

# Problems and Optimization Analysis of Subject Services in Domestic Finance and Economics University Libraries under the “Double First-Class” Construction Background: Postprint

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## Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] This study examines the current status of subject services in libraries of the first batch of finance and economics universities approved for first-class discipline construction under the “Double First-Class” initiative, identifies the drawbacks revealed in the new round of discipline construction, and proposes optimization and improvement measures to better serve first-class discipline construction.

[Method/Process] Taking the first batch of finance and economics universities approved for first-class discipline construction as case studies, this research employs website investigation and literature analysis methods to identify evident problems in the philosophy, institution, and service delivery of subject librarian systems in these university libraries.

[Results/Conclusion] These university libraries require corresponding optimization in philosophy, institution, and service, including existential and perfection optimization of the institutional framework, as well as object, content, and method optimization of services.

## Full Text

### Preamble

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Problems and Optimization Analysis of Subject Services in Domestic Finance and Economics University Libraries Under the Background of “Double First-Class” Construction

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## Abstract

**[Purpose/Significance]** This study examines the current state of subject services in domestic finance and economics university libraries that were among the first batch approved for first-class discipline construction under the “Double First-Class” initiative, identifies shortcomings exposed in the new round of discipline construction, and proposes optimization measures to better serve first-class discipline development. **[Method/Process]** Taking the first batch of finance and economics institutions approved for first-class discipline construction as examples, this study employs website investigation and literature research methods to identify notable problems in the subject librarian systems of these university libraries regarding concept, system, and service. **[Result/Conclusion]** These libraries require corresponding optimization in concept, system, and service, including both existence-based and perfection-based system optimization, as well as object, content, and mode optimization in service.

**Classification Number:** G250

**Keywords:** university libraries; “Double First-Class”; discipline construction; subject librarian system; system optimization

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## 1. Introduction

In October 2015, the State Council issued the “Overall Plan for Coordinating the Construction of World-Class Universities and First-Class Disciplines,” officially launching China’s “Double First-Class” construction initiative in higher education. According to this plan, by 2030, more Chinese universities and disciplines will enter the world-class ranks, with several universities reaching the forefront of world-class universities and a group of disciplines entering the forefront of world-class disciplines, resulting in a significant overall enhancement of higher education strength. By the mid-21st century, the number and strength of world-class universities and disciplines will rank among the world’s best, essentially establishing China as a higher education powerhouse. Since the commencement of the first construction cycle in 2016, “a five-year cycle has been implemented, with construction universities subject to overall quantity control, open competition, and dynamic adjustment.” This indicates that for at least the next 30 years, the “Double First-Class” construction will become the fundamental trend in the development of China’s higher education, playing a major role in the national strategic allocation of high-quality higher education resources, and serving as a new guiding principle and policy for the development of domestic finance and economics universities in the first half of the 21st century.

World-class universities cannot exist without world-class disciplines, which in turn cannot develop without world-class subject services, and these services cannot function without outstanding subject librarians and a robust subject librarian system. The “first-class disciplines” emphasized in the “Double First-Class” initiative have made universities across China, including finance and

economics institutions, fully aware of the importance of discipline construction in overall university development. Consequently, the status and role of subject services and the subject librarian system in university library service systems have been dramatically elevated. According to surveys, nearly a hundred domestic university libraries have introduced subject librarian systems, making subject librarians and subject services one of the core research topics in university libraries, with finance and economics university libraries being no exception. Relevant research has gradually expanded: Duan Dan, using the Dongbei University of Finance and Economics Library as an example, explored practice in subject services for finance and economics institutions, including innovative service concepts, emphasizing subject librarian team building, establishing subject knowledge bases, improving online consultation services, comprehensively implementing various forms of subject services, innovating citation verification services, and expanding existing service items. Xu Qin, based on a survey of subject service status in finance and economics university libraries, analyzed four models of subject services and proposed development strategies. Chen Xi-angzhu, analyzing the current state of subject librarian system construction in finance and economics university libraries, focused on major problems and proposed corresponding solutions. Ding Yongling analyzed the current situation, difficulties, and service innovation of subject librarian services in China's finance and economics universities. He Lin and Liu Yingqing conducted surveys on subject librarian system construction in finance and economics university libraries, pointing out existing deficiencies and construction strategies. While these studies have played positive roles in promoting the construction and improvement of subject librarian systems in domestic finance and economics university libraries, they regrettably were not conducted under the background of the "Double First-Class" initiative and did not address the needs of domestic finance and economics universities within this framework. This study attempts to fill this gap.

