

# Deconstructing and Reconstructing the Concept of National Reading as a Public Good: Connotation, Methods, and Pathways –From Two Academic Perspectives on Reading Promotion: “Empty Talk Harms the Nation” and “Practical Action Prospers the Nation”

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## Abstract

Grounded in the “practice-pragmatism” educational philosophy of Yan Yuan, a scholar from the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, this paper vigorously advocates a national reading perspective from the viewpoint of Marxist practice theory that emphasizes “action speaks louder than words” and “practice is superior to literature” . It rejects the historical metaphysical mechanistic reading that reads for reading’ s sake, strives to become a “two-legged bookcase” , and fails to apply knowledge toward understanding and transforming the world. The paper also calls upon experts and scholars to further refine the classification, meaning, and characteristics of “reading” , and to scientifically and effectively distinguish the application and promotion of the two major documentary carriers of “wen” (writing) and “xian” (language). Through a professional promotion mechanism, it aims to provide readers with personalized “exclusive reading lists” that align with their disciplinary backgrounds, reading needs, and psychological characteristics, and to guide them in linking theory with practice and engaging in supra-utilitarian reading, thereby truly guiding national reading onto a safe, effective, sustainable, and healthy reading trajectory for readers.

## Full Text

### Preamble

*This paper is one of the research outcomes of the 2023-2024 General Project of the Library and Information Committee of Liaoning Provincial Higher Education*

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## Title

### **The “Restoration” and “Reconstruction” of Public Goods Reading for All: Connotation, Method, and Path**

*Starting from the Two Reading Promotion Concepts of “Empty Talk Harms the Nation” and “Practical Work Revitalizes the Nation” in Academic History*

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## Abstract

Based on the “practice-pragmatism” educational philosophy of Yan Yuan, a scholar from the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, this paper advocates for a Marxist view of reading for all grounded in the principle that “actions speak louder than words” and “practice surpasses text.” It rejects the historical phenomenon of reading for reading’s sake, where individuals become mere walking encyclopedias incapable of transforming knowledge into tools for understanding and changing the world—a metaphysical, mechanistic approach to reading. The paper calls on experts and scholars to further refine the classification, meaning, and characteristics of “reading,” and to scientifically and effectively distinguish the application and promotion of the two major carriers of literature: “wen” (writing) and “xian” (oral tradition). Through a professional promotion mechanism, the goal is to provide readers with personalized “exclusive reading lists” that align with their disciplinary background, reading needs, and psychological characteristics, while guiding them to integrate theory with practice and engage in non-utilitarian reading. Only then can nationwide reading be truly implemented on a safe, effective, sustainable, and healthy track for readers.

**Keywords:** reading for all, pragmatism, empty talk harms the nation, healthy reading, equal emphasis on wen and xian, new bibliography

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## 1. Writing Origin

Nationwide reading has been included in the government work report for ten consecutive years, demonstrating its deep integration into national consciousness and daily life. The role of reading in inheriting human thought and culture, and in inspiring people to understand and transform the world, is beyond question. From the perspectives of motivation and teleology, the most critical

considerations—beyond establishing starting points and goals—are the selection of methods and the evaluation of outcomes. Equally important is the methodological examination during the transmission of motivation.

The author contends that in advocating and deepening nationwide reading, we must first thoroughly comprehend the meaning of “reading” as proposed by the state, distinguishing which forms of reading are truly needed by “all citizens” and which actively promote national life, and which forms are difficult for the public to manage and may produce negative side effects. Recently, IFLA released its latest brief on “digital public goods,” defining the relevance of libraries to digital public goods. The concept of “public goods” refers to “things beneficial to society as a whole” (quoted from the e-Line Intelligence micro-platform, May 10, 2023). Since the “reading objects” and “reading carriers” targeted by nationwide reading constitute the promotion and application of “public goods” (including digital products), reading promoters in the new era must first evaluate and verify whether their promotional materials (public goods) genuinely qualify as “things beneficial to society as a whole” before conducting scientific and effective promotion. As the saying goes, “the Dao consists of yin and yang,” and “eliminating the false while preserving the true” is a working principle that Marxists should consistently uphold. Therefore, the author calls on experts, scholars, and practitioners to set aside pretensions, empty their preconceptions, and thoroughly “restore” and “reconstruct” the existing concept of nationwide reading, examining what important insights and methodological lessons China’s ancient reading concepts and promotional experiences can offer us.

