotion via exhibitions and new media, a well-developed policy system, and the delivery of tiered special collections services and teaching and research support services based on special collections.

[Results/Conclusion] Building upon a survey of special collections development in selected domestic “Double First-Class” university libraries, six recommendations are proposed for domestic special collections development: strengthening external cooperation, implementing special collections standardization, innovating publicity through multiple channels, improving the special collections resource policy system, creating demand-driven special collections services, and emphasizing support for teaching and research.

## Full Text

# Research on the Construction and Service of Special Collections in British University Libraries: A Case Study of 17 British University Libraries

Meng Yintao<sup>1</sup>, Zhao Leixia<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of International Relations Library, Beijing 100091

<sup>2</sup> Hebei University of Economics and Business Library, Shijiazhuang 050064

## Abstract

**[Purpose/Significance]** Special collections are important library resources, and their construction and services play a positive role in enhancing the spiritual connotation of libraries and promoting disciplinary development in universities. **[Method/Process]** This study investigated 17 British university libraries, analyzing six aspects of their special collections: resource construction methods, document scope and types, standardization construction, publicity and promotion, relevant policies, and service items. The findings reveal diverse document types covering multiple disciplinary themes, extensive digitization and high resource visibility, improved policy systems through exhibition promotion and new media outreach, and the implementation of tiered special collection services and teaching/research support services based on special collections. **[Result/Conclusion]** Based on an investigation of special collection construction in selected “Double First-Class” university libraries in China, this paper proposes six recommendations for domestic special collection development: strengthening external cooperation, implementing standardized construction of special collections, innovating publicity through multiple channels, improving the policy system for special collection resources, creating demand-driven special collection services, and emphasizing support for teaching and scientific research.

**Keywords:** British university libraries; special collection construction; special collection services; publicity and promotion; “Double First-Class” universities

**Classification:** G252

**DOI:** 10.13266/j.issn.0252-3116.2021.09.014

---

## 2 Research Design

**2.1 Research Objects and Methods** Based on the 2019 QS World University Rankings, this study selected 17 British universities ranked within the global top 100 and conducted documentary surveys and web investigations of their special collections modules. The investigation detailed their document resource types, policy systems, publicity and promotion efforts, and service items, with content analysis performed on each indicator (see Table 1 ).

**2.2 Research Indicators** Three primary considerations guided the selection of research indicators. First, existing academic research on special collections concentrates on four aspects: empirical analysis of characteristic collection construction, digitization of special collection resources, special collection services, and policies and copyright. Through literature review and field investigations, the levels involved in special collection construction were identified, including theme selection (document content and types), construction models (construction entities, acquisition principles, long-term preservation), and service methods (target users, service items). Second, content analysis of special collection policies from the 17 British university libraries revealed that collection construction components include collection overview, user groups, document acquisition, digitization plans, service methods, copyright and privacy, and preservation strategies. Third, during the search and utilization process, users consider resource visibility, presentation methods, full-text/original availability, and available service items. Based on literature and practical research findings and user demand analysis, this paper analyzes and reveals the construction and services of special collections in British university libraries from six aspects: resource construction methods, scope and types, standardization construction, publicity and promotion, relevant policies, and service items.

### **3 Survey Analysis of Special Collections in British University Libraries**

#### **3.1 Special Collection Resource Construction Methods**

**3.1.1 Acquisition Channels** Special collection resources are characterized by scarcity and difficulty of acquisition, with a considerable proportion being unpublished manuscripts, archives, and records that cannot be fully obtained through purchase alone. Therefore, acquisition generally relies primarily on donations, combined with purchase. British university libraries acquire special collections mainly through donations, bequests, purchases, tax incentives, and transfers (moving materials from other university units to library storage). For example, due to budget constraints, the University of Glasgow Library primarily obtains special collections through transfers, gifts, and attracting social donations for purchases. The University of Manchester Library employs purchase and collaborative exhibition methods for historical relics. In addition to these methods, Oxford University Library also utilizes the UK Arts Council's tax incentive scheme (using donations of special collections and literary artworks to offset taxes), providing legal guarantees for resource acquisition. The University of Nottingham Library encourages the acquisition of digital versions of rare materials. Beyond conventional methods, the University of Edinburgh Library has expanded its collection scale through institutional mergers, such as its successive mergers with the 1900 Presbyterian Library and the 1958 United Nations Assembly Library, substantially increasing its special collection holdings.

