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Reading Promotion Practices and Implications in Chinese and American Community Libraries from an Equalization Perspective (Postprint)

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] This study conducts a comparative analysis of the differences in reading promotion practices between Chinese and American community libraries from an equalization perspective, aiming to enhance the service level and quality of community libraries through mutual learning.

[Method/Process] Using case study and comparative analysis methods, this research examines the equalization practices of reading promotion in community libraries, with Ningbo, China and Milwaukee, USA as representative cases.

[Results/Conclusions] Through comparative analysis of equal supply, equal process, and equal consumption in community library services, the study derives implications including: balancing resource allocation to achieve equalization of reading promotion supply; innovating cultural activity forms and content to achieve equalization of reading promotion process; respecting readers' right to free choice to achieve equalization of reading promotion consumption; leveraging cultural characteristics to promote equalized services of community libraries; and constructing urban community public cultural service platforms to jointly build and share new achievements of social civilization.

Full Text

The Practice and Enlightenment of Community Library Reading Promotion Between China and America from the Perspective of Equalization

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] This paper conducts a comparative analysis of the differences in reading promotion practices between Chinese and American community libraries from the perspective of equalization, aiming to improve the service level and quality of community libraries through mutual learning. **[Method/Process]** Taking Ningbo's community libraries in China and Milwaukee's community libraries in the United States as examples, this study employs case analysis and comparative analysis methods to examine the equalization practices in reading promotion implemented by community libraries in both countries. **[Result/Conclusion]** Through comparative analysis of the equalization of community library services in terms of supply, process, and consumption, this paper concludes that community libraries should balance resource allocation to achieve supply equalization in reading promotion, innovate activity forms and content to achieve process equalization, respect readers' freedom of choice to achieve consumption equalization, promote equalization services based on cultural characteristics, and build urban community public cultural service platforms to co-construct and share new achievements of social civilization.

The UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (1994) requires libraries to adapt to urban community and rural development in their operations and management [1]. The Public Cultural Service Guarantee Law of the People's Republic of China, implemented on March 1, 2017, emphasizes strengthening public cultural facility construction and improving the public cultural service system according to the requirements of public welfare, basic nature, equalization, and convenience to enhance public cultural service efficiency. The core of basic public cultural service equalization is to promote equal opportunity, ensuring that people have access to basic public services rather than simple averaging [2]. Public library service equalization refers to the provision of public cultural services and products to all members of society, where the public equally enjoys culturally guaranteed rights under the public library system [3]. As an extension of public library services in time, place, and content, community libraries expand the service scope of public libraries and represent an important pathway to achieving public library service equalization. Equalization functions as a work chain comprising three main components: starting point, process, and result [4]. The realization of community library reading promotion equalization takes supply equalization as its foundation, uses various forms of activity process equalization as its implementation path, and considers consumption equalization as the result of readers enjoying reading services.

Public library reading promotion constitutes both the basic content of library-provided public cultural services and an important approach to improving citizens' cultural literacy, receiving significant national attention. The 13th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China elevates nationwide reading to a national strategic level. The Public Library Law of the People's Republic of China, implemented on January

1, 2018, stipulates in its general provisions that public libraries should undertake the important responsibility of guiding, serving, and promoting nationwide reading [5]. For the fifth time, the National People's Congress included "nationwide reading" in the Government Work Report [6]. Developing nationwide reading in depth serves as a path to improve service efficiency and promote the construction of public library service equalization, representing the duty of public libraries at all levels.

In recent years, domestic research on public cultural service equalization has primarily focused on summarizing equalization work and exploring implementation pathways, with relatively less theoretical research on equalization itself [7]. Studies on reading promotion activities from an equalization perspective have mostly targeted special groups such as vulnerable populations and children, or examined public libraries at the national or single regional level, or conducted theoretical research on nationwide reading from an equalization perspective. Few studies have compared reading promotion practices between domestic and foreign community libraries from an equalization perspective. This paper adopts this perspective, aiming to enrich and improve the service quality of community libraries through comparison and mutual learning, enhance the level of public cultural services provided by community libraries, and provide equalized services for community residents.

2. Overview of Community Library Reading Promotion Practices in China and America

The American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights and the 12 Statements on American Library Development state that libraries should provide equal services regardless of readers' age, gender, origin, wealth, or other characteristics [8]. The United States, which began experimenting with reading promotion activities in the 19th century, has accumulated over a century of experience, implementing programs such as the National Book Festival, One City One Book, Shared Reading Programs, and Reading Challenge Programs. Reading activities conducted by public libraries removed obstacles for the development of American libraries, and by the 1970s, community libraries had become widespread in the United States [9]. In 2012, the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) collaborated with school libraries and community libraries to address youth health issues through youth service and program evaluation and summer reading programs for young adults [10]. The Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) awarded the 2017 Baker & Taylor Summer Reading Grant to public libraries in Nevada, California, encouraging special children and families in Nevada's community libraries to participate in summer reading [11]. These reading promotion activities conducted by community libraries provided equal opportunities for readers of different age groups and special populations to participate in reading activities and share the equalized resources provided by libraries.