According to the "Notice on Publishing the List of World-Class Universities and First-Class Disciplines Construction Universities and Construction Disciplines" issued by the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance, and National Development and Reform Commission on September 20, 2017, no finance and economics universities were included among the first batch of 42 universities approved for world-class university construction. However, among the first batch of 95 universities approved for world-class discipline construction, five were finance and economics institutions (Zhongnan University of Economics and Law, Southwestern University of Finance and Economics, University of International Business and Economics, Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, and Central University of Finance and Economics), accounting for 5.3% of the total, involving four finance and economics first-class disciplines. Although these proportions are not large, they demonstrate the arduous task and considerable expansion space for domestic finance and economics institutions in building world-class universities and disciplines.

## 2. Research Purpose and Methods

Under the new circumstances where the “Double First-Class” construction curtain has been raised and the competitive environment for high-quality resources among domestic universities has significantly changed, are the libraries of these first-batch finance and economics universities approved for first-class discipline construction providing high-quality, efficient, and professional subject services for first-class disciplines? Have their subject librarian systems been well-prepared, advanced with the times, and innovated to overcome deficiencies, becoming increasingly perfected and playing their due positive roles in the new round of first-class discipline construction? This study takes the five finance and economics universities first approved for first-class discipline construction as research objects, primarily employing webpage content analysis and literature review to investigate and analyze the status of subject librarians and the shortcomings of subject librarian systems in these libraries during the period from January 15 to April 1, 2018, and proposes optimization suggestions. These recommendations can be extended to subject services in other finance and economics university libraries for reference, enabling them to better align with current and future discipline construction trends.

## 3. Research Process and Problem Discovery

Through website investigation and review of other literature, the author identified three main problems in the subject librarian systems of the five first-batch finance and economics university libraries approved for first-class discipline construction.

### 3.1 Conceptual Problems

Among the five finance and economics universities, only three libraries (Zhongnan University of Economics and Law, Southwestern University of Finance and Economics, and University of International Business and Economics) have established subject librarian systems to provide subject services. The libraries of Shanghai University of Finance and Economics and Central University of Finance and Economics only provide general library services without establishing professional subject librarian systems. Table 1 also shows that the subject librarians in these three libraries are general-purpose librarians rather than specialized ones, and none have established dedicated subject librarians specifically for “Double First-Class” construction or provide related subject services. This indicates that while these finance and economics university libraries have achieved certain accomplishments in subject librarian system construction and subject services, 40% still lack subject librarian systems, which is clearly detrimental to first-class discipline construction in these institutions.

Further investigation revealed that the numbers of subject librarians in these three libraries are 8, 8, and 4 respectively, with each librarian serving 1.75, 2, and 2 colleges on average. Since a college typically encompasses multi-

ple disciplines (including key disciplines and first-class disciplines), this means one subject librarian must serve several disciplines. While this approach may broaden service coverage to some extent, it compromises service quality and standards. The insufficient number of subject librarians makes it difficult to provide one-to-one services for first-class disciplines, national key disciplines, or provincial key disciplines, let alone guarantee services for other disciplines.

[TABLE: 2 shows that the service coverage rates for Zhongnan University of Economics and Law, Southwestern University of Finance and Economics, and University of International Business and Economics are 70%, 57%, and 60% respectively. Overall, current subject services adopt a dispersed, evenly distributed approach without distinguishing between primary and secondary disciplines. While this benefits most colleges and disciplines by providing access to library subject services, the generalization of service objects is not conducive to first-class discipline construction and cultivation under the “Double First-Class” background, representing a misallocation of valuable resources.

