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**A Review of the Post-print Edition of “Draft History of the Library Association of China”** The Library Association of China was an important organization in the development of modern library services in China, and research on its history holds significant academic value. The post-print edition of...

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### **Abstract**

History of the Chinese Library Association is a seminal work in specialized library history research in recent years. It is characterized by a rigorous structure, rich historical materials, and original insights. Although it exhibits certain deficiencies in chapter organization, the level of detail in biographical narratives, citation of foreign sources, and textual annotations, its publication holds invaluable reference significance and value for both the operation and management of the Library Society of China and the future development of library services in China.

### **Full Text**

**Review of *Draft History of the Chinese Library Association***

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**Abstract** *Draft History of the Chinese Library Association* represents a major achievement in recent specialized library history research. Characterized by its

rigorous structure, rich historical materials, and original insights, the work offers invaluable reference for the management of contemporary Chinese library societies and the future development of China's library cause, despite certain shortcomings in chapter arrangement, detail balance, foreign citations, and textual annotations.

[**Keywords**] Chinese Library Association; Republican-era libraries; library history; library science; American Library Association

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## 1. Writing Characteristics

### 1.1 Rigorous Structure with Clear Hierarchy

*Draft History of the Chinese Library Association* is the culmination of years of research by Dr. Li Pengyuan, a scholar-librarian with systematic academic training. As Professor Wu Jianzhong notes in the preface, the work demonstrates rigorous structure and clear hierarchy, representing a labor of dedication with significant academic value. Though not his doctoral dissertation, the book follows the standard paradigm of dissertation writing: the introduction establishes research significance, current status, methodology, and purpose, followed by four chapters addressing the association's founding and annual conferences, international exchange and cooperation, contributions to Republican-era library science education, and historical significance and contemporary value. This structure prioritizes thematic organization over strict chronology, resembling a subject-based study of the Chinese Library Association.

The total-part structure proves particularly effective. Following the introduction, chapters 2-4 provide a macro-historical narrative covering the association's establishment, development, prosperity, and decline. Chapters 5-7 then examine specific aspects: international exchange, editing and publishing, and contributions to library science education. This arrangement allows readers to grasp both the overall historical trajectory and detailed thematic achievements. While Tomison's *History of the American Library Association (1876-1972)* adopts a purely chronological structure across ten chapters, Li Pengyuan's thematic approach enables deeper comprehension of the Chinese Library Association's major accomplishments and historical contributions, offering readers refreshing clarity.

### 1.2 Rich Historical Materials with Fluent Language

The book's wealth of historical materials is remarkable, representing years of painstaking effort. Beyond the three major Republican-era library science journals—*Library Science Quarterly*, *Bulletin of the Chinese Library Association*, and *Library Science School Quarterly*—the author consulted extensive additional materials from library science, education, and history. The bibliography lists approximately 300 references, including numerous

historical documents requiring meticulous reading, classification, and synthesis to reconstruct historical narratives.

The work demonstrates particular strength in its detailed analysis of classification research. Chapter 4, “The Chinese Library Association in Its Development Period (1925-1937),” meticulously examines classification studies before and after the association’s founding, analyzing major classification schemes from the 1904 *Catalogue of Gu Yue’s Book Collection* to Kang Youwei’s *Japanese Bibliography* (1902), Shen Zurong and Hu Qingsheng’s *Imitation of Dewey’s Decimal Classification* (1909), and Du Dingyou’s *World Book Classification* (1922). The author documents the association’s establishment of a Classification Committee and thoroughly analyzes theoretical research and practical compilation efforts by Republican-era library scientists, including Hong Youfeng’s *Library Classification* (1924) and the *Three Principles of the People-Centered Library Classification*. This level of detail in historical documentation is rare among contemporary library history works.

Complementing its scholarly rigor, the prose remains fluent and logical. Dr. Li’s solid writing foundation and professional expertise enable vivid reconstruction of the association’s professional achievements and historical contributions across different periods.

