

Development Direction of Discipline Construction for Chinese Library Science in the New Era (Postprint)

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] The world today is undergoing profound changes unseen in a century, and China is in an important period of development since modern times. Under the new circumstances, “demonstrating new commitment in rectifying the source and clarifying the fundamentals, and achieving new accomplishments in upholding integrity while innovating” has become the new mission for the development of social science construction in China. Under the tide of the new era, the development of library science discipline construction in China needs to adhere to its original aspiration, maintain a clear stance, and clarify its direction.

[Method/Process] From the perspective of value judgment, this study clarifies and analyzes the needs, perspectives, and aspirations of three distinct stakeholder groups: library science major applicants, library science faculty, and library practitioners; reviews the original aspiration, developmental trajectory, and fundamental tasks of library science discipline construction in China; and explores the developmental direction of library science discipline construction in the new era.

[Result/Conclusion] The fundamental task of library cause construction is to meet the needs of national cultural development. The development of library science discipline should neither take the European and American models as references, nor aim to satisfy the desires of applicants, faculty, and the industry. Instead, it should shoulder the important responsibility of constructing an orientation toward national cultural development needs, be rooted in Chinese soil, firmly uphold the “Four Confidences”, follow the Chinese path, and cultivate professional talents and future builders for the national library cause. Teachers are practitioners of discipline construction and guides for students to establish correct value judgments, and must steadfastly adhere to the principle of fostering virtue through education. Students, faculty, and the industry should join

hands in unity, watch over and help one another, jointly cherish the library cause and professional education, and provide positive energy for the prosperity of China's library cause.

Full Text

The Developing Direction of Library Science Discipline in China in the New Era

Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] Today's world is undergoing profound changes unseen in a century, and China is in a critical period of development since modern times. Under these new circumstances, the new mission for China's social science development is to "demonstrate new commitment in returning to the original sources, and achieve new accomplishments in upholding integrity while innovating." In the tide of the new era, the development of library science discipline construction in China must maintain its original intention, clear position, and definite direction. **[Method/Process]** From the perspective of value judgment, this paper clarifies and differentiates the needs, views, and hopes of three different stakeholder groups: prospective library science students, library science faculty, and library practitioners. It reviews the original intention, development history, and fundamental tasks of library science discipline construction in China, and explores the development direction of library science discipline construction in the new era. **[Result/Conclusion]** The fundamental task of library development is to meet the needs of national cultural development. The development of library science discipline should neither take European and American models as references nor aim to satisfy the wishes of examinees, teachers, or the industry. Instead, it should focus on contributing to national cultural development, take root in Chinese soil, strengthen the Four Confidences, follow the Chinese path, and cultivate professional talents and future builders for the nation's library cause. Teachers are the practitioners of discipline construction and the guides for students to establish correct value judgments. They must uphold virtue and cultivate people. Students, teachers, and the industry should join hands, watch over and help each other, jointly cherish the library cause and professional education, and provide positive energy for the prosperity of China's library cause.

Keywords: library science discipline; library science specialty; library science education; talent cultivation; cultural confidence; public cultural services

In 2020, a crucial node in the historical process of profound global changes unseen in a century, China reached a critical juncture in achieving its "Two Centenary Goals." Facing the combined shocks of the sudden pandemic and international competition, China has demonstrated remarkable resilience and vitality, entering the final year of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects through poverty alleviation, the concluding year of the 13th Five-Year Plan,

and the formulation year of the 14th Five-Year Plan. General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized that China's philosophy and social science community should "demonstrate new commitment in returning to the original sources, and achieve new accomplishments in upholding integrity while innovating" [1], pointing out the direction for the development of social science construction with Chinese characteristics in the new era. However, analyzing the issue of library science discipline construction purely from an academic research perspective makes it difficult to reach universally accepted viewpoints and conclusions. This is because at least three groups are concerned about the development direction of library science discipline and education: prospective library science students, library science faculty, and library practitioners. Standing from different positions and holding different value orientations, they naturally have different attitudes and views. Therefore, clarifying the value orientations and expectations of these three groups regarding library science education, reviewing the original intention, development history, and fundamental tasks of library science discipline construction in China, will provide clearer insights into what direction library science discipline should develop.

