

Investigation and Analysis of the Textual Content of Provincial Public Library Charters in China: Postprint

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] By analyzing the textual content of provincial public library charters in China, this study provides references for the research and formulation of public library charters.

[Method/Process] Through website surveys, telephone surveys, and field investigations, this study examines the charters of provincial public libraries in mainland China, comparatively analyzes the structure and content of public library charter texts, and reveals the current status of charter content in China's public libraries.

[Results/Conclusion] The survey results are summarized and analyzed, with recommendations proposed including: emphasizing the scientificity and standardization of charter content, creating charters with distinctive institutional features, clearly defining rights and obligations within charters, and promptly publishing charters to the public.

Full Text

Preamble

Investigation and Analysis of Constitution Texts of Provincial Public Libraries in China

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] This paper analyzes the constitution texts of provincial public libraries in China to provide references for the research and formulation of public library charters. [Method/Process] Through website surveys,

telephone surveys, and field investigations, this study examined the charters of provincial public libraries in mainland China. The study compared and analyzed the structure and content of these public library charters, revealing the current status of constitution texts in Chinese public libraries. **[Result/Conclusion]** The paper summarizes and analyzes the survey results, proposing recommendations to emphasize the scientific and standardized nature of charter content, create charters with distinctive institutional features, clarify rights and obligations in charters, and promptly publish charters externally.

Keywords: public library; constitution; formulation; construction

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Public libraries, as vital components of national culture and education, bear the responsibility of providing diverse information resources and services to the broad readership, playing an irreplaceable role in enhancing cultural and information literacy and fostering scientific and technological innovation across society. While fulfilling their functions, public libraries continuously standardize, optimize, and improve their institutional frameworks, exploring optimal operational models and mechanisms. Among these, the most representative and crucial institution is the public library charter.

Public library charters emerged alongside the establishment and development of public libraries, maturing and improving as understanding of public libraries deepens and as these institutions innovate. In recent years, with the continuous development of public cultural services and the gradual advancement of public institution management system reforms, the construction of public library charters has received increasing attention. The promulgation of the *Public Library Law of the People's Republic of China* provides the most fundamental legal basis for charter formulation. In November 2013, the Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee adopted the *Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening Reform*, which proposed to “clarify the functional positioning of different cultural institutions, establish corporate governance structures, and improve performance evaluation mechanisms. Promote the formation of councils in public libraries, museums, cultural centers, and science and technology museums, incorporating representatives from relevant sectors, professionals, and community members into management” [1]. This further advanced charter formulation for public libraries. The *Notice of the General Office of the Ministry of Culture on Carrying Out the Sixth National Evaluation and Grading of Public Libraries at or above the County Level* explicitly requires each library to have a charter and provides detailed scoring criteria for charter formulation and implementation in the evaluation process [2]. This evaluation work has effectively promoted attention to and development of public library charter formulation.

On November 4, 2017, the 30th Session of the Standing Committee of the Twelfth National People's Congress passed the *Public Library Law of the People's Republic of China*. Article 15, Chapter II explicitly lists the charter as the

first condition that public libraries must meet [3]. This legally establishes the charter as the statutory basis for public library operations, confirming the charter as the overarching guideline and fundamental law of public libraries. The public library charter serves as the basic guide for library operations, unifying the responsibilities, rights, and interests of government, society, and the library itself, and constitutes one of the necessary conditions for establishing a public library.

In March and July 2011, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council issued the *Guiding Opinions on Classifying and Advancing the Reform of Public Institutions* (Zhongfa [2011] No. 5) and the *Notice of the General Office of the State Council on Issuing Supporting Documents for Classifying and Advancing the Reform of Public Institutions* (Zhongfa [2011] No. 37), respectively, introducing nine supporting documents. For public welfare service institutions, these documents explicitly proposed reforming the management system of public institutions, separating government administration from institutional management, and separating management from operation. This provided the institutional foundation for public library charters.

This research focuses on investigating the current status of charter construction in Chinese public libraries and analyzing the survey results, aiming to provide references for the research, formulation, and improvement of public library charters. The significance of this study lies in its focus on public library charters as the research object, which to some extent helps deepen rational understanding of public library governance, assists public libraries in breaking through existing governance limitations, and enables better handling of relationships between public libraries and government and between public libraries and society. It also helps standardize internal operational mechanisms. Actively exploring effective mechanisms for public library charter construction to promote reforms in internal governance structures and shifts in service consciousness, and continuously improving the ability and level of charter-based library management, holds profound reference significance for both current construction and future development of public libraries.

