

History of Library Developments in China

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Abstract:

China, as a country with one of the most ancient origins of libraries, has a long history of books and libraries. Libraries have experienced several periods of developments. However, the emphasis has not been put on the research on history of library developments until the twenty-first century. This study examines the historical and current status of library developments in China. It compares the similarities and differences of the developments of libraries in terms of the social, political, economic, scientific, technological, educational, and cultural backgrounds of various periods. It also analyses the main problems influencing the developments of post-contemporary Chinese libraries. Suggestions and recommendations are helpful to develop future libraries successfully in the digital age.

Keywords: History, library developments, similarities and differences, problems, suggestions

1 INTRODUCTION

China, as a country with one of the most ancient origins of libraries, has a long history of books and libraries. Libraries have experienced several periods of developments. According to the Chinese historical periods of social developments, library development periods can be divided into ancient library, modern library, post-modern library, contemporary library and post-contemporary library. However, the emphasis has not been put on the research on history of library developments, which “is a weak area all the time in libraries and librarianship in China”, until the twenty-first century (Wang, Wu, & Huang, 2010b, p. 63).

During recent ten years, the research has been conducted on “the policies and regulations for various types of libraries, library history, library and large-scale economic development of the western regions, library development strategies for communities and rural areas, library branding, knowledge management, open access, and many other aspects” (Gao, Wu, & Zhao, 2009, p. 23). There are many publications concerning library history and development. Some researchers are focused on the methods of dividing library developments into periods (Lu, 1998; Qiu, 2008; Wang, Wu, & Huang, 2010b). Others discuss the library development issues for only one period (Cui, 1999; Fan, 2009; Gao, Wu, & Zhao, 2009; Gong, 2011b;

Huang, 2011; Peng, 2008; Qing, 2012; Qing, Wang, & Zhu, 2009; Tan, 2011; Wang, 2006; Wang, L., 2010; Yang, 2008). And another researchers explore the library developments for a few periods (Gong, 2011a; Huang, 2010; Huang, Gan, & Yang, 2009; Li, 2010; Liu, 2009; Wang, 2010; Zhang, 2003; Zhang, 2011). However, few studies have been conducted on all the historical periods' library developments in China from multiple perspectives.

With the rapid developments of economy, science, technology, education and culture, Chinese libraries are currently facing development opportunities and challenges. In order to develop all types of libraries more successfully, it is important and necessary to explore the past successful and unsuccessful development experiences from multiple perspectives.

This study examines the historical and current status of library developments in China. It compares the similarities and differences of the developments of libraries in terms of the social, political, economic, scientific, technological, educational, and cultural backgrounds of various periods. It also analyses the main problems influencing the developments of post-contemporary Chinese libraries. Suggestions and recommendations are helpful to develop future libraries successfully in the digital age.

2 FIVE PERIODS OF DEVELOPMENTS

There are many different views on the divisions of the historical periods of library developments (Huang, 1994, pp. 1-2; Lu, 1998; Qiu, 2008, p. 36; Wang, Wu., & Huang, 2010a; Wang, Wu, & Huang, 2010b, p. 64). Studies of library developments display about five points of views. Library developments might be examined and explored based on: (1) "the history of Chinese society"; (2) "the history of the development of cultural and academic history"; (3) "the characteristics of the library development"; (4) "the features of the interplay between books and libraries"; and (5) "the Chinese historical era" (Wang, Wu, & Huang, 2010b, p. 64).

The history of library developments is divided into five periods: "libraries for book storage (pre- 1905), libraries for the public (1905-1949), libraries for politics (1949-1976), libraries for modernization (1976-1992), and libraries for the market economy (1992-present)" (Lin, 1998, p. xx). However, "these labels give each period the appearance of a black-or-white situation" (Zeng, 2000, p. 151).

Most researchers divide the periods of library developments according to the Chinese historical periods of social developments (Huang, 1994, p. 1). For this study, the historical and current status of library developments are briefly examined and explored according to these five periods: ancient library (pre-1840), modern library (1840-1912), post-modern library (1912-1948), contemporary library (1949-1977) and post-contemporary library (1978-present).

Ancient Libraries (Pre-1840)

According to the discovery of the oracle bone (or tortoise shells) inscriptions in Anyang, China, and late in the nineteenth century, the ancestors of Shang dynasty (1600-1046 B.C.) had a kind of book called "Ce Dian" which recorded how the Xia dynasty (about B. C. Babylonian era) was overthrown and a mature system and method of storing the materials of the oracle bones with over 4000 discovered Chinese characters, which indicate that the origins of books, libraries and archives can be traced back as early as 3000 years ago, the period of Chinese Shang dynasty, or even as early as 4000 years ago (Wang, Wu, & Huang, 2010b, p. 64).