1. Three Perspectives

In recent years, the library science education community has been exploring how discipline construction can serve talent cultivation, which involves three core issues: what kind of people to cultivate, how to cultivate them, and for whom to cultivate them. The direct stakeholders of these three core issues are precisely the examinees, teachers, and the industry.

1.1 How Prospective Students View Library Science

How do prospective students view library science? In reality, undergraduate, master's, and doctoral candidates have distinctly different views of the library science specialty.

First, what are undergraduate candidates' views of library science? Based on our years of teaching and admissions experience, undergraduates do not have a particularly favorable view of library science. After the annual college entrance examination results are released, some high-scoring candidates admitted to library science programs at prestigious universities, along with their parents or relatives, express dissatisfaction online. We have observed that even students admitted to Sun Yat-sen University's library science program make negative comments online. Of course, we also see similar situations on social media regarding Peking University. Since Peking University is a top institution in China, candidates have high expectations for admission, but being placed in library science often falls short of their expectations. We cannot ignore or deny these facts, because candidates are inevitably pragmatic. The entire family strives for the candidate to enter university, naturally hoping for both a good university and an ideal major that will lead to a promising career. Under these circumstances, library science is not a favored major for undergraduates. Consequently, the

first-choice admission rate is often not very high, creating a sense of tension in our undergraduate education. Sometimes this situation even influences the curriculum design and direction of undergraduate library science education.

So how do master's and doctoral candidates view library science? For a long time, or at least in recent years, graduate education in library science has been very popular. The biggest difference between graduate and undergraduate candidates is that master's and doctoral students are genuinely choosing their career development direction, resulting in a large number of applicants and intense competition. In recent years, the application situation for professional master's programs has been particularly explosive across various universities, with admission rates of one in ten or more. Doctoral entrance examinations are even more challenging, with extremely limited spots and the most intense competition. This is because most of these individuals are determined to pursue library careers. Since China launched library science graduate education in the late 1970s, the number of talents has multiplied and employment prospects have been generally favorable [2]. Overall, graduate education is somewhat easier to manage.

What about undergraduate education then? In the construction of world-class universities and disciplines, returning to undergraduate education is the primary task of universities. Under these circumstances, should library science follow the wishes of undergraduate candidates in running the program? This question deserves our reflection. Concerns may intensify when observing foreign situations. In the 1990s, two prestigious American universities closed their library schools: the Graduate Library School at the University of Chicago in June 1990 [3] and Columbia University's School of Library Service in July 1992 [4]. These closures once caused widespread discussion and concern. However, it must be specifically noted that the main reason for these closures was insufficient funding, with the root cause being the universities' private nature. American private universities primarily rely on tuition income based on enrollment numbers as their main evaluation criterion—in other words, tuition is fundamental to sustaining the university. Before these two library schools closed, there were strong social calls to preserve them, and the universities gave them several years to raise donations from society to postpone closure, but the fundraising results were unsatisfactory and the funding issues remained unresolved, leading to their closure. However, American public universities have not closed their library schools. In the United States, the Master of Library Science (MLS or MLIS) remains an important standard for professional librarian qualification certification. Therefore, candidates' orientations and attitudes are not decisive factors in determining educational direction, nor will they affect the discipline's development direction.

1.2 How Teachers View Library Science

How do teachers view library science? In fact, teachers are the group that has the greatest impact on discipline development. Because society's awareness of library science is not high, and freshmen know little about library science

and the library profession, their basic understanding of library science depends on teachers' instruction, imparting knowledge, and resolving doubts. Using an imperfect analogy: students are the river crossers, teachers are the ferrymen, the industry is the opposite shore, and library science is the ever-changing river. No matter how library science changes, and regardless of whether students view the library profession as the end of their studies and the beginning of their careers, teachers are the navigators during students' academic years and the guides for students to correctly understand library science and the library profession. Since the new century, especially in the past decade, many changes have occurred in library science education, with the biggest change being teachers' mindset and value orientation. Why? Because library science is not and cannot become a prominent discipline, yet many teachers are passionate and hope the discipline can become prominent, gain great importance from the university, have a strong voice in academia, and be highly valued by society. These are professional teachers' goals, but often represent an overly eager and unrealistic expectation. Library science teachers must clearly recognize that library science is a small discipline, and its scholarship can never become a household name. However, library science is a discipline needed by the nation—an indispensable one.

