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A Study on the Historical Evolution and Contemporary Value of National Reading: Postprint

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] This study aims to explore the historical background of the origin of national reading and systematically review its evolutionary trajectory, in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the dissemination and practice of national reading in China, thereby influencing and promoting the construction and development of a learning society and a culturally strong nation.

[Method/Process] Through investigating the historical evolution of national reading and its developmental responses abroad, this research conducts an inductive analysis from three dimensions manifested in China's practical implementation of national reading: "systematic project," "legal guarantee," and "strategic layout," to explore and elucidate the contemporary value of national reading.

[Results/Conclusion] The analysis and comprehension of the contemporary value of national reading holds significant importance for guiding the implementation of national reading initiatives and the advancement of reading promotion activities.

Full Text

Preamble

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Abstract:

[Purpose/Significance] This study aims to explore the historical background of the origin of nationwide reading, trace its evolutionary trajectory, and provide a comprehensive understanding of its dissemination and practice in China, thereby

influencing and promoting the construction and development of a learning society and a culturally strong nation. [Method/Process] Through research on the historical evolution of nationwide reading and its international development responses, this study summarizes three key aspects of its practical implementation in China: “systematic engineering,” “legal guarantee,” and “strategic layout,” and explores and interprets the contemporary value of nationwide reading. [Result/Conclusion] The analysis and understanding of the contemporary value of nationwide reading are of great significance for guiding the development of nationwide reading activities and the deepening of reading promotion initiatives.

Keywords: nationwide reading; reading promotion; reading; learning society

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In modern society, reading has increasingly assumed a diversified posture, demonstrating its distinctive spiritual qualities. Promoting nationwide reading and establishing a reading society have become the global trend of cultural development. As the proverb goes, “Unused fields leave granaries empty; unread books leave descendants ignorant.” Reading is not only crucial for individual learning, progress, and personal development but also concerns the prosperity and development of a nation and its people. The term “nationwide reading” has appeared with increasing frequency, attracting significant attention from academic circles and all social strata. Currently, nationwide reading has spread like a prairie fire, gradually becoming a consensus from the central to local governments and throughout society as a whole. Precisely because of this, we must maintain our commitment amidst change, innovate while holding fast to our principles, coordinate complementary forces from all quarters, and guide national reading in the correct manner to jointly advance the development of nationwide reading.

Domestic research on nationwide reading has already yielded substantial results, most of which share a common characteristic: they 梳理 and summarize the background, development process, and features of nationwide reading activities, and then investigate and explore the pathways and strategies for promoting such activities. First, there are studies focusing on surveys and analyses of nationwide reading conditions. For instance, Zhang Yajun conducted an in-depth analysis of nine national surveys on national reading habits, examining the underlying causes of the data and discussing the developmental changes in various reading rates [1]. Yan Beini and Wei Yuting employed both online and literature surveys to study provincial-level reading activity brands under China’s “Scholarly China” strategy, extracting four major models for promoting nationwide reading activity brands in China [2]. Second, there are studies proposing development strategies for nationwide reading promotion. Wang Lei and Ding Zhenwei argued that incentive mechanisms should be integrated throughout the entire process of nationwide reading activities, employing various operational models such as policy incentives, material incentives, and spiritual incentives that complement each other to form an incentive system, thereby promoting the

nationwide reading initiative into a new normal development phase [3]. Si Xinli, combining brand theory with the current state of reading promotion at home and abroad, analyzed the branding operational characteristics of the Beijing Reading Season and pointed out its replicability as a model for urban reading promotion that could be popularized, providing reference for the construction of nationwide reading promotion brands in China [4].

Third, there are comparative studies analyzing domestic and international nationwide reading situations. Zhang Hanyu and Wanyanshuangshuang conducted comparative analyses of institutional construction, participating entities, and practical forms of nationwide reading in China and abroad, proposing that China should strengthen the production and recommendation of high-quality books, fully leverage the role of social independent groups and public welfare organizations, vigorously carry out diverse reading activities, and called for accelerating the improvement of relevant reading legislation and the pace of nationwide reading construction [5]. Zhang Qilin investigated foreign reading legislation using analytical and comparative methods, selecting four perspectives— institutions, scientific research, projects, and evaluation—to study the impact of foreign reading legislation on reading promotion, noting that foreign reading legislation has significantly influenced reading promotion experience and advocating that China should draw lessons from it [6]. Yan Weidong pointed out that foreign governments and libraries serve as two important drivers of reading promotion, playing different roles in advancing reading: governments adopt a top-down approach through legislation and policy formulation to dominate national reading movements, while libraries adopt a bottom-up approach through creating reading environments and organizing reading promotion activities to guide public reading [7].

