

Construction and Practice of Social Service Capacity in Public Libraries: A Case Study of Chifeng Library (Postprint)

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] Taking the Inner Mongolia Chifeng City Library as an example, this study explores the construction and practical issues of public library social service capacity in the current social environment, aiming to provide references and insights for how public libraries in China can more effectively undertake their social responsibilities. [Method/Process] By examining the practical process of social service capacity building at the Inner Mongolia Chifeng City Library, this paper summarizes the common problems and solutions in library social service capacity construction. [Results/Conclusion] It proposes that in the current social environment, public library social service capacity building should first integrate social responsibility into the library's strategic planning, provide adequate institutional guarantees, transform it into part of the library's values and philosophy, and develop new models through extensive cooperation with social forces, while being mindful of acting within one's capacity and achieving breakthroughs through selective prioritization.

Full Text

2. The Boundaries of Public Library Social Responsibility

In theory, societal demands on enterprises are unlimited, yet fulfilling social responsibility incurs costs, which means enterprises cannot shoulder unlimited responsibilities without hindering their own development and failing to accomplish even their "core" duties. The same applies to public libraries. With limited resources, libraries can only assume finite social responsibilities. But how much of these resources can be allocated to social responsibility? What social responsibilities should libraries undertake? Where are the boundaries of library social responsibility? Let us first review what social responsibilities public libraries have undertaken in practice over the past decades.

Internationally, Han Yu' s 2009 survey of five U.S. public library websites found that these libraries fulfilled their social responsibilities through resource development, special lectures, themed activities, and service innovation, focusing on issues such as population, employment, economy, environmental protection, and energy [?]. The IFLA Committee on Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE), which replaced the Social Responsibility Discussion Group (SRDG) as IFLA' s main implementer of library social responsibility, reported in its 2010 World Report that among 122 surveyed countries, half conducted HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns through libraries via materials distribution, exhibitions, training, and mobile libraries. Regarding information access for persons with disabilities, 60% of respondent countries indicated that libraries had special programs for disabled patrons, including information resources and accessibility facilities. Libraries in 48 countries promoted basic education by donating books to school libraries, training school librarians, offering summer programs, and extending public library services to schools. Additionally, 50% of countries reported that libraries promoted environmental protection through exhibitions, relevant materials, and collaborative activities with environmental organizations [?].

In China, Han Jun' s 2012 survey of 19 urban public library websites identified six major categories related to library social responsibility: leisure and health, education and learning, arts and humanities, business management and law, individuals and families, and environment and society, with lectures, interactive experiences, videos, and other formats as primary vehicles [?]. Yang Guang' s 2015 comparative study of ten public libraries each from China and the United States revealed that the top five social responsibility themes for U.S. public libraries were practical arts and skills, gaming and entertainment, lifelong learning, computer training, and job-seeking services, while Chinese public libraries prioritized cultural and ethnic issues, culture and reading, gaming and entertainment, arts and history, and notable figures. Both countries' libraries primarily fulfilled these responsibilities through special lectures, themed activities, skills training, service expansion, and resource development [?].

Thus, while the social issues libraries focus on have evolved over time, their methods of fulfillment remain closely tied to routine library services. Lectures, training, and thematic resource development are all traditional service approaches. Although libraries have recently developed new methods to enhance their social service capacity—such as maker spaces providing tools and creative environments—these remain extensions of traditional services, leveraging or expanding existing resources to meet social needs through convenient, familiar service models. As renowned library science expert Shera noted: “Like the entire social communication system in which it exists, the library can become a tremendous aggregating force of vital importance to social development. Libraries must promote understanding and cohesion amid society' s contradictions, divisions, and conflicts.” This has been the general direction of libraries' social responsibility efforts in recent decades.

Therefore, when discussing what social responsibilities libraries should undertake and their boundaries, a review of library practice reveals that for individual libraries, three principles should guide the accurate delineation of social responsibility boundaries: the “priority of core responsibilities principle,” the “act within capacity principle,” and the “promote social harmony principle.” Libraries must only consider assuming social responsibilities after fully accomplishing their core duties, selecting responsibilities within their capabilities that can leverage or expand existing resources [?], while maintaining the overarching direction of promoting social harmony.

