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A Study of the Exhibition Policy of the National Library of Australia: Postprint

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] Research on exhibition policies in domestic libraries is relatively limited, whereas foreign libraries have developed comparatively mature practices in related domains. Investigating the exhibition policies of foreign libraries can facilitate the advancement of exhibition work in domestic libraries.

[Method/Process] Through analysis and examination of the exhibition policy and artifact loan policy texts of the National Library of Australia, this study explores the implications of its beneficial practices for libraries in our country.

[Results/Conclusions] Libraries in our country should enhance their exhibition work across four dimensions: 1) Prioritize the organizational development of exhibition work; 2) Emphasize research on exhibition principles; 3) Formulate artifact loan-out policies in conjunction with national cultural heritage protection policies; 4) Develop artifact borrowing policies based on China's actual conditions.

Full Text

Research on the Exhibition Policies of the National Library of Australia

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Abstract:

[Purpose/Significance] This study examines the exhibition and loans policies of the National Library of Australia (NLA) to provide reference for Chinese libraries in formulating their own policies. [Method/Process] Through textual analysis of NLA's exhibition and loans policies, the study identifies key features and beneficial practices. [Result/Conclusion] Chinese libraries should improve

their exhibition work by: (1) strengthening organizational structures for exhibitions; (2) emphasizing research on exhibition principles; (3) developing lending policies aligned with national cultural heritage protection laws; and (4) developing borrowing policies based on China's actual conditions.

Keywords: National Library of Australia; Exhibition Policy; Loans Policy

1. Introduction

Book exhibitions are a traditional library service characterized by comprehensiveness, vividness, and interactivity. They serve as important means for libraries to promote collections, disseminate cultural knowledge, uphold the spirit of the times, and advance nationwide reading, occupying a significant position in the work of various types of libraries in China. Since the reform and opening-up, exhibition activities in Chinese libraries have increased substantially, and connections with foreign institutions have become closer. In response to new requirements in this new era, the library community in China must consider how to standardize exhibition activities, streamline exhibition processes, improve exhibition quality, and meet the public's demand for high-quality exhibition services.

This paper takes the exhibition and loans policies of the National Library of Australia (NLA) as its research object, exploring the characteristics of these policies to provide reference and guidance for Chinese libraries in developing relevant policies.

2. Literature Review

Research on library exhibition work in China has a long history, but studies on exhibition policies urgently need strengthening. As of December 2018, a CNKI search using "exhibition policy" as the keyword yielded 29 documents, none of which were relevant to library exhibition policy research. Using "library AND exhibition" as the keyword retrieved 229 documents, which after removing news reports and irrelevant materials, resulted in 229 research papers. These studies primarily focused on public libraries, followed by university libraries, exhibition functions, and exhibition strategies, mostly using case studies. No discussion of library exhibition policies was found.

Additionally, while the websites of 31 provincial public libraries and the National Library of China in mainland China (excluding Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan) generally have sections related to exhibitions, none were found to contain exhibition policy content. This lack of policy research deserves attention for two reasons: First, the demands of the times require libraries to formulate rigorous exhibition policies. We are currently in a new historical period where new developments constantly emerge. In the exhibition field, joint exhibitions between Chinese and foreign libraries, as well as Chinese libraries holding exhi-

bitions overseas or borrowing overseas exhibits for domestic temporary public exhibitions, are increasing. New problems in exhibition preparation, exhibit protection, and transportation require timely summarization of experience and formulation of exhibition policies to efficiently and professionally handle various situations. Second, from an epistemological perspective, moving from practice to theory represents the ultimate outcome and necessary destination of human understanding of the world. China's library community has long focused on exhibition practice, with relatively scarce theoretical research. Policy is one form of theory. Carefully summarizing exhibition experience and elevating it to exhibition policy would greatly benefit exhibition activities. In the policy formulation process, drawing on foreign library practices is an effective approach, and the NLA's exhibition and loans policies serve as an excellent example.

3. NLA Exhibition Policy

3.1 Legal Basis The NLA is Australia's largest reference library. Its function is to collect and preserve documentary materials of national significance relating to Australia and its people, as well as important non-Australian materials, and to provide public access to them. This function is fulfilled through the library's own efforts and cooperation with other libraries or information providers. The NLA's exhibition function is authorized by Australia's *National Library Act 1960*, Section 6 of which states that the National Library Council shall make the library's collections available to designated individuals and institutions in ways and under conditions it determines, for purposes it deems to be in the national interest.

The NLA conducts exhibitions and displays of its collection materials to promote public awareness, understanding, and appreciation of its holdings; to foster general understanding of the library's functions and collections; to establish the library as a major tourist destination; to increase public visits; and to enhance national use of the library's resources.

3.2 Organizational Structure To ensure smooth implementation of exhibition activities, the NLA has established an Exhibition Committee and defined the responsibilities of the Director-General, Head of Exhibitions, and the Exhibition Committee .

[TABLE:2: NLA Exhibition Committee Roles and Responsibilities]

The Exhibition Committee requires organizers to submit written exhibition proposals before events, which can only be implemented within the approved framework. The Committee evaluates proposals based on criteria including: relevance to the NLA's strategic direction and collections; historical and educational significance; visitor appeal and capacity to attract new audiences; quality, content, artistic value, and originality; suitability for gallery spaces and availability; opportunities for public programs; and connections to major events or commemorations. Proposals for commercial, political, or fundraising purposes are not

considered.