Finally, there are studies on the positioning and role of various libraries in nationwide reading. Among these, research findings on reading promotion by university libraries and public libraries are particularly abundant, accounting for a large proportion of reading promotion research. For example, Liu Haitao addressed issues such as the shortage of specialized technical personnel and the absence of long-term mechanisms for reading promotion in university libraries, recommending the expansion of talent cultivation, establishment of sustainable development mechanisms for reading promotion, and strengthening of cross-system public cultural service regional collaboration to actively align with future trends in university library reading promotion [8]. Cheng Huanwen and Liu Jiaqin argued that improving the certification rate, coverage rate, and reading rate of public libraries represents the key focus and difficulty of their innovation, as well as the key to enhancing their social influence [9]. In addition to the above-mentioned research categorized by type, numerous scholars have analyzed and summarized nationwide reading activities from the perspectives of different reading groups and target audiences.

Building upon previous research, this study primarily employs literature surveys, comparative analysis, and comprehensive induction to 梳理 and summarize

the origins and development of nationwide reading, and to analyze its practical evolution both domestically and internationally. Distinguishing itself from other research, this paper focuses on examining the evolutionary trajectory of nationwide reading and distilling its unique contemporary value, with the aim of providing reference for reading promotion institutions in China when conducting reading promotion activities, offering theoretical foundations, academic justification, and decision-making support for the popularization and promotion of nationwide reading activities, and providing guidance for the establishment of reading concepts, cultivation of reading habits, and improvement of reading abilities among the general populace.

2. The Origin and Development of Nationwide Reading

In recent years, “nationwide reading” has frequently appeared in various media as an international concept, becoming a key term in press and publication, public cultural services, and library fields. Tracing the proposal and development of the “nationwide reading” concept helps clarify its formation 脉络 and evolutionary trajectory, thereby enabling a comprehensive grasp of its essence.

2.1 The Proposal of “Nationwide Reading”

The origin of the “nationwide reading” concept can be traced back to UNESCO’s slogan “Books for All,” which can be translated into Chinese as “全民读书” (reading for all) or “人人读书” (everyone reads). In the 1970s, UNESCO conducted a series of investigations and research on book reading and publishing conditions in numerous countries, particularly in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and designated 1972 as “International Book Year” at its 16th General Conference in 1970. The final results of this research were published in multiple report forms on UNESCO’s English website in the early 1980s. It was precisely because of the strong advocacy for reading during “International Book Year” that many countries, regions, and relevant organizations began to implement their own reading promotion plans. In fact, since its establishment in 1946, UNESCO has regarded the promotion of reading as important work for facilitating the dissemination, inheritance, prosperity, and innovation of human culture, repeatedly advocating for and organizing activities related to reading promotion, and sparing no effort to publicize the significance and value of reading to the global community. These reading-related activities have gained widespread public attention and achieved positive social effects under the response and promotion of governments and relevant organizations, contributing to the cultivation of reading habits and the development of reading culture among the populace. In 1982, UNESCO once again proposed the project “Towards a Reading Society: Targets for the 1980s,” dedicated to assisting countries and regions worldwide in formulating book development strategic plans [10]. On March 5, 1997, the UNESCO Director-General and the Egyptian Minister of Culture signed a memorandum launching the international “Reading for All” project. On July 24 of the same year, the first International “Reading for All” Special Committee meeting was

held in Aswan, Egypt, issuing “a signal for the international community to further expand reading promotion efforts” [11]. As the concept of nationwide reading continued to spread, its cultural strategic status and role received increasing attention from countries worldwide, which have raised the banner of nationwide reading and introduced various policies and promoted diverse reading activities and projects. Nationwide reading represents an unprecedented reading revolution in history, possessing connotations and values different from any past period in terms of the number of readers, reading concepts, reading purposes, reading environments, reading carriers, and reading methods.

2.2 The Establishment of “World Book Day”

On April 23, 1995, UNESCO established this day as “World Book and Copyright Day,” also known as “World Book Day.” The inspiration for “World Book Day” can be traced back to “St. George’s Day” in Catalonia, Spain, during which people exchange roses and books. Based on a proposal by the International Publishers Association at its 25th General Congress, the Spanish government formulated the “World Book Day” plan and submitted it to UNESCO, which Russia subsequently supplemented with the concept of copyright protection. The date of April 23 was chosen because it holds significant meaning in the literary field: literary giants such as Shakespeare were born and died on April 23, as did Cervantes, Garcilaso de la Vega, Maurice Druon, and other renowned writers, making it an occasion to pay tribute to books and encourage people worldwide to discover the joy of reading. In 2001, to further enhance public interest in reading and encourage book publishing, UNESCO launched the “World Book Capital” project under the existing framework of “World Book Day,” designating Madrid, Spain, as the first “World Book Capital.” Since then, UNESCO has annually awarded the “World Book Capital” title to a national capital, with details of cities receiving this title over the years shown in Table 1

The main declaration of “World Book Day” states: “It is hoped that people scattered around the world, whether old or young, whether poor or rich, whether sick or healthy, can all enjoy the pleasure of reading, respect and thank the literary, cultural, scientific, and intellectual masters who have made great contributions to human civilization, and protect intellectual property rights.” This unique form of nationwide reading promotion aims to make governments and the public attach greater importance to reading, stimulate reading interest, and simultaneously enhance awareness of copyright protection. Thereafter, every April 23, many countries and regions worldwide hold various forms of reading activities and book promotion campaigns covering all citizens. For example, the United States officially launched and has continued to develop “Read Across America” since 1998; Japan held the “Children’s Reading Year” in 2000; Canada convened the “National Reading Summit” between 2009 and 2012; the United Kingdom initiated the “World Book Night” in 2011, which has since expanded to Ireland, the United States, and Germany; and the Australian government

launched the “Reading Flash Mob” campaign nationwide in 2013.

