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Practice and Reflection on the Construction of Honor Systems in Public Libraries: A Case Study of Benxi City Library (Postprint)

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] Taking the practice of Benxi City Library in establishing an honor system as a case study, this study explores practical models for constructing honor systems in public libraries. [Method/Process] Based on an analysis of the current state of honor award practices and research in public libraries, this paper introduces how Benxi City Library applied the advanced concepts of the American Library Association (ALA) award system to construct a practical model for public library honor systems, elucidates several reflections on this practical model, and proposes feasible recommendations for the future construction of honor systems in public libraries. [Results/Conclusion] An honor system is reflected not only in the comprehensive coverage of awards, but more importantly in mechanism construction, thereby continuously encouraging librarians' progress and growth and promoting the development of the library profession.

Full Text

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Practice and Reflections on Constructing a Public Library Honor System: A Case Study of Benxi City Library

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] Taking the practice of Benxi City Library in establishing an honor system as an example, this paper explores the practical model for constructing public library honor systems. **[Method/Process]** Based on an analysis of the current state of practice and research on public library honor rewards, this paper introduces how Benxi City Library utilized the advanced concepts of the American Library Association (ALA) award system to construct a practical model for public library honor systems, elaborates on several reflections regarding this practical model, and proposes feasible recommendations for future construction of public library honor systems. **[Result/Conclusion]** An honor system is reflected not only in the comprehensive coverage of awards but more importantly in the construction of mechanisms, in order to continuously encourage staff progress and growth, and promote the development of library services.

Keywords: public library; honor system; practice model; review mechanism; reader nomination system

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The public library honor system is a novel concept proposed during China's sixth national public library evaluation. As an important component of library organizational culture, the public library honor system encompasses both structural composition and institutional safeguards. It serves to disseminate library culture and values among library staff, encouraging them to approach their work with a positive attitude, pursue progress and growth, and realize their personal values [1]. Through reflections on the practice of Benxi City Library (hereinafter referred to as "Benxi Library") in establishing its honor system, this paper proposes feasible recommendations for future honor system construction, aiming to provide reference and guidance for the development of domestic public library honor systems.

1. Practice and Research of Public Library Honor Rewards

In recent years, China's library community and related institutions have gradually increased their emphasis on the function of rewards. Most public libraries at various levels typically conduct annual commendation activities for outstanding employees at year-end, though these activities are usually not separately designated but rather incorporated as part of the annual summary work. Nanjing Library's "Director's Award" stands as the only independently named commendation award in China [2]. The China Library Society and provincial library societies in Zhejiang, Guangdong, and other provinces have also established several awards targeting library staff, including "Role Model Figures in Chinese

Libraries” [3], “Reader Activity Planning Award” [4], and “Most Beautiful Librarian” [5]. Meanwhile, provincial culture departments in Liaoning, Jiangsu, Gansu, and other provinces have instituted awards such as the “Public Library Outstanding Service Achievement Award,” “Library Applied Scientific Research Achievement Award,” and “Library Science Academic Achievement Award” to encourage library workers in their respective provinces to continuously expand service fields, innovate service methods, and advance reader services and applied scientific research in libraries [6-8].

These practical experiences have accumulated valuable insights for further advancing public library honor system work. Concurrently, domestic scholars have conducted research on library honor rewards in recent years. Wang Chuanmin et al. analyzed the functions and management of library honors [9]; Ge Xiaoyan explored motivational strategies to meet librarians’ spiritual needs [10]; Ning Yang examined the content, characteristics, problems, and countermeasures of library scientific research reward systems [11]; Liu Guanghong argued that library honor rewards not only serve general talent incentive functions but, more importantly, play a fundamental and long-term strategic role in enhancing intrinsic motivation, possessing global, fundamental, and long-term strategic significance [12]; Wang Zhaohui discussed the importance of collecting public opinions during the library reward publicity period and responding to inquiries [13]. Additionally, scholars such as E Lijun, Han Yu, Liu Ziheng, Bian Guoyao, and Liu Ying have explored the content, characteristics, award institutions, policies, and procedures of the American Library Association’s award system [14-17]. These studies have laid a foundation for ongoing research on public library honor systems.

