



Comparative Study on the Current Situation and Promotion Methods of Paper Book Reading at Home and Abroad

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Abstract: This paper discusses the current status of paper book reading in several countries across Asia, Europe, North America, and Oceania, and examines the practices of university libraries in these countries in supporting paper book reading. The study finds that domestic university libraries tend to focus on internal support, emphasizing breadth with diverse and flexible themes. In contrast, university libraries in Europe, North America, and other foreign regions are more inclined to conduct social activities, digging deep into fewer themes with many extended activities on the same topic. Consequently, there are significant differences in audience scale, effectiveness, and social impact between the two. Drawing on the strengths of various practices, the paper proposes suggestions in six aspects: seeking on-campus collaboration, collective reading of a single book, seizing opportunities during admission, learning from successful cases, serving society, and addressing practical problems. These recommendations aim to provide references for university libraries to support paper book reading and management decision-making.

Keywords: domestic and international, university libraries, paper books, college students, reading promotion

1. Introduction

Reading has played an indelible role in the flourishing process of human civilization for thousands of years. Countries around the world have increasingly emphasized the importance of national reading. Since the 1990s, many countries have enacted legislation to ensure the right to read[1]. China also places a high emphasis on national reading, incorporating it into the government work report for ten consecutive years. In June 2017, China passed the "National Reading Promotion Regulation (Draft)." In 2021, the "14th Five-Year Plan" clearly proposed to "promote national reading deeply and build a 'scholarly China.'" Various provinces across China have successively completed local legislation on national reading, bringing national reading into the legal framework. The mediums that carry text and information have continuously evolved with the times: from the oldest turtle shells and bamboo slips, to silk and paper. With the rapid development of science and technology, the era of electronic information is progressing swiftly, and paper-based reading is currently facing unprecedented challenges. In the context of the era where "reading paper" and "reading screens" each have their respective advantages, most readers in China still have a strong reliance on paper books.

Domestic university libraries have a longstanding history that spans spanning several decades, amassing a substantial collection of valuable paper books. According to data sourced from the "Ministry of Education University Library Fact Database," encompassing 1,400 university libraries, the mean collection size stands at 1.315 million paper books, with an average annual circulation of 54,000 books in 2021[2]. This indicates a paper book borrowing rate of less than 4.11%. Given the national emphasis on reading, we need to consider how to effectively utilize measures to make better use of the paper collections in university libraries. This paper aims to investigate the practices of university libraries at home and abroad in supporting paper book reading, with the goal of providing ideas and methods for domestic university library colleagues to revitalize the circulation of paper books.

2. Research Methods

This study investigates the current status of paper book reading in key countries across Asia, Europe, North America, and Oceania through online research. Additionally, it examines the specific practices implemented by university libraries domestically and internationally to promote reading paper books through literature research in databases such as SSCI, ProQuest® Dissertations & Theses, CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure), Wanfang Data, and VIP Journals. The relevant research content was read, organized, and supplemented with a paper book borrowing data and survey questionnaires from Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications to create a comprehensive review.

3. Research Conclusions

3.1 Current Status and Promotion Practices of Paper Book Reading in China

According to the 20th National Reading Survey, the average number of paper books read per capita by adult Chinese citizens in 2022 was 4.78 books. Regarding preferred reading formats, 45.5% of adult citizens favored reading on paper [3]. Surveys within the university demographic indicate that most respondents prefer paper books, as they find the tactile experience of holding a book and turning pages more immersive, and they believe paper books help protect their eyesight [4]. At Shandong Agricultural University, 77% of undergraduates prefer paper resources, with 41.9% frequently using them [5]. At Jishou University, 65% of undergraduates prefer paper reading [6], while 51.79% of students at the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology choose paper reading as their primary option [7]. A survey conducted in 2023 by Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications found that out of 725 students, 438 (60.41%) preferred reading paper books. This demonstrates that reading printed materials still plays a significant role in the reading habits of contemporary university students.

In recent years, many universities have observed a continuous decline in borrowing paper books. The total number of books borrowed from the library at Shanghai Normal University has decreased annually, with a 64% drop in borrowed volumes from 2007 to 2016, averaging an annual decline of 10% [8]. At Henan University of Chinese Medicine, less than 40% of books entered circulation from 2012 to 2017, with borrowing numbers decreasing annually [9]. The library at China Three Gorges University experienced an approximately 50% decrease in total book borrowing from 2013 to 2017 [10]. The borrowing rates at Zhongkai University of Agriculture and Engineering's library were 8.43%, 7.98%, and 7.50% for the years 2016, 2017, and 2018, respectively [11]. The library at Guangzhou Nanyang Polytechnic experienced a similar downward trend in borrowing from 2013 to 2017, followed by a slight rebound starting in 2018 [12]. Faced with the current state of paper book reading among university students, university libraries have decisively taken on the responsibility of spearheading reading initiatives. They have implemented various measures to guide students back to in-depth reading using paper books as a medium.