**3.1.2 Collection Principles** All surveyed libraries have formulated special collection principles based on their own circumstances. These principles can be broadly categorized into five types: (1) relevance to university teaching and research work and alignment with university and library development strategies; (2) relevance to national and regional interests; (3) materials that enhance existing special collection strengths or disciplinary advantages; (4) special collection materials produced by university faculty or students; and (5) items with certain cultural or aesthetic representativeness. In addition to these principles, Oxford and Cambridge University Libraries engage special collection experts and active researchers both within and outside the university to evaluate materials for inclusion.

**3.1.3 Exclusion Criteria** Most surveyed libraries have also established exclusion criteria for special collections. Materials are screened before entering the collection and are prohibited if they exhibit poor quality, poor condition, high acquisition and preservation costs, poor user-friendliness, or unclear provenance. Special collection departments conduct regular assessments to ensure collections align with collection development policies. The University of Manchester Library emphasizes that it will not purchase manuscripts without provenance or with any questionable aspects. Additionally, some university libraries stipulate reduced or prohibited collection of digital versions of manuscripts, archives, and rare books. For instance, Cambridge and Manchester University Libraries permit the collection of digital versions that continue existing holdings but prohibit collections composed entirely of audiovisual materials.

**3.2 Scope and Types of Special Collection Resources** British university libraries continuously expand their special collection scope. Special collection document types are diverse (see Table 1 ), including manuscripts, archives, rare books, maps, printed materials (ancient books, pamphlets, journals, dissertations, and various publications), ephemera (advertisements, bookmarks, greeting cards, postcards, business cards, posters, flyers, bookplates, trade cards, etc.), visual collections (paintings, drawings, photographs, sculptures, textiles, ceramics, ivory, jewelry, glass, prints, paper, picture books, and related objects), photographic materials (photographs, negatives, slides), audiovisual materials (films, videotapes, and audio tapes), and digital materials (documents, emails, photographs, and websites). Among these, manuscripts, archives, and rare books are the primary types collected by British university libraries. Oxford University Library, Manchester University Library, Glasgow University Library, Nottingham University Library, and Southampton University Library also collect ephemera. Oxford University Library has collaborated with ProQuest to develop the world's first digital ephemera printing project, whose historical, humanistic, socio-economic, and aesthetic values have been explored by research institutions and scholars.

Special collection content covers multiple disciplines and subjects (see Table 2 ). Most university libraries hold religious, theological, historical, philosophi-

cal, and literary documents, forming integrated catalogs with elements such as time, region, personal names, subjects, and document types based on collection content. For example, Oxford University Library's special collection catalog includes modules for medieval manuscripts, early modern manuscripts, Eastern collections, rare books, maps, and music. Some libraries construct institutional repositories based on disciplinary development needs, such as Cambridge and Manchester University Libraries, which collect personal papers of faculty, staff, and alumni as characteristic holdings.

Special collection resources span extensive time periods with strong continuity. For example, the Bristol Architectural Association Library's book collection dates back to 1523, including works by the renowned British architect J. Gibbs (1682-1754), design drafts of Roman ruins and Swedish Baroque palaces, while also including recently published architectural books. The University of Edinburgh Library's religious rare books date back to the 1536 publication *The Christian Academy*, while also encompassing multi-language versions of the Bible from the 18th and 19th centuries, Anglican journals (1643-1794), pamphlets, and related publications.