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## 2. Core Values of Ancient Chinese Reading Concepts

### 2.1 “Choosing the Good and Following It” Enables “Illuminating the Mind and Awakening Wisdom”

The Western Han classicist and bibliographer Liu Xiang once stated: “Books are like medicine; reading them well can cure ignorance.” This highlights reading’s function of enlightening the mind and awakening wisdom. The ancients were wise and thoughtful, and wisdom emerges from carefully contemplating such metaphors. Many people only see the affirmative side of this statement, unilaterally believing that reading is “beneficial in every way without any harm,” which is not entirely true. Liu’s words are measured: “good reading” can “cure ignorance,” but they also imply potential consequences of “poor reading.”

How does one “read well”? What constitutes “good reading”? What are the aftereffects of “poor reading”? These questions deserve our attention and reflection. Is this “reading” merely what we simply consider “looking at words”? Moreover, if it is “medicine,” how can we directly assume it is a “miracle cure”? Medicine is divided into beneficial drugs and poisons, and involves dosage, proportion, formulation, usage methods, and applicable scope. In fact, medicine itself is neither “good” nor “bad”; the key is “prescribing the right

remedy.” For promoters, how to enable “good reading” is the “right remedy” and the crucial point!

## 2.2 “Reading Without Doing” Actually “Harms the Nation and the People”

Let us first cite several passages by Qing scholars Yan Yuan and Li Gong recorded in Liang Qichao’ s *Intellectual History of the Past Three Hundred Years in China*, to examine the “negative consequences” of blind, unmethodical reading. Yan Yuan wrote in his work *Cunxue Bian*:

“A person’ s time and energy are limited. One day spent in recitation and discussion is one day missed in practice; one portion more devoted to paper and ink is one portion less devoted to the real world.” [1]

Readers should carefully examine Yan’s dialectical thinking and not misinterpret it as an “anti-reading theory.” His premise is that reading should emphasize “practice and application.” “Knowledge” is the “knowledge of practice,” and “practice” is the “practice of knowledge.” Practice, internship, and application are both the starting point and the destination. When “practicing,” “knowledge” must be present; when “knowing,” “practice” has already begun. This is the true “unity of knowledge and action” in Chinese culture. The recommendation for promoters is that when publicizing and guiding readers, they should focus on planning and guiding “practical application,” rather than simply handing over bibliographies for self-study, which becomes typical “flyer-distribution-style” reading promotion. We should build a stable and far-reaching bridge between “reading” and “practice,” conveying this “warm tip” to readers: if your reading is operable, practicable, and actionable, and if practice surpasses words, then congratulations—this approach can continue. However, if you attempt to become “learned in literature” through “extensive reading” without making any effort at “personal practice and application,” then as a responsible and accountable reading promoter, I would offer you strong warnings and reminders. Even “truth” possesses “direct reality,” meaning that no matter how correct, wise, or reasonable the words in books may be, they require you to make judgments and adjustments based on your actual circumstances rather than applying them directly. Hence, the ancients said, “It is better to have no books than to believe everything in them,” and that reading without action is worse than not reading at all.