1. Literature Review

1.1 Domestic Research Review

Liang Jingxu (2008), in reviewing the 1907 *Proposed Charter of the Capital Library*, stated that “subsequent systems regarding collection development, ticket sales for reading, external borrowing methods, funding sources, personnel allocation, room classification, and opening hours in early Chinese libraries can all trace their origins to this charter, demonstrating its role and value in early library construction in China” [4]. Men Ting (2011), in the article *The Hunan Library Provisional Charter: The Beginning of Provincial Official Library Charters in the Late Qing Dynasty*, noted that the *Hunan Library Provisional Charter* was a product of educational system reforms that abolished the imperial

examination system and established modern schools, holding pioneering significance and providing important reference and impetus for the formulation of the *Capital Library and Provincial Libraries General Charter* and other provincial library charters [5]. Xiao Rongmei (2014), in *Pilot Exploration and Reflection on Corporate Governance Structure of Shenzhen Library*, pointed out that “the library charter and local legislation revisions failed to keep pace, and the corporate charter could not solve management system problems, which could actually be addressed through local legislation” [6]. Li Guoxin (2014), in *Public Library Corporate Governance: Structure, Status, Issues, and Prospects*, discussed council charter issues, emphasizing that council management and operation need to be “charter-based” [7]. Liu Fang (2015), in *Research on Public Library Corporate Governance Structure*, mentioned that “Zhejiang Library, as a pilot unit, has made beneficial explorations in this regard, limiting government rights through establishing charters and transforming the council’s decision-making power from formal expression to actual function” [8]. Han Dongliang (2015), in *Analysis of the Characteristics of the Yiwu City Library Council Charter*, conducted direct research and analysis on the Yiwu City Library Council charter, covering the council’s positioning and purpose, composition and generation methods, powers of the chairperson and executive director, and institutional characteristics and problems, providing detailed analysis of the library’s distinctive features [9].

2. Investigation and Analysis

2.1 Website Publication of Acts, Charters, and Regulations by Provincial Public Libraries

shows the publication status of acts, charters, and regulations on the websites of 31 provincial public libraries in China.

2.2 Investigation of Structural Completeness of Provincial Public Library Charters

This study compares the 13 collected provincial public library charter texts with the requirements stipulated in Article 16, Chapter II of the *Public Library Law of the People’s Republic of China*, which explicitly states: “Public library charters shall mainly include the name, library address, purpose, business scope, management systems and relevant rules, termination procedures, and plans for handling remaining assets.” The survey results on the completeness of essential chapters in the collected charters are shown in .

As shown in , all 13 provincial public library charters investigated include the essential elements required by the *Public Library Law of the People’s Republic of China*. Among them, the *Jilin Provincial Library Charter* combines the purpose and business scope into one section, while others present them separately.

2.3 Content Analysis of Provincial Public Library Charter Texts

2.3.1 General Provisions General provisions typically include: basis for charter formulation, institution name, address, funding sources, sponsoring unit, and registration authority. All 13 collected provincial public library charters cite the *Interim Regulations on the Registration Management of Public Institutions* and their implementation 细则, as well as relevant national laws and regulations as the basis for charter formulation, reflecting the rigorous legal foundation of public library charters as programmatic documents.

Regarding library names, all 13 charters contain relevant statements. With increasingly frequent international inter-library cooperation among public libraries, it is essential to specify both Chinese and English names in charters. However, upon reviewing the 13 charters, only those of Jilin, Shandong, Shaanxi, and Zhejiang libraries explicitly state both Chinese and English names.

Regarding library addresses, the specific administrative region and exact location should be clearly indicated. For public libraries with multiple branch libraries, the detailed address of each branch should be specified. For example, the *Shandong Provincial Library Charter* states: “Article 3: This library is located at No. 2912, Second Ring East Road, Jinan City, Shandong Province. Article 4: This library currently has two branch libraries. One is the Shandong Provincial Children’s Library (internally known as the Children’s Department), located at No. 231, Yingxiongshan Road, Jinan City; the other is the Traditional Chinese Studies Branch, which is the location of the Nishan Academy of Shandong Provincial Library, located at No. 275, Daminghu Road, Jinan City” [11]. Among other charter texts, some libraries provide incomplete or no mention of branch addresses.