3.1.1 Establishing Reading Promotion Organizations

Several university libraries, including Peking University, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, and Harbin Institute of Technology, have established reading promotion departments or groups [13]. Some universities promote reading by assigning the task to part-time librarians instead of creating new departments, such as Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications Library, which established a "Cultural Construction Post" within the Literature Lending Department. The establishment of such departments or positions provides a platform for university libraries to conduct reading promotion activities and organize a variety of engaging reading events.

3.1.2 Creating Reading Service Spaces

To enhance reading comfort, many university libraries have established unique reading service spaces. Currently, 34 university libraries have established "reading promotion cultural spaces" [14]. China University of Mining and Technology established the "Student Reading and Quality Development Center" to encourage students to rediscover, appreciate, and derive growth from reading while growing through it [15]. Chongqing University Library established the "Songyuan Book House" in student dormitories, Zhejiang University Library created "Yue Space" in faculty and student residences, and Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications Library constructed a "Red Theme Reading Room" and installed a self-service borrowing machine in the student one-stop community to facilitate book borrowing for readers.

3.1.3 Planning Reading Promotion Activities

Various universities have made numerous efforts to promote traditional book reading among college students. Fudan University Library launched the "Dandan Reading" series of activities to support general education, mental health, and ideological and political education through various book reading programs [16]. China University of Mining and Technology Library designed a three-dimensional, immersive reading guidance model using the KAPO model for reading promotion services [17]. Hainan Medical University Library conducted the creative "One Battle to the End: Classic Book Reading Knowledge Contest" to guide readers from "shallow reading" to "deep reading" [18]. Changchun University of Technology Library organized the "Run, Book—Finding the Reading Promotion Ambassador" activity to promote reading in a fun and engaging game format [19]. The University of Science and Technology of China established a platform for book exchange called the "Book Bank" [20]. Zhejiang Normal University Library combined "Campus Book Drift" with reading promotion activities, achieving significant results [21]. Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications Library provides year-round reading guidance for all faculty and students through a series of branded activities such as "Light and Shadow Reading," [22] "Yue Reading Academy," and "Red Classic Reading".

3.2 Current Status and Promotion Practices of Paper Book Reading Abroad

3.2.1 Asian Countries

Japan places great emphasis on cultivating the habit of visiting libraries from a young age. Programs such as "Everyone Reads Together," "Read Every Day," "Read Books You Like," and "Just Read" help stimulate minors' interest in reading paper books. South Korea's "Reading with Libraries" initiative helps children from impoverished or underprivileged backgrounds develop reading habits. Additionally, the "Miracle Libraries" project provides reading resources and guidance to minors of different age groups [23].

Survey results, however, indicate that Japanese university students do not frequently visit libraries. Many students believe that online information is sufficient and do not see the necessity of utilizing library resources. To address this issue, Japanese university libraries are digitizing paper books, enabling teachers and students to access or download required e-books at any time [24]. Besides organizing new book introduction events, Seoul National University provides a personalized reading service based on big data, where students can explore books of interest on a platform and receive tailored recommendations [25]. Kangwon National University has implemented a comprehensive reading certification and management system that requires students to participate in activities to earn credits or certificates, effectively guiding their reading behavior. Nanyang Technological University Library in Singapore facilitates access to new book information through subject library blogs and subject hubs. It also creates shared learning spaces and utilizes various social media tools to promote reading activities, attracting numerous readers to participate [26].

3.2.2 European Countries

European countries began promoting reading early on, which resulted in a widespread preference for reading paper books among Europeans. In France, a reading survey showed that the overall reading rate is 89%, with a book reading rate of 86%. On average, French people read 22 books per year, 17 of which are paper books [27]. Reading promotion in Europe is often carried out through nationwide activities organized by the government or various organizations. Typical examples include France's "Reading Festival" and "Night of Reading", the UK's "National Year of Reading", "Summer Reading Challenge", and "World Book Night", and Germany's "Start Reading" [28]. Norway implements programs such as "Make Space for Reading!" and the "School Library Development Plan" to enhance reading skills and promote personal growth among students [29]. In Russia, libraries and other institutions promote reading paper books through intergenerational classic reading activities such as "Reading Mother, Reading Nation," "Reading the Great Patriotic War to Children," and the "Reading Marathon" [30].

European university libraries play a central role in disseminating knowledge supporting academic research. Oxford University Library, for example, helps readers become familiar with its collections and fosters reading habits through initiatives such as "Ask a Librarian" and "Library Experiments." It organizes activities such as resource discovery, book recommendations, seminars, and book exhibitions. The library also digitizes its paper collections for convenient online access and free sharing with readers. Additionally, it engages with the community by inviting members to participate in reading activities, thereby promoting the circulation of paper books [31]. The University of Birmingham Library, with government support, provides e-book vouchers to youth and children nationwide each year, enabling free access to over 3,000 libraries [26].

3.2.3 North American Countries

In North America, represented by the United States and Canada, the current state of reading paper books is favorable. A survey of American college students revealed that 92% prefer reading paper books over digital devices [32]. Similarly, paper books remain the most popular reading format among the general American public, with a steady preference rate between 65% and 69% from 2012 to 2021. This rate is significantly higher than the reading rates for e-books and audiobooks [33].

"Common Reading Programs" have been the primary method of promoting reading in American colleges in recent years. From 2010 to 2019, 732 institutions have implemented common reading projects, including nearly two-thirds of the top 100 universities and one-third of the top 100 liberal arts colleges in the United States [34]. California State University, Bakersfield's "Reading Runners" is an example of a "Common Reading Program" conducted during the semester. The "One Book, One Community" initiative connects universities with local communities, broadening the horizons of college students and benefiting the community through university's cultural resources [35]. American university libraries also collaborate with university education and performing arts centers, university colleges, and university radio stations to organize "The Big Read." This initiative offers a wide range of activities to a diverse audience and has achieved significant success [36].

3.2.4 Australasian Countries

In recent years, with the joint efforts of the government, schools, and families, initiatives such as "National Science Week" and "National Reading Day" have nurtured a flourishing reading culture in Australia. A 2014 survey of 3,000 Australians

aged 15 and above found that 87% of respondents regularly read books in genres such as science fiction, biographies, history, and new poetry and drama, with nearly 60% reading novels weekly [37].

The University of Sydney Library, as a primary venue for academic reading, is committed to building a diverse collection. It also promotes paper book reading through events such as "Sydney Rare Book Week" and by recommending books on its official website, encouraging students to engage in reading activities [38]. The University of Technology Sydney Library has formed the "Bonus" consortium with 11 other prestigious university libraries. This collaboration allows for the sharing of library resources to facilitate interlibrary loans and free postal delivery [39].

3.3 Insights for Chinese University Libraries from Domestic and International Reading Promotion Practices

3.3.1 Seeking Internal Cooperation to Avoid Insularity

Both domestically and internationally, many activities that support reading paper books cannot be accomplished by libraries working in isolation. Librarians need to step out of their ivory towers and seek collaboration with various departments and faculties within the university. These efforts should align with the university's development goals and strategic plans, be based on actual educational needs, and deeply understand the desires of both faculty and students. Collaboratively planning paper book reading promotion schemes, organizing student reading sessions, discussions, and reflections can significantly enhance reading capabilities. Collaborating with student associations to host reading-related events, listening to student interests, and leading a campus-wide reading movement are essential. Through cross-departmental cooperation, training promoters both online and offline can help increase the circulation rate of paper books in university libraries.

3.3.2 Unified Reading to Foster Communication and Shared Understanding

In American universities, it has become increasingly evident that "common reading programs" involving students, faculty, and administrators can create a more harmonious and cohesive campus environment. By reading together, students and the entire academic staff develop a closer relationship, which is beneficial for their continuous learning throughout their university years. Since 2013, the "One School, One Book" reading promotion activity has been ongoing in universities in Hunan Province for 11 years. Each year, a reading theme is selected to encourage for students to enrich their spiritual world through reading, enhance cultural confidence, and cultivate patriotic feelings. This has become an important brand in establishing a "Scholarly Hunan." Through common reading projects in both domestic and international universities, a culture of appreciation for and engagement with quality literature has been cultivated. This has led to the formation of academic groups, the generation of numerous exceptional reading analyses, and the emergence of numerous exceptional advocates for reading. These initiatives have set benchmarks for promoting reading culture promotion activities and have played a significant guiding role. This indicates that university libraries should enhance and improve their reading promotion activities. Utilizing high-quality paper books as a medium, educators should lead students to develop through immersive reading, nurturing ideals, fostering integrity, enlightening wisdom, and grasping principles. This is crucial for fully developing a modern socialist country and advancing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

3.3.3 Seizing the Opportunity of Freshman Enrollment to Initiate a Reading Journey

The "Freshman Common Reading Program" conducted in the United States and Canada in recent years has yielded positive results. This suggests that freshmen, having just bid farewell to the heavy workload of high school, embark on a new journey in university life with relatively ample time. Launching guided reading of extracurricular paper books during the summer vacation or at the beginning of the academic year can enrich their spiritual world, broaden their knowledge, and stimulate their reflections on life. University libraries should seize the opportunity of freshman enrollment to organize guided reading activities and stimulate freshmen's interest in reading paper books. Firstly, they can invite student representatives, instructors, and counselors to actively recommend high-quality books. Secondly, the library can organize various reading activities on a class-by-class basis. These activities may include reading appreciation sessions, comparisons between books and movies, personal book selections, discussions on favorite protagonists, creating mind maps of certain books, and exploring how reading specific books has contributed to personal growth. Encourage students to write short book reviews or reflections or create videos recommending books, and reward outstanding reviews or videos. Through this approach, all freshmen can actively engage in reading, providing goals for promoting paper book reading promotion in university libraries. It also enhances the library's influence within the university and contributes to the sustainable development of reading leadership.

3.3.4 Drawing Inspiration from Excellent Reading Cases to Establish Unique Reading Brands

The "One Battle to the End: Classic Book Reading Knowledge Contest" organized by the Library of Hainan Medical University, the "Run, Books, Run: Searching for Reading Promotion Ambassadors" event held by the Library of Changchun

University of Engineering, and the "Dandan Reads with Joy" program at Fudan University Library are widely popular among students and have achieved good results. Carnegie Mellon University initiated themed discussions, and the University of Washington collaborated with several theaters to promote community reading through stage plays. These activities, which incorporate entertainment, challenge, discussion, and appreciation, greatly stimulate students' curiosity and desire for exploration. They have a positive effect on promoting paper book reading and provide new ideas for promoting reading. The Library of Jiangyuan University has implemented a book certification and management system, whereas the University of Science and Technology of China has built a platform for reading exchange platform called "Book Bank." " These initiatives have somewhat encouraged student reading, expanded their perspectives, and fostered self-improvement.

3.3.5 Changing Mindsets and Elevating Positions, Focusing on Campus Services to Serve Society

In most European and American countries, it is advocated that university libraries are advocated to be open to the public. European university libraries engage with communities to promote paper book reading among young people, while North American "Big Read" and "Common Reading Programs" are mainly centered in libraries but also involve other departments or media in society. In China, many university libraries share paper book resources among themselves or with public libraries through systems such as the Beijing University Library Document Resource Assurance System and the Higher Education Document Assurance System. However, the scope of public service is mainly focused on students and faculty, with limited outreach to the general public. This suggests that domestic university libraries, while guiding reading among students and faculty, need to break down barriers and open paper book borrowing to surrounding primary and secondary schools and even community residents. In the era of promoting national reading, university libraries should capitalize on their strengths to emerge as pioneers and hubs for national reading. They should also encourage the circulation of more paper books, aiming to achieve a win-win social impact.

3.3.6 Addressing Real Challenges and Seeking Solutions

University libraries face several challenges in promoting paper book reading. Early published books in the paper collection may be worn out, while knowledge in natural science books becomes outdated quickly, making it challenging to recommend obsolete books. Many paper books in the collection are losing popularity, as students increasingly prefer electronic reading. There is a shortage of personnel dedicated to promoting paper book reading, leading to varied but superficial activities. Few activities manage to both attract students and achieve educational goals. Collaboration with other university departments is lacking, with most activities reliant on the library's own student recruitment efforts. The reading atmosphere in universities tends to be utilitarian, lacking extracurricular book reading. Additionally, there is a lack of funds for reading promotion, as well as a deficiency in evaluation and incentive mechanisms.

This prompts us to consider actions such as promptly culling old or outdated paper books and replenishing the collection based on readers' needs, as well as setting up special shelves based on themes to facilitate discovery and retrieval. Additionally, planning diverse reading activities to encourage deep reading among university students using paper books, enhancing the training of personnel promoting paper book reading, and encouraging them to innovate and carry out reading activities that align with school objectives and are people among students. It also involves establishing evaluation and feedback mechanisms, enhancing communication and cooperation with other departments in the university, developing lecturers and counselors as reading promoters across the university, harnessing their exemplary role in guiding students towards reading paper books, and providing positive guidance. Furthermore, it is important to seek funding for reading activities from multiple sources and channels, and to promptly praise and encourage librarians who excel in promoting paper book reading promotion librarians. These efforts will truly stimulate students' enthusiasm for reading paper books, enhance their critical thinking skills, foster the formation of correct outlooks on life and values, and promote the effective utilization of university library paper book collections.

4. Conclusion

Through investigation and research, it is evident that many countries have elevated nationwide reading to a strategic level, with university libraries leading in-depth and refined promotion of print book reading. Foreign university libraries prioritize social impact by hosting large-scale events to increase reader engagement. Domestic university libraries focus on improving college students' reading quality and have extensive experience in promoting printed books. Common practices, such as hosting lectures, events, and integrating reading requirements into credit systems, play a crucial role in promoting print book reading among college students. However, university libraries also face the trend of decreasing circulation of print collections, necessitating more extensive efforts to promote print book reading. University libraries should prioritize their campus community while also considering their broader societal impact. They have the opportunity to take the lead in promoting print book reading and contribute to nationwide efforts to encourage reading among communities, cities, and the

entire nation.

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