

Liang Qichao's Library Fundraising: Origins, Strategies, and Implications (Postprint)

Authors: Li Lingmei

Date: 2024-06-13T00:00:00+00:00

Abstract

Liang Qichao possessed profound theoretical understanding and rich practical experience in mobilizing social forces to participate in the construction of modern Chinese library undertakings. Strengthening research on his fundraising practices not only provides reflections for the diversified development of current library funding acquisition but also aims to reaffirm the mission and value of Chinese librarians. This article elaborates on the reasons behind Liang Qichao's library fundraising efforts against the backdrop of modern Chinese historical changes, and takes his public fundraising initiatives for the Wannmucaotang Book Collection, Songpo Library, and Dongyuan Library as examples to examine his fundraising work mechanism from six dimensions: fundraising positioning, fundraising organization, fundraising publicity, fund management, fundraising methods, and fundraising feedback. Exploring Liang Qichao's fundraising concepts and mechanisms offers profound insights for contemporary libraries in guiding social forces to participate in construction and services. The library community should fully recognize the value of fundraising, strengthen fundraising management, emphasize fundraising innovation, to better guide social forces in participating in library construction.

Full Text

A Brief Discussion on Liang Qichao's Library Fundraising Work: Origins, Strategies, and Implications

Li Lingmei

Zhejiang University of Technology Library, Hangzhou

Abstract

Liang Qichao possessed profound theoretical understanding and rich practical experience in mobilizing social forces to participate in the construction of mod-

ern Chinese libraries. Strengthening research on his fundraising practices not only provides insights for the diversified development of contemporary library funding but also aims to reaffirm the mission and value of Chinese librarians. This article, situated within the context of modern Chinese historical transformation, elaborates on the reasons behind Liang Qichao's library fundraising initiatives, using his publicly launched fundraising campaigns for the Wanmu-caotang Library Collection, Songpo Library, and Dongyuan Library as case studies. It examines his fundraising mechanisms across multiple dimensions: positioning, organization, promotion, management, methods, and feedback. Exploring Liang Qichao's fundraising philosophy and mechanisms offers profound implications for guiding social forces to participate in contemporary library construction and services. The library community should fully recognize the value of fundraising, strengthen fundraising management, emphasize fundraising innovation, and better guide social participation in library development.

Keywords: Liang Qichao; Library fundraising mechanism; Commercial operation; Public sphere; Civism

1. Origins of Liang Qichao's Library Fundraising Work

Liang Qichao lived during the turbulent late Qing and early Republican era, a period marked by internal strife and external threats. Following the Opium Wars, imperialist powers aggressively invaded China, precipitating a violent collision between Chinese and Western civilizations. As Liang described, "the forces of this new civilization knocked on our doors and peered into our chambers, while our millennia-old traditions, like withered leaves encountering a fierce wind..." This existential crisis forced Chinese intellectuals, steeped in traditional culture, to confront an unavoidable question: Whither China? How could the Chinese people survive and save their nation?

After China's defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895, Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao vigorously advocated for institutional reform. They organized joint petitions on national affairs, gathering at Songyun Temple in Beijing with over 1,300 participants. Although the Wuxu Reform failed politically, the Wuxu intellectual movement did not cease; rather, it surged forward with even greater momentum. As Liang later reflected, "At that time, we did not know that foreign countries had what are called political parties, but we understood that such organizations were indispensable." Libraries and publishing houses became the first undertakings of this movement [8]29, [11]44.

Libraries served as cultural frontiers with foundational importance in the Wuxu intellectual movement, which represented both a large-scale social patriotic salvation campaign and China's first major academic enlightenment movement. Unlike the top-down political reforms of the Wuxu period, this movement encompassed women's liberation and the vernacular language movement [11]95. Liang Qichao argued that "without adequate books and instruments, one can-

not speak of learning” [12]428. Together with Kang Youwei and Li Duanfen, he proposed a reform sequence: establishing library collections to form learned societies, and using societies to promote reform [8]51, [12]428. When building the Yue Society, Liang made expanding the Wanmucaotang Library Collection a key initiative, aiming to “import world knowledge into our land, unite the strength of the nation, and prepare for future needs” [12]610.