2.3.2 Purpose and Business Scope Zhang Boling, a renowned Chinese educator and founder of the Nankai school system, once elaborated on the importance of educational purpose: “The purpose of a university is like a blueprint for building a house—what tools to use and what results to achieve must be determined according to national and institutional circumstances, not through imitation” [12]. The same applies to library purpose. Reviewing the 13 provincial library charters reveals that the *Capital Library Charter* has the most distinctive purpose: “people-oriented, readers first.” In other charters, phrases such as “inheriting civilization,” “disseminating knowledge,” “promoting social progress,” and “providing public cultural services” appear frequently, with high similarity among purposes, and some charters even have identical statements.

A public library’s purpose should represent the vision it aims to achieve. The purpose should serve as the core philosophy and inexhaustible driving force guiding a public library’s construction and development—the initial goal and ultimate endpoint of library operations. Although the purpose occupies limited space and contains few words in a charter, each word should carry significant weight.

The business scope is a crucial part of the charter, with all 13 provincial library charters containing relevant provisions. The *Shandong Provincial Library Charter* and *Zhejiang Library Charter* provide the most detailed stipulations, specifying information resource construction, public cultural services, coordination and cooperation, and other related businesses. For provincial public libraries, the charter should define service content, methods, and approaches based on the library's current situation, covering document acquisition, organization, preservation, reader services, and key cultural projects.

2.3.3 Management Systems and Relevant Rules Organizational management systems are among the most important and critical contents of public library charters. A scientific management system that aligns with the library's actual conditions can effectively guide the library to exercise its rights correctly according to the charter and relevant regulations. This content occupies substantial space in the collected charter texts.

Through detailed examination of the 13 provincial library charters, it was found that except for the Capital Library and Shandong Provincial Library, which retain the traditional government centralized management model, all other provincial library charters explicitly establish a council as the decision-making body (see), indicating that corporate governance structures have been widely practiced in provincial libraries in China.

Corporate Governance Structure Management Model. Charters stipulating the establishment of a council as the decision-making and supervisory body typically include: council powers and composition, including representatives from sponsoring units, government departments, the library's party and administrative leaders, library professionals, and social representatives; qualifications, powers, and obligations of council members; generation methods, powers, and obligations of the council chair; generation methods, powers, and obligations of supervisors; council meeting procedures and recording requirements. Charters also stipulate that the management layer serves as the council's executive body, with the director responsibility system implemented.

The corporate governance structure comprises three main components: the decision-making layer, management layer, and supervisory layer, as shown in [Figure 1: see original paper]. The decision-making layer is the council, the core institution responsible for reviewing the library's development strategies and plans, approving annual work plans and major business activities, and reviewing and nominating the director and deputy directors. The management layer, consisting of the director, party secretary, and deputy directors, serves as the council's executive body, responsible for implementing council resolutions and managing daily operations. The supervisory layer, served by the board of supervisors, monitors whether the charter is being followed, oversees business operations, and supervises the management layer's implementation of council resolutions and fulfillment of duties.

Traditional Government Centralized Management Model. Under this model, higher-level authorities are responsible for planning the library’s personnel, financial, and material resources, primarily managing library affairs through administrative means. The management layer consists of the administrative leadership team (director and deputy directors) and the party leadership team, implementing a collective decision-making system for major issues.

Other Relevant Rules. Most of the 13 charter texts only stipulate management systems and corresponding content regarding either “corporate governance structure” or “traditional government centralized management model,” without mentioning other relevant rules.

Notably, Shandong Provincial Library, Shaanxi Provincial Library, and Zhejiang Library explicitly define the powers of staff representative assemblies in their charters. The staff representative assembly is the basic form through which employees participate in democratic management and supervision, exercising democratic management powers. Clarifying these powers promotes charter construction.

Additionally, the Capital Library mentions establishing an academic committee and a collection development committee. The academic committee reviews the library’s research directions and medium-to-long-term development goals and plans, providing consultation on important academic matters. The collection development committee coordinates and makes decisions on document resource construction.