3. Research Status of Library Social Responsibility in China

In 2010, the Library Society of China designated “Library Social Responsibility” as a conference theme, defining it in the call for papers as: As an institutional arrangement, library establishment and maintenance is the government’s responsibility; correspondingly, libraries must also fulfill their own social responsibilities. *Library Development* dedicated a special column in its seventh issue that year to publish five award-winning papers on library social responsibility, which for the first time in China’s library community clarified that “library social responsibility” primarily refers to “extra duties” beyond traditional library services, while also addressing why libraries should undertake these “extra services” from different perspectives. Since then, Chinese scholars have paid increasing attention to library social responsibility theory, promoting the shift of public library social services from spontaneous to conscious development, and encouraging public libraries to focus more broadly on social issues in their innovative services.

Regarding the significance of libraries undertaking social responsibility, “demonstrating library social value and promoting sustainable library development” has become scholarly consensus. Like the consensus reached in the U.S. library community, China’s library community generally recognizes that libraries need to fulfill social responsibilities as a responsible social institution, which concerns public and societal moral evaluation of libraries [?]. Xu Junlin argues that social responsibility is the social foundation for public libraries to gain social recognition, improve social status, and achieve sustainable development [?]. Guo Haiming contends that proactively undertaking social responsibility can win libraries good social reputations, enhance their competitiveness, and effectively realize the appreciation of library resource values, thereby promoting sustainable library development [?].

Concerning the definition and connotation of library social responsibility, most scholars view it as responsibilities beyond libraries’ core duties. Representative perspectives include: Liu Ziheng et al. define library social responsibility as the responsibility of libraries, as social components, to address a series of “non-library issues” related to humanity’s sustainable future, such as economic, ethnic, environmental, war and peace, and religious issues [?]. Fan Bingsi argues that

only responsibilities beyond libraries' core duties or basic responsibilities assigned by society can be termed library social responsibility [?]. Han Yu defines library social responsibility as the responsibility to help solve social problems—not “core duties” but not “optional” either, rather something society demands libraries consciously undertake [?]. Guo Xuejun defines library social responsibility as the responsibility libraries jointly undertake in addressing historical 遗留 problems, natural disasters, and typical social issues [?].

Regarding the content and implementation methods of library social responsibility, Jiang Yongfu et al. categorize library social responsibility into three aspects: legal responsibility (fulfilling statutory duties), ethical responsibility (maintaining social “common good” or “moral order”), and purely voluntary responsibility (actively undertaking obligations for public welfare causes like peace, harmony, democracy, rule of law, environmental construction, charity, and assistance) [?]. Zhu Junwei believes specific content relates to bridging the digital divide, ensuring equitable information access, community services, assisting vulnerable groups, and promoting social reading [?]. Zuo Xuemei et al., from a moral perspective, propose that library social responsibility comprises two aspects: properly handling relationships with stakeholders and intervening in society through multiple channels to promote social harmony [?]. Guo Haiming argues that under China's cultural power strategy, library social responsibility implementation mechanisms require national government regulation and guidance at the macro level, active social participation at the meso level, and library internal development and improvement at the micro level [?].

These views represent Chinese libraries' positive attitude toward social responsibility. However, fulfilling social responsibility depends not only on attitude but also on capacity. While Chinese libraries actively research social responsibility theory, they have neglected capacity-building research, resulting in well-intentioned but inadequate practice that hinders effective participation in solving social problems, reducing social responsibility fulfillment to superficial efforts.