2.3 Response and Development of Nationwide Reading Abroad

The “reading crisis” is a common challenge faced by governments worldwide. For instance, the United States released survey reports on the “reading crisis” in 2004 and 2007, showing that Americans’ reading time was decreasing while electronic media were becoming increasingly popular, a trend particularly pronounced among young people. In recent years, Japanese reading habits have shifted more toward mobile phone reading, primarily of novels, which has become a popular trend; Europeans’ book reading rates have generally declined, but the situation remains optimistic for newspapers, with nearly half of Europeans reading newspapers 5-7 times per week. Against this backdrop, many countries have regarded reading promotion as an important government responsibility. For many culturally developed nations, the concept of “nationwide reading” has long been rooted in national education and integrated into cultural development, as reading determines not only the depth and breadth of a nation’s thinking but also holds important strategic significance for national prosperity and development. As the world undergoes profound changes unseen in a century, competition in comprehensive national strength is increasingly manifested not only in external economic, defense, and technological aspects but also in internal cultural and national cohesion competition. Therefore, investigating and analyzing the response and development of nationwide reading abroad helps us, based on our own development foundation, fully absorb advanced experiences, overcome our own shortcomings, cultivate a favorable atmosphere for nationwide reading, further enhance national quality, and make nationwide reading deeply rooted in people’s hearts.

In the second half of the 18th century, a “reading revolution” spread across major European countries such as Britain, France, and Germany, with book production surging and newspaper circulation doubling. Bestsellers in small formats became cheaper, and various reading societies and rental bookstores sprang up everywhere [12]. Accompanying this were rapidly evolving innovation capabilities and an endless stream of valuable ideas. Western developed nations’ emphasis on national reading has closely followed their steps toward modernization. Whether it was the prevalence of paperback and pocket books or the establishment and popularization of public libraries, all provided excellent platforms for the public to read and seek knowledge. The concept of striving to promote equal access to reading rights for all citizens has been deeply embedded in the mindset of governments and various social organizations. In the late 1990s, these countries became strong supporters and practitioners of UNESCO’s promotion of nationwide reading, vigorously promoting the stable and positive development of nationwide reading mechanisms.

Compared with other Asian countries, Japan’s national reading promotion activities started relatively early, and the Japanese nation’s love for reading is world-renowned. Japan has both reading week activities dating back to before

World War II and the Reading Start program introduced after learning from Western advanced experiences and successful measures. It can be said that Japan's ability to sweep the globe with its anime culture is built upon the fertile soil of national reading ability that inherits culture and nurtures creativity. Japanese scholars and writers have won numerous Nobel Prizes in Physics, Literature, Chemistry, and Medicine, which more or less reflects the power of national reading. Since the post-WWII period, reading promotion for youth groups has become a top priority in Japan's nationwide reading endeavors. Focusing on children's reading is a distinctive feature of Japan as a reading powerhouse. To elevate children's reading from an activity mechanism to a national strategy, Japan enacted the Children's Reading Activities Promotion Law, which is rare globally. The Japanese government has also established public welfare funds to attract and 号召 participation from all social sectors in children's reading promotion activities. For example, in 2012, Japan received 596 applications for children's reading activities, approved 438, with total support amounting to 161 million yen.

As a country that has long been part of the Confucian cultural sphere along with China, South Korea's nationwide reading activities can be traced back to the 1960s. Under government leadership, various sectors of society launched large-scale reading promotion activities such as the "Reading Great Books Movement," "Library Reading Movement," and "Rural Library Movement," igniting a nationwide upsurge of "reading for quality improvement." Notably, the South Korean government convened the "Liberal Education Conference" to encourage citizens to nourish wisdom and cultivate character through reading classical works, making the Korean nation a creative people. Additionally, starting in the late 1960s, "rural libraries" established in Korean villages represented another large-scale nationwide reading promotion activity led by the government. These small-scale libraries, similar to today's rural book houses in China and managed by the corporate body "Rural Library Revitalization Association," alleviated the imbalance in reading facilities and resources between urban and rural areas, extending the reading movement to every corner of the countryside [13]. In the 1980s, civil reading groups such as the Children's Book Research Society began to flourish in South Korea and introduced Britain's Reading Start program to the country. In 1991, South Korea saw its first institution specializing in reading education, "Hanuri Reading Culture University." In 1993, South Korea began implementing the National Comprehensive Reading Index Survey—a national reading survey—which has been recognized as "national certified statistics" conducted annually since 2008. This was also one of the reading survey experiences carefully examined by the China Institute of Publishing Science before launching its own national reading survey.