2.3.4 Rules for Document Collection, Organization, Preservation, Services, and Disposal Among the 13 provincial library charters, six explicitly stipulate rules for document collection, organization, preservation, services, and disposal, while the other seven do not mention these aspects (see).

In the six charters that address these rules, those of Shanxi Provincial Library and Capital Library demonstrate distinctive features. For example, the *Shanxi Provincial Library Charter* states: “In document selection, according to the *Shanxi Provincial Library Document Selection Measures*, the Document Resource Selection Committee conducts evaluation and approval of document resource needs proposed by various departments” [10]. The *Capital Library Charter* mentions: “Document resource construction should adhere to the principle of sharing, meaning that based on the overall distribution of documents in the Beijing area and the library’s actual needs, document resource construction should be conducted in a planned and purposeful manner. Strengthen procurement coordination with various types and levels of libraries in the Beijing area, achieve resource sharing, and strive to establish a document guarantee system that meets the needs of Beijing’s social, cultural, and economic development.”

Content in other charters shows high similarity, indicating considerable commonality but insufficient individuality in these aspects.

For public libraries, document collection, organization, preservation, services, and disposal represent one of their most important functions. When formulating these rules, public libraries should draft corresponding charter provisions based on national documentation standardization requirements and the library's own work 细则 to ensure institutional guarantees for related work and reduce arbitrariness. The *Public Library Service Standards* provide relevant explanations that can serve as references for charter formulation.

2.3.5 Asset Management and Use Rules Library operations cannot proceed without financial support, making asset management and use rules crucial for public libraries. Whether these rules are scientific, reasonable, and effective relates directly to the financial security for normal, healthy, and orderly development of public libraries. As a large system, public libraries must clearly define financial and asset management methods in their charters.

The 13 charter texts contain basically consistent provisions on asset management and use rules, typically including six aspects: legitimate assets are protected by law and cannot be infringed upon by any unit or individual; fund usage should align with the library's purpose and business scope, complying with financial regulations; the unified national public institution accounting system should be implemented, with lawful acceptance of supervision from relevant departments; financial personnel should be equipped and managed according to laws and regulations; employee salaries, social insurance, and benefits should be implemented according to national regulations; economic responsibility audits should be conducted before council transitions and when the legal representative leaves office, with audit results filed for record.

2.3.6 Termination Procedures and Legal Handling of Assets After Termination All 13 charter texts provide necessary explanations regarding termination procedures and the handling of remaining assets after termination.

2.3.7 Other Matters Requiring Charter Stipulations (1) Rights and Obligations of Service Targets and Staff. As the main subjects in daily library operations, it is necessary to stipulate the rights and obligations of service targets and staff in public library charters. However, only the charters of Heilongjiang, Liaoning, Shandong, and Zhejiang provinces contain provisions on these rights and obligations; other provincial charters only partially address or omit this content.

Public library charters should, within the framework of rules and regulations, explain and standardize the rights and obligations of relevant stakeholders to constrain their behaviors. These provisions must not be vague or general; only through such clarity can public libraries develop in a healthy environment.

(2) Information Disclosure. Among the 13 provincial charters, nine include necessary explanations on information disclosure, stipulating that the library's

charter, basic information, development plans, and work plans should be disclosed truthfully, completely, and promptly, demonstrating the library's willingness to accept supervision from all parties. However, some charters do not mention this. Public libraries should emphasize information disclosure during charter formulation and consciously accept supervision from readers and society.

(3) Library and Society. The *Shandong Provincial Library Charter* and *Zhejiang Library Charter* include a chapter on "Library and Society," which is commendable, while the other 11 provincial charters do not address this topic. Public libraries exist within a social environment and need to better adapt to social development. Therefore, emphasizing the theme of "library and society" in charters reflects the important value of public libraries' existence and development.

Overall, the 13 provincial public library charter texts collected in this study are basically formulated according to the provisions of Article 16, Chapter II of the *Public Library Law of the People's Republic of China*. These elements are the most basic and important components of public library charters, determining whether they are scientifically and reasonably formulated. While ensuring these elements, each library should formulate charters with distinctive features based on its actual situation. Unfortunately, existing Chinese public library charter texts suffer from serious homogenization, particularly in provisions regarding purpose and organizational management systems, rarely reflecting each library's unique characteristics and style.

