Bridge the Text and Tech Literacy Gap between Generations
-- Case study of Reading Programs from Public Libraries in Guangdong Province of China

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Abstract:

While the computer and Internet brought huge change to the society, various differences emerged. Commonly Children who have grown up with computers are liable to escape from text reading, elders who have got used to paper reading are strange with new devices and feel worried to use. It is clear that there is a gap of text and tech literacy between generations. We explore how public libraries in Guangdong Province help bridge this gap through reading programs in many ways, such as library self service facilities, computer training for elders, stories in books performance, computer composition competition, calligraphy contest onsite, and animation cartoons database.

Beginning Words

Modern Illiteracy is a hot word in the present-day landscape of culture, mostly refers to those elders who are not able to make use of computers, they are no longer in their young ages to accept new things, they feel hard to learn new skill and device. According to the report of the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), there are 564 million netizens by the end of 2012, among which there are only about 10 million elders aged over 60. Compared to the 200 million elder populations, it means that, out of every 100 elders, only 5 are netizens.

Traditional Illiteracy is another hot word in the present-day landscape of culture, mostly refers to those young people who pick up the keyboard and put down the pen, they usually use computer and seldom write with pen, their handwriting is careless and often forget or write wrong characters; they are addicted to cyber world for images, video and social networking, they are liable to escape from text reading, their knowledge of traditional culture and manners is shortage. What is worse, this group seems larger and younger, from white-collars to students in school.

One group is elder Modern Illiteracy and another group is young Traditional Illiteracy, obviously there is a tech and text literacy gap between generations. When we explore how public libraries help bridge this gap through dozens of reading programs collected by the Reading Guidance Committee of Guangdong Library Society in 2012, we find that some programs produce an invisible and potential effect; meanwhile some programs produce a visible and immediate effect. Let us look into a few cases.

Part One: Library Self Service Machines

Most elders are afraid to use ATM machine, but they may become fearless and skillful with the library self service machines. At the annual conference of the Library Society of China held in Dongguan city, Guangdong Province in 2012, there are various library self service products in the good-sized exhibition. Public libraries in Guangdong Province, especially those in cities like Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Dongguan, Foshan, Zhuhai and Zhaoqing, are pioneers to introduce these advanced facilities. These machines are placed convenient to public, elders are curious to try. When grandparents come with their grandchildren, usually the young runs to the machine lively, their intergenerational communication becomes closer.

1.1 Large Touch Screen Reading Machines

Sun Yat-sen Library of Guangdong Province, when its reconstructed building opened by the end of 2010, introduced 7 large touch screen machines, of which 4 for reading popular journals & newspapers, and 3 for reading featured local resources such as Sun Yat-sen Graceful Appearance, Pieces of Ancient Books, and the Provincial Library with 100 Years of History. This often happens that a grandchild teaches a grandparent how to turn pages on screen and the grandparent tells the text on screen. Both children and elders enjoy the large touch screen reading, as it combines both sounds and colors, page by page alike the printed edition, adjust larger or smaller just at one's fingertips, no need for mouse or reading glasses.

1.2 Self Service Machines for Library Cards and Books Borrowing

Guangzhou Library, when its new building in Zhujiang New Town opened by the end of 2012, introduced 11 self service machines, of which 3 for library cards and 8 for books Checking in/out. Elders are active to apply library cards by the self card issuers, as it is free and no requirement for any deposit, they just need to let the machine read their ID cards or social security cards then add the function of a library card right on the same card, rather than producing seperate library card, only taking ten seconds for the whole process. They also like to use the self service machines to

check in/out books, they become confident with the machines, and feel younger. Every weekend, the family reading rooms are full of children, parents or grandparents.

1.3 Neighborhood 24-hour Self Service Machines

Shenzhen Library has built up its 200 neighborhood 24-hour self service library machines by February 2013 since 2003. These machines have been set up at neighborhoods like subway station, urban village, shopping center, residential community, hospital, theater, school, park, industrial area, customhouse, coach station, cultural station, gym, coffee house, cafeteria and airport, etc. Each machine can hold about 400 items for loan and 800 items returned. People can apply library cards, search books and do borrow, return, renew or reserve books by self service. Though users are mostly young people, many elders like to stand by and learn; they connect the machine to ATM in mind, and call it Books ATM vividly.