Nationwide reading activities in the United States began to emerge in the mid-to-late 1970s. In 1977, the U.S. Congress legislated and passed the initiative proposed by Librarian of Congress Boorstin to establish the Library of Congress Center for the Book, with the core objective of broadening the reach of reading and promoting it among all citizens. Since the launch of the "National Reading

Promotion Partners” program in 1987, more than 90 units from government, education, civil affairs, and other organizations have joined. The United States has also established multiple domestic and international informal reading promotion websites and established reading promotion centers in countries such as South Africa and Russia [14]. Throughout U.S. history, almost every U.S. President has vigorously promoted reading after taking office, with successive presidents regarding the advancement of reading for minors as an important national policy and educational priority, continuously promoting nationwide reading through legislation and policy measures. For example, in 1991, President George H.W. Bush issued the “America 2000 Education Strategy,” which included as its fifth development goal that “every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy.” In 1997, President Clinton launched the “America Reads Challenge” and the America Reads initiative, aiming to encourage college students to participate in reading challenges through compensation to help parents and children improve reading abilities. In 2002, President George W. Bush designated “Reading First” as the main axis of education policy, implementing a series of effective measures to ensure equal opportunities for improving reading abilities for children from low-income families, intending to ensure that no child in America would be left behind. After taking office in 2008, even when facing the significant impact of the U.S. financial crisis, President Obama continued to regard the advancement of reading for minors as an important task, signing the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act in 2009, which allocated \$5 billion to strengthen early childhood education, with special subsidies for disadvantaged students in poor reading environments. Additionally, to promote reading activities across the United States, Congress reviewed and passed the Reading Excellence Act in 1998, marking the formal elevation of nationwide reading promotion from the policy level to the legal level [15].

Nationwide reading activities in the United Kingdom began to sprout in the late 1980s and gradually emerged in the 1990s. In the late 1980s, some British libraries began to receive support and coordination from different funding agencies to hold literary promotion activities, which later extended to other fields. The United Kingdom undoubtedly ranks among the countries with the most developed library undertakings in the world. What makes Britain’s reading promotion activities unique and noteworthy is the “reader development” theory proposed by Rachel Van Riel of Opening the Book Company in 1995. This theory is defined as “an active intervention practice to increase confidence and enjoyment in reading, expand reading choices, provide opportunities to share reading experiences, and elevate reading to a creative activity” [16]. Most reading promotion activities initiated by British public libraries have since been conducted under the guidance of this theory. Strong government support has also been crucial to the development of nationwide reading promotion activities in the UK. In 1998, after the Labour government came to power, it began implementing the National Literacy Strategy, a seven-year initiative for which the British government invested £553 million in support, representing one of

Prime Minister Tony Blair's main policies for developing education. As the first country to propose the concept of a "National Reading Year," the British government allocated £4 million to support the first National Reading Year activities in 1998. In 2008, the UK government invested £37 million to launch the second National Reading Year, aiming to create a unique reading culture in Britain. Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families Ed Balls, along with numerous supporters of reading activities in society, jointly attended the launch ceremony held at Downing Street on January 8 of that year. To this day, this activity continues to have an important influence on the promotion of nationwide reading activities worldwide. Additionally, the "Bookstart" program proposed by the UK is the world's first program specifically providing reading guidance and services for preschool children. According to statistics, the program benefits 2.1 million children and their families annually [17]. This demonstrates that foreign governments attach great importance to nationwide reading promotion, not only investing substantial funds and resources but also making it an important component of government work, with national leaders, major officials, and social celebrities actively participating in related activities.

Looking back at the birth and development of the "nationwide reading" concept, we can clearly see that, on the one hand, UNESCO has always played an important role in promoting and facilitating nationwide reading; on the other hand, the responses from countries worldwide have also demonstrated that nationwide reading is not merely a reading activity of one or a few countries but a new trend that has already swept across the globe. Viewing nationwide reading as an important strategic component of human cultural and educational development is inseparable from the concept of achieving the modernization of national culture and human modernization.

3. The Practice of Nationwide Reading in China

The Chinese nation possesses a profound reading culture and a long-standing reading tradition. The dissemination, practice, and development of the nationwide reading concept in China will bring about a dual qualitative and quantitative leap in national reading. The rooting of this concept in China precisely reflects the people's growing cultural needs and the necessity to promote cultural development in tandem with economic development.