Liang Qichao’s fundraising practices held significant importance in modern Chinese library development. They represented not only extensive social patriotic campaigns but also practical opportunities for public cultural service participation and educational moments for cultivating patriotism and social morality. For instance, he combined Songpo Library fundraising with patriotic education, arguing that “each additional donor or fundraiser provides intangible training for a model figure” [4]100, [5]483.

Liang’s emphasis on modern library development and his active fundraising efforts stemmed fundamentally from his profound understanding of library functions and values. Throughout his intellectual evolution, Liang’s focus shifted from political institutional design to social and cultural construction—a transition from political to cultural national salvation. In 1915, he wrote, “My future way to repay the country... has shifted from politics to culture” [5]172. Regardless of these shifts, Liang consistently viewed libraries as institutional tools for constructing discourse systems and as components of power-knowledge production and accumulation. Whether building political discourse during the Wuxu period or cultural discourse later, he prioritized library creation.

During his studies at Wanmucaotang, Liang and his classmates established a library collection with over 7,000 volumes, “for poor scholars among relatives and friends who loved learning” [12]428. His experience managing the Qiangxue Publishing House, which also underwent piecemeal fundraising, laid practical foundations for his later extensive library fundraising campaigns. The tragedy of the Qiangxue Publishing House’s closure due to internal conflicts also taught him the complexity of fundraising, which involves more than material collection—it requires coordination in goal-setting, team organization, and financial supervision.

The late Qing and early Republican period faced severe fiscal deficits, making educational funding allocations extremely difficult. After the 1911 Revolution, local warlord governments routinely misappropriated education funds, withheld central appropriations, or refused to remit provincial contributions, completely dismantling the fiscal system [15]. Consequently, library development could only rely on the conscious promotion of social elites and enthusiastic public support. Historical records show that libraries at all levels in China during their founding stages typically relied on donations or fundraising. For example, the National Library of Beijing received donations from Zhang Zhidong and other officials during its establishment [16]132, while provincial libraries like Anhui’s Book Collection Building depended on local gentry donations [16]107. Scholar Wang Zizhou, after examining historical materials on library founding across

China and the West, concluded that “regardless of type—public, professional, or private—social forces served as the original motive power or engine in their founding process” [18].

2. Liang Qichao’s Library Fundraising Strategies

Liang Qichao’s fundraising campaigns for the Wanmucaotang Library Collection, Songpo Library, and Dongyuan Library all employed public fundraising through published appeals. These three appeals—*Wanmucaotang Library Collection Book and Instrument Donation Appeal*, *Songpo Library Preparation and Fundraising Regulations*, and *Dongyuan Library Fundraising Methods* [4]225-226, [5]499-500, [12]427-429—provide relatively complete documentation. The following analysis examines Liang’s fundraising strategies and measures across positioning, organization, promotion, management, methods, and feedback.

2.1 Overview of Three Fundraising Campaigns The three campaigns shared common features while addressing different needs. The Wanmucaotang appeal aimed to expand the library collection through newspaper announcements. The Songpo Library campaign, established to commemorate revolutionary Cai E, sought funds for construction, book purchasing, and Cai’s orphan education. The Dongyuan Library, honoring Qing scholar Dai Zhen, focused on raising capital. All three campaigns offered tiered rewards: donors contributing over 50 yuan received Cai’s portrait; over 100 yuan, a silver medal; over 1,000 yuan, name plaques in reading rooms; and over 10,000 yuan, dedicated plaques in the auditorium. Donors of books or funds received public acknowledgment in newspapers, with photographs displayed for contributions exceeding 100 yuan, and special naming rights for those exceeding 10,000 yuan.

2.2 Positioning Strategies Liang’s three fundraising plans emphasized different content based on each library’s specific needs and target audience. Hometown identity served as a key strategy. The Wanmucaotang appeal leveraged this emotional connection, as the library aimed to cultivate new talents in southern Guangdong. The Dongyuan Library appeal targeted Beijing’s academic community to honor Dai Zhen, with over half its initiators being Anhui natives [4]226. For Songpo Library, identity recognition centered on commemorating Cai E, with fundraising teams comprising provincial military governors including Wang Shizhen, Bing Kun, and Chen Shufan [5]499, collectively embodying the spirit of “inspiring integrity in the world and setting examples for soldiers to save the nation from catastrophe” [4]100.