1.4 Self Service Libraries without Guard

Foshan United Library has launched its first group of 5 smart self service libraries in Dec 2012, respectively in Foshan Originality Industrial Park, Gaoming Dreamweaving Computer Inc, Foshan Library, Chanchen District Library and Nanhai District Library. Each library is allocated with thousands of paper books, several computers with access to millions of e-books and hundreds of popular journals & newspapers, also self service machines for library cards and books borrowing. Furthermore, there is no guard inside, it usually opens until late night, citizens with ID cards are free to enter, and they would help themselves all things. Whenever elders visit inside or go by, they become aware of the tide of new tech and self service.

Part Two: Computer Training for Elders

Though elders are strange with new technology and devices, they want to catch up with the times. Many people may do not notice that, computer reading rooms in public libraries, which used to be full of teens, now often full of elders, they are honored as e fashion elders. Computer training in public libraries is hot countrywide in China, take the Yuexiu District Library in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province as an example, elder students come to learn for many reasons, some say they do not have computers at home, some say they can learn the most ABC knowledge of computer here, some say they would like to learn with others around their age, some say the lectures from librarians here are quite easy to understand.

2.1 An elder student wrote a poem to praise the brand service

To promote reading with modern technologies, Yuexiu District Library has held more than 300 free computer courses for elders since 2005. Thousands of senior citizens have come to learn making use of the computer, cell phone and social networks. The class is popular and elders benefit a lot, just as one of them praises in a long poem that, the classroom is full of students, librarians train us in a good way, click the mouse and input the keyboard, write an article and store it easily, watch films like in a cinema, enjoy singing like in a KTV room, play the stocks and games online, read news around the world, keep our brain moving and live longer, so nice an opportunity, never miss it, thanks to librarians.

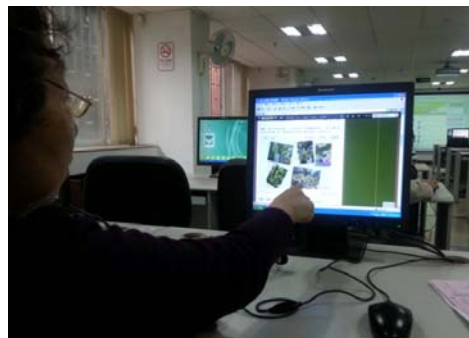**2.2 Primary Class Starts from Hardware**

As soon as elders go into the classroom—the computer reading room for teenagers of the library, they can see those hardwares normally embedded in a box, now are displayed in a showcase – CPU Board, Memory (RAM), hard disk, graphic card, sound card, disk drive, as well as data transmission band and power supply. The librarian help elders get to know functions of main hard wares and soft wares, also skills to use the keyboard and mouse, through the text books and courses on all terminals. Then all elders would start to practice in person, turn on the computer and

get online. After one day's course step by step, most elders are able to visit the library's website, satisfied smiles appear on their faces.

2.3 Middle Class Learns to Surf online

There are 40 elders in the middle class in February 2013, some of them have attended the middle course for a few times, and they have been able to surf online according to their different interests. A multi-choice survey was done in class that "What would you like to do by learning computer?" From the 24 answer sheets called back, we counted up that 24 persons like to view news online, 22 persons like to search information online, 18 persons like to send emails, 17 persons like to watch videos online, 16 persons like to chat via QQ, 10 persons like to play microblog, 7 persons like to play games online, 3 persons like to sort out e-photos, 2 persons like to play stocks online, 2 persons like to play WeChat, and 2 person likes to download and print files.

2.4 WeChat on cell phone, Funs anywhere

There is a young grandma in the middle class, sitting together with several friends around her age. She said that her son gave her this cell phone iPhone4 after he replaced a new one iPhone5 a few months ago. She often enjoys communicating with her family and friends via WeChat, she likes to share photos, make video call, and leave voice message, she feel easy just speaking to the phone, no need to input so many words. She showed us pictures of her little grandchild still in swaddling clothes, which were shared by her daughter-in-law, also pictures of food and drink shared by her son when he was traveling on train and in another city. It seems that this grandma deserves intergenerational cohesion with better tech literacy.