These findings indicate that under the current “Double First-Class” construction background, although three of the five first-batch finance and economics universities have established subject librarian systems, two still lack such systems entirely, let alone specialized services for first-class disciplines. Among the three with systems, subject librarian numbers are generally insufficient to meet first-class discipline construction needs. All five libraries exhibit a general lack of awareness regarding first-class disciplines and subject service concepts.

### 3.2 System Problems

Two of the five finance and economics university libraries (Shanghai University of Finance and Economics Library and Central University of Finance and Economics Library) have not established subject librarian systems, representing a 40% system deficiency. The other three libraries have relevant systems but with various problems. For example, Zhongnan University of Economics and Law Library only publishes six main responsibilities of subject librarians and contact information for eight librarians on its website. Southwestern University of Finance and Economics Library merely posts contact information and corresponding colleges and disciplines. University of International Business and Economics Library similarly only provides contact information for four subject librarians, offering only online consultation services. Clearly, such subject librarian systems are highly incomplete, making implementation feasibility, effectiveness, and sustainability difficult to guarantee and 不利于 normal, efficient subject services under the “Double First-Class” construction background.

### 3.3 Service Problems

From the perspective of library subject services, the author found that while the three finance and economics university libraries specify subject librarians’ service content, service colleges (disciplines), and service methods, obvious prob-

lems exist, including overly broad service paths, vague and generalized service objects, lack of service focus, and simplistic, passive, rigid service methods with ordinary, routine content lacking distinctive features.

## 4. Optimization Recommendations

### 4.1 Conceptual Optimization of Subject Services

In “Double First-Class” construction, world-class universities require support from numerous world-class disciplines, whose cultivation and construction depend on high-level subject librarians and subject services from libraries. Therefore, the five finance and economics university libraries approved for first-class discipline construction should fully recognize the indispensable role of subject librarians in enhancing their institutions’ competitive advantages in the “Double First-Class” initiative. Conceptual optimization of subject services should be the top priority, strengthening the “Double First-Class” concept. While considering general discipline construction needs and providing routine subject services, they should emphasize and highlight the establishment of high-level, high-quality subject librarians for first-class disciplines, providing more comprehensive, precise, cutting-edge, and efficient subject services. Otherwise, this will significantly hinder first-class discipline construction and affect the effectiveness of the “Double First-Class” initiative and the smooth advancement of the “Double First-Class” strategy.

Moreover, an appropriate number of subject librarians is a prerequisite and guarantee for high-quality, efficient subject services. International library science research and practice indicate that for effective subject service, a subject librarian should ideally serve no more than one discipline. Therefore, appropriate quantity optimization is both necessary and challenging for these five libraries to ensure high-level, high-quality subject services. Specific optimization should comprehensively consider factors including subject librarians’ professional backgrounds, educational qualifications, age distribution, total number of university disciplines, and numbers of first-class and key disciplines.

### 4.2 System Optimization of Subject Librarians

The system-related problems in subject services at the five first-batch finance and economics university libraries can be optimized from two dimensions.

**4.2.1 Existence-Based Optimization** This aims to address the problem of moving from non-existence to existence, primarily targeting finance and economics university libraries that have not yet established subject librarian systems. Under the new circumstances where some excellent comprehensive university libraries provide outstanding subject librarian services and “Double First-Class” construction has become a trend, this situation is highly detrimental to the cultivation and construction of first-class disciplines and the long-term development of these institutions, making it rather urgent. These libraries urgently

need to establish practical, complete, and efficient subject librarian systems based on the “Double First-Class” disciplinary background and their actual conditions, and implement them earnestly.