So how should professional teachers build the discipline? In recent years, influenced by the iSchool alliance, domestic library science education has shown a clear trend of constantly changing names to pursue so-called global trends. Everyone wants to rename their schools and disciplines with more appealing titles. There is now a tendency to hope that the word "library" will no longer be used at all, nor even "library science," finding "Library, Information and Archive Management" too long. However, the iSchool alliance is dominated by Europe and America, centered on European and American library science, information science, archival science, and all related disciplines. Everyone must clearly see that computer science, communication technology, new media, big data, and other disciplines now dominate the iSchool alliance, controlling discourse, and library science's voice has become increasingly weak, deviating from the iSchool alliance's original founding purpose. Under these circumstances, teachers in the first-level discipline of Library, Information and Archive Management will play a crucial role in the discipline's future development. However, current professional teachers' focus and interests are increasingly distant from library development, paying more attention to information technology development rather than China's library cause. Yet in this new era of "returning to original sources and upholding integrity while innovating," reviewing the starting point of Chinese library science discipline—when Mary Elizabeth Wood founded the Boone Library School in 1920, the Library Association of China was established in 1925, and the *Bulletin of the Library Association of China* and *Library Science Quarterly* were successively launched [5]—Wood's original intention in founding Chinese library science was very simple: to cultivate talents for the library cause, enable library development in China, and allow all ordinary Chinese people to have access to books. Therefore, from its inception, the responsibility, mission, and commitment of Chinese library science teachers have been to develop and

prosper China's library cause. If library science teachers do not love the library cause, even belittle themselves, and feel ashamed rather than proud of libraries, they will ultimately become self-amusing "grave-diggers" [6]. This year, East China Normal University obtained first-level doctoral program authorization in Library, Information and Archive Management, and I sincerely congratulate them. However, in the 1990s, East China Normal University also adopted a "shock therapy" approach to its library science program; otherwise, they would have obtained this authorization long ago. Therefore, library science teachers must have a very clear long-term understanding of this discipline and maintain some reverence for it.

1.3 How the Industry Views Library Science

Finally, how does the industry view library science? In recent years, the industry seems to have become an outsider in the development interests of library science discipline, also expressing considerable criticism of library science. On the one hand, due to various policy reasons, there are increasingly more non-professional library directors. Their welcome and dedication to library science graduates are not as high as a decade ago, and their attitudes toward recruiting library science graduates are rather extreme during hiring. They hope library science students are all-capable and can do everything, yet when they feel library science education does not match their actual work needs, they refuse to hire library science graduates for professional positions. In other words, although the industry has a general demand for library science education, its expectations are too high. On the other hand, small and medium-sized city libraries and small to medium libraries have a large demand for library science graduates, but students' job-seeking expectations are also high. Students prefer large libraries in large and medium-sized cities and coastal areas, but these libraries have very high recruitment thresholds. Consequently, the disconnect between education and industry is inevitable.

2. The Development Direction of Library Science Discipline

From students to teachers to the industry, different stakeholders hold different positions and thus have different views on library science development. Can these three perspectives determine the development direction of library science discipline? According to the national standard definition of discipline: a discipline is a relatively independent knowledge system. The three concepts of "relatively," "independent," and "knowledge system" form the foundation of the discipline definition [7]. Different from specialty and industry, discipline is the classification of science and scholarship. So, from what position should we think about the development direction of library science discipline? Returning to the main topic of this conference discussion, that is, in the new era, how do we return to original sources, uphold integrity while innovating, and demonstrate new commitment and achieve new accomplishments?

2.1 Returning to Original Sources and Upholding Integrity While Innovating

What is the “root” of library science discipline? This “root” is libraries. We must not forget the “root,” nor ignore it, or deliberately obscure it. According to the national discipline classification standard, under the category of “Library, Information and Documentation Science,” “Library Science” includes “History of Library Science,” “Comparative Library Science,” “Library Sociology,” “Library Management,” “Library Architecture,” “Book Acquisition,” “Book Classification,” “Cataloging,” “Bibliography,” “Library Services,” and “Other Library Science Sub-disciplines.” This is the national standard. What library science studies is neither bookish scholarship nor technical training, but all aspects related to library development. Looking at the curriculum design of current library science education institutions, how many can definitively claim that their curriculum system comprehensively covers the above knowledge system? According to the latest national statistics [8], there are currently 3,196 public libraries, 2,688 institutions of higher education, and 300,000 cultural institutions across the country—a vast cultural undertaking before us. If we run library science professional education without libraries, operating outside the library cause while complacently expanding, our educational direction will deviate from the right path. Returning to original sources means returning to common sense, not constantly talking about specious high theories while ignoring common sense.