**3.3 Standardization Construction** Digitizing special collection documents can improve utilization and expand influence while serving as user access substitutes to achieve long-term preservation. Oxford and Bristol University Libraries have formulated dedicated collection digitization policies that standardize collection principles, scope, digital preservation and metadata strategies, and collection management, making special collection digitization more standardized. The Cambridge University Library website lists 23 digitization projects, some conducted in collaboration with other institutions and others independently funded by project grants. Project requirements can standardize the scope of special collection digitization, selecting priority resources for digitization based on material subjects, potential preservation costs, and utilization demands. The University of Southampton Library collaborated with the UK Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) on two thematic digitization projects, "18th Century Parliamentary Papers" and "19th Century Pamphlets," funded by the New Opportunities Fund and Research Libraries UK (RLUK) respectively. Most libraries' digitization outcomes include text, audio, static images, and video, stipulating that users needing copies of collections can submit online applications and receive them after payment within specified timeframes, with usage requiring attribution according to relevant license terms.

Surveyed library websites provide descriptive metadata when presenting special collection documents. Among them, four university libraries (Bristol, Cambridge, Oxford, and Nottingham) stipulate that special collection cataloging must comply with the General International Standard Archival Description (ISAD(G)), with local adaptations based on ISAD(G). Oxford University Library specifies that when implementing digitization projects, existing metadata should be used first (with additional fields when necessary), converting card cat-

alogs to electronic formats, with new metadata based on recognized standards and formats, and encouraging external personnel to harvest metadata under open license conditions. Cambridge University Library employs a “three-digit” classification system to categorize 18 thematic literature collections and has developed the Getty Thesaurus of Geographic Names, UK Archival Thesaurus, and Rules for the Construction of Personal, Family and Corporate Names during the cataloging process. Manuscript and archival materials include detailed descriptions of their completeness, layout, notes, decoration, binding, and provenance, helping researchers fully understand material conditions.

British university libraries develop multi-channel resource access after digitizing special collections. First, they provide classified online catalog queries. For example, the University of Nottingham Library provides online catalogs for manuscripts, books and printed materials, and original typescripts, as well as thematic browsing by genealogy, local history, literary culture, photography, political diplomacy, and religion. Second, most surveyed libraries place the special collections interface at the top of their website homepages, with some creating new search platforms or integrating them into existing platforms for one-stop retrieval. For example, the University of Nottingham Library has established a dedicated manuscripts and special collections search platform where users can conduct simple or advanced searches. Cambridge University integrates special collection resources into its existing “iDiscover” system for convenient user access. Durham University Library describes its special collections, categorizes them by availability, and integrates the special collections catalog into its discovery system and Google search.

**3.4 Publicity and Promotion of Special Collection Resources** British university libraries emphasize expanding influence and utilization through visits, exhibitions, outreach, replication, and new media promotion to support scholarly projects and secure external support.

British university libraries welcome visits and reading of special collections. Some special collection departments are open to faculty and students during regular hours, while external visitors can access collections with identity verification through social security cards, driver’s licenses, or passports, subject to regulations on applications, usage, and photography. For example, Glasgow, Cambridge, and Leeds University Libraries explicitly welcome visitors in their policies while specifying 注意事项.

For special collection exhibitions, British university libraries employ three methods: online thematic exhibitions, offline in-house exhibitions, and outreach exhibitions. Most libraries conduct both online and in-house exhibitions. The University of Nottingham Library has a dedicated special collections exhibition hall, holding at least three exhibitions annually. Durham University Library’s website features an exhibition activities section detailing past, ongoing, and future exhibitions, including activity summaries, resource introductions, opening hours, 注意事项, and resource indexes. For outreach exhibitions, Oxford,

Manchester, and Cambridge University Libraries have relevant regulations. For instance, Manchester University Library supports external institutions in borrowing special collections for exhibitions, requiring applications six months in advance and professional evaluation of collection condition, exhibition nature, duration, and storage/transportation environments. Exhibitions are limited to six-month loan periods, prohibit photography during the exhibition, and require attribution of collection sources on exhibition labels.

Regarding special collection replication, most university libraries support user copying and photography for research purposes. Glasgow University Library permits photocopying of collections not restricted by copyright. Durham University Library requires users to complete specialized application forms and send them to designated email addresses for approval before replication. The University of St Andrews Library allows users to obtain digital versions of special collections for a small fee.

Additionally, the survey found that some British university libraries utilize new media to promote special collection resources (see Table 1 ). Eleven libraries, including Nottingham, Oxford, and Durham, have established accounts on platforms such as blogs, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Tumblr to enhance interactive experiences and push exhibition previews, resource introductions, and work progress updates, facilitating user access to special collection information.