**4.2.2 Perfection-Based Optimization** This aims to address the problem of moving from existence to excellence. Generally, a complete subject librarian system should include qualifications, job responsibilities, evaluation mechanisms, service content, librarian introductions, and contact information. This perfection-based optimization primarily targets those finance and economics university libraries that have established subject librarian systems but with incomplete systems, such as the three mentioned above. As previously stated, due to various problems in their subject librarian systems, these three libraries are not conducive to providing efficient, high-quality specialized services for “Double First-Class” disciplines. Therefore, they need to establish or optimize their subject librarian systems according to the specific needs and characteristics of first-class disciplines under the “Double First-Class” background, clearly defining the basic framework, management mechanisms, and working mechanisms, including position settings, qualification requirements, basic skill requirements, basic work content (such as information consultation, project tracking, discipline resource construction, and information literacy education), evaluation procedures and content, and contact information. Through institutional innovation, they can form their own distinctive features.

### 4.3 Service Optimization of Subject Librarians

Although the three finance and economics university libraries provide subject librarian services, related services have certain problems requiring optimization from three aspects: service objects, service content, and service methods.

**4.3.1 Service Object Optimization** Service object optimization can proceed from two dimensions:

(1) **Path-level optimization.** Investigation found that the service paths of subject librarians in the three libraries primarily go from library to college, with one librarian corresponding to one or more colleges, which actually means one librarian serves multiple disciplines. The most obvious drawback of this service path is unclear service scope (should they serve all disciplines in a college or just one discipline?) and consequent increased service difficulty. Therefore, optimization is needed. The specific method is to transform the service path from library-college to library-discipline-faculty, where one librarian can correspond to one or multiple disciplines (referring to similar disciplines). The optimized service path offers clear service objects, matches current and future first-class discipline construction, facilitates full utilization of limited subject librarian resources, improves work efficiency, and benefits discipline construction and development.

**(2) Discipline-level optimization.** Investigation found that current service objects in the three libraries exclude some marginal colleges and disciplines. Service coverage rates are 70%, 57%, and 60% respectively. While this approach benefits most mainstream colleges and disciplines, the generalization of service objects is not conducive to first-class discipline construction under the “Double First-Class” background, as it fails to concentrate resources where most needed. Therefore, libraries need to develop relatively complete service optimization plans. Without affecting other disciplines’ development, they should select advantageous disciplines based on the numbers and distribution of first-class disciplines, potential first-class disciplines (including national and provincial key disciplines with potential to become first-class in the next round), and existing first-class disciplines, organizing a group of high-level, high-quality subject librarians to provide specialized, personalized services for first-class discipline cultivation and construction.

**4.3.2 Service Content Optimization** Investigation found that subject service content in the five libraries primarily includes basic, routine services such as literature resource construction, literature retrieval, reader promotion and training, and consultation services, with little difference from general library services and no deep-level services reflecting distinctive features or innovation connected to first-class discipline construction. Under the first-class discipline construction background, such basic service content has limited effect on first-class discipline construction. Therefore, these libraries urgently need to optimize subject librarian service content based on the “Double First-Class” background, institutional characteristics and advantages, and actual library conditions.

Service content optimization mainly manifests in two directions: First, **service content focus**: While maintaining basic services for other disciplines, subject librarians should appropriately focus services on first-class and potential first-class disciplines, providing them with more comprehensive and thoughtful routine services. Second, **service content expansion and innovation**, primarily around essential teaching and research for first-class discipline construction. In teaching, subject librarians should proactively provide teaching materials and guidance needed by instructors of key courses in first-class disciplines, national-level quality courses, and online quality courses, actively participate in classroom discussions and teaching research activities, collaborate with teachers or teams to complete teaching research projects, and continuously monitor quality course construction progress to provide timely services. In research, during the preliminary preparation and application stage of first-class discipline research projects, subject librarians can provide cross-college, cross-discipline, and cross-university research cooperation opportunities and information retrieval, consultation, and support services for project applications. During the research stage, they can provide retrieval services, literature consultation, and guidance on research tools and their applications. During research output stages, they can provide services for academic achievement dissemination and publication, open access, digital services, and copyright consultation.

After project completion, they can provide research data storage, supervision, and data mining services. For example, Cornell University Library subject librarians provide comprehensive support to researchers, helping them develop research plans and data management plans, providing various online research guides, answering publication and copyright consultation questions, and managing research data according to requirements. Subject librarians are not only service supporters but also research partners. Additionally, subject librarians can conduct regular surveys on teaching and research dynamics in related disciplines, provide personalized services such as information screening and filtering for first-class discipline leaders and key project leaders, regularly attend academic conferences in first-class disciplines, and provide research consultation for large-scale projects.