4. Practice of Social Service Capacity Building at Chifeng Library

Established in 1982, Chifeng Library faced severe challenges after its new building was completed in 2010, including funding shortages, outdated equipment, and an aging workforce. To escape this predicament, the library formulated a five-year development plan and implemented comprehensive operational innovations, successfully relocating to the new building in 2012. After several years of development, Chifeng Library transformed from a traditional to a modern library, becoming a first-class public library in Inner Mongolia. In 2013, it was rated a prefecture-level “National Second-Class Library” in China's fifth public library evaluation and awarded the title of “National Advanced Collective in Cultural System.” It achieved excellent results in the sixth evaluation in 2017. A crucial lesson from these years of development was that while im-

proving infrastructure and talent development, the library focused on building social service capacity, consciously and gradually undertaking feasible social responsibilities to contribute to local social, economic, and cultural development, thereby demonstrating library importance to the public and government and securing long-term, sustained government support.

4.1 Using Youth Services as a Breakthrough to Enhance Social Service Capacity

Facing insufficient fiscal investment and weak infrastructure, the library leadership believed that only by finding a breakthrough to expand social influence using existing resources could they secure additional funding. Through extensive research, they discovered that youth education was increasingly valued by parents. In 2010, Chifeng's permanent population included over 600,000 minors. If the library could assume more social responsibility in youth education, it would gain parental support and expand its influence. After examining youth education practices in other Chinese libraries, Chifeng Library established the strategic goal of "focusing on basic education and assuming social responsibility," leveraging existing youth service experience, broadly cooperating with social organizations to compensate for funding shortages, and vigorously planning and organizing a series of educational activities for citywide minors. Activity themes included early childhood and family education, art, dance, writing, and social education, with diverse formats such as training series, lectures, competitions, and performances. These activities, built upon existing human and material resources, fully mobilized social forces, compensated for construction funding shortages, enhanced service capacity, and significantly expanded the library's social influence. Examples include collaborating with radio stations on summer junior reporter series, hosting painting and calligraphy competitions with the Hongshan District Art Association, co-organizing "Mom's Help" parent-child classes with the Chifeng Animation Association, and holding award-winning essay contests with primary and secondary schools (see Table 1). After more than a year, these series attracted broad societal participation, with coverage by Chifeng radio, television, and major newspapers. Cumulative participation reached one million children and youth. The enhanced social service capacity for minors gradually made youth services Chifeng Library's signature offering, significantly raising its profile and social influence in Chifeng.

While youth services are not new for public libraries, elevating them to the level of social responsibility and consciously undertaking "extra duties" yields unexpected benefits and substantially improves overall service capacity. The success of youth activities attracted many adult readers, prompting the library to gradually expand services to include family education consultation, college entrance exam guidance, and employment counseling. In 2013, the library signed an agreement with the National Library for the Blind, receiving 2,000 braille books to enhance services for blind readers. The library became more than just a place for reading and studying—it became a venue where citizens' diverse needs

could be met.

4.2 Focusing on Regional Cultural Preservation and Inheritance to Further Expand Social Responsibility

After several years of effort, Chifeng Library's operating funds increased from 30,000 yuan in 2011 to 7.91 million yuan in 2015, with significant improvements in infrastructure, collections, automation equipment, and talent development. The library's overall service level and capacity reached new heights. When formulating its new development strategy, Chifeng Library identified regional cultural preservation and cultural confidence building as its next breakthrough, launching the Chifeng Memory Oral History Digital Project. Based on oral histories of Chifeng's notable figures, this project comprehensively collects images, audio, video, and various documents reflecting Chifeng's historical and cultural heritage.

Excellent traditional Chinese culture is the "root" and "soul" of the Chinese nation and the solid foundation for our cultural confidence. Oral history supplements formal written history with ordinary citizens' stories, facilitating in-depth exploration of regional history, preserving regional culture, and promoting cultural inheritance. Moreover, oral history collection, documentation, and organization connect academia with the public and scholars with ordinary people—essential for a harmonious society. Many libraries worldwide undertake similar memory preservation projects, such as the Library of Congress's "American Memory," UNESCO's "Memory of the World," Germany's "Our Story—National Memory," Singapore's "Singapore Memory," and China's "Chinese Memory."