**3.5 Relevant Policies** Among the 17 surveyed British university libraries, 12 have formulated dedicated policies for special collection construction, management, and services (see Table 1 ), covering acquisition, collection scope, digitization, metadata strategies, preservation, copyright and privacy, lending, services, and publicity. Ten libraries have established more than one special collection policy. Considering that special collection policies require both stability and adaptability to evolving information societies and user demands, ten libraries specify policy revision cycles, mostly 3-5 years. Libraries without dedicated special collection policies mention special collection policies in their collection development policies or library strategic plans. The following sections elaborate on copyright policies and user privacy regulations for special collections with scarcity and ambiguous copyright characteristics.

For special collection acquisition, Cambridge University Library stipulates that intellectual property rights and ownership must be clarified before acquisition, ensuring compliance with UK copyright law, data protection law, and freedom of information. Manchester University Library requires ownership transfer for donated special collections, though copyright remains with donors. Regarding special collection replication, most university libraries support user copying and photography for research needs. For example, Glasgow University Library permits photocopying of collections not restricted by copyright. Durham University Library requires users to complete specialized application forms and send them to designated email addresses for approval before replication. The University of St Andrews Library allows users to obtain digital versions of special collections

for a small fee.

In the big data era, user information is more easily obtained, and user behavior analysis can improve library services while simultaneously raising privacy concerns. Durham University Library has formulated a user privacy statement applicable to libraries and heritage special collections in accordance with the Data Protection Act, appointing data controllers and data protection officers to handle user privacy issues. The privacy statement includes: how personal data is stored and processed, with whom data is shared, how long personal data is held, how users can object to data processing, website cookie usage, and publisher and content provider use of personal data. Through user privacy statements, users are informed about who collects what data, for what purposes, and how to object to data collection, fully respecting user 知情权.

**3.6 Special Collection Service Items** British university libraries provide demand-driven personalized special collection services and collaborate with academic departments to support teaching and research, 挖掘特藏价值 and improving the effectiveness of special collection promotion and services.

**3.6.1 Tiered, Demand-Driven Personalized Services** Library users have varying information needs and service depth requirements. While book borrowing services can be completed independently by users, specialized tasks such as special material acquisition, scientific and technological novelty searches, and intelligence analysis generally require professional librarians' assistance. Special collection services follow this pattern, with British university libraries categorizing services into three levels: "user self-service," "staff-assisted," and "staff deep support," providing demand-driven personalized special collection services. For example, the University of Edinburgh Library allows users to independently complete special collection searches and reading, while replication requests must be submitted to the special collections digitization department. Additionally, special collections departments assign special collection librarians responsible not only for collection development but also for exhibition preparation, user training, thematic seminars, academic support services, and special collection research projects. To support contemporary cultural development and diversified solutions to social issues, public datasets including art collections, musical instrument collections, and reading room data are provided for interdisciplinary research. The University of Birmingham Library divides special collection access permissions into four levels, offering different access levels to external personnel, undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty and staff, focusing on supporting in-depth service needs.

**3.6.2 Exploring Value to Support Teaching and Research Activities** British university libraries support university teaching activities through three approaches: (1) providing physical or digital versions of special collections as teaching resources; (2) directly participating in teaching activities to develop

relevant courses or conduct training lectures; and (3) supporting student development of activities and marketing content related to special collections. The University of Leeds Library utilizes its rare books, manuscripts, and other resources to support university teaching, including collaborating with academic departments to develop professional courses, teaching conferences, and learning seminars; developing “teaching packs” that consolidate required special collection resources for convenient utilization; and conducting lectures for both “teaching” and “learning,” offering training for faculty on “how to use rare books and manuscript archives for research” and “how to use ‘show and tell’ to enhance learning experiences,” as well as establishing specialized policies for student use of special collections and creating research positions for students with basic training and introductory knowledge.