Building upon this foundation, the author combines relevant practices from Benxi Library in establishing its honor system to conduct in-depth reflections on public library honor systems and propose feasible recommendations for future construction.

2. Creating a New Honor System Model Using ALA Award Concepts

The sixth national public library evaluation explicitly introduced the concept of “honor system” for the first time, representing a qualitative enhancement in the understanding of public library development. For the vast majority of public libraries, including provincial-level institutions, the honor system represents an entirely new concept. A public library honor system should encompass not only comprehensively covered awards but also clearly defined evaluation criteria; more importantly, it must possess scientifically complete institutional design. Although various libraries and societies at different levels had previously established different types of reward and commendation programs, these fell considerably short of honor system requirements in three key aspects: First, they failed to address a series of position-based awards that best reflect public library service effectiveness and social responsibility, leaving corresponding award stan-

dards to be established. Second, they did not clearly distinguish between the functions of award selection and award establishment, nor did they create independent award committees, resulting in structural asymmetry between selection management and award management. Third, the procedural design of the review process failed to fully reflect actual work performance, judges' evaluations lacked effective supervision, and public feedback was not adequately adopted or addressed, leading to varying degrees of deficiency in fairness, transparency, and participation.

The sixth national public library evaluation has promoted understanding of honor systems among public libraries, prompting fresh attempts to construct honor systems suited to their own circumstances and contemporary characteristics. This holds significant exploratory value and historical importance for modernizing China's public library governance system and capabilities.

Seizing the opportunity presented by the sixth national public library evaluation, Benxi Library, building upon successful experiences from domestic and international library award systems, focused on introducing the conceptual framework of the American Library Association (ALA) award system. Among numerous library awards worldwide, those administered by the ALA have attracted considerable attention, recognized as the most valuable and authoritative awards in the international library community due to their broad coverage and fair, transparent selection processes. The ALA award system has matured considerably over time, manifesting in four primary aspects: (1) establishment of an efficient selection organization comprising a review committee, awards committee, and liaison office; (2) formulation of clear selection policies covering award quantities and amounts, professional review, and requirements for recipients; (3) creation of a transparent selection process encompassing announcement, application, review committee discussion, voting, press release, and award ceremony; and (4) implementation of an award management system featuring the "three pillars" of regular review, necessary elimination, and reasonable establishment of new awards.

Benxi Library has focused on digesting and absorbing the advanced concepts and experiences of the ALA award system to form a distinctive yet practical public library honor system. The eight position-based awards in this system essentially cover the main operational areas of public libraries, while the four individual awards create favorable conditions for cultivating and selecting outstanding talent, with each award having clearly defined selection criteria. The system also includes specially established review committees, awards committees, and a secretariat, constructing a complete and scientific review architecture. The review process, centered on four key components—two rounds of review and public announcement, and all-staff assembly—ensures openness, fairness, and transparency.

The construction of a public library honor system is a systematic project, far more complex than simply issuing a few awards; it requires comprehensive promotion. Centered on the principle of "value—norm—progress—recognition,"

Benxi Library's honor system constructs a systematic practical model with relatively complete functions and effective performance, focusing on the overall layout of extracting, forming, and promoting public library organizational culture.

3. Benxi Library's Practice in Constructing an Honor System

A public library honor system serves as a measure of organizational image and a core element of library spirit, embodying the value orientation of upholding cultural dignity and serving the public. Benxi Library's practice in constructing its honor system represents a full expression of library spirit, aiming to encourage continuous staff improvement and thereby drive the development of the entire library enterprise. The following introduction proceeds from three aspects:

3.1 Award Composition and Selection Criteria

3.1.1 Award Composition Benxi Library focuses on enhancing service effectiveness and fully motivating staff enthusiasm by establishing eight "position-based awards" covering: Reading Promotion Organization and Guidance Award, Basic Reader Services Award, Automation Construction Award, Information Consultation Award, Collection Management Award, Business Collaboration Award, and Logistics Support Award. To better respect and discover talent while emphasizing the equal importance of practice and research, the library has also established four individual awards: Outstanding Contribution Award, Young Talent Award, Excellent Case Award, and Academic Research Award.