**4.3.3 Service Method Optimization** Investigation found that subject service methods in the three libraries primarily include telephone, email, message boards, QQ, WeChat, Weibo, and online consultation. Research shows that a large proportion of domestic finance and economics university libraries adopt such service methods. While this information-transfer service approach is fundamental, it remains simplistic, passive, and rigid, with limited effect on first-class discipline construction. Under the “Double First-Class” background, these methods should be optimized to emphasize proactivity and personalization to better promote first-class discipline construction and development.

**(1) Embedded service.** Library subject librarians can proactively integrate into first-class discipline teaching and research teams, becoming team members and actively participating throughout the entire process of quality course teaching and key project research in first-class and key disciplines, fully embedding themselves in research teams, organizations, and activities. Through discipline surveys, participation in college and discipline seminars, faculty lunches, and extensive in-depth exchanges and communication with first-class discipline faculty and leaders, they can understand needs and seek cooperation opportunities, thereby transforming services from traditional user-initiated requests to proactive integration into colleges and disciplines, and from undifferentiated universal services to personalized services targeted at specific disciplines and individuals.

**(2) Collaborative service.** To compensate for subject librarians’ insufficient professional knowledge, Tsinghua University pioneered the “library-professor” (also called “faculty consultant”) system domestically. The library engages 1-2 associate professors or above with teaching and research responsibilities from each college or discipline as library-professors to cooperate with subject librarians in providing subject services. Their main responsibilities include providing suggestions for discipline resource construction, offering advice for library development, feeding back faculty opinions, and providing subject services for major projects and key research directions. Under the “Double First-Class” background, this collaborative approach between subject librarians and library-professors transforms passivity into proactivity, which is highly beneficial for

first-class discipline construction and cultivation and deserves promotion in domestic finance and economics university libraries.

**(3) Team-based service.** This refers to providing subject services through teams rather than individuals. A subject librarian team comprises librarians with the same or similar disciplinary backgrounds providing personalized, professional, and knowledge-based services to disciplinary users. It enables knowledge complementarity among team members, leverages individual strengths, compensates for limitations in individual librarians' knowledge and capabilities, and helps form centripetal force, cohesion, collaborative power, and service capacity to improve service levels. Research shows that libraries at Renmin University of China, Wuhan University, Nankai University, and Shanghai Jiao Tong University have achieved good results through team-based services. Under the “Double First-Class” background, domestic finance and economics university libraries urgently need to attempt this team-based service approach.

**(4) Network-based service.** In the Internet era, subject librarians need to use conventional network tools such as email, message boards, QQ, WeChat, Weibo, and online consultation to provide subject services. Under the “Double First-Class” background, first-class discipline construction requires finance and economics university libraries to utilize new network service platforms such as discipline knowledge service platforms, discipline databases, subject librarian webpages, discipline navigation systems, and discipline information portals to provide multi-channel, multi-form network-based services, thereby expanding service ideas, improving efficiency, increasing influence, and more effectively promoting first-class discipline construction.

## 5. Conclusion

The above research demonstrates that the subject librarian systems in most domestic finance and economics university libraries, represented by the five first-batch institutions approved for first-class discipline construction, have not yet adapted to the “Double First-Class” trend. Their all-around adjustments from concept to quantity to system to service for first-class discipline construction remain limited, and their current role in first-class discipline construction is still quite restricted. The author believes that with sufficient attention from domestic finance and economics universities to the “Double First-Class” initiative and to library subject services, and with appropriate adjustment, optimization, and improvement of existing subject librarian systems, they will undoubtedly play greater roles in future “Double First-Class” construction.

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## The Problems and Optimization Analysis of Subject Service in Domestic Finance and Economics University Libraries Under the Background of “Double First-Class” Construction

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**Keywords:** university libraries; “Double First-Class”; discipline construction; subject librarian system; system optimization

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

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