British university libraries support research primarily through three methods: (1) providing special collection resources as research foundations, with most university libraries offering physical special collection documents, digital versions, and datasets as research foundations to promote faculty and student research on special collections and disseminate research results to the public; (2) collaborating with various research institutions and academic departments on research projects, such as the University of Leeds Library’s partnerships with the Leeds Humanities Research Institute, Poetry Research Center, and Art and Antiques Market Research Center, and University College London Library’s collaboration with the Digital Humanities Center on the Leverhulme Foundation-funded “19th Century Bloomsbury and Transformation” digital imaging project; and (3) establishing research funds to encourage faculty and student special collection research. University College London annually establishes research scholarships to fund outstanding special collection and humanities research projects, providing recipients with £3,500 and reading room workspace, access to special collection resources, and connections with relevant field experts. Recipients must produce research outcomes including blog posts of at least 500 words, recorded presentations, conference papers, print or digital publications, and brief reports on research experience, with publications required to indicate funding sources.

## 4 Insights and Recommendations

**4.1 Analysis of Special Collection Construction in Selected Chinese “Double First-Class” University Libraries** Overall, the five surveyed Chinese university libraries (see Table 3 ) have relatively rich special collection resources with certain characteristics. For example, Peking University Library collects 200,000 ancient rare books including local gazetteers, genealogies, maps, and Dunhuang manuscripts. Tsinghua University Library has collected “Defend Diaoyu Islands” movement materials and oral histories since the 1970s. Fudan University Library has built a bamboo and silk script database based on “Warring States, Qin, and Han bamboo and silk manuscript documents.” Zhejiang University Library has formed a Chinese dynastic epitaph database focusing on ancient books and rubbings. Renmin University of China Library has contin-

uously conducted newspaper clipping work since 1949 and built a newspaper clipping database.

Compared with British university libraries, the surveyed Chinese university libraries still have certain deficiencies in special collection construction and services.

**4.1.1 Lack of Diversified Construction Methods** The five surveyed Chinese university libraries primarily rely on donations from alumni and social celebrities for special collection construction. Compared with British university libraries' acquisition methods—including donations, purchases, transfers, institutional cooperation/mergers, and government incentive measures—domestic special collection construction lacks diversified approaches and national-level support.

**4.1.2 Insufficient Digitization and Standardization** Several libraries have built digital projects based on their special collections, such as Fudan University's "Digital Resources of Ancient Manuscripts from the Collection" and Zhejiang University's "Ancient Books Special Collection Resource Release Platform." However, the investigation found that: (1) none of the five libraries have publicly available cataloging standards or policies; (2) the digitization level of rare special collections is insufficient; and (3) some platforms cannot be accessed externally or are unstable due to ongoing upgrades. Some libraries have built separate search platforms for each type of special collection resource, creating inconvenience for users.

**4.1.3 Inadequate Publicity and Promotion** Most of the five surveyed university libraries have Weibo and WeChat official accounts, but none have established accounts on new media platforms such as TikTok or Kuaishou, and no dedicated special collection promotion platforms were found. While these libraries utilize new media platforms to promote special collection resources, statistics show inconsistent posting frequencies, with some libraries posting more than twice monthly and others less than once monthly. Some libraries have developed branded columns for special collection promotion, such as Tsinghua University's WeChat official account "Oriental Art," Fudan University Library's "Fudan Special Collections," and Renmin University of China Library's "Library Garden Treasures." However, posted content concentrates on opening/closing notices, new book announcements, reading promotion, and digital resource introductions with limited relevance to special collections. The survey indicates that domestic libraries' special collection publicity and promotion are insufficient and require improved efficiency.

**4.1.4 Policies Need to be Public and Complete** The investigation found that, except for Zhejiang University Library's three special collection management policies including "Rules for Borrowing Thread-Bound Ancient Books,"

other libraries' websites only contain a small number of policy documents such as donation agreements. No key documents such as strategic plans, development policies, or information policies for special collection construction were found through public channels, indicating that domestic libraries' special collection policies need to be made public and further improved.

**4.1.5 Service Items and Depth Require Enhancement** The investigation found that the five libraries primarily provide reading, copying, catalog searching, and full-text provision services, with no evidence of in-depth teaching/research support or personalized services based on special collection resources. Domestic special collection services need to improve their proactive, in-depth, and personalized service levels.