However, compared with these international and national libraries, Chifeng Library faced obvious gaps in financial, human, and technical resources. To ensure smooth project implementation, the library conducted extensive research and actively sought support from government departments. During the project planning phase, it received strong support from Chifeng Municipal Propaganda Department, Municipal Culture, Radio, Television, Press and Publication Bureau, Development and Reform Commission, and Finance Bureau, whose leaders and experts provided excellent guidance on the project's purpose, objectives, production approach, and figure selection criteria, enabling Chifeng Memory to benchmark against "Memory of the World" and "Chinese Memory" from the outset. After project approval, Chifeng Library secured substantial financial support from relevant municipal government departments. The first phase completed bidding in early 2016, with Beijing Bixu Culture Co., Ltd. selected through public tender to undertake production.

To ensure the project's success and comprehensively reflect Chifeng's diverse cultural heritage, the library established a leadership and production organization system with the director of the Municipal Culture, Radio, Television, Press and Publication Bureau as group leader, library leadership as producers, and Bixu Culture Co., Ltd. and library technical staff as directors, cinematographers, sub-

titlers, and stage managers. It formulated selection criteria and procedures for Chifeng Memory figures, with the Municipal Culture, Radio, Television, Press and Publication Bureau issuing notices to district/county bureaus to launch the first-phase selection process.

Through recommendations, self-nominations, nominations, preliminary document review, and symposiums, the first phase selected 12 figures including Song Yingda, Bai Xianlin, and Wu Guozheng—veteran cultural workers in Chifeng, retired leaders who devoted themselves to Chifeng’ s development, and lifelong rural residents. They are both witnesses to Chifeng’ s living history over the past century and participants in its great journey from hardship to prosperity. Their narratives vividly convey Chifeng’ s rapid development since 1949, especially since reform and opening up, and the people’ s magnificent struggle to create a better life under Party leadership.

To ensure quality, the library developed a 12-step production process including preliminary communication, outline drafting, recording, video editing, audio extraction, first-version subtitles, initial proofreading, video subtitling, video verification, interviewee proofreading, final review, and final revision. During this period, leaders from Chifeng Municipal Propaganda Department and Municipal Culture, Radio, Television, Press and Publication Bureau heard multiple progress reports and provided guidance.

After nearly one year of effort, the first phase produced nearly 80 episodes totaling over 1,600 minutes of interview videos with 12 figures. On September 26, 2017, the “Chifeng Memory Release Ceremony” was held at the Chifeng Regional Library Cadre Training Workshop, piloting promotion at grassroots libraries. A dedicated Chifeng Memory website was subsequently created for free public viewing, receiving widespread acclaim. Local television stations also broadcast the series, achieving high ratings and generating significant response in Chifeng’ s cultural circles. The project enabled citizens to directly and conveniently understand Chifeng’ s excellent culture and glorious history, strengthening cultural confidence and national pride, and effectively promoting civic education in patriotism, collectivism, and socialism.

The second phase bidding was completed in November 2017, with production beginning in March 2018. This phase expanded to nine fields including propaganda, education, women, tourism, industry, agriculture, transportation, technology, and folklore. The project will publish the large-scale *Chifeng Memory* book series, comprehensively reflecting Chifeng’ s century of development through text and images. After the second phase and the first three volumes of the book series are published, a “Chifeng Memory” symposium will be convened, inviting renowned experts and scholars from Chifeng, Inner Mongolia, and nationwide in culture, library science, and local history to discuss Chifeng Memory, oral history, and cultural confidence, further expanding influence.

The Chifeng Memory project’ s success enabled Chifeng Library to take a solid step forward in its strategic goal of social responsibility, further enhancing its

social service capacity and influence. The figure selection process generated significant response across Chifeng society, sparking among youth a passion for exploring traditional culture and increasing understanding of the importance of historical and folk art preservation and protection. As the first-phase oral history videos were released on the library website and broadcast on television, the library received countless accolades from citizens and cultural figures, unprecedentedly elevating its social image.

