

Postprint: Government Procurement of Library Books in Shaanxi Provincial Universities: Current Status and Applicability of Relevant Laws, Regulations, and Policies

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Abstract

Through statistical analysis of government procurement data for books in Shaanxi provincial universities from 2019 to 2023, this paper examines the current status of government procurement of books in these institutions. The study reveals that government procurement has become the primary method for book acquisition in university libraries, with the process strictly following relevant national laws, regulations, and policies on government procurement. However, existing laws, regulations, and policies neglect the special nature of books' knowledge attributes and the diversity of publishing. It is necessary to further deepen the reform of the government procurement system, maintaining the universal applicability of the law while accommodating procurement projects with special characteristics, and constructing a transaction system that aligns with procurement needs. Library professionals should also take proactive action and exercise flexibility, seeking a balance between compliance in the procurement process and rationality of outcomes, achieving satisfactory procurement results within the framework of government procurement laws for books, thereby further improving the quality of library collections.

Full Text

Research on the Current Status of Government Procurement for Books in Shaanxi Provincial Universities and the Applicability of Relevant Laws, Regulations, and Policies

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Abstract

This article analyzes the current status of government procurement for books in Shaanxi provincial university libraries based on statistical data from the Shaanxi Provincial Government Procurement Network spanning [years]. The study finds that government procurement has become the primary organizational form for university library book acquisitions, with processes strictly adhering to national government procurement laws, regulations, and policies. However, existing legal frameworks overlook the unique knowledge attributes of books and the diversity of publishing. The research argues that further deepening reforms to the government procurement system are necessary to accommodate both the universality of law and the special nature of certain procurement projects, thereby constructing transaction systems aligned with procurement needs. Librarians should also take proactive initiatives, exercising flexibility to balance procedural compliance with reasonable outcomes, achieving satisfactory procurement results within legal boundaries and ultimately improving library collection quality.

Keywords: university library; government procurement for books; laws and regulations

Introduction

Government procurement refers to the act of purchasing goods, engineering, and services within the centralized procurement catalog or above procurement threshold standards using fiscal funds by state organs, public institutions, and social organizations [1]. The legal and policy framework for government procurement includes the *Government Procurement Law of the People's Republic of China*, the *Implementation Regulations of the Government Procurement Law*, departmental rules issued by the Ministry of Finance in its name, normative documents on procurement behavior, and related notices and letters. Consequently, all government procurement activities must comply with relevant laws, regulations, and policies.

As institutions serving teaching and research, university libraries primarily fund book acquisitions through fiscal allocations and must therefore integrate into the government procurement management system, strictly following prescribed procedures and processes. Existing research on government procurement for books has predominantly focused on theoretical analysis, with relatively few empirical studies, and even fewer examining how book procurement integrates into the government procurement legal and policy framework. Current studies primarily investigate market scale, problems in bidding processes, and solutions within specific scopes [2-4]. Wang Mao [5] clarified legal application misconceptions in document procurement, identified factors affecting efficiency and quality, and proposed solutions to align document procurement with the rule of law. Zhen [6] analyzed relevant provisions of the Government Procurement Law alongside library industry declarations and guidelines, summarizing the particularities of

book procurement and existing legal dilemmas, calling for improved laws and regulations and greater librarian agency in government procurement.

As government procurement laws, regulations, and policies continuously evolve, many earlier research findings require updating. Against the backdrop of comprehensive budget management, book procurement has been fully incorporated into the government procurement system, yet industry discussions on related legal and policy issues have recently grown quiet. A comprehensive review of provincial government procurement websites reveals a massive market scale for library book procurement, particularly in university libraries with substantial demand and high procurement values. This study systematically organizes and analyzes representative government procurement data for books from Shaanxi provincial universities posted on the Shaanxi Provincial Government Procurement Network from [years], conducting empirical research on current status to analyze existing procurement practices, applicable legal procedures, and compliance issues. The aim is to stimulate deeper discussions on book procurement issues and provide references for improving government procurement laws, regulations, and policies.

1. Statistics on Procurement Project Numbers and Amounts

1.1 Data Sources and Statistical Scope

The Shaanxi Provincial Government Procurement Network is the official platform designated by the Shaanxi Provincial Department of Finance for publishing government procurement information. This study examined procurement announcements and results for book acquisition projects posted by Shaanxi provincial university libraries on this platform from [years]. The statistical sample exclusively covers regular Chinese-language print book procurement projects from Shaanxi provincial universities, excluding discounted Chinese print books, foreign-language print books, databases, and other resource types. Projects containing both regular Chinese print books and other resource types were excluded if their budget amounts could not be separated.

Due to COVID-19 impacts and Shaanxi provincial regulations that goods and engineering projects below 200,000 yuan fall under self-procurement (no longer requiring announcements on the provincial network), the number of projects in 2020 dropped sharply. In other years, project numbers remained relatively stable, indicating maturing government procurement systems with universities universally integrating book procurement into government frameworks. Cross-year projects where procurement announcements were published in one year and results in the following year were uniformly counted in the later year.

1.2 Statistics on Procurement Project Numbers

The distribution of book government procurement projects for Shaanxi provincial universities from [years] is shown in [TABLE:N]. The highest procurement amount reached [amount] million yuan, with only [percentage]% of projects below 500,000 yuan. [Percentage]% of projects fell within [range], while projects above [amount] million yuan accounted for merely [percentage]% of the total.

1.3 Statistics on Procurement Amounts

According to Shaanxi Provincial Government Procurement Network statistics, the total budgeted amount for book procurement by provincial universities from [years] was [amount] million yuan, with an average annual procurement of [amount] million yuan and an average per-project amount of [amount] million yuan. Since book procurement projects typically use discount-based bidding, the actual procurement amount is the budget amount multiplied by the discount rate. The statistical data essentially reflects actual procurement expenditures. Details are presented in [TABLE:N].

2. Analysis of Government Procurement Methods

2.1 Annual Statistics on Procurement Methods

Statistics on procurement methods for Shaanxi provincial university book government procurement from [years] are shown in [TABLE:N]. Among [number] statistical samples, [number] adopted open tendering, accounting for [percentage]% of total projects. Competitive consultation methods were used in [number] projects, while competitive negotiation appeared in [number] projects. No projects used inquiry methods. After 2020, competitive consultation methods were no longer employed.

2.2 Applicability of Government Procurement Methods

Government procurement must select legally prescribed methods based on procurement content and threshold standards, without arbitrary choice [5]. Common methods include open tendering, invited tendering, competitive negotiation, competitive consultation, single-source procurement, and framework agreement procurement. Single-source procurement applies when goods or services can only be obtained from a unique supplier, which does not apply to books since suppliers are not exclusive and books are not listed in the centralized procurement catalog. Framework agreement procurement requires selection from publicly enlisted suppliers by government departments, also unsuitable for book procurement.

Invited tendering, where purchasers invite qualified suppliers (more than three) through bidding invitation letters, offers greater autonomy for libraries. However, Article 14 of the *Administrative Measures for Government Procurement*

of Goods and Services stipulates that invited tendering may use written recommendations from purchasers, provided that: (1) the total number of alternative suppliers must not be less than double the number to be randomly selected, and (2) all recommended supplier lists and reasons must be announced with bid results. In practice, without sufficient justification, announcements often trigger challenges from other suppliers. To avoid disputes, university procurement management departments typically avoid invited tendering, making this method difficult to implement in practice.

Competitive negotiation and inquiry methods have short procurement cycles (minimum 10 days for negotiation, 3 days for inquiry), with awards based on lowest price after meeting substantive requirements. However, the resulting low-price awards often lead to poor book quality and substandard processing services. Suppliers winning at minimum prices may lower product and service quality to compensate for losses, creating a “bad money drives out good” scenario.

Competitive consultation involves consultation panels negotiating with qualified suppliers on goods, engineering, and services, with suppliers submitting response documents and quotes for comprehensive evaluation. Applicable scenarios include purchasing services, technically complex or special projects where detailed specifications cannot be determined, art purchases, projects with undeterminable quantities, insufficient market competition for scientific research projects, and projects requiring support for scientific and technological achievements transformation. Competitive consultation uses comprehensive scoring methods and multi-round quoting, with minimum 10-day bidding periods. For goods and service projects below the open tendering threshold, competitive consultation is an optimal choice for book procurement.

Books are copyright-protected publications for disseminating knowledge and culture—products of human thought and specific evolving knowledge transmission tools [10]. Books possess dual attributes: the essential attribute of knowledge content and the physical carrier as external form. The knowledge system, ideas, and information resources they carry distinguish them from other commodities [6]. However, government procurement laws, regulations, policies, and normative documents uniformly treat books as general goods without acknowledging their special knowledge attributes. Consequently, in procurement practice, books remain categorized as general merchandise. The statistical data shows that all projects below the open tendering threshold adopted the longer-cycle open tendering method, reflecting both widespread criticism of lowest-price awards in competitive negotiation and inquiry methods and purchasers’ resistance to them. This choice represents a “lesser of two evils” decision by procurement officers.

3. Analysis of Government Procurement Results

3.1 Analysis of Procurement Results Announcement Timing

Government procurement activities strictly follow legal and policy requirements with standardized, necessary procedures, resulting in lengthy procurement cycles. Projects must sequentially complete budget allocation, procurement intention publication, procurement plan filing, bidding document preparation and review, agency selection, bid announcement, supplier registration, evaluation expert selection, results confirmation, and results announcement. Since 2021, the Ministry of Finance's *Notice on Conducting Government Procurement Intention Disclosure* requires intention disclosure at least 30 days before procurement activities, further extending cycles. Open tendering projects require 20 days from announcement to bid opening. Under ideal conditions without disputes or challenges, complete procurement processes require at least two months. According to fiscal year budget arrangements, projects typically launch after budget allocation in early [month], with bidding ideally completed by [month]. However, in practice, delayed approvals, communication issues, supplier challenges, and contract negotiations often postpone completion to [month] or later.

Statistics on announcement timing by month for Shaanxi provincial university book procurement results from [years] are shown in [TABLE:N]. Projects announcing results before [month] numbered [number], while those completing announcements during [month] peaked at [number]. Projects finishing in [month] reached [number], indicating that by year-end, many universities had not yet completed book procurement bidding. Subsequent processes including contract signing, supplier fulfillment, cataloging, and shelving—compounded by summer breaks—mean these tasks primarily occur in [months], creating concentrated collection development periods that risk gaps or bloated collections.

3.2 Analysis of Transaction Discounts

Among [number] statistical samples, [number] transaction discounts were recorded (excluding foreign books and discounted Chinese books), showing concentrated discount rates. The highest discount reached [percentage]%, the lowest [percentage]%, with [number] projects below [percentage]% discount. Discounts below [percentage]% were mostly for social science book packages at specialized colleges, while [percentage]% discounts typically involved yearbooks or special collections. The average annual discount rate was [percentage]% in 2019, [percentage]% in 2020, [percentage]% in 2021, [percentage]% in 2022, and [percentage]% in 2023, showing a 逐年 decreasing trend. This continuous price war increasingly threatens collection quality, with discount “red lines” repeatedly breached.

Even nationally recognized excellent suppliers like Beijing Rentian Bookstore Group Co., Ltd. participate in this race-to-the-bottom pricing. Their discount rates for winning bids at certain universities were [percentage]% in 2019, [percentage]% in 2020, [percentage]% in 2021, [percentage]% in 2022, and [percent-

age] % in 2023, displaying a wave-like decline. Distribution details are shown in [FIGURE:N].

3.3 Analysis of Number of Winning Suppliers

University libraries serve their institutions' teaching and research, building collections according to their educational characteristics and disciplinary specialties. Comprehensive universities typically have dozens of majors—the author' s institution has [number] undergraduate programs across [number] disciplinary categories—requiring diverse book selections. Most universities therefore select two or more suppliers to distribute risk, preventing failure to complete annual procurement or meet faculty/student needs due to poor supplier performance.

Among [number] statistical samples, [number] projects recruited multiple suppliers. As shown in [TABLE:N], projects recruiting two suppliers numbered [number], while those with three suppliers were most common at [number]. Recruiting multiple suppliers helps distribute risk but complicates management. Three suppliers offer a balanced approach. However, only [number] projects recruited four or more suppliers. Of [number] samples, [number] projects with multiple suppliers used qualification shortlisting, subcontracting, or specified procurement share allocation to assign business to specific suppliers.

Since the Ministry of Finance' s 2021 *Notice on Conducting Special Cleanup of Qualification Databases, Alternative Databases, and Candidate Databases* prohibited qualification shortlisting, the number of such projects dropped sharply while subcontracting or share-specified projects surged. Universities must now divide projects into packages (e.g., social sciences, natural sciences, arts) or specify procurement shares for each winning supplier. For libraries, qualification shortlisting was ideal—if one supplier' s quality or service fell short, others could compensate. Current regulations force universities to specify shares, creating risks: if urgently needed books cannot be obtained from the designated supplier for that package but are available from another winning supplier, must procurement be abandoned? This rigidity, failing to consider publishing diversity, can lead to suppliers mixing other categories into their assigned packages, degrading collection quality.

3.4 Analysis of Winning Suppliers

Among suppliers involved in [number] procurement projects, [number] winning bids were recorded (each supplier' s multiple wins counted separately). Beijing-based suppliers won [number] times, Hubei suppliers [number] times, and Shaanxi local suppliers [number] times. Beijing suppliers lead due to the city' s status as a major book distribution center, dominating procurement markets nationwide [13]. Among all suppliers, Beijing Xinhua Cultural Media Co., Ltd. and Beijing Rentian Bookstore Group Co., Ltd. form the first tier with [number] and [number] wins respectively, far ahead of others. Shanghai Xinhua Media Chain Co., Ltd. ranks second with [number] wins. Shaanxi local suppli-

ers like Shaanxi Jiahui Hantang Book Distribution Co., Ltd., Xi'an Xinhua Bookstore Co., Ltd., and Shaanxi Tianqi Distribution Co., Ltd. hold third-tier positions with [number] wins each. This pattern demonstrates a market structure dominated by large, well-known library suppliers.

4. Conclusions and Discussion

Based on statistical analysis of Shaanxi provincial university book government procurement data from [years], this study examines procurement system reforms and strategies to address procurement challenges, reaching the following conclusions:

Government procurement has become the primary organizational form for university library book acquisitions, with continuously improving institutionalization. It plays an irreplaceable role in standardizing procedures, improving fund utilization efficiency, and promoting integrity construction. The process has formed a market pattern dominated by large, nationally recognized library suppliers.

However, procurement projects strictly follow national government procurement laws and regulations, yet these frameworks, while universally applicable, should also accommodate special procurement characteristics. Book procurement possesses unique features: it requires continuous, long-term acquisition, typically using multi-batch annual purchasing models rather than simple goods procurement based on fixed catalogs. Suppliers must provide value-added services like data cataloging, magnetic strip and barcode attachment—specialized reprocessing requiring technical expertise. Frequent supplier changes affect procurement efficiency and collection continuity.

Current procurement cycles are excessively long. Fiscal budgets are allocated in early [month], and the *Notice on Conducting Government Procurement Intention Disclosure* requires 30-day advance publication of procurement intentions (which can occur before budget approval). Using this as basis, procurement documents can be prepared simultaneously. Once budgets are officially approved, bidding can launch immediately, shortening cycles. This policy should be implemented promptly.

For projects below open tendering thresholds, the inability to use competitive consultation methods forces adoption of longer-cycle open tendering. This stems from the government procurement management system's classification of books as general goods rather than recognizing them as "technically complex or special projects where detailed specifications cannot be determined" as stipulated in the *Interim Measures for Competitive Consultation Procurement*. The library community should actively advocate, through expert organizations and research projects, for recognition of book procurement's special characteristics in legal provisions, enabling competitive consultation for sub-threshold projects.

At the institutional level, universities can develop two-year book procurement

budgets based on stable annual funding. Appropriately extending supplier service periods avoids annual re-bidding interruptions, provides adequate communication time for both parties, and improves efficiency and service quality.

At the supplier level, joint procurement models offer efficient, cost-effective solutions [13]. In 2016, the Zhejiang Provincial Department of Education organized joint procurement of Chinese print books for provincial universities, where institutions selected suitable suppliers based on 入围 suppliers' performance, pricing, and their own disciplinary needs [14]. This model frees librarians from selecting agencies and reviewing bid documents, allowing more time for professional work like collection analysis and user needs research, while reducing sales costs for suppliers who no longer need to bid at multiple universities. It enhances efficiency for all parties and reduces socioeconomic costs.

In conclusion, under the existing legal framework, librarians should proactively seek breakthroughs to balance legal compliance with reasonable outcomes. University library collections are the knowledge foundation for teaching, research, and innovation; their quality directly affects academic development. In this new era of comprehensive high-quality development, ensuring procurement quality is paramount. This article aims to stimulate deeper discussions on government procurement system reforms. Librarians should keep pace with the times, actively break collective silence from a professional perspective, and work collaboratively to achieve both procedural compliance and reasonable results in book government procurement, thereby promoting prosperity in China's book culture industry.

References

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[2] [Other references preserved as in original text...]

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

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