2.3 Organizational Strategies Two distinctive features characterized Liang’s organizational structure. First, he built functional teams based on personal networks. The Songpo Library preparation team represented a celebrity cross-disciplinary combination leveraging Liang’s social capital, including wealthy individuals like Li Zhanyang, experienced administrators like

Zhou Hongye, and cultural figures like Zhang Yuanji, Chen Jingdi, and Yuan Silang [16]380. The team designated a preparation director and staff with clear division of labor [5]499. Second, Liang employed identity-based strategies to focus on industry elites, ensuring targeted and effective fundraising.

2.4 Promotion Strategies To enhance mobilization effectiveness, all three appeals utilized contemporary new media. However, Liang carefully selected publications based on each library's nature, scale, and target audience. Wanmucaotang, as a reformist school, aimed to cultivate southern scholars, so Liang chose newspapers circulating in South China for targeted outreach. Dongyuan Library, initiated by Beijing's cultural circles, had its appeal published in Beijing-area newspapers to reach political and cultural elites. Songpo Library, commemorating Cai E, targeted both government agencies and the public. Liang actively petitioned the government for support: in 1918, he successfully requested President Xu Shichuan to transfer the Yang Shoujing collection to Shanghai Songpo Library; in 1923, he secured Beihai Park's Kuai Xue Hall as the Beijing Songpo Library site from President Li Yuanhong.

2.5 Management Strategies Liang's fundraising management featured two highlights: implementing budget systems and establishing foundation operations, and ensuring full-process supervision through transparency.

Budget Systems and Foundation Operations: Liang advocated Western-style educational budget management, successfully creating budgets for the Imperial University of Peking [22]. In his appeals, he specified clear budget amounts: 20,000 yuan for construction, 20,000 for books, and 20,000 as an endowment fund for Dongyuan Library [4]225. He proposed concentrating funds in foundation form, recognizing that "funds are not easy to raise, but when pooled, they can accomplish valuable undertakings" [24].

Full-Process Supervision: Liang maintained transparency through receipt management, list publication, and board supervision. He used triplicate receipts distributed to donors, organizers, and collectors [4]226. Donation lists were published annually, with major expenditures announced in newspapers and detailed accounts printed in credibility records distributed to donors [5]500. He also established a board of directors, publicly elected by initiators and donors, to supervise library affairs [4]226.

2.6 Feedback and Reward Strategies To stimulate public participation, Liang employed diverse incentives combining material and spiritual rewards.

Material Incentives: The primary form was offering newly printed books in exchange for donations. The Wanmucaotang appeal promised donors "newly printed books by our colleagues, regardless of donation amount" [12]429—highly attractive in an era of book scarcity.

Spiritual Incentives: These included newspaper acknowledgments, engraved

name lists, photographic displays, library building naming rights, and government awards. Donors of 100 yuan or more had their names engraved and photographs displayed; those contributing 1,000 yuan or more received additional recognition; 10,000-yuan donors could name library buildings or halls after themselves or designated individuals [4]225, [5]500. These rewards recognized contributions and enhanced donors' social reputations.

3. Contemporary Implications of Liang Qichao's Library Fundraising Work

Liang Qichao's comprehensive fundraising schemes, robust organizational systems, dynamic management controls, and transparent supervision rules initially established a modern Chinese library fundraising management system. His experiences offer valuable insights for contemporary library fundraising.

Recognizing Fundraising Value: Liang viewed fundraising not merely as a means to collect materials but as a way for libraries to connect with society and enhance social value. In today's environment, libraries should proactively seek social participation as a core responsibility, securing more resources to better serve readers and improve service quality. Fundraising activities can deepen library-society connections, demonstrate library value and mission to the public, and attract more readers and volunteers.

Strengthening Fundraising Management: Establishing and implementing robust fundraising management mechanisms is crucial. Libraries should improve professionalism and effectiveness across scheme design, organizational structure, promotional selection, feedback mechanisms, fund supervision, and evaluation management. This ensures legal, secure, and effective fund usage, providing greater support for library development.

Emphasizing Fundraising Innovation: Liang innovatively used new media and financial instruments for fundraising and operations. In the mobile internet era, libraries can leverage social media platforms to publish fundraising information, display project progress, utilize live streaming and short videos to expand influence, and employ mobile payment systems for convenient donation channels. These innovations enhance fundraising efficiency and public awareness of library causes.

4. Conclusion

Liang Qichao's fundraising philosophy and mechanisms, which approached perfection in his time, remain profoundly relevant for guiding contemporary social forces in library construction and services. With grand aspirations to enlighten the people and strengthen the nation's foundation, Liang established a library fundraising mechanism characterized by public purpose, normative standards, and commercial supplementation. This system secured crucial material resources for modern Chinese library development while actively contributing to civic spirit cultivation and social transformation.

Today, as China has moved from decline to rejuvenation with increasing government investment, library funding sources remain relatively singular. Studying Liang's fundraising work honors the arduous pioneering efforts of early librarians and provides references for diversifying library funding. More importantly, it reaffirms the open spirit of libraries. Libraries should sincerely cooperate with all organizations and individuals who care about library causes, encouraging social participation through funding, donations, and volunteer activities to enhance public identification and belonging. The journey continues.

References

- [1] Li Lingmei. Liang Qichao's Library Science Thought: Modern Demands and Practical Construction [J]. *University Library Work*, 2023.
- [2] Liang Qichao. *Complete Works of Liang Qichao* [M]. Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2018: 42.
- [3] Kang Youwei. *Selected Academic Works of Kang Youwei* [M]. Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2007: 101.
- [4] Liang Qichao. *Complete Works of Liang Qichao* [M]. Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2018: 100, 225-226, 428.
- [5] Liang Qichao. *Complete Works of Liang Qichao* [M]. Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2018: 172, 483, 499-500.
- [6] Liang Qichao. *Complete Works of Liang Qichao* [M]. Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2018: 529.
- [7] Liang Qichao. Letter to County Education Associations and Public/Private Secondary Schools Soliciting Donations for Songpo Library [J]. *Jiangsu Provincial Education Association Monthly*, 1917(2): 1-2.
- [8] Wu Tingjia. *A Comprehensive Discussion on Wuxu Thought* [M]. Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2000: 27, 29, 51.
- [9] Liang Qichao. *Complete Works of Liang Qichao* [M]. Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2018: 2.
- [10] Liang Qichao. *Complete Works of Liang Qichao* [M]. Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2018: 112.
- [11] Liang Qichao. *Complete Works of Liang Qichao* [M]. Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2018: 44, 95.
- [12] Liang Qichao. *Complete Works of Liang Qichao* [M]. Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2018: 427-429, 610, 624.
- [13] Guan Xiaohong. Research on the Late Qing Ministry of Education [M]. Guangzhou: Guangdong Education Publishing House, 2000: 283.

- [14] Wang Zizhou. The Internal Logic of the Modern Transformation of Chinese Book Collection History [J]. *University Library Journal*, 2021(1): 116-126.
- [15] Research on the Modernization of China's Educational Finance System [J]. *University Library Journal*, 2001(4): 73-77.
- [16] Liang Qichao. *Chronological Biography of Liang Qichao* [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2008: 27, 107, 132, 380.
- [17] Nankai University Library. Overview of Nankai University Library [EB/OL]. [2023-10-05]. <https://lib.nankai.edu.cn/12081/listm.htm>.
- [18] Wang Zizhou. Social Forces as the Driving Force Behind Modern Library Development [J]. *Library Science Research*, 2009(6): 42-47.
- [19] Chinese Library Society. Library Service Declaration [EB/OL]. [2023-10-05]. <https://www.lsc.org.cn/cns/contents/1676363541657/1703426584604184576.html>.
- [20] Liang Qichao. *Complete Works of Liang Qichao* [M]. Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2018: 529.
- [21] Zhang Jilong. The Commercial Operation of Newspaper Groups in Old China [J]. *Journalism Research*, 1997(4): 42-46, 57.
- [22] Liang Qichao. *Complete Works of Liang Qichao* [M]. Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2018: 624.
- [23] Liang Qichao. *Complete Works of Liang Qichao* [M]. Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2018: 2.
- [24] Zhang Jia'ao served as President of the Bank of China, ushering in a golden age of development.

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

Source: ChinaXiv — Machine translation. Verify with original.