5. Strategies for Public Library Social Service Capacity Building

Library social service capacity is the ability to fulfill social responsibility. However, current research on library social responsibility rarely addresses capacity building, creating a practical dilemma: libraries hope to undertake more social responsibilities to highlight their important societal role, yet lack the capacity to do so. Summarizing Chifeng Library's experience, public library social service capacity building should proceed from several aspects:

- (1) **Integrate social responsibility into library strategic planning.** Deep analysis is needed on how to reflect social responsibility in traditional service strategic goals. Chifeng Library, through several rounds of research, established "focusing on basic education and assuming social responsibility" as a stage-specific strategic goal, and after achieving results, set "regional cultural preservation and cultural confidence building" as its further development objective. Similarly, Dongguan Library, which has developed rapidly in recent years, explicitly identified "boosting Dongguan social construction" as a strategic direction in its 13th Five-Year Plan, with targets including supporting innovative city construction, providing urban cultural leisure spaces, establishing a Chinese cartoon base, supporting urban construction and external publicity, and promoting public cultural propaganda through all media and channels [?]. Only by incorporating social responsibility into library strategic goals can resource allocation for human, financial, and material resources be coordinated to achieve social responsibility objectives.
- (2) **Provide institutional guarantees and establish scientific evaluation systems.** Public libraries already have evaluation standards for all work, with many maintaining their own assessment systems. To strengthen social service capacity, social responsibility fulfillment must be consciously incorporated into evaluation systems. For example, when assessing lectures, Chifeng Library not only counts annual frequency and attendance but also lists social service-related lectures as a separate indicator. Similarly, when evaluating youth services, it tracks not only book circulation and visits but also off-site activity participation and feedback. These indicators examine annual social responsibility fulfillment and social benefits to determine the next year's work plans and targets.

- (3) **Integrate social responsibility into library culture**, transforming it into part of library values and concepts so that social responsibility becomes a conscious behavior for all staff. Senior leadership must lead by example, implementing and undertaking social responsibility throughout all library activities and popularizing social responsibility knowledge among staff to enhance understanding of its importance for sustainable development. Implementation should start small, incorporating social responsibility concepts into library safety, hygiene, environmental protection, and energy conservation. The cohesion formed by enhanced overall social responsibility consciousness powerfully promotes staff participation and cooperation in social responsibility fulfillment, thereby greatly improving social service capacity. In recent years, Chifeng Library's internal culture building has continuously strengthened staff social responsibility consciousness, forming a strong sense of responsibility that closely links individual development with library and social development. Staff not only actively participate in library social services but also proactively contribute suggestions, creating synergy to jointly promote social service capacity improvement.
- (4) **Actively seek external cooperation and support.** Collaboration with government or social organizations not only maximizes limited resources but also opens broader and richer social service models. In recent years, through extensive cooperation, Chifeng Library has greatly enriched its service content and methods and enhanced its service capacity. For instance, family education, employment guidance, and youth activities in painting, photography, and broadcasting—none of which are library strengths—have become quality service projects through social organization participation. Similar examples exist in other public libraries: Guangdong Provincial Sun Yat-sen Library cooperated with provincial prisons to establish 25 “Knowledge-Seeking and Renewal Reading Bases,” with prisons providing space and libraries providing books, successfully extending library services to this special domain [?]. Shanghai Pudong Library partnered with local environmental departments to launch the “Pudong Environment Weekly Public Opinion” project, helping environmental departments grasp major events in the environmental sanitation industry in real time, providing information services for leadership decision-making and indirectly helping improve citizens' living environment [?]. In fact, libraries have conducted many cooperative activities and services in recent years, some with mature models that need re-examination from a social responsibility perspective to clarify direction, consolidate existing services, and develop new ones to elevate social service capacity.
- (5) **Act within capacity and choose breakthrough points.** Social issues are multifaceted, and libraries cannot possibly solve all of them. Following the principles of “priority of core responsibilities,” “act within capacity,” and “promote social harmony,” libraries should consider creating shared value that benefits both society and library innovation development