3.3 Exhibition Principles The NLA’s exhibition policy stipulates eight principles: (1) Enrich public understanding of “what it means to be Australian” through displays; (2) Enhance public access to NLA collections and services; (3) Promote deeper understanding of Australian life and culture; (4) Attract new users; (5) Encourage research and interpretation of collections; (6) Promote recognition of the NLA as a major national cultural institution; (7) Increase public awareness of libraries’ collection and access functions; and (8) Display important works from other institutions when possible.

3.4 Special Provisions The policy makes special provisions for exhibitions in the Treasures Gallery and in-house displays managed by the Exhibitions Department .

[TABLE:3: NLA Special Provisions for Treasures Gallery and In-house Displays]

4. NLA Exhibition Loans Policy

4.1 Overview The NLA can lend its collection items to other libraries, museums, or collecting institutions for exhibition, and can borrow items from other individuals or institutions. This loans function is also authorized by Section 6 of the *National Library Act 1960*. The NLA views lending and borrowing for exhibition as important work ensuring broadest public access to national collections, promoting knowledge dissemination and scholarly research. The primary consideration in approving loans is minimizing risk of loss or damage and ensuring long-term preservation.

4.2 Key Concepts and Roles The loans policy distinguishes several important concepts and defines core roles and responsibilities .

[TABLE:4: NLA Loans Policy Key Concepts]

[TABLE:5: NLA Loans Policy Roles and Responsibilities]

4.3 Conditions for Lending Items are lent only for display, exhibition, or research purposes, generally only to reputable institutions with qualified staff, not to private or commercial entities. All loans require written agreements. The NLA considers: demand for the item for in-house exhibitions; condition and suitability for loan; exhibition history; nature of the borrowing institution; importance and scope of the exhibition; loan duration; and item value. Notification periods must be at least 12 months, with loans generally not exceeding 12 months (extendable to 24 months with approval).

Items that cannot be lent include: those whose acquisition conditions prohibit loan; fragile, sensitive, or valuable items at risk during handling or transport;

items already committed to other exhibitions; and recently displayed fragile items. The NLA may refuse any loan request or recall loaned items.

4.4 Standards for Borrowing The Exhibitions Department may apply to borrow items for research, reproduction, exhibition, or display. All borrowed items are subject to the lender's contractual terms. The NLA may reject borrowed items that are damaged, contaminated, or pose unacceptable risks. Due diligence is required, including researching ownership history, investigating lenders, checking lost art databases, and consulting experts. Special consultation is required for items related to Indigenous peoples, following guidelines from the National and State Libraries of Australia.

For overseas items potentially covered by Australia's *Protection of Cultural Objects on Loan Act 2013*, the NLA must confirm compliance with the Act, regulations, and international conventions. Borrowed items must be properly insured, with valuations reflecting market value. The NLA provides appropriate storage and care, matching the conditions agreed upon with lenders.

5. Implications for Chinese Libraries

5.1 Organizational System Research of 31 provincial public libraries and the National Library of China reveals that few have dedicated exhibition departments, with most assigning exhibition work to departments like social education, reader services, or publicity. Drawing on NLA's practices, Chinese libraries should: (1) Establish dedicated exhibition committees chaired by the library director, with members from key departments and external experts; (2) Develop comprehensive exhibition and loans policies posted on library websites for public supervision; and (3) Hold regular meetings to address major issues like exhibit protection, venue selection, and scheduling, with periodic policy revisions.

5.2 Exhibition Principles Libraries should formulate principles based on: (1) Venue characteristics including location, size, lighting, ventilation, and temperature/humidity control; and (2) Exhibit features including origin, artistic value, and capacity to attract new audiences. Different library types should adopt distinct principles: national libraries should promote national spirit and major policies; public libraries should focus on reading promotion and local characteristics; and university libraries should highlight teaching, research, and educational missions.

5.3 Collection Lending Policies Chinese libraries should pay close attention to: (1) Legal compliance, particularly China's *Cultural Relics Protection Law* and its implementation regulations regarding lending and transportation of cultural relics; and (2) Protection measures, including consulting preservation departments, assigning escorts for valuable items, and developing emergency re-

sponse plans. The *Measures for the Administration of Movable Cultural Relics Restoration* should also inform policy development.

5.4 Collection Borrowing Policies Chinese libraries should research the applicability of domestic laws to overseas exhibits. Australia's *Protection of Cultural Objects on Loan Act* provides a legislative model that facilitates international cultural exchanges. China's *Regulations on Foreign-Related Cultural and Artistic Performances and Exhibitions* lacks specific provisions for borrowed overseas exhibits. Chinese libraries should develop policies addressing: provenance investigation, consultation with relevant groups (especially for items of historical significance to specific communities), and assessment of potential controversies. Comprehensive policies and procedures should be established, with special consultation protocols for sensitive items that prioritize humanistic care.

6. Conclusion

The NLA's exhibition and loans policies demonstrate a systematic, legal-compliant approach that Chinese libraries can learn from. Key takeaways include establishing robust organizational structures, formulating clear principles, ensuring exhibit safety, and strictly adhering to legal requirements. As international exhibitions become more common, Chinese libraries must develop comprehensive policies that both facilitate cultural exchange and protect cultural heritage, drawing on international best practices while adapting to China's legal and cultural context.

References

[The original references section contains numerous Chinese-language citations that have been omitted from this translation as they are not essential to understanding the paper's content. The references cover topics including library exhibition services, public library functions, cultural heritage protection laws, and foreign-related exhibition regulations.]

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

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