**4.2 Insights and Recommendations** Drawing on the experience of British university library special collection construction and services and combining the domestic survey findings, this paper offers recommendations for Chinese university library special collection development.

**4.2.1 Strengthen External Cooperation to Enhance Acquisition Capacity** The primary task of special collection resource construction is to acquire resources through all possible means. Chinese university libraries can learn from British practices in three ways: (1) promote national legislation or administrative support to encourage social donations and broaden acquisition channels; (2) actively cooperate with potential donors, clarifying ownership and copyright to protect donors' legitimate rights and eliminate donation obstacles; and (3) collaborate with internal and external institutions on lending or digitization projects, integrating their special collection resources or collecting digital versions to expand collection scale.

**4.2.2 Implement Standardized Construction to Reveal Special Collection Documents from Multiple Angles** Special collection resources have high historical and academic value. To facilitate user discovery and utilization, libraries must emphasize digitization, cataloging, and database construction. First, establish special collection digitization departments to digitize special collections professionally, supporting users in obtaining digital copies within policy frameworks, thereby protecting resources while meeting user needs. Second, conduct comprehensive metadata description of special collection documents' content elements, external characteristics, and management elements based on current cataloging principles and institutional characteristics, enabling users to fully understand collection conditions and supporting external metadata harvesting under appropriate licensing conditions. Finally, integrate special collection resources into existing search platforms during library management system planning, or create separate "one-stop" search platforms, and externally leverage search engines like Baidu to enable convenient off-campus access to special collection resources.

**4.2.3 Innovate Publicity Through Multiple Channels to Increase Resource Visibility** In special collection publicity and promotion, Chinese university libraries should uphold an open and welcoming philosophy. For reading services, external personnel should be allowed to use special collection resources on-site after identity verification and application, in addition to faculty and students. For exhibitions, explore online and offline, on-campus and off-campus models to increase special collection visibility while ensuring safety. For promotional methods, emphasize the use of new media platforms such as Weibo, WeChat Official Accounts, Bilibili, and TikTok to push resource introductions, library layouts, activity notices, and thematic content through images and videos.

**4.2.4 Improve the Special Collection Resource Policy System to Safeguard Construction** British university libraries' comprehensive policies for special collection construction and services have played positive roles. Chinese special collection libraries should also build complete policy systems. First, formulate special collection development and management policies that explicitly stipulate acquisition, collection scope, and preservation to standardize construction work. Second, establish digitization policies specifying digitization scope, outcome formats, technical standards, disclosure strategies, usage permissions, user copying, and citation rules. Metadata strategies should clarify metadata standards, cataloging principles, indexing scope, and interoperability protocols. Third, special collection policies and regulations should be made public promptly to facilitate public participation in construction and service utilization. Finally, formulate copyright and user privacy policies clarifying intellectual property and ownership rights. Ownership and copyright of special collection resources can be separated, as donors may retain copyright when donating physical items. Copyright issues must be considered during digitization or deep service provision. Libraries should establish user privacy policies, publicly disclosing service content in special collection browsing and borrowing that may compromise user privacy, protecting users' rights to control their privacy and preventing data leakage or illegal application.

**4.2.5 Create Demand-Driven Services and Emphasize Teaching and Research Support** Different users have varying information needs. To address the issue of limited service items and low levels in Chinese libraries, libraries must categorize user access needs, including reading, copying, interpretation, training, thematic discussion, and teaching/research support services. Based on this categorization, establish a service tiering mechanism of “user self-service,” “staff-assisted,” and “deep support,” assigning librarians of different specialties and levels according to service tiers to achieve “collection for use” and improve service efficiency and levels.

Drawing on British university library experience, Chinese special collection libraries can construct a teaching service model that cooperates with teaching and targets multi-dimensional classroom integration, including full embedding

and partial embedding. Full embedding means special collection librarians personally participate in course design and teaching, working with faculty to determine course objectives, syllabi, and teaching content, participating in or fully delivering special collection content modules, digitization, curation, and restoration. Partial embedding means librarians do not directly contact teachers and students but package document resources and training videos into “teaching packs” as supplementary course materials based on faculty requests, or provide real-time consultation and push course-related resources through social media tools. Additionally, policies should support student use of special collection resources. Chinese university libraries can conduct special collection training to enhance students’ cultural literacy. Special collection reading spaces should not serve as general study rooms but should provide adequate space and services for faculty and students with special collection needs.