The development of library science discipline in China must not only adhere to “theoretical confidence” and “cultural confidence,” but also “system confidence” and “path confidence.” Due to systemic differences, the development of China’s library cause is completely different from European and American models. Blindly copying everything from iSchools and applying their knowledge to Chinese library science discipline development is, in my view, highly inappropriate. We cannot detach from the national system or ignore China’s development path.

Three concepts in the development of Chinese higher education deserve our deep consideration: The first is fostering virtue and cultivating talent—this is our fundamental task. The national education cause has launched its 14th Five-Year Plan, and the Ministry of Education has solicited public opinions on the national education development 14th Five-Year Plan through its portal website and other platforms, covering 20 thematic areas, with the first being “fostering virtue and cultivating talent,” which is the fundamental task of education. The second is taking root in Chinese soil, which is often overlooked by us. The third and most important is cultivating builders and successors of socialism with Chinese characteristics, which in library science education means cultivating builders and successors of the library cause.

2.2 Fostering Virtue and Cultivating Talent

In today's rapidly changing world, when various voices are rampant, we need some stability. Without stability, our cause will be difficult to sustain. Reviewing the Boone Library School at the inception of library science, it also experienced historically difficult periods. In 1928, due to war, Huachung University was closed, but the Boone Library School persisted. When Huachung University reopened, the Boone Library School had become the private Boone Library School, an independent institution. Imagine if the Boone Library School had also closed with Huachung University—our century-old library science education might have been interrupted then. During the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, when many schools closed, the Boone Library School continued operating under extremely harsh conditions, never interrupting its mission, steadfastly guarding this cause, preserving the flame of library science, and inheriting the Boone spirit of wisdom and service. Therefore, to foster virtue and cultivate talent in library science education, we must inherit the library spirit and pass on our love for this cause.

2.3 Taking Root in Chinese Soil

How does library science take root in Chinese soil today? We talk daily about national reading promotion, and the Central People's Government has included "national reading" in its government work report for seven consecutive years [9]. Is advocating national reading and building a learning society a national policy? Of course it is. Is prospering and developing China's cultural undertakings and establishing a public cultural service system covering the entire society a national policy? Of course it is. Is inheriting excellent Chinese culture and protecting cultural heritage a national policy? It certainly is. Should university libraries develop under the "Double First-Class" construction and the development of Chinese universities? Of course they should. From whatever perspective, our country places library development in a very important position. So what should library science education do? Naturally, it should take root in Chinese soil and develop according to national cultural development needs. At this conference, Professor Ni Xiaojian, who has long served as director of the Capital Library, spoke on behalf of the industry from the perspective of library work. Professor Ke Ping also addressed these issues from a higher disciplinary construction perspective—the development direction of Chinese library science discipline must forge a Chinese path.

2.4 Cultivating Builders and Successors of China's Library Cause

Library science education must take root in Chinese soil and in China's library cause. It can be said that the deeper the roots of library science education, the higher our position. Upholding integrity means having stability! Guarding our foundation, guarding our library cause as the fundamental basis for development! In terms of curriculum design and talent cultivation in library science

education, we must make greater contributions to the development of China's library cause.

Finally, I hope that teachers engaged in library science education will not look down upon libraries or library science specialties, and certainly should not continuously send wrong messages and signals at various conferences and in various journals—that library science is failing, that we need to rescue library science, or even “de-library-ize” it. These statements are unacceptable and will have extremely negative social impacts. Because sending these wrong signals and voices from within the industry will inevitably lead to wrong perceptions among decision-makers, endangering library science education and ultimately becoming the “grave-diggers” of library science education—indeed, those who dig their own graves. This conference has many participants, and I take this opportunity to appeal: I hope everyone will watch over and help each other, cherish our library cause and library science professional education, jointly provide positive energy for the development of library science education and the library cause, rather than sending out negative voices. At all times, we all need to join hands and watch over each other. Only in this way can we jointly revitalize our library science education and jointly prosper and develop our library cause!

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