3.1.2 Selection Criteria (1) **Position-based Awards.** These include: - **Reading Promotion Organization and Guidance Award:** Granted to employees who have made positive contributions in organizing high-level, in-depth reading promotion activities, planning and advancing serialized and categorized reading guidance work, and enriching and broadening the connotations and methods of reading promotion. - **Basic Reader Services Award:** Granted to employees who have made positive contributions in proactively and enthusiastically serving readers, promoting service quality improvement, and analyzing literature utilization and reader reading preferences. - **Automation Construction Award:** Granted to employees who have made positive contributions in information infrastructure assurance, maintenance and management, as well as network and digital system construction, debugging, and operation. - **Information Consultation Award:** Granted to employees who have made positive contributions in providing specialized information services and reference consultation services to society, and undertaking the collection and database construction of local literature. - **Collection Management Award:** Granted to employees who have made positive contributions in literature acquisition, organization, and collection, cataloging and processing, and optimizing collection structure. - **Business Collaboration Award:** Granted to employees

who have made positive contributions in organizing and managing library business activities and research, business statistical analysis, and grassroots business guidance and training. - **Logistics Support Award:** Granted to employees who have made positive contributions in daily administrative management, human resource management, financial and archival management, and safety and environmental management.

(2) **Individual Awards.** These include: - **Outstanding Contribution Award:** Granted to employees who have worked in libraries for over 30 years, made outstanding contributions to library business work or organizational management, and achieved remarkable accomplishments in library science theory, methodology, technology, and research. - **Young Talent Award:** Granted to employees under 40 years old with strong professional responsibility, who diligently study their profession, are eager to learn and explore, combine theory with practice, and have created extraordinary achievements and made outstanding contributions in their library positions. - **Excellent Case Award:** Recognizes reading promotion activities or public lectures with distinctive features and significant effects that generate substantial social benefits and impact; achievements in public cultural services utilizing library literature and information resources through new media and mediums; and results obtained in providing continuous and systematic services for research projects and topics promoting economic and social development. - **Academic Research Award:** Recognizes achievements in institutional research, methodological research, and studies on internal management concerning library career development, business construction, and internal management.

3.2 Review Architecture

3.2.1 Establishment of Review Committee The review committee comprises the library director, deputy directors, and business backbones with senior professional titles or associate senior titles for over five years. Committee members' responsibilities include carefully fulfilling review obligations according to the composition and standards of the honor system awards to ensure a fair and smooth selection process. Specifically, this encompasses reviewing application materials, selecting award recipients, drafting award justifications, researching, formulating, and revising application conditions, requirements, and review rules, as well as stipulating the number of award recipients and award amounts.

3.2.2 Establishment of Awards Committee The awards committee comprises deputy directors with over 15 years of library experience and business backbones with senior professional titles for over five years or associate senior titles for over ten years. The committee's responsibilities include scientifically and rationally setting various awards within the honor system according to library development to ensure the overall functionality of awards. This specifically includes stipulating award names, researching, formulating, and revising selection criteria, and clarifying distinctions between awards. Simultaneously, the

awards committee is responsible for regularly reviewing the rationality of existing awards, modifying or discontinuing certain awards, establishing new awards, and ensuring that the purpose and criteria of new awards do not overlap with existing ones.

3.2.3 Establishment of Secretariat Under the leadership of the review committee, the secretariat is responsible for drafting review-related documents, award ceremony speeches, and award citations; submitting award process schedules to the review and awards committees; releasing and promoting award information, collecting and submitting application materials, recording review committee discussions, organizing and publicizing preliminary review results, and collecting and reporting public feedback; contacting award recipients to prepare acceptance speeches, and preserving review archival materials.

3.3 Review Process

3.3.1 Information Release [Figure 3: see original paper] This involves announcing annual award settings and selection criteria, specifying application requirements for each award, including two aspects: requirements for applicant qualifications and requirements for submitted application materials. Specific requirements primarily concern work field, work performance, academic achievements, age, and years of service.