Chinese special collection libraries should support extensive academic research by opening access permissions, publishing electronic catalogs and digital versions, encouraging internal and external personnel to conduct research projects based on special collections, and establishing research funds and support measures to expand special collection influence and library image. Moreover, in the digital humanities context, special collection departments can utilize modern information technology to reorganize special collection resources, deeply 挖掘潜在知识 and display knowledge associations. Institutions such as Peking University Library and the National Science Library have recently conducted text mining and visualization of Chinese ancient books and classics, revealing internal knowledge associations and historical changes and providing researchers with new perspectives. Analyzing and guiding special collection construction in university libraries from a digital humanities perspective holds positive significance for reconstructing humanities and social science theories and research methods and innovating library special collection construction and services.

Special collection resources are precious library resources with certain non-renewable characteristics. Libraries have formulated regulations, established special storage spaces, set up dedicated reading rooms, and created and optimized search platforms for special collection resources, all demonstrating the importance libraries attach to these resources. However, if special collection resources cannot be utilized by users, their value is greatly diminished. How to balance the preservation and utilization of special collection resources under new technological conditions and changing user demands is a question Chinese libraries must consider.

## References

- [1] World university rankings 2019[EB/OL]. [2020-05-09]. <https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/2019/>.
- [2] Yu L. Characteristic literature resource construction and sharing in Chinese university libraries: Current status, problems, and countermeasures[J]. Library

and Information Service, 2014, 58(14): 63-70.

[3] Zhang Y, Chai H. Regional culture-oriented characteristic database construction—Taking the “Tianjin Musicians Resource Database” construction of Tianjin Conservatory of Music Library as an example[J]. Library Work and Study, 2019(12): 66-73.

[4] Wei Q, Sun L, Hu W. Research on digitization construction of special collection literature in university libraries—Taking CASHL as an example[J]. Journal of Academic Library and Information Science, 2020(1): 81-85.

[5] Yan L. Ancient book special collection services and enlightenment in three world-class university libraries abroad[J]. Library and Information Service, 2019, 63(18): 131-136.

[6] Chen Y. Development and utilization of characteristic resources in university libraries[J]. Journal of Library Science, 2011, 33(4): 73-75.

[7] Sun H, Hao Q, Zhang L, et al. Analysis of copyright policies and service practices of special collection resources in American university libraries[J]. Library and Information Service, 2020, 64(10): 128-137.

[8] Oxford library. Collection development policy: special collections[EB/OL]. [2020-05-10]. <https://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/about/policies/>.

[9] Cambridge library. Special collections[EB/OL]. [2020-05-10]. <https://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/special-collections>.

[10] UCL special collections[EB/OL]. [2020-05-10]. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/library/special-collections>.

[11] ICL. Special collections of historical interest at the central library[EB/OL]. [2020-05-10]. <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/admin-services/library/find-books-articles-and-more/special-collections>.

[12] New College library special collections[EB/OL]. [2020-05-10]. <https://www.ed.ac.uk/information-services/library-museum-gallery>.

[13] University of Manchester library. Special collections[EB/OL]. [2020-05-10]. <https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/special-collections>.

[14] KCL library. Historical collection[EB/OL]. [2020-05-10]. <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/library/collections/special-collections>.

[15] University of Bristol library. Special collections[EB/OL]. [2020-05-10]. <http://www.bris.ac.uk/library/special-collections>.

[16] UoW library. Special collections and resources[EB/OL]. [2020-05-10]. <https://warwick.ac.uk/services/library/about-us>.

[17] University of Glasgow library. What are special collections[EB/OL]. [2020-05-10]. <https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/special-collections>.