3. Recommendations for Strengthening Public Library Charter Construction

Public library charters should occupy a primary position in the internal management system of public libraries. To achieve the goal of governing libraries according to law, a scientific management system must be established and continuously improved. The internal management system of public libraries must gradually become standardized and scientific, and this is the necessary path. Scientifically formulating public library charters based on actual conditions holds profound significance and crucial importance for standardizing the management of public libraries in China. Therefore, we must intensify efforts to advance public library charter construction, standardize the formulation and implementation mechanisms of public library charters, and develop scientific and effective public library charters in a reasonable and lawful manner.

3.1 Emphasize the Scientific and Standardized Nature of Charter Content

As a comprehensive and programmatic document, public library charters have significant meaning and far-reaching impact on library construction and future development. Charter formulation must follow standardized principles, focusing on whether content is comprehensive, structure is reasonable, and relevant ex-

pressions are consistent throughout. Attention should also be paid to whether the formulation process is fair, as this is the most fundamental criterion for charter legitimacy. The charter formulation process should be supervised by a reasonable and compliant procedure to ensure that every 环节 follows established procedures, thereby guaranteeing that charter content is standardized, rigorous, and scientific.

3.2 Create Charters with Distinctive Institutional Features

Every public library has its unique history and distinctive characteristics. When formulating charters, it is necessary to emancipate minds and actively construct new ideas based on the library's actual situation and characteristics. The charter construction process requires not only practical review and analysis of past experiences and lessons but also forward-looking vision to reserve sufficient space for future sustainable development. Charter construction in the new era should demonstrate the library's demeanor and pursuits, permeating innovative thinking throughout the process to ensure that charters reflect institutional characteristics everywhere.

Each public library, regardless of size, has its own history and cultural accumulation. Due to different development paths, each library forms its unique philosophy, resulting in different target positioning. All these characteristics should be clearly reflected in the charter. Only with distinctive charters can implementation quality and effectiveness be guaranteed, enabling libraries to become competitive and influential under charter guidance and achieving sustainable development. However, current Chinese public library charter texts show high similarity and rarely reflect individual libraries' characteristics and styles.

3.3 Clarify Relevant Rights and Obligations in Charter Content

Clarifying the relationship between relevant rights and obligations in public library charters has extremely important practical significance. This involves defining the rights and obligations between sponsoring units and public libraries, as well as those of librarians and readers. In the final charter text, these rights and obligations must be explicitly stipulated through specific provisions. Only by clearly defining the rights and obligations of all parties can the charter implementation process clearly define the scope of rights for each party while ensuring better fulfillment of obligations.

3.4 Promptly Publish Public Library Charters Externally

Public library charters serve as both the library's "business card" and its commitment to society and readers. Public libraries should promptly disclose charter content to society and readers through their websites or other channels, actively accepting supervision from all sectors on charter-based library management. This can promote strict management by library administrators according

to the formulated and published charter, ensuring that daily operations follow established rules and preventing charters from being shelved immediately after formulation.

This study investigated dozens of public library websites in China, examining and comparing provincial public library charter texts to reveal the current status of charter construction, hoping to provide references for public library charter research. Library management is a constantly changing and deepening dynamic system [13], and similarly, public library charter construction is in a continuous process of change and improvement. Research on public library charters is a relatively complex topic. This paper's analysis of collected charter content is not sufficiently in-depth, and the research object is limited to provincial public library charters in China. Charters at municipal and county levels require further research and analysis.

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Abstract: [Purpose/significance] This paper analyzed the constitution texts of provincial public libraries in China to provide reference for studying and making public library constitutions. [Method/process] This paper investigated the constitution texts of provincial public libraries in China through website survey, telephone survey and field survey, revealed the current situation of the constitution texts by literature analysis and comparison. [Result/conclusion] The paper summarized and analyzed the survey results, puts suggestions on improving the content of the constitution of public libraries, like paying attention to the scientificity and standardization of contents, creating constitution with distinctive features, clarifying rights and obligations, and issuing charters in time.

Keywords: public library; constitution; formulate; construction

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

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