Yan Yuan long ago observed that if the “literature” in “being learned in literature” refers only to “written texts,” then before the Four Books and Five Classics existed, wouldn’ t all the sages who governed the world have been “uncultured and unlearned”? Clearly, reducing “learning” to “extensive reading,” “establishing lecture halls,” or “prolific writing” reflects shallow, clumsy, and narrow views. Liang Qichao thoroughly discussed these principles in *Intellectual History of the Past Three Hundred Years in China*, where the assertion that “reading is scholarship” no longer requires refutation. We should not exaggerate the role of reading but comfortably regard it as a good habit. If one seeks to

acquire extraordinary abilities or achieve breakthroughs through reading alone, one must understand that it is not a simple “causal relationship” or “sequential relationship” from A to B. Even the legend of Confucius editing the Six Classics was, from Yan Yuan’s perspective, a “remedial” method adopted after the “Dao could not be practiced” and “governance could not be implemented” —a second or third choice. Writing books, extensive reading, and eloquent discourse are neither the best strategy nor the “only rule” for “transforming our learning.” As we will mention later, even “extensive reading” requires scientific and effective methods and pathways; otherwise, it yields no results and leads to lifelong error.

Now let us hear what Li Gong had to say:

“More experience on paper means less experience in worldly affairs; more spirit devoted to writing means less spirit for economic affairs. The fall of the Song and Ming dynasties resulted from this.” [2]

These are sharp words that offer great enlightenment. We resolutely reject armchair strategizing, metaphysical discourse, and pedantic reading. There is no need to pursue or envy such approaches—methods that harm the nation and people are not what we seek in “nationwide reading.” Without strictly defining “reading” in national policy, we would surely lose sleep over this. With historical lessons before us, we must carefully reflect and discuss countermeasures. The reading atmosphere, depth, and breadth in the Song and Ming eras were likely no less than today, though they certainly could not achieve “nationwide reading” as most commoners were illiterate, with literacy opportunities only through imperial examinations. Even in *Dream of Red Mansions*, Wang Xifeng could not write. Setting aside these historical limitations, I believe readers will resonate with Yan Yuan’s words. “Empty talk harms the nation, practical work revitalizes it” —this is the “high expectation” that nationwide reading places upon us. Let us not misunderstand Yan Yuan’s words; he absolutely did not oppose reading but offered “purely positive reminders,” urging people to “free up the time and energy spent reading to do real scholarship.” [3]

These are not new realizations. Reflections on and warnings against misunderstandings and improper practices regarding reading have existed since ancient times. The “School of Mind” centered on Wang Yangming and Chan Buddhism both provided incisive explanations of phenomena such as “the obstacle of words” and “scholarship misleading people.” Without elaborating further, I will simply excerpt a few statements for colleagues to contemplate together, hoping to provide readers with a comprehensive, scientific, and reassuring promotion strategy and system. Yan Yuan stated:

“The decline of the sage’s Dao in the world often occurs because people see the Dao between mental awareness, oral exposition, and written discussion, yet do not see the Dao in their own lives. Schools are called academies or lecture halls, all relying on the phrase ‘learning without teaching’ from the *Analects* as a handle for justifying their errors. They fail to consider that Confucius taught for the sake of learning, while later generations learn for the sake of teaching—

a difference of a thousand miles.” [4]

Note the final phrase: “Confucius taught for the sake of learning” versus “later generations learn for the sake of teaching” —the order differs, and so does the realm. Ancient scholars compiled their lifelong learning into books to transmit to later generations, which is “making books from scholarship.” Modern scholars produce abundant results, writings, and publications within a year or two, treating writing as scholarship. Haste harms oneself, while bestsellers harm the world. The relationship between writing, scholarship, and achievement is not our deep concern here. For this paper’s argument, we truly hope readers, promoters, and policymakers understand that if the phenomenon of “improper reading” or “reading for reading’s sake” is not eradicated, it will inevitably become a “stumbling block” to nationwide reading. Our recommendation is summarized in this passage by Liang Qichao:

“In summary, Master Xi Zhai’s (Yan Yuan’s) academic style simply teaches people to do more, speak less, attend to practical matters, and discuss principles less. He said: ‘Song Confucians were like people who obtained a road map, observing one place after another, delighting in claiming they knew the route across the world, and everyone called them knowledgeable about the road. In reality, they had not taken a single step or reached a single place, merely wandering through weeds.’ He also said: ‘The words of sages can guide the way. Now people do not walk the road but only imitate the sages’ words as if they were walking. With each generation, guiding words increase, yet fewer people are seen on the broad road.’ He further said: ‘Those who only talk, even if they speak much of Yao and Shun, are ultimately useless. Just as discussing chaff cannot relieve hunger and thirst, discussing rice, grain, fish, and meat also cannot relieve hunger and thirst.’ ” [5]

These words have a refreshing effect on our enthusiastic readers. Some might argue that promoters are only responsible for promotion, that people have their own discernment and choices, and that reading is a private, personal matter requiring no further comment. Such statements might have some merit in the era of traditional libraries as intermediaries or in traditional bookstores and newsstands, but they are inadequate in today’s age of “intrusive” and “embedded” promotion. Since promoters engage in marketing and publicity, they must examine, test, and explain the safety and applicability of their “products” and “services.” If our promotion only tells readers to “read classics,” “speak of Yao and Shun,” and “become knowledgeable and cultured,” without reminding them that reading serves practice, better relationships between people and the world, and better service to the public—without reminding them of the obvious yet subtle truth that each day spent reading is one day less of social practice and each article copied is one less experience of nature—then dragging the public into the “dusty paper piles” merely repeats the mistakes of the Song Dynasty. How can the sinicization and modernization of Marxist nationwide reading proceed without understanding these lessons, charging forward with promotion alone? Bringing these historically harmful reading habits and academic pathologies to

light, showing and explaining them to readers, offering warnings and purification, and incorporating them into the “public goods” category after quarantine before entering the public sphere—the author believes this is an indispensable “important link” in the professional construction of nationwide reading.

### 2.3 Breaking Through “Textual Barriers” to Become an “Enlightened Person”

Do not assume that “opening a book always benefits.” If one reads blindly, without method, or with words as the ultimate goal, consider where this places the person. Again using Yan Yuan’s reading philosophy as an example:

“He believed that exclusive reading can make people foolish and weak...The more one reads, the more confused one becomes; the more one examines affairs, the less knowledgeable; the more one manages economics, the less capable.” Zhu Xi once said: “Seeking literary refinement consumes much effort and spirit, which is truly regrettable.” Xi Zhai (Yan Yuan) further stated: “It is indeed regrettable that literary scholars expend so much spirit on writing. But you gentlemen devote your lives to the four characters—thinking, reading, expounding, and writing—completely abandoning Yao and Shun’s three affairs and six ministries, and the Zhou rituals of six virtues, six conducts, and six arts, unwilling to learn or practice them. What is this? For over a thousand years, leading the world into dusty paper piles, exhausting mental and physical energy, creating weak, sick, and useless people—all this was done by Hui’an (Zhu Xi).” Shu Gu said: “Long reading makes one prefer quiet and dislike disturbance, rendering the mind rigid and pedantic...Thus giving people grounds to say ‘pale-faced scholar,’ ‘scholars are useless,’ and ‘coughing monkeys in the forest.’ The world still claims that reading nourishes body and mind—what a mistake!...As Master Yan said, scholars become like women and girls, peeping at people through door cracks in terms of knowledge, and unable to lift a single chick in terms of strength.” One cannot say these words are excessive, for these “scholars” have truly made a complete mess of society.[6]

What are your thoughts after reading these quotations? Reading promotion is a sacred, weighty undertaking concerning the nation’s survival and people’s well-being. How can we promote it casually without questioning right and wrong? This is not something to be dismissed with “no one is perfect, no gold is pure.” This is not optional news on a mobile phone. This is not a job talk with “scattered discussion, unclear viewpoints, and little reference value.” As a library science researcher and reading promotion practitioner, how can one bear to let readers foolishly devote themselves to “hard reading” without understanding? Yan Yuan exhausted his energy to issue the strongest voice of his time, shouting with raised arms: “Practice is precious, foolish reading is poisonous.” Reading promoters must understand and observe this and must not treat it lightly or overlook it!