3.3.2 Application

- (1) **Self-application:** Library staff proactively participate in award applications according to specific application requirements, considering their own circumstances and qualifications.
- (2) **Nomination by others:** Library colleagues or readers nominate candidate applicants, explaining the candidate's qualifications and the reasons for their nomination.

3.3.3 Submission of Application Materials Applicants provide corresponding materials according to specific award requirements. Applicants must elaborate in detail on their work or research in the materials, explain how they meet the corresponding award criteria, and most importantly, articulate the social benefits generated by their work or research.

3.3.4 First-round Review The review committee establishes an assessment leading group to conduct thorough evaluations of annual work summaries and submitted archival materials from various departments, with on-site assessments conducted when necessary. Library-wide and cross-departmental work receives separate focused assessment, and theoretical research throughout the year undergoes in-depth evaluation. Based on these assessments, the group proposes specific evaluation opinions for each award applicant. According to assessment results and submitted materials, review committee members conduct a recorded

vote to preliminarily determine the list of award recipients for the year, with each member required to provide voting justifications (i.e., review opinions) for each candidate.

3.3.5 Public Announcement The secretariat is responsible for publicizing preliminary review results along with specific review opinions from committee members for each candidate across the entire library. After the announcement period, the secretariat comprehensively and promptly reports collected feedback to the review committee.

3.3.6 Second-round Review After carefully and thoroughly considering feedback collected during the public announcement period, the review committee convenes a meeting to deliberate on preliminary candidates who have raised objections, followed by another recorded vote, with committee members required to provide voting justifications for specific candidates.

3.3.7 All-Staff Assembly The review committee presides over the assembly, announcing the award justifications for each preliminary candidate confirmed through two rounds of review voting. All staff members provide final approval through anonymous voting. Each preliminary candidate must receive approval from over two-thirds of the votes for the selection results to become final.

3.3.8 Award Ceremony The review committee reads award citations for each recipient, presents honorary certificates, conducts a comprehensive review of the library's work and research over the past year, and provides a thorough summary of the selection process.

4. Reflections on Public Library Honor Systems

4.1 Position-based Awards Help Enhance Service Levels

In the actual work of public libraries, public cultural service is the primary mission. Therefore, honor systems should establish more awards from the perspective of improving service quality and stimulating staff enthusiasm. Library work involves different positions, with each representing different service aspects. Due to varying position natures, librarians' achievements should be treated differently [14]. Public libraries should establish position-based service awards corresponding to specific work categories. In Benxi Library's honor system, the establishment of position-based awards comprehensively covers various fundamental aspects of public library work, targeting and rewarding exemplary cases in service, leveraging the driving effect of advanced models, thereby enhancing the overall service level of public libraries.

At present, relevant awards from the China Library Society (hereinafter referred to as "CLS"), various provincial societies, and provincial culture departments

have not yet involved position-based awards. The establishment of position-based awards in public library honor systems serves as a beneficial supplement to this situation. Moreover, position-based awards embody the social responsibilities and role commitments of public libraries, making them particularly suitable for such institutions to establish.

4.2 Clarifying the Functions of “Selection” and “Establishment”

Currently, in various Chinese library awards, review and award establishment are combined without distinction, causing confusion between the functions of “selection” and “establishment.” Benxi Library’s honor system has separately established a review committee and an awards committee, providing a practical solution to functionally differentiate “selection” from “establishment.” “Selection” represents the review and choice under the premise of “establishment,” while “establishment” represents the setting and screening tested through “selection.” The two functions both promote and check each other. On one hand, the rationality of award establishment becomes directly evident during the review process. Well-established awards feature clear project categorization, easily graspable standards, and recipients with outstanding performance, representing vibrant work and research in specific library areas. On the other hand, scientific and fair review allows the functions behind awards to be fully realized, naturally manifesting the awards’ nobility, value, and attractive honor, motivating more librarians to conscientiously align their work and research with award criteria. The two committees in Benxi Library’s honor system maintain clear division of labor while collaborating closely, forming a virtuous cycle of “establishment—review—work enhancement.”