3.1 Advocacy and Establishment: From Reading Activity to Systematic Engineering

As social recognition of the nationwide reading concept has steadily increased and nationwide reading activities have been vigorously promoted, nationwide reading has evolved from an ordinary surface-level reading activity into a national cultural development strategy. After 1949, the Chinese government, publishing industry, and various social organizations carried out various mass-oriented book recommendation activities and reading advocacy efforts targeting

different reading groups. For example, in May 1982, the Shanghai Revitalizing China Reading Guidance Committee, initiated by the Shanghai Federation of Trade Unions, was established, with 800,000 workers enthusiastically participating within a year, receiving full affirmation from the Party Central Committee. This reading activity became the longest-lasting, most socially influential, and largest-scale mass reading activity since the founding of New China, greatly stimulating public enthusiasm for reading and learning and, to a certain extent, improving the cultural quality of workers and the masses. In 1988, the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League launched the “Chinese Youth New Century Reading Plan,” aiming to help and serve youth reading and personal development through organizing reading activities operated in a socialized and market-oriented manner, focusing on improving young people’s ideological and moral cultivation and scientific and cultural quality to promote their healthy growth and all-round development. In 1993, the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee, the Ministry of Education, the former State Press and Publication Administration, and the All-China Women’s Federation jointly launched the “National Youth Patriotic Reading Activity,” which continues to be held annually. On April 23, 1996, World Book Day, Nanjing decided to hold an annual Book Festival, aiming to widely extend this equal right to learn through reading to all citizens.

The true beginning of nationally-promulgated policies to promote nationwide reading can be traced back to January 1997, when nine departments including the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee, the Ministry of Culture, and the former State Press and Publication Administration jointly issued the “Notice on Implementing the ‘Knowledge Project’ Nationwide,” announcing the launch of the “Knowledge Project” to “advocate nationwide reading and build a reading society,” and deciding to hold a “National Reading Month” every December. The “Knowledge Project” was a social and cultural systematic project first initiated by the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, which clearly defined developing library undertakings as its means and advocating reading, disseminating knowledge, and promoting social progress as its goals from its inception.

It is worth mentioning that the rural library project, one of the five major cultural benefit projects for the construction of the public cultural service system determined by the CPC Central Committee and the State Council, was piloted in 2005 and fully rolled out in 2007. Rural libraries are public welfare cultural venues built in administrative villages to meet farmers’ cultural needs, equipped with a certain number of books, newspapers, electronic audio-visual products, and corresponding reading and playback conditions, managed and serviced autonomously by farmers. On December 4, 2009, the magazine *Rural Library* was officially launched in Beijing, marking that the rural library project, as one of the country’s major cultural benefit projects, had its own specialized publication. Under the correct leadership of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council, with strong support from the Publicity Department and the Ministry of Finance and other relevant departments, and with the full promotion of lo-

cal Party committees and governments, by 2012, rural libraries had basically covered all administrative villages with basic conditions nationwide. As the allocation of books and newspapers gradually reached their destinations and management and operation systems were gradually established, the advancement of nationwide reading in vast rural areas gained a tangible platform. Meanwhile, the construction and improvement of workers' libraries and community libraries have also made certain progress, effectively supplementing public libraries and providing increasingly convenient reading conditions for ordinary residents.

The Party and the state have entered a substantive construction phase in advancing nationwide reading, which has become an important component of the national cultural construction and development systematic project, receiving high-level attention and strong support from the national level. In 2011, the "Nationwide Reading Project" was first included as one of the projects in press and publication public service construction. At the Fifth Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee in 2016, "advocating nationwide reading" and "significantly improving national quality and social civilization" were listed as important tasks for the "13th Five-Year Plan" period. This plan also became China's first national-level "Nationwide Reading" plan, namely the *Nationwide Reading Development Plan for the 13th Five-Year Plan Period*, which clarified the guiding ideology, basic principles, and main objectives of nationwide reading work, established key tasks, timelines, and roadmaps for the "13th Five-Year Plan" period, and included multiple project construction plans such as the "Nationwide Reading Quality Content Construction Project," "Nationwide Reading 'Seven Entries' Project," "Children and Youth Reading Project," "Key Groups Reading Promotion Project," "Nationwide Reading Facilities Construction Key Project," and "Digital Reading Construction Key Project" to further promote the normalization and standardization of nationwide reading work and jointly build a book-loving society [18].

3.2 Support and Guarantee: Establishing Legal Protection for Nationwide Reading

The development of nationwide reading activities must have a legal basis. Most Western developed countries have successively formulated relevant laws and regulations to support and promote nationwide reading activities. In 2015, China released the *China Economic Life Survey*, whose data showed that China's overall reading rate was actually declining, with the average daily leisure time being 2.55 hours, one-third of which was spent online, one-sixth watching television, and only one-tenth reading books. Moreover, effective reading promotion mechanisms had not yet been formed in central and western China, per capita book ownership was severely insufficient, and nationwide reading awareness was not yet robust. Therefore, under conditions of clearly insufficient reading rates, there was an urgent need to provide top-level design for nationwide reading through legal thinking and forms, consolidate excellent practical experiences of nationwide reading in institutional forms, guide the public to pursue higher