Yan Yuan used his personal scholarly experience to explain the difference be-

tween “good reading” and “foolish reading,” comparing reading without investigation to taking arsenic:

“I too am one who swallowed arsenic. Exhausting my mind and energy, I suffered deeply from its harm, and even at over sixty years old, I could not enter the Dao of Yao, Shun, the Duke of Zhou, and Confucius. Whenever I heard the sound of village school children reading on the road, I would sigh: ‘What a waste of energy!’ Whenever I saw people writing with brushes, I would sigh: ‘What a waste of mind!’ Whenever I saw crowds entering and leaving examination halls, I would sigh: ‘What a waste of talent!’ Twenty years ago, when I saw intelligent and ambitious people, I would urge them to read more; recently, when I see talented people, I warn them not to read too much…Alas! Look at the thousand sages and hundred kings—were they readers? Even those who have ordered the world since the Three Dynasties—were they readers? We must awaken urgently!” [7]

The world must not view these words as “mad ravings” ; the profound meaning within must be deeply examined. Confucius said: “When there is energy to spare after acting, then one studies literature.” Again, “action surpasses words.” Applying learning to practical use, mastering classics for practical application, and pragmatic rationality are the underlying themes of Chinese cultural psychology and the cultural genes for practicing socialist core values. How can we be bound to dusty paper, chanting “empty ambitions reaching the clouds,” “for a hundred years, sick alone I ascend the platform,” or “newly thin, not from wine, not from autumn sorrow,” without transforming knowledge into wisdom and establishing virtue in people? Reading promoters must personally believe in, contemplate, and examine these truths. I believe many readers are unaware of these “reading side effects,” for who would imagine that others would promote a “problematic product” for them to “try” ? Though “the ignorant are not blamed,” now that we know, can we afford to “see but ignore” ?

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### 3. The Dialectical Unity of Promotion Resources (Wen) and Promotion Personnel (Xian)

We are not here to tear down “reading promotion” but to inspect whether the platform it has built is solid in foundation, firm in texture, and sound in quality.

When we promote and facilitate reading, we call its carriers “literature” (文献). The “literature” to be promoted to all citizens must enter the category of “public goods” before entering the circulation and promotion process. This is the premise of this paper and the “proper meaning” of nationwide reading. Let us therefore examine the etymology, evolution, and connotation of the Chinese term “文献” (wenxian) to see what lessons it offers for today’ s reading concepts and promotion professionalism.

The term “文献” first appears in ancient books in the *Analects* (Ba Yi): “The Master said: ‘I can speak of the rituals of Xia, but Qi cannot provide sufficient

evidence. I can speak of the rituals of Yin, but Song cannot provide sufficient evidence. This is due to insufficient literature. If it were sufficient, I could provide evidence.’ ” [8]

Zhu Xi explained in his *Collected Commentaries on the Analects*: “Qi is the descendant of Xia; Song is the descendant of Yin. Zheng means evidence. Wen means books and records. Xian means worthy people. It means I can speak of the rituals of these two dynasties, but these two states cannot provide sufficient evidence because their literature is insufficient. If their literature were sufficient, I could use it as evidence for my words.” Here, xian refers to worthy, knowledgeable people (who also possess virtue).[9]

According to Qian Mu’ s *Famous Works of Chinese Historiography*, let us paraphrase the main points:

The Yuan dynasty scholar Ma Duanlin wrote a book called *Comprehensive Examination of Literature (Wenxian Tongkao)*, a monumental work on ancient Chinese institutions. Ancient China had the so-called “Three Comprehensive Works” for researching political systems and customs: Du You’ s *Comprehensive Institutions (Tongdian)*, Zheng Qiao’ s *Comprehensive Treatise (Tongzhi)*, and Ma Duanlin’ s *Comprehensive Examination*. In its preface, *Comprehensive Examination* states: “Wen means books and records; xian means worthy people.” It further explains: “Narratives are based on classics and histories, supplemented by dynastic *Huiyao* and various biographical works.” This is what is meant by “wen.” The most important, of course, are the Six Classics and Seventeen Histories. Dynastic *Huiyao* are important references for political institutions, such as *Tang Huiyao*, *Five Dynasties Huiyao*, *Song Huiyao*, and later compilations like *Two Han Huiyao*. *Huiyao* are historical works focusing on a dynasty’ s institutions, geography, customs, and folkways, supplementing official histories. Beyond *Huiyao*, various biographical works are included. All these constitute “wen.”

Ma’ s book records primarily based on these materials. Beyond recording, it includes commentary: “First, taking memorials from contemporary officials; next, recent scholars’ commentaries; and finally, discussions among famous figures and records by unofficial historians.” This is what is meant by “xian.” For each institution and measure, the opinions of those actually engaged in governance at the time are seen in their memorials. We must understand that while events of each era are important, the opinions generated about these events are equally important. Later generations’ commentaries on previous eras appear not only in formal writings but also in leisurely discussions recorded in various novels and notes. All these constitute “xian.”

Thus, “wen” and “xian” are two distinct things. “Wen” refers to books; “xian” refers to people. For scholarship, books are important, but people are also important—perhaps even more important than books. I often tell students to read book by book and to perceive the person behind the book. This person deserves more attention than the book itself. More importantly, this person refers not only to

the author but also, for a considerable period in our past, to those who read the book. Books are dead things; the people who write them are living lives. It is through these dead books that living people are transmitted to posterity.[10]

For readers, “wen” and “xian” should be distinguished and emphasized differently. Finding reading methods and threading together “xian-level” works around a classic text or figure—with predecessors above and successors below—generates interest and deepens understanding of certain knowledge or culture, achieving Confucius’ s state of “learning and practicing at due times.” Gentle guidance and daily progress are the path to lifelong learning. For libraries, in the digital-intelligence era, paper and electronic resources are “wen,” while human resources are “xian.” Nationwide reading requires not only the “public goods” nature of “reading carriers” (i.e., their benefit to society as a whole), which we endorse as “wen,” but also helping readers establish a nationwide reading concept that coordinates reading with practice, science with humanities, and utility with aesthetics—enabling them to understand and transform nature. More importantly, we must help readers learn to “bring the words in ancient books to life,” grasping the author’ s personality, temperament, conduct, and era as a starting point. From there, we connect major figures and viewpoints who have read the book throughout history into lines and networks, creating an intellectual map and spiritual coordinates of an author, school, or intellectual trend. This allows us to use Marxist dialectical materialism—viewing things developmentally and in connection—to examine and apply the literature that enters the public sphere as “(digital) public goods,” thereby enriching readers’ reading methods and aesthetic experiences.

### 3.2 Deeply Grasping the “Readers” and “Era” That Have Engaged with the Literature

Qian Mu continues his discussion in *Famous Works of Chinese Historiography*:

In a university, two conditions are necessary for academic research. First, a library containing many books—this is “wen.” Second, ideal, standard professors—this is “xian.” Scholarship requires both self-learning and asking questions. Without these two, literature is insufficient. For example, to study Confucius’ s principles, one must read the *Analects*, which is “wen,” or the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, which is also “wen.” But this is not enough. There are also people like Zuo Qiuming and Mencius—worthy people, “xian.” Both are needed to understand the *Analects* and *Spring and Autumn Annals*. To learn and examine Confucius’ s many principles, when reading the *Analects*, one should also ask Mencius; when reading the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, one should also ask Zuo Qiuming. Therefore, “wen” and “xian” should be discussed together, with both sides attended to. If we call this scholarship in “dusty paper piles” or “reading dead books, reading books to death, dying from reading books,” it is not true scholarship. But if you encounter a great worthy person who guides you, you will know that profound meaning lies within these dusty tools and reference books, and dead tools become living scholarship—provided someone can explain

them. Even if you go abroad to study Sinology, where many Chinese books are collected, these are merely piles of books. With books but insufficient “xian,” you still read dead books, so you must learn to use reference books flexibly.

Therefore, to study Confucius, one should follow the line from pre-Qin Mencius and Xunzi through the Han and Tang dynasties to Song, Yuan, and Ming, all the way to the Qing dynasty. How many people have studied Confucius throughout history? All these people’s explanations constitute “xian.” But over time, so-called “xian” also becomes “wen.” In our modern era, finding someone who can discuss the Dao of Confucius and Mencius like Mencius, Xunzi, Zhu Xi, or Wang Yangming is not easy. So although we speak of traditional culture, we still need a living “xian” for a true tradition. Seeking only in libraries is insufficient. Libraries are not living things; we need people, scholars. Only with “xian” can “wen” radiate brilliance and reveal its splendor.[11]

Qian Mu was a historian who made considerable achievements in reading and scholarship. His reading methods, reflections, and insights are highly enlightening. As described above, his distinction and application of “wen” and “xian” are incisive, providing a “textbook-level” promotion paradigm for reading classics like the *Analects*. Therefore, we strongly advocate strengthening the construction and improvement of reading promoter teams. On one hand, we must genuinely recruit these “xian-level” figures from all walks of life, helping them transform from professors, writers, media professionals, social activists, and artists into “reading promoters” with systematic promotional spirit. They should guide readers hand-in-hand, heart-to-heart, comprehensively and operably, step by step, helping them discover their reading interests and temperament, build their own “reading repositories,” and find the password to “self-discovery.” This is also an indispensable part of a healthy and scientific nationwide reading concept. Only with professional reading promotion teams capable of screening “(digital) public goods,” practicing reading that integrates knowledge with action, and understanding the equal importance of wen and xian can we implement high-quality Chinese-style modernized promotion practically and without side effects.

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#### 4. New Bibliography Construction Empowering Reading Promotion

Based on the above discussions, we have learned that “reading also has side effects,” that “practice surpassing text is healthy,” and that “human resource construction is the primary productive force.” Next, we briefly outline the third and most crucial step in the scientific guidance system for reading promotion: in the digital-intelligence era, using new bibliography (as proposed by Professor Ke Ping) as the starting point for intelligent, exclusive, personalized reading promotion methods.

Through extensive practice, we have observed that many urban public libraries

and city reading rooms use field surveys, expert recommendations, and big data analysis to compile thick recommendation catalogs, mixing various genres and bestsellers with classics. Readers hold these volumes, feeling ashamed, finding the titles “hard to swallow,” claiming themselves “unlearned and unskilled.” They feel uneasy not reading them but struggle when they do. This cannot be simply attributed to moral or intellectual “subjective assumptions” about readers. In light of this, using new bibliography methods seems to have identified the “crux” of the problem: reading also requires steps and procedures. Your thinking and knowledge accumulation must be “compatible” with the promoted books to “connect” with their content. Conversely, traditional promotion lists themselves lack systematic organization, having failed to consider where the audience’s knowledge, experience, and learning “interfaces” lie. They are scattered, lack “converter interfaces,” and have no scientific “extraction codes,” leaving citizens to “fill in the blanks” themselves. Such promotion is too “elitist,” “self-centered,” and “formalistic.”

The Qing dynasty classicist and textual critic Wang Mingsheng wrote in *Seventeen Histories Discussed*: “Bibliography is the foremost important matter in scholarship; one must ask the way from it to find the proper entrance.” [12] Another is the Southern Song historian and collator Zheng Qiao (courtesy name Yuzhong), who profoundly and incisively revealed the relationship between books and academic development: “Scholarship lacks specialization because books are unclear; books are unclear because categories are not distinguished. With specialized books comes specialized scholarship; with specialized scholarship comes hereditary ability. People preserve their scholarship, scholarship preserves its books, books preserve their categories. People die but scholarship continues; the world changes but books do not perish...When categories are distinguished, the hundred schools and nine streams each have their order.” [13] He also stated: “When ancient people compiled books, they always investigated the root and branch, with sources above and continuities below.” [14]

These provide two valuable lessons. First, lack of focus, concentration, and specialization in scholarship is not only due to insufficient diligence, intelligence, or perseverance but also due to a crucial factor we have not recognized: insufficient understanding and familiarity with the classification, systems, context, and full picture of books in one’s field of interest, leading to blind men touching an elephant, swimming alone in an isolated sea, or a headless fly missing the point.

Second, without organically mastering the bibliographic overview and historical evolution of a specific field, it is difficult to achieve remarkable results. Others have highways and light rails paved by predecessors, while you are alone, throwing stones to find the way. Therefore, in scholarship, we must particularly emphasize both source and continuity—these are the treasures and benefits that reference literature provides us. People have limits, learning is boundless, the world changes, but the fragrance of books endures.

Another figure is the late Qing official Zhang Zhidong. Since not everyone is fortunate enough to encounter good teachers, scholars often have the academic

tradition of recommending introductory bibliographies to beginners. Zhang Zhidong strongly recommended the *General Catalogue of the Complete Library of the Four Treasuries*, which offers important insights. He said: “Wandering without direction yields no lifelong gain; finding the entrance doubles the result with half the effort.” [15] “But how can good teachers be easily obtained? Books are teachers. Now I point out a good teacher for you all: read the *General Catalogue of the Complete Library of the Four Treasuries* once, and you will roughly know the path to scholarship.” [16]

Scholarship is similar to general reading. If such learned scholars need to “find the entrance” in their research, then for general readers, methods, pathways, and trajectories become even more important. Therefore, we strongly advocate that experts and scholars “show humility,” “lower their stature,” and “pool collective wisdom” to find the entrances for different readers’ needs and plan systematic, progressive reading systems with follow-up services. We should transform embedded services into one-stop services, achieving scientific, systematic, and disciplinary development of reading promotion guidance mechanisms.

Ultimately, only by integrating our “reading” into learning, life, and productive practice, and into the construction of a strong socialist culture with Chinese characteristics in the new era, can we actively advocate for healthy “nationwide reading.” For those forms of consumptive, utilitarian, and indulgent reading that are “deaf to the affairs outside the window,” where negative factors outweigh positive ones, reading promoters must also explain this clearly to readers. As for the common reader concern— “why can’ t I understand or continue reading the classics everyone recommends” —this strongly correlates with promotion methods, mechanisms, and insufficient systematicity. We must eliminate “menu-style,” “flyer-style,” and “order-style” promotion, help readers find entrances, paths, and radii, build steps, draw road signs, install navigation, and effectively guide the entire populace in reading guidance and scientific practice. Only then can we fulfill the promoter’ s “duty,” reach the librarian’ s “conscience,” and embody the information professional’ s “integrity,” thereby achieving the realm I once envisioned in a poem:

Reading classics makes a word-immortal, Reading history and people with righteous  
reaching the sky. Promoting to others with jade-like virtue, Widely  
befriending the worthy to cultivate one’ s work. Transmitting Confucianism  
and tracing Daoism with passionate suffering, Inheriting changes with detached  
leisure. Creative insights make poetry and music beautiful, New tea and book  
scrolls nourish the heart.

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

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