In January 1997, nine ministries and commissions in China, including the Cen-

tral Propaganda Department, Ministry of Culture, and former General Administration of Press and Publication, jointly issued the “Notice on Implementing the ‘Knowledge Project’ Nationwide,” proposing to implement the Knowledge Project that “advocates nationwide reading and builds a reading society,” which was later undertaken by the Chinese Library Society and changed the reading month to April each year [12]. During the 2015 World Book Day, the Chinese Library Society, jointly with library societies from Inner Mongolia, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Ningbo, and other regions, released the “Fragrant Community Standard System” and “Fragrant City (County-level), Fragrant Community Standard System Indicators Explanation” for libraries nationwide, providing an institutional basis for building fragrant cities and communities [13] and enabling library services to cover broader geographical areas. President Xi Jinping proposed in the 19th National Congress report to “deeply explore, discover, and promote fragrant communities.” The National Library Society held the “Fragrant Community” discovery activity in June 2017, attracting 126 communities nationwide to apply, aiming to “advocate nationwide reading and build a scholarly society.” Against the backdrop of national emphasis on community libraries’ participation in public cultural service system construction, residents can enjoy equal service resources, integrated service systems, and fair public service rights provided by community libraries [14].

Ningbo and Milwaukee serve as economic centers of Zhejiang Province, China and Wisconsin, USA respectively. From 2004 to 2014, the two cities conducted several mutual visits and signed a memorandum of understanding on economic, educational, and cultural exchanges and cooperation, as well as an agreement on establishing friendly exchange relations [15]. Among them, Yinzhou District of Ningbo is one of the first national public cultural service system demonstration zones and a national model for public cultural services. Milwaukee began constructing community libraries in the 19th century, and its influence and appeal in grassroots public cultural services represent historical accumulation and a model for other states and cities in the United States to learn from. Therefore, this paper selects Ningbo and Milwaukee, which are representative in grassroots public cultural services, as cases for comparative analysis of equalization practices in community library reading promotion.

3. Equalization Practices in Community Library Reading Promotion in China and America

3.1 Equalization Practices in Ningbo’s Community Libraries

Ningbo’s community libraries (member libraries listed in Table 1) have created excellent hardware and software facilities for readers and actively conducted reader activities. Ningbo’s community libraries are committed to achieving supply equalization in public cultural services. The implementation of the “One Card” project has interconnected seven community libraries (excluding Yinzhou Library) including district libraries, street libraries, and community mobile sta-

tions, and networked them with 11 public libraries in Ningbo, achieving unrestricted interlibrary loan and return of collection resources across regions and creating a “community of shared destiny” for Ningbo’s community libraries. Beilun District Library implements a main-branch library system, with the main library located in the district library and 10 street and township branch libraries under its jurisdiction. Except for Yinzhou District, other community libraries have joined Ningbo’s public library “One Card” system, achieving joint construction and sharing of paper books and massive electronic information resources throughout the city [16]. Ningbo’s community libraries are committed to achieving process equalization in public cultural services, conducting reading activities such as youth reading series, “Reading Ambassador” projects, and human libraries in community libraries, aiming to enhance readers’ reading abilities while respecting their different reading capacities and choices [17]. Ningbo’s community libraries are committed to achieving consumption equalization in public cultural services. Adhering to the philosophy of “service first, readers supreme,” Ningbo’s community libraries serve local residents, uphold the principle of zero threshold, and eliminate discrimination and differential treatment in services. For example, Cixi Library aims to provide comprehensive and equalized quality services for readers including book lending, electronic reading, information inquiry, and information navigation [18]. Yinzhou Library is the product of the merger of a community library and Ningbo University Park Library, serving more grassroots people with the service philosophy of aggregation, openness, diversity, joint construction, sharing, and mutual knowledge [19].

3.2 Equalization Practices in Milwaukee’s Community Libraries

Milwaukee’s 14 community libraries in Wisconsin (composition shown in Table 2) are community-led libraries that also serve as members of the Milwaukee County Federated Library System (MCFLS), committed to achieving supply equalization in public cultural services. MCFLS is state-funded and operates according to Wisconsin regulations. Similar to Ningbo’s community library “One Card” system, its mission is to most effectively utilize local, county, state, and federal funds to provide high-level book reading and promotion services for all Milwaukee residents. Milwaukee’s community libraries are committed to achieving process equalization in public cultural services. For example, Cudahy Family Library has served the community for over a hundred years while maintaining youthful vitality, providing rich reader activities for local residents every month. MCFLS’s mission is to provide readers with various forms of materials, services, and activity information, conducting activities including reading promotion to meet readers’ information and entertainment needs. Milwaukee’s community libraries are committed to achieving consumption equalization in public cultural services. With a more people-friendly attitude, community libraries provide quality resources, services, and lifelong learning opportunities for every community and every member, playing an increasingly important role in the cultural lives of local residents. South Milwaukee Public Library, since its establishment in 1917, has maintained a mission to encourage residents to

develop lifelong learning habits and safeguard citizens' freedom to access information, with community library resources and services open to every Milwaukee County Federated Library cardholder [20].

3.3 Comparative Analysis

The authors employed web-based research methods, logging onto the official websites of eight community libraries in Ningbo and 14 community libraries in Milwaukee to collect and analyze required content. Specifically, the authors collected statistics on the total number of activities, total reading promotion activities, and the proportion of reading promotion activities to total activities (rounded to two decimal places) for Ningbo's community libraries in January and November 2017, and for Milwaukee's community libraries in January and December 2017. The reason for selecting January and December 2017 was that major holidays (Spring Festival, Christmas) fell in these months respectively. Since domestic community libraries rarely provide activity previews and some foreign community libraries no longer open activity calendars for past months, November 2017 and January 2018 were also selected.

The following sections conduct comparative analysis from three aspects: equalization of reading promotion supply, process, and consumption in Ningbo and Milwaukee community libraries.

3.3.1 Comparison of Reading Promotion Supply Equalization Supply equalization serves as the foundation for community libraries to achieve reading promotion, the guarantee for rational resource allocation and reading service equalization, and the prerequisite for smooth implementation of public cultural services. As shown in Table 3, Milwaukee's community libraries provide various library services to ensure smooth implementation of reading promotion activities, such as fax, printing, photo and image transmission, electronic reading, special access channels for disabled persons, and Braille and audio books with playback equipment. Ningbo's community libraries provide online reading and off-site services for readers, who can either use electronic resources from community libraries without leaving home or visit nearby community libraries to enjoy culturally guaranteed rights by public libraries. Additionally, Ningbo's community libraries provide branded reading services, earnestly practicing normalized nationwide reading.

3.3.2 Comparison of Reading Promotion Process Equalization Process equalization represents the method for community libraries to achieve reading promotion [21] and the guarantee for smooth implementation of public cultural services. Milwaukee's community libraries provide extremely detailed information regarding activity scheduling, target age groups, participant requirements, and venues, reflecting that foreign community libraries' reading promotion activities are more targeted and equitable, with greater attention to detail and design in library activities. As shown in Table 6, Milwaukee's commu-

nity libraries have launched rich reading promotion activities for different age groups: for infants under three years old [22], community libraries focus on creating a reading atmosphere through rhythmic patterns and sensory stimulation to create a pleasant environment; West Allis Library prepares reading plus playtime for 2-year-olds and 9-23-month-old infants; for preschool children with limited literacy, reading formats primarily involve listening to books and experiencing the reading atmosphere; for teenagers, reading promotion mainly focuses on book reading and exchange; for adults, reading promotion combines reading with various activity formats. Additionally, another characteristic of Milwaukee's community libraries is their strict requirements regarding participants' ages and venues, with relatively strict limitations on activity timing and participant numbers. For example, Greenfield Public Library's 15-minute reading plus 30-minute game time parent-child reading activity and the children's independent writing practice session held from 6-8 PM on January 16, 2018, require children to complete activities independently without parental accompaniment. To prevent many readers from being unable to participate due to limitations on numbers and time, community libraries increase the frequency of identical activities, repeating them within a month, week, or even a day.

Ningbo's community libraries feature highly diverse reading promotion activity formats, as shown in Table 7. Ningbo's community libraries also incorporate many traditional Chinese cultural activities and programs, including calligraphy displays, ink wash painting, and Spring Festival couplets, inheriting and promoting excellent Chinese traditional culture through library activities. While Milwaukee's community libraries' reading promotion activities are worth learning from in terms of accuracy and specificity in publishing activity information, they relatively lack activities with national and ethnic cultural connotations such as those conducted by Ningbo's community libraries.

3.3.3 Comparison of Reading Promotion Consumption Equalization

Consumption equalization represents the goal of community library reading promotion, the manifestation of readers' enjoyment of public cultural service rights, and the result of public cultural service implementation. Tables 8 and 9 clearly demonstrate that Milwaukee's community libraries attach great importance to the initial stage of lifelong reading. The 14 community libraries in Milwaukee conduct a relatively large proportion of reading promotion activities for children (rounded to two decimal places), with relatively fewer activities for teenagers and adults, typically totaling no more than 50% of all activities. In contrast, when conducting reading promotion activities, most of Ningbo's community libraries do not categorize target audiences, forcing the authors to conduct subjective demographic divisions based on photos published on webpages or activity content and attributes. This phenomenon reflects the lack of equalization in various demographic groups' enjoyment of reading promotion resource services, inadequate service delivery, and even potential underutilization of resources, ultimately affecting community residents' sharing of cultural services provided by community libraries.

4. Implications

4.1 Balancing Resource Allocation to Achieve Supply Equalization in Reading Promotion

For community libraries' reading promotion services, the quality of allocated funds, facilities, and personnel directly determines activity quality. First, upgrade community library hardware and software facilities through the internet to informatize public cultural service work, facilitate service demand satisfaction, and humanize service delivery [23]. Increase the frequency of community library reading promotion activities to achieve normalization, as only through continuously increasing activity frequency can community libraries gain experience from each event and improve their capacity to organize reading activities. Second, innovate activity themes and participating entities, strengthening understanding and cooperation between different reading subjects to eliminate reading discrimination and unfairness while conducting popular reading promotion activities, enhancing community cultural atmosphere, and laying foundations for more reading activities. Finally, under the background of supply equalization, deepen activity content by integrating reading with current national political and economic development, allowing national and ethnic culture to permeate various library activities to maximize reading's value and significance, or combine reading with currently popular cultural elements to make reading activities more attractive.

4.2 Innovating Cultural Activity Forms and Content to Achieve Process Equalization in Reading Promotion

Community library reading promotion activities should generate reading interest among those lacking reading willingness and capacity, cultivate reading habits, and foster love for reading. First, reading activities should be selective, with appropriate restrictions on participants' ages and numbers, and content selection based on recorded reader habits and preferences. Second, community libraries should provide special care for disabled persons and children who cannot easily express personal preferences, allocating financial, human, and activity resources preferentially toward them. Refine special population categories and actively conduct reading promotion activities based on readers' different ages and physical conditions. Finally, further standardize public cultural service standards, even aligning with world-leading public cultural service standards to provide readers with more and fairer choices.

4.3 Respecting Readers' Freedom of Choice to Achieve Consumption Equalization in Reading Promotion

Equalization is implemented for all community members but does not produce identical results in every individual. Due to various differences among community residents, they propose different demands on libraries. Although equalization results may vary, every resident possesses the same opportunity

to enjoy cultural services. First, increase basic resource coverage rates and per capita possession to fully satisfy readers' convenience needs. Second, strengthen community library network resource construction. Community library website resources constitute an important pathway for community residents to learn about reading promotion activities and obtain information. Network resource supply and interface design should conform to users' psychological and physiological habits, following design principles that unify image while highlighting individuality [24]. Finally, strengthen cooperation with social forces. Through collaboration with social forces in reading promotion activities, community libraries can introduce professional activity planning to improve activity quality and increase resident engagement with community libraries.

4.4 Promoting Equalization Services Based on Cultural Characteristics

Due to developmental differences in cultural and economic backgrounds across regions, community library development models vary with distinct characteristics. To ensure smooth implementation of community library reading promotion activities, community libraries should actively publicize and provide public cultural services with community characteristics to gain recognition from community residents and government, enhance community libraries' cultural image, and form a "supermarket-style" supply and "menu-based" service model for community library public cultural products and services [26]. Additionally, each community should rely on local cultural characteristics to strengthen reading concepts, allowing reading to penetrate community consciousness, and learn from foreign community libraries' diverse and interesting reading promotion activity formats.

4.5 Building Urban Community Public Cultural Service Platforms to Co-Construct and Share New Civilization Achievements

In the 19th National Congress report, General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized accelerating the construction of institutional mechanisms that prioritize social benefits while unifying social and economic benefits, and improving the public cultural service system [27]. To achieve public cultural service results and ensure residents have greater sense of gain in co-construction and shared development, efforts should focus on building urban community public cultural service platforms. Public libraries strive to construct basic application platforms supported by engine technology to achieve cross-boundary cooperation in resources and service platforms, aiming to break existing segmented resource management patterns [28]. Utilizing urban community public cultural service platforms can improve community libraries' service efficiency for readers, who can share information resources through public service platforms. On the other hand, community libraries can serve readers through information technology. For example, Shanghai's community libraries established "Oriental Community Information Centers" to provide residents with basic information services, mak-

ing community library service methods more advanced and service content more substantial, achieving co-construction and sharing of public library document resources and activity information.

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Author Contributions:

Lu Hejian: Determined research ideas, revised article topic selection and overall framework, reviewed paper, proposed revision suggestions, and finalized

manuscript.

Wang Zhenzhen: Proposed research ideas, collected and organized materials, wrote and revised paper.

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

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