Ancient Chinese libraries, synonymously called book-storage houses or book repositories because of the emphasis on the collections until the term “library” was used in *Shi Wu Daily* on September 27, 1896, “originated from the Xia and Shang dynasties, came into being in the two Han dynasties, developed in the Sui and Tang dynasties, and their best development stages were in the Song and Qing dynasties” (Huang, 2011, p. 2).

From Zhou dynasty to Qing dynasty, four unique systems of collections: (1) private collections; (2) official collections; (3) college collections; and (4) monastery collections, were gradually established. What is a library? More traditionally speaking, it is a collection of books. In this traditional sense, these four types of collections were four types of libraries and reflected the rapid library developments in ancient China. The ancient book-storage buildings were libraries because there was a relatively management system for them to develop in terms of circulation, acquisition, collection, classification, and catalogue; and at the same time, the book storage building functions and processes were closely related to acquiring, lending, cataloguing, processing, weeding, and preserving which are traditional library functions.

Statistical records demonstrate that “when Liu Xiang catalogued the national collections in Han dynasty, there were over 10,000 volumes of national collections; and in South and North Dynasties, 12 persons had a private collection of more than 10,000 volumes; in Tang Dynasty, 22; in Song dynasty, 50; in Ming and Qing dynasties, over 100” (Huang, 2011, p. 3). The volumes were made of bamboo and completed by hand, which indicates that there were not many real books at that time. During the Song dynasty, Bi Sheng invented the moveable type of printing, but it could not be widely applied to the mass printing production. Thus, the lack of the mechanical book making technologies resulted in the collection of books in small quantities (Huang, 2011, p. 3).

The private academics with good collections were set up in mid-Ming dynasty, and “in many ways, libraries of the private academics can be regarded as the precursors of the university libraries of today” (Ma, 1993, p. 184).

In the late Ming dynasty, the western missionaries spread some scattered library concepts as well as religions, but, in the Qing dynasty, the missionaries were expelled and the door to understanding the outside world was closed, which impacted the library developments (Gong, 2011a, p.2).

Modern Libraries (1840-1912)

After the failure of the Opium War, the internal and external influences accelerated the library reforms and developments in China. One influence came from the “forward-thinking Chinese intellectuals who not only promoted the learning of Western science and technology but also advocated the adoption of Western socio-political institutions” and reformers such as Guangying Zheng (1842-1922) who “as early as the 1860s, foresaw the necessity of a national library system when he proposed a thorough reform of Chinese political and educational institutions” (Liao, 2008, p. 38), Youwei Kang (1858-1927) and Qichao Liang (1873-1929) who “introduced Western library practices in a fairly systematic fashion” (Liao, 2006, pp. 360-361). The other influence was the Western missionaries’ efforts to “bring Western library practices to Chinese soil” (Liao, 2006, p. 361).

In 1847, the first Chinese modern library called Shanghai Xujiahui Tu Shu Guan was established by Catholic Christian community in Xujiahui district, Shanghai (Chen, 2004, as cited in Gong, 2011a, p.2; Liao, 2009, p. 24; Peng, 2008, 249). In 1862, Jing Shi Tong Wen Guan, the origin of modern Chinese education was built. In 1901, the first formal public library was built in Anhui province. In 1904, Hunan Library & Educational Museum that used “library” in its name for the first time in China was in Changsha, China. Many academic libraries were also set up.

In the late 19th century, the Qing government faced increasing internal and external pressures and challenges. In 1910, the Qing government issued a library law. Since then, the great transformation from “book storage building” to “library” had been completed. The developments of libraries had reached a higher level. Many laws, regulations, and policies for managing libraries were made. At the end of the Qing dynasty, a “country-province-county” three-tier system was preliminarily established (Gong, 2011a, p. 3).

Post-modern libraries (1912-1949)

After the overthrow of the Qing dynasty in 1912, “the New Culture Movement” and “the New Library Movement” were in full swing with the founding of the Republic of China. With “the New Library Movement” and even ordinary people’s participation in the vigorous librarianship construction, libraries developed very rapidly. Especially in 1912, Yuanpei Cai, as Minister of Education, promoted social education and established the popular library as a social institution. With the promulgation of the library regulations, this kind of library, as one of the most important institutions of social education, developed very quickly (Gong, 2011a, p. 3). The total number of the popular libraries was 2492 in 1936 (as cited in Gong, 2011a, p. 3).

Table 1: Statistical Results of Chinese Library Development during 1916-1936

Year	No. of Libraries	Year	No. of Libraries
1916	293	1930	2935
1918	174	1931	2953
1921	170	1934	1816
1925	502	1935	4032
1928	642	1936	5196
1929	1428		

Source: (Zhang, 2008, p. 58) (Zhang obtained the above information from 8 original sources.)