based on their own advantages and local conditions. Shared value refers to library service models or projects that utilize library resources (including information, human, financial, and material resources) to achieve service innovation while fulfilling specific social responsibilities. The Chifeng Memory project was developed based on this thinking, according to the actual conditions of the library and Chifeng City. It leveraged library advantages while promoting local historical and cultural preservation and inheritance, effectively achieving shared value between the library and society. Similarly, while library maker spaces are currently a primary means for public libraries to provide innovation and entrepreneurship services through space reconfiguration, not all libraries are suitable for building maker spaces. For some county libraries in remote areas, the service demand and social impact of maker spaces are far less significant than those of left-behind children's education issues. Moreover, these libraries' existing resources cannot support the human, material, and financial requirements for building maker spaces, whereas left-behind children's education activities are fully achievable with existing resources and can produce good social effects. Therefore, such public libraries should focus their social responsibility fulfillment on left-behind children's education rather than maker space development where social service capacity is weak. Acting within capacity and choosing breakthrough points is thus a fundamental principle for public library social service capacity building.

Responding to the times and proactively undertaking "extra" social responsibilities has become an important factor in public libraries' sustainable development. By participating in solving and improving social problems within their capacity while ensuring traditional services, libraries can positively impact social harmony and development. Formulating social responsibility goals from a strategic height, implementing social responsibility in practice, integrating it into library culture, actively cooperating with government and social organizations, and choosing breakthrough points according to circumstances are effective paths for public libraries to improve social service capacity and fulfill social responsibility. However, library social responsibility is not simply about doing one thing. From a macro perspective, social responsibility fulfillment and capacity improvement require long-term goals and sustained effort as a cause for improving people's livelihoods and promoting social harmony and progress. From a micro perspective, social responsibility must be integrated into all library work, with every project and event treated seriously. Only thus can public libraries create new social value and inject new development momentum in the tide of social development.

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Table 1 Chifeng Library Children’s Activities and Extended Activities Overview

Regular Series Activities	Description
Reading Little Stars	Selecting and awarding “Reading Little Stars” every two months
Junior Reporter Activities	Joint “Focus on Chifeng Library” junior reporter group experience activities with Chifeng Evening News
Children’ s Lecture Hall	Inviting experts from various fields to elementary schools to disseminate knowledge on fire safety, security, law, etc.
Animation Dubbing Contest	Co-organized with Chifeng Animation Association
Little Volunteer Activities	Recruiting 10-16-year-old volunteers passionate about public welfare, providing training before service
“Mom’ s Help” Parent-Child Class	Co-organized with Chifeng Animation Association, one-hour Sunday classes to help mothers with education issues
Reading, Photography, Painting Competitions	Irregularly held in cooperation with primary schools, kindergartens, banks, and related enterprises

Regular Series Activities	Description
Employment Consultation and Guidance	Providing citizens with essential computer skills training, career consultation, and guidance
Family Education Consultation	Providing family education guidance and consultation for parents of primary and secondary school students through lectures, training, and parent-child activities
College Entrance Exam Guidance	Hiring professionals to provide strategy analysis for exam registration
Organizing young readers to participate in or host Hohhot Animation Festival activities	

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Ju Hongyun: Refined the research approach and wrote the paper;
Zhou Mingxuan: Collected materials and revised the paper.

Abstract: [Purpose/significance] Taking Chifeng Library in Inner Mongolia as an example, this paper discusses the construction and practice of public library social service capacity under the current social environment, providing reference for Chinese public libraries to more effectively undertake their social responsibility. [Method/process] Combined with the practice process of library social service capacity building in Chifeng, Inner Mongolia, this paper summarizes common problems and solutions in library social service capacity construction. [Result/conclusion] In the present social environment, it is suggested that social responsibility should be integrated into library strategic planning, fully guaranteed in systems so as to transform it into part of library values and ideas. Extensive cooperation with social forces is useful to open up a new model, according to respective abilities and advantages for breaking through.

Keywords: social service capacity; social responsibility; public library; Chifeng Library

Note: The final sections regarding award-winning papers and journal publication information have been omitted as they constitute journal front/back matter rather than substantive content of the article.

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

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