4.3 Three Mechanisms and Four Components of the Review Process

In Benxi Library’s honor system, the review committee establishes an assessment leading group to conduct thorough material and on-site evaluations of all aspects of annual work and research, thereby forming an objective guarantee mechanism based on performance facts that eliminates the notion of “same treatment regardless of work quantity” and “same treatment regardless of work quality.” Based on assessment results and applicant materials, review committee members vote solemnly. The method of recorded voting with justifications ensures each judge casts a solemn vote with a highly responsible attitude, forming a transparent review mechanism. “Relationship votes” that disregard actual work and research performance or review requirements can be directly exposed through the subsequent public announcement phase under broad staff supervision, forming an accountability mechanism that implicitly requires stricter self-discipline from judges.

The two components of first-round and second-round review in Benxi Library’s honor system enable truly qualified business backbones who meet award standards and possess work and research capabilities to stand out. The two components of public announcement and all-staff assembly allow all library staff to

fully participate in the award review process, facilitating broad solicitation of opinions. The close coordination of these four components can deeply instill the proper work ethic advocated by the honor system into staff members through the entire process of advanced model generation.

The three mechanisms—objective guarantee, transparent review, and accountability—combined with the four components—two rounds of review, public announcement, and all-staff assembly—powerfully ensure a rigorous and fair review process with convincing results, fully demonstrating the honor system’s positive role in promoting the healthy development of library services.

5. Feasible Recommendations for Future Construction of Public Library Honor Systems

5.1 Emphasizing Mechanism Construction in Honor Systems

The United States’ ALA library awards are numerous, essentially covering all areas involved in library work. Meanwhile, the sound and mature award mechanisms of the ALA library awards, including application qualifications, requirements, review and award institution settings, selection criteria, and review processes, are key to ensuring the awards’ annual successful issuance and widespread attention, recognition, respect, and emulation by international peers.

The sixth national public library evaluation’s requirements for honor systems extend beyond merely aggregating award types to also demand systematic design and institutional arrangements. This has prompted public libraries to begin establishing scientific and complete commendation systems. From the perspective of existing domestic commendation practices, the library community still has significant gaps in recognizing the importance of honor commendations and mechanisms. An honor system is reflected not only in the comprehensive coverage and mutual complementarity of award types but also in the construction of honor system mechanisms. Regarding the latter aspect, the domestic library community still has many weaknesses to address. Several measures should be taken: (1) Further improve the review architecture of public library honor systems. Currently, awards at various library societies are established by review committees without independent awards committees, resulting in a lack of unified and clear award generation mechanisms. The sound operation of public library honor systems requires attention not only to selection management but also to award management to maintain the credibility of awards themselves [15]. Establishing awards committees in public library honor systems will facilitate the creation of award-related management systems, thereby forming a well-structured situation with symmetrical architecture between selection management and award management. (2) Clearly recognize that a complete review process constitutes an important component of public library honor systems, ensuring: establishment of clear award standards to provide review basis and avoid subjective judgments by review committee members [16]; scientific institutional design of

review processes to reflect the guidance, fairness, transparency, and participation of honor systems; commendation ceremonies that highlight library spirit and create a “perfect outlet” reflecting honor system values—becoming a “shaping field” for staff work capabilities, a “warming furnace” for work willingness, and a “convergence point” for library sentiment.

Emphasizing mechanism construction in honor systems will enable the domestic library community to develop deeper understanding of the overall functions of honor systems. This will facilitate active thinking and bold exploration by public libraries at all levels to construct honor system models that both conform to China’s national conditions and follow international practices, thereby forming scientific practices for China’s public library honor systems.