and newer reading goals through relevant regulations and policies, and further narrow the gap in reading promotion between regions. In March 2013, China's nationwide reading legislation work officially commenced. In that year and in 2014, nationwide reading was included in the legislative planning projects of the State Council's Legislative Affairs Office and was listed by the Publicity Department in China's five-year plan for cultural legislation. The period from 2015 to 2016 was an important time for the development of China's public cultural services, with various laws, regulations, and policy documents being introduced successively to jointly guide and promote the deepening development of public cultural services. In response, various provinces and municipalities actively responded to the advancement of nationwide reading work, successively formulating and promulgating relevant normative documents or local regulations to promote and guarantee the development of nationwide reading activities (see Table 2 for details). The situation regarding nationwide reading legislation can be divided into three categories: including nationwide reading legislation in government proposals; conducting research on nationwide reading legislation; and formally issuing nationwide reading legal documents.

As nationwide reading legalization construction advances, the promotion of normalized and institutionalized nationwide reading activities has reached a new level. Currently, local governments have taken the lead in the legislative process for nationwide reading legislation in China, with provinces and municipalities nationwide responding to international and domestic nationwide reading promotion requirements by formulating and promulgating laws and regulations suited to their local needs. The promulgation and implementation of local nationwide reading legislation or normative documents have provided legal support and guarantee for nationwide reading activities, which is not only significant for promoting the development of local nationwide reading undertakings but also serves as a notable model for other provinces and municipalities to accelerate nationwide reading legal construction and establish long-term mechanisms for nationwide reading work, providing valuable experience for China's formulation of the *Nationwide Reading Promotion Regulation* in 2017. This also fully demonstrates that China's nationwide reading undertaking is orderly entering a track of standardized and legalized development, profoundly reflecting the high-level attention of the Party and government to people's livelihood and cultural construction undertakings, and using their 号召力, influence, coordination, and authority to organize, lead, and promote nationwide reading through policy formulation and implementation, thereby improving nationwide reading levels and reading abilities.

3.3 Promotion and Upgrade: Nationwide Reading Elevated to National Development Strategy

Since 1999, the China Institute of Publishing Science has released the "National Survey Report on National Reading Habits." This survey is a basic national project with continuous and large-scale characteristics, aimed at understanding

the development trends of national reading tendencies and the current state of cultural consumption. It serves as the most scientific and reliable basis for accurately and comprehensively observing the status of national reading in China. From 1999 to 2019, the China Institute of Publishing Science has released 17 “National Survey Reports on National Reading Habits.” After 2010, the national strategic significance of nationwide reading gradually became clear. From 2010 to 2015, the “Two Sessions” annually saw NPC deputies and CPPCC members propose multiple motions and proposals related to nationwide reading, such as formulating the *Nationwide Reading Promotion Law*, establishing a “National Reading Fund,” and launching a “National Reading Day.” Among them, Wu Shulin, Deputy Director of the State Press and Publication Administration, proposed elevating nationwide reading to a national strategy. At the Sixth Plenary Session of the 17th CPC Central Committee, the establishment of a socialist cultural power was explicitly proposed for the first time, emphasizing the practical protection of the people’s basic rights to participate in public cultural activities such as reading books and newspapers. The report of the 18th CPC National Congress proposed the goal of “enriching people’s spiritual and cultural life,” advocating that the whole society actively carry out nationwide reading activities to solidly advance the process of building a culturally strong nation. Therefore, the advancement of nationwide reading has become a key link in China’s construction of a socialist cultural power. Since 2014, “nationwide reading” has been included in the State Council’s government work report for six consecutive years, fully demonstrating the high-level attention of the Party and government to nationwide reading. In 2015, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council jointly announced the *Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of a Modern Public Cultural Service System*, which mentioned nationwide reading and specific promotion measures in multiple places.

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core has timely listed the nationwide reading project as one of the major cultural projects during the “13th Five-Year Plan” period from the strategic height of national development, committed to providing the best hardware facilities for comprehensive reading through legislative guarantees and financial support, and providing important basis and action programs for the development of nationwide reading work at the national, provincial, and municipal levels. Currently, for governments at all levels, nationwide reading has become an important direction for enhancing urban cultural temperament and a key component of government efforts to promote public cultural services. The implementation of a series of nationwide reading-related policies, plans, and measures illustrates the continuous expansion and upgrading of “nationwide reading” from concept to practice, from cultural activity to national strategy, entering a new era. Details are shown in Table 3 .

China’s nationwide reading undertaking began with the Revitalizing China Reading Activity in 1982. Up to today, the development of nationwide reading in each period bears specific imprints of its era. In the 1980s, nationwide read-

ing aimed for “the rise of China,” with its high reading enthusiasm stemming from the supernormal growth in reading demand caused by knowledge deficits and cultural 断层 resulting from various historical reasons, such as the ten-year “Cultural Revolution,” before the 1980s. In the 1990s, nationwide reading grew together with China’s transition from a planned economy to a market economy and the emergence of the “business fever,” striving to awaken people from the obsession with money above all else, and receiving unprecedented attention as it truly began to emerge. Nationwide reading in the 21st century aims to cultivate good reading habits among the populace, promote reading 风尚, and gradually establish a book-loving society and build a culturally strong nation. It can be said that stimulated by the reading crisis and guided by cultural policies, the new era has endowed nationwide reading with new meanings and characteristics, and the growing national economy has further motivated people to pursue spiritual enrichment and satisfaction.