### 1.3 Original Insights with Unique Perspectives

The book offers numerous fresh perspectives that will inspire library historians. For instance, regarding Du Dingyou’s overseas studies, Li reveals that while domestic scholars generally know he studied at the University of the Philippines, few realize that the Philippines was then an American colony and that Du’s advisor was American. Consequently, his library science education was entirely American-style, providing deeper understanding of Du’s background.

Similarly, the author devotes substantial space to describing Bao Shiwei’s 1925 visit to China and his contributions to the association’s establishment, clarifying that the American Library Association originally intended to send Library of Congress Director Herbert Putnam, not Bao Shiwei. When Putnam declined, the ALA dispatched Bao instead. The book also illuminates the private relationship between Shen Zurong and Liu Guojun—both masters of modern Chinese library history—previously unknown to outsiders.

Another significant contribution addresses the debate over public versus academic libraries. While many attribute to Liang Qichao the view that “public libraries should not be built” in favor of academic libraries, Li traces this perspective to Gao Renshan’s 1925 article in the *Beijing News* supplement. Liang Qichao’s subsequent speech at the association’s founding ceremony merely echoed Gao’s viewpoint. This clarification corrects a common historical misattribution.

## 2. Existing Shortcomings

### 2.1 Chapter Arrangement

While the overall structure is sound, certain improvements could enhance clarity. The current chapter titles—“Background of the Chinese Library Association’s Founding,” “The Association’s Purpose,” “Establishment of the Chinese Library Association,” “The Association in Extraordinary Times,” and “The Association’s Decline”—could better reflect developmental stages. More significantly, Chapter 2 devotes an entire section to Wei Dihua’s contributions to the association’s founding, yet much of this content addresses the establishment of Boone Library School rather than direct contributions. The connection between the 1900 Boxer Indemnity funds and Wei Dihua appears tenuous, making this section’s placement seem incongruous and potentially misleading.

### 2.2 Detail Balance in Biographical Narratives

The book exhibits imbalance in biographical coverage. While Shen Zurong and Yuan Tongli made unparalleled contributions to the association’s establishment and development, no dedicated sections introduce them. Instead, the author provides a specialized section on Wei Dihua, creating a sense of disproportion. This is particularly noticeable given that Shen Zurong’s advocacy and contributions to the association’s founding receive extensive treatment throughout the text, and Yuan Tongli’s role as chairman was indispensable. The decision to feature Wei Dihua over these more central figures may leave readers with an impression of misplaced emphasis.

### 2.3 Foreign Citations and Translation

Despite referencing numerous foreign figures and institutions, the book relies primarily on Chinese translations or Republican-era reports rather than direct foreign sources. For example, when discussing Bao Shiwei’s works and impressions of his China visit, the author cites secondary Chinese scholarship rather than Bao Shiwei’s autobiography *A Librarian’s Life*, an important primary source. This reliance on indirect citations reduces textual credibility and persuasiveness.

Translation errors also appear occasionally. The English county name “Litchfield” in Connecticut is misspelled, and North Dakota is mistakenly identified as North Carolina. When discussing Dewey’s motto—“the best reading for the largest number at the least cost”—the original English formulation would better serve readers than paraphrase alone.

### 2.4 Textual Annotations

The narrative occasionally lacks necessary annotations for historical facts, diminishing reading experience and comprehension. For instance, when discussing the China Foundation for the Promotion of Education and Culture—a Sino-American collaborative organization—detailed lists of Chinese and American

representatives would enhance understanding. Similarly, the absence of annotations for specialized terms like “reference department” (the modern equivalent being “information consultation”) may confuse readers.

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### 3. Conclusion

*Draft History of the Chinese Library Association* stands as an outstanding specialized work in Chinese library history research. With rich historical evidence and fluent prose, Dr. Li Pengyuan vividly reconstructs the association’s brief yet glorious history. Despite minor issues—including structural imperfections, biographical imbalance, insufficient foreign citations, and translation errors—these do not detract from its significance.

The work’s publication holds important reference value for both contemporary library society management and future library cause development, marking a significant contribution to Chinese library science research. As the Chinese Library Association approaches its centennial anniversary (1925-2025), this work provides essential historical memory and scholarly foundation for understanding the development of modern Chinese libraries.

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