5.2 Utilizing Reader Nomination Effectively

To date, commendations in China’s library field still adopt the “application system” as the sole registration method. In future public library honor systems, the application system should operate in tandem with the nomination system to further identify “most beautiful librarians” with outstanding performance. The nomination system should integrate with mechanisms implemented in many Chinese libraries, such as reader selection of “excellent service librarians” and “reading promotion ambassadors,” thereby forming a “reader nomination system.” Reader nomination fully embodies readers’ affirmation of librarians’ services, motivating librarians to devote themselves wholeheartedly to providing cultural services to readers. Meanwhile, the “reader nomination system” provides readers opportunities to participate in public library honor system selection, exercising their right to evaluate library and librarian service quality and granting public library honor systems broader mass participation. The sixth national public library evaluation highlighted a clear orientation toward service effectiveness, namely, the function of public libraries in prospering and disseminating culture to society. The application of “reader nomination” in public library honor systems can enhance the effectiveness of the cultural service supply side while profoundly reflecting the demand-side status of public cultural acquisition, continuously urging public libraries to effectively meet the cultural needs of regional communities through quality public services. Therefore, the reader nomination system will inevitably become an important engine invigorating public library honor systems.

5.3 Highlighting the Recognition Value of Individual Awards

Awards established in honor systems necessarily represent areas that public libraries need to focus on and strongly support. In honor systems, clearly targeted individual awards such as the Outstanding Contribution Award, Young Talent Award, Excellent Case Award, and Academic Research Award significantly convey respect for “lifelong dedication” and “innovation.” Many outstanding librarians work silently and selflessly as stepping stones for others. Meanwhile, as library services develop, some practices and research involve risk assessment. The

“cold bench” spirit of career dedication and the courage to innovate represent librarians’ most precious professional states, as only persistence and pioneering can truly drive library progress. Therefore, public library honor systems must clearly highlight career orientations of persistence and pioneering, combining award issuance with professional ethics.

The renowned American library scholar C. Russom noted that library awards are granted to librarians or librarian organizations, not to library buildings, which can come and go; librarians are the true cornerstone of libraries’ existence [17]. Talent constitutes libraries’ most valuable asset. Clearly targeted individual awards will fully demonstrate public library honor systems’ full respect for and excavation of librarians’ human value. The need for self-actualization represents the highest level of human need. People require recognition and motivation to maximize their potential. Consequently, recognition formed through respecting and excavating human value should become the primary objective of future public library honor system construction.

5.4 Organic Integration with Other Types of Commendations

Seizing the opportunity of the sixth national public library evaluation, public libraries at all levels will gradually establish their own honor systems. Combined with existing awards from the China Library Society, provincial societies, and provincial culture departments, a library award mechanism with Chinese characteristics can be formed. Whether in terms of award settings or review processes, public library honor systems better align with the specific conditions and characteristics of public libraries themselves. Their direct promotional effect on public library work and staff sense of honor is undoubtedly more evident than other award forms. For instance, categorized position-based awards can only be comprehensively established within public library honor systems, and opportunities for ordinary librarians to participate in review processes can only be provided by public library honor systems. Meanwhile, awards organized by the China Library Society, provincial societies, and provincial culture departments possess greater macro-orientation, guidance, and authority, playing crucial roles in promoting library development toward comprehensive, fundamental, and forward-looking directions. Moving forward, these two aspects of honor commendations should achieve organic integration to form synergistic effects. On one hand, public library honor system awards can serve as a project delivery platform for society and government awards, with the material organization process for applying for public library honor system awards becoming the preparatory process for applying for society and government awards. On the other hand, both parties can learn from each other in practical operation, continuously improving award settings and review mechanisms to make their respective commendation systems increasingly scientific, thereby jointly forming a broad-sense library honor system.

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Abstract: [Purpose/significance] Taking the practice of Benxi Library honors system construction as an example, the paper explores the practice mode of public library “honor system” constructing. [Method/process] This paper analyzes the status of practice and research about public library honor and rewarding. It also introduces how Benxi Library constructs the practice mode of public library “honor system”, using advanced idea of American ALA reward system. Then it explains some thoughts on this practice mode, and proposes feasibility suggestions of future public library “honor system”. [Result/conclusion] Honor system does not only reflect comprehensive coverage of the awards, but also reflects construction of mechanism, in order to keep encouraging the progress and growth of staff member, and promote the development of library business.

Keywords: public library; honor system; practice mode; review mechanism; reader nomination system

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

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