4. The Contemporary Value of Nationwide Reading

As a contemporary keyword in the history of human reading, the meaning and essence of “nationwide reading” have long overflowed the narrow space of studies and extended to the perspective of the entire nation’s present and future development. The nationwide reading undertaking is a brand-new undertaking in China today. Exploring and deeply understanding its contemporary value is conducive to establishing a learning society and building a book-loving society against the backdrop of comprehensively advancing the nationwide reading undertaking, and is beneficial for expanding the positive influence and coverage of nationwide reading. It represents an important path for comprehensively improving national quality and enhancing national cultural soft power. At this major historical opportunity period when China is striving to build a moderately prosperous society in all respects and realizing the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, our country and nation must prosper and develop by vigorously promoting a learning atmosphere and paving the way forward with solid reading and learning.

4.1 The Need to Establish a Learning Society

Since the 1970s, UNESCO has continuously called on all humanity to move toward a learning society, and many countries have successively carried out various activities to build learning societies. In 2014, when attending the CICA Summit and meeting with foreign experts, Xi Jinping first proposed: “China should forever remain a learning power” [19]. A new historical process of coordinating whole-Party learning and nationwide learning, and coordinating the construction of a learning-oriented Party and a learning-oriented country, was thus launched. In 2015, in his congratulatory letter to the International Conference on Education and Information, Xi Jinping once again emphasized the need to build a learning society where “everyone can learn, everywhere can be a learning place, and learning can happen anytime” [20]. The creation and devel-

opment of a learning society cannot be accomplished in isolation; it is a major common challenge facing humanity and a product of scientific and technological development and social civilization progress.

The popularization of nationwide reading is a foundational measure and inherent requirement for accelerating the construction of a learning society and promoting the building of a learning power. Reading and learning can advance civilization inheritance, guide personal growth, maintain Party consolidation, and promote national prosperity. The report of the 19th CPC National Congress is the first important Party document in which the CPC has simultaneously elevated the promotion of learning society, learning-oriented Party, and learning power construction to the Party's important will and strategic tasks, forming a new comprehensive situation of learning carried out at multiple levels and in multiple dimensions across the state, Party, and society. Using whole-Party learning to drive nationwide learning and using learning-oriented Party construction to lead learning-oriented country construction represents the best demonstration of the CPC's high learning consciousness, cultural confidence, and global vision under new era conditions.

4.2 Improving the Cultural Literacy of the Whole Nation

When summarizing the greatest benefits of reading for humanity, the International Reading Association (IRA) pointed out: "The level of reading ability directly affects the future strength of a country and its people." A country and nation that wish to stand proudly among the nations of the world cannot for a moment lack the guidance of advanced culture or the powerful spiritual strength of national cohesion. The prosperity and development of culture and the comprehensive progress of society cannot be separated from the cultivation of nationwide reading habits. If a nation develops the habit of nationwide reading, it will produce more outstanding talents and achieve greater accomplishments in science and culture. As Li Keqiang pointed out: "Reading enables people to constantly think anew. Reading good books can not only enhance personal abilities, vision, and comprehensive quality but also subtly influence a person's civilized qualities, enabling them to maintain a peaceful and far-reaching state of mind and cultivate aspirations for striving and achievement. Reading is not only about personal cultivation; the overall reading level of the nation will also have a lasting impact on the moral level of the entire society" [21]. Reading is an important way for readers to acquire knowledge, enrich their minds, and improve themselves, as well as a necessary path for promoting educational prosperity and talent cultivation. Reading concerns not only individual growth and development but also affects the future of the nation and its people.

With social development and progress, especially the acceleration of globalization, the concept of enhancing cultural soft power and achieving all-round human development has received unprecedented attention. The degree of social civilization and progress depends not only on the quality and level of national education but also on the state of nationwide reading. The introduction and

development of “nationwide reading” in China represent both an objective inevitability of cultural prosperity and development and a practical need to further improve the overall quality of the entire nation. The high frequency of the keyword “nationwide reading” in recent years shows that promoting nationwide reading is timely. With the progress and development of the times, nationwide reading has presented diversified characteristics due to differences in age, knowledge reserves, work needs, and interests. In fact, the most essential significance of nationwide reading lies in enabling more people to access books, enjoy the pleasure of reading, and gradually transform reading into a conscious behavior of the entire population to achieve all-round human development. Today, “mobile reading” frequently occurs, “fragmented reading” is often mentioned, but truly high-quality in-depth reading is not common, and nationwide reading has sounded the alarm for us.

4.3 Cultivating a Social Reading Atmosphere and Reading 风尚

Nationwide reading is by no means a slogan or a temporary activity; it is a process that subtly improves people’s spiritual life status by cultivating good reading habits, like still waters running deep. It is a systematic project requiring long-term persistence and development, as well as a barometer of a city’s public cultural development. Li Keqiang emphasized: “I hope nationwide reading can form an atmosphere that is ubiquitous... and regard reading as a lifestyle combined with work styles, which will not only increase innovative forces for development but also enhance social moral strength” [22]. The goal of any reading activity calling for universal participation is to awaken and stimulate social attention to nationwide reading, guide the general public to gradually accept reading, value reading, and establish a system that ensures equal reading rights for all citizens, thereby forming a social culture that advocates and loves reading.

In 2019, when Xi Jinping visited the editorial staff of *Readers* magazine, he stated: “When the people read more, our national spirit will become more profound and 厚重. We should advocate for more reading and build a book-loving society” [23]. Essentially, building a book-loving society is both an inheritance of historical culture and a need of the times. The advocacy and implementation of nationwide reading is the necessary path to building a book-loving society, and creating an excellent social reading atmosphere can add momentum to the construction of a book-loving society. Reading more and reading good books, making nationwide reading a common practice, will undoubtedly enrich public daily life and spiritual life, thereby stimulating the magnificent power to build a book-loving society and a culturally strong nation. Under the national-level top-level design and active call, we can see responses from multiple regions across the country. Suzhou has built a 24-hour smart library accessible by facial recognition; Jinan makes full use of internet advantages to create libraries providing “one-stop, barrier-free, and full-process” book borrowing services for citizens; Beijing’s Sanlian Taofen Bookstore has operated 24 hours a day since 2014,

with an increasing number of nighttime readers. Additionally, branded reading month activities in Shanghai, Jiangsu, Hubei, Shenzhen, Xiamen, and other provinces and cities have continued for many years with increasingly broad coverage, receiving more widespread attention and strong support from the general public.

4.4 Enhancing Cultural Confidence and Building a Cultural Power

Reading, as a primary means of spreading traditional Chinese culture, connects national culture, history, and development construction with people at the center, carrying the collision of thoughts and spirits of generations of Chinese people in historical evolution, presenting cultural values and missions of different historical periods, and promoting the continuous inheritance of culture and national governance. Since the 18th CPC National Congress, the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core has attached great importance to the establishment and enhancement of cultural confidence, emphasizing that cultural confidence is the beautiful and solid foundation for confidence in the path, theory, and system, with more fundamental, extensive, and profound power. The extensive and profound Chinese culture with unique characteristics has always been the powerful spiritual support for the Chinese nation to overcome difficulties and thrive. It can be said that reading drives the establishment of cultural confidence, and cultural confidence carries the content of reading.

From the Sixth Plenary Session of the 17th CPC Central Committee proposing the long-term strategy of building a culturally strong nation, to the report of the 19th CPC National Congress emphasizing the importance of building a socialist cultural power, to the Fourth Plenary Session of the 19th CPC Central Committee pointing out: “We must uphold and improve the system for prospering and developing socialist advanced culture to consolidate the common ideological foundation for all people’s united struggle” [24], these statements can be said to provide fundamental guidance and practical leadership for promoting innovative development of nationwide reading in the new era. Additionally, the Fifth Plenary Session of the 19th CPC Central Committee attached great importance to cultural construction, making plans and designs from a strategic and overall perspective. Most importantly, it clearly proposed building China into a culturally strong nation by 2035, marking the first time the Central Committee has explicitly set a specific timetable for building a culturally strong nation. The prosperous development of nationwide reading can not only effectively promote the creative transformation and innovative development of excellent traditional Chinese culture, inherit revolutionary culture, and develop socialist advanced culture but also represents a realistic path to enhancing cultural confidence and building a culturally strong nation.

Reading is the most universal and enduring cultural need of humanity, providing important intellectual support for social civilization progress, national quality improvement, and national prosperity and development. Currently, the trend of nationwide reading has already swept across the globe and is gradually gaining

momentum in China. This is inseparable from the all-round support of the Party and government, the advocacy of celebrities and experts, the guidance and promotion of public opinion, and even more from the exemplary role of numerous cities and citizens. Exploring the evolutionary trajectory of nationwide reading and thereby grasping its contemporary value is conducive to cultivating lifelong reading habits among the entire population, improving overall reading abilities, stimulating reading interest, continuously satisfying people's aspirations for a better life, and promoting the sharing of cultural development achievements by all. Standing at the height of national strategy, guiding and advancing nationwide reading is a task that bears heavy responsibilities and a long road ahead. As the key to sustainable development, the influence of reading cannot be underestimated. Building a diversified reading culture and cultivating a good social reading atmosphere can further stimulate the innovative and creative vitality of the entire nation, accelerate the construction of a learning society, and promote scientific, cultural, and spiritual civilization construction.

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