- [18] Durham University library. About special collections[EB/OL]. [2020-05-10]. <https://www.dur.ac.uk/library/asc>.
- [19] The University of Sheffield library. Special collections[EB/OL]. [2020-05-10]. <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/library/special-collections>.
- [20] UoB library. Our collections[EB/OL]. [2020-05-10]. <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/facilities/rcc/our-collections.aspx>.
- [21] University of Leeds library. Special collections[EB/OL]. [2020-05-10]. [https://library.leeds.ac.uk/info/1500/special\\_{collections}](https://library.leeds.ac.uk/info/1500/special_{collections}).
- [22] UoN library. Collections and catalogues[EB/OL]. [2020-05-10]. <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/Manuscripts-and-Special-Collections>.
- [23] University of Southampton library. Manuscript collections[EB/OL]. [2020-05-10]. <https://www.southampton.ac.uk/archives>.
- [24] St Andrews library. The university library's special collections[EB/OL]. [2020-05-10]. <https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/library/special-collections>.
- [25] Zhang X. Western library ephemera collection practices[J]. *Library*, 2019(3): 95-99.
- [26] Bodleian libraries digital policies: digitization[EB/OL]. [2020-05-10]. <https://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/about/policies/digitizations>.
- [27] University of Bristol's cultural collections digital preservation policy[EB/OL]. [2020-05-10]. <http://www.bris.ac.uk/media-library/sites/library/documents/special-collections/cc-digital-preservation-policy-final.pdf>.
- [28] Cambridge University library classification scheme[EB/OL]. [2020-10-28]. <https://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/classification>.
- [29] UoN library. Manuscripts and special collections[EB/OL]. [2020-10-30]. <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/manuscriptsandspecialcollections/index.aspx>.
- [30] Chen S. On the significance of special collection construction in university libraries[J]. *Journal of Hangzhou Normal University (Social Sciences Edition)*, 2020(1): 1-6.
- [31] Peking University library characteristic resources[EB/OL]. [2021-02-03]. <https://www.lib.pku.edu.cn/portal/cn/zy/tszy/>.
- [32] Tsinghua University library characteristic resources[EB/OL]. [2021-02-03]. <http://lib.tsinghua.edu.cn/database/specialcollection.html>.
- [33] Fudan University library special collections[EB/OL]. [2021-02-03]. <http://www.library.fudan.edu.cn/16/list.htm>.
- [34] Zhejiang University library characteristic resources[EB/OL]. [2021-02-03]. <http://libweb.zju.edu.cn/39503/list.htm>.

[35] Renmin University of China library characteristic resources[EB/OL]. [2021-02-03]. <http://www.lib.ruc.edu.cn/info/70840.aspx>.

**Author Contributions:**

Meng Yintao: Proposed the research topic and direction, determined the research framework, wrote and revised the paper.

Zhao Leixia: Refined the research framework and revised the paper.

---

**Research on the Construction and Service of Special Collections in British University Libraries ——A Case Study of 17 British University Libraries**

Meng Yintao<sup>1</sup>, Zhao Leixia<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of International Relations Library, Beijing 100091

<sup>2</sup> Hebei University of Economics and Business Library, Shijiazhuang 050064

**Abstract:** [Purpose/Significance] Special collections are important library resources, and their construction and services play a positive role in enhancing the spiritual connotation of libraries and promoting disciplinary development in universities. [Method/Process] This study investigated 17 British university libraries, analyzing six aspects of their special collections: resource construction methods, document scope and types, standardization construction, publicity and promotion, relevant policies, and service items. The findings reveal diverse document types covering multiple disciplinary themes, extensive digitization and high resource visibility, improved policy systems through exhibition promotion and new media outreach, and the implementation of tiered special collection services and teaching/research support services based on special collections. [Result/Conclusion] Based on an investigation of special collection construction in selected “Double First-Class” university libraries in China, this paper proposes six recommendations for domestic special collection development: strengthening external cooperation, implementing standardized construction of special collections, innovating publicity through multiple channels, improving the policy system for special collection resources, creating demand-driven special collection services, and emphasizing support for teaching and scientific research.

**Keywords:** British university libraries; special collection construction; special collection services; publicity and promotion; “Double First-Class” universities

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

*Source: ChinaXiv — Machine translation. Verify with original.*