Part Three: Activities to Improve Teens' Text Literacy

Text is the foundation of a language; one after another it has been passed on by carriers such as clay pieces, bamboo slips and paper sheets, now into the digital age. As young generations use the keyboard, we still can help them carry on the text in some ways. To meet their interests, composition competition on computer can be a good way to clear up words wrongly written; calligraphy game can be an incentive to neaten their careless handwriting; performing stories in books might encourage reading more; traditional customs in animation cartoons can also become things they enjoy. If students are tired of dull study in schools, they can take part in these kinds of activities in local public libraries, together with friends or families.

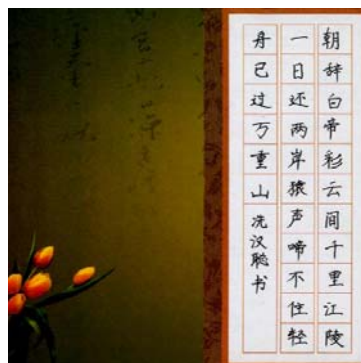### 3.1 Computer Composition Competition in Summer Vacation

Shantou Library started this yearly summer vacation competition in 2007, it has held 6 sessions up till now. During the competition, players compose on computer following the topic given onsite and the duration. More and more students attend to enrich their vacation life. For example, a fifteen year old boy has attended in all six years successively; he completed an essay of 900 words within 45 minutes, standing out from the 150 participants in the competition of 2009. He told the news media that, the competitions has improved his ability of composition and keyboard input. Actually his text literacy has been improved as well, as he tried to throw away those wrongly written words that often appear in social networks.

3.2 Calligraphy Game Onsite

Maoming Library started this first calligraphy game in July 2012, about 200 calligraphy fanciers from middle schools and primary schools in the city attended. They are required to write a classical poem with 28 Chinese Characters, 40 Chinese Characters or 56 Chinese Characters, respectively according to their age periods. Participants would write their favorite classical poems with pens or pencils on the uniform sheets given onsite in a pointed period of time. At last, 66

participants from three age periods were selected to be awarded for their excellent works. It is a great fun for so many calligraphy fanciers to write together, it is also an incentive for the large number of spectators to practice hand writing in normal times.

3.3 I Tell the Stories in Books

It is a program untaken by Dongguan Library since 2007. All the 33 branch libraries of towns and streets in Dongguan city organize the preliminary contest for the first-round selection; nearly ten thousand people are involved every year. For example, the 177 finalists in 2012 were from 32 preliminary contests during April and May; the contestants told stories in books by performance with speaking, music, singing or dancing, also with scene and costume. After the final, over 159 thousand netizens voted for their favorite contestants on the website of Dongguan Library by the end of May. This program has promoted effectively the text reading among children, teachers, parents or grandparents, at library, school, kindergarten and home.

3.4 Guangzhou Memories Animated Cartoons Database

Guangzhou Children Library has started to create this featured database since 2009, it is an edition for teens, all works are original, including columns like Folk Customs, Guangzhou Local Foods, Interesting Place Names, Guangdong Nursery Rhymes, Cantonese Stories, etc. The database is available on library website, furthermore, eight appreciation meetings and lectures were held in Guangzhou Books Shopping Centers, Teen's Channel of Guangzhou TV station was authorized to broadcast from July to October 2011, and the famous Cantonese stories teller Yan Zhitu was invited to tell stories, exhibits were also delivered to schools. Teenagers love animation cartoons, so they are delighted to see or hear local traditional cultures in these ways.

Closing Words

There are more self service facilities such as reading computers distributed in reading rooms, OPAC search computers distributed in stack rooms, and machines for checking building layouts. Furthermore, public libraries extend services by websites and always employ new technologies, e.g. Take the Exhibit Home is a program by Sun Yat-sen Library of Guangdong Province, introducing 2-dimensional bar code into exhibitions for the library centennial celebration, as soon as visitors shoot the QR code, e-exhibits would be available on their cell phones.

There are also more programs encouraging text reading for kids and teens, such as family reading, traditional pieces appreciation, reading aloud of Chinese civilization, etiquette training, lantern riddle salons. Moreover, public libraries co-organize activities in a larger scope, e.g. Sun Yat-sen Library of Guangdong Province starts the Love and Affection in Family 4.23 World Book Day Creative Competition in 2013, co-working with public libraries in Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Hong Kong and Macao, selected works from are road showed in these areas.

Text, culture, media and technologies have been always changing through the long human history. The text and tech literacy intergenerational gaps are certain at all time, today is no exception. Fortunately, public libraries are taking parts to bridge the gap between Old and Young.

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