The numbers of all types of libraries displayed in Table 1 above illustrate that libraries developed very well from 1916 to 1936. However, after 1937, libraries were greatly damaged because of the continuous wars. In 1937, “The Japanese artilleries attacked 2166 libraries at the county level and above, 80% of libraries’ losses were extremely great and the other library buildings were totally destroyed” (Zhang, 2008, p. 60).

At the beginning of the 20th century, 12 academic libraries were established and Peking University Library (1902) “is widely accepted as the earliest national academic library in China” (as cited in Wu & Huang, 2003, p. 249). In 1936, the number of missionary university libraries and private university libraries was 28; 20 national university libraries were built; and “many academic libraries were badly destroyed” during the war against Japanese invasion (1937-1945) (as cited in Wu & Huang, 2003, p. 249).

The rapid developments of libraries were in urgent need of a large number of library management personnel. In order to meet this need, scholars as well as educational organizations actively called on the government to carry out library science education. Schools of library science were gradually established. In 1920, Mary Elizabeth Wood established the first school of library science in Boone University, China. The other schools included the library science branch of Guangzhou Normal College (1921), department of library science in Shanghai Guoming University (1925), Sichuan College of Library Science (1926), division of library science in Nanjing Jinling University (1927), department of library and museum science in the National Institute of Social Education established by the Ministry of Education in Sichuan (1942), and library science division of department of Chinese in Beijing University (1947) (as cited in Gong, 2011b, p. 9).

China's rapid library developments also resulted from the American librarianship's influences and the great contributions made by "Mary Elizabeth Wood (1861-1931) and her American-trained Chinese students" who launched with other library professionals the new library movement of Chinese library history, and western missionaries (Liao, 2009, p. 20; Zheng, Deng, Cheng, Liu & Wang, 2010, p. 341). Wood introduced American librarianship to China, set up the Boone library, established Boone library school and initiated China's library science education (Liao, 2009, p. 21; Zheng, et al., 2010, pp. 342-344). Wood was regarded as "the queen of the modern library movement in China" by President Yuanhong Li, the second president of the Republic of China (Cheng, 2000, as cited in Zheng, et al., 2010, p. 341), and her library spirit of devotion and faithfulness "will be our spirit fortune for generations and inspire librarians for generations to strive for library development" (Zheng, et al., 2010, p. 348). Western missionaries were involved with China's early library development reforms of three types of libraries : church libraries, public libraries and private academic libraries (Liao, 2009, pp. 24-25).

From 1915 to 1947, many library regulations and policies were promulgated at the national and local government levels and many other library policies were made at the association and community levels, and from 1918 on, many library associations were established, which guaranteed the good and rapid developments of libraries (Gong, 2011a, p. 5).

Contemporary Libraries (1949-1977)

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, all types of libraries had steadily developed until 1960. During the beginning of the 1960s, libraries did not develop well because of the natural disasters and the most difficult economic times. The developments of libraries were stagnated during the period of the Cultural Revolution from 1966-1976.

The types of libraries in China are various. After the founding of the Institute of Scientific and Technical Information (ISTI) by the Chinese Academy of Sciences in 1956, the name of ISTI was changed into "Institute of Scientific and Technical Information of China (ISTIC)" in 1958. ISTIC is "a national scientific and technical information centre and a national co-ordinating organization of information work for the whole country" (Luo, 1983, p. 23). At the same time, "every Ministry and most commissions under the State Council, and every province and autonomous region, established their own scientific and technical information institutes" (Luo, 1983, p. 23). These libraries are called science and research libraries. By this time, a comprehensive library system including public libraries, educational libraries, science and research libraries, trade union and factory libraries, and "a great number of libraries or

reading rooms in civil administrative organizations and army units from the central level down to the grassroots units” had been established (Luo, 1983, p. 28).

The number of public libraries displayed in Table 2 below is a reflection of the developments during 1949-1977. In the early years, the impressive improvements in all aspects were made. There was no exception for the development of public library. “The Great Leap Forward” campaign resulted in the surprising increase of the number of public libraries during 1958-1961, and “after the campaign was over, the number of public libraries was quickly back down to normal levels” (Bao & Huang, 2009a, p. 13). During the Cultural Revolution period (1966-1976), the public library development was stagnated, as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Statistical Results of the Number of Public Libraries during 1949-1977

Year	No. of Libraries	Year	No. of Libraries
1949	55	1964	543
1950	63	1965	577
1951	66	1966	523
1952	83	1967	470
1953	93	1968	448
1954	93	1969	400
1955	96	1970	323
1956	375	1971	392
1957	400	1972	460
1958	922	1973	523
1959	1011	1974	583
1960	1093	1975	629
1961	873	1976	768
1962	541	1977	851
1963	490		

Source: (Bao & Huang, 2009a, pp. 12-13; 2009b, p. 2) (Bao and Huang obtained the above information from 2 original sources of National Bureau of Statistics.)

During this period, there were 132 academic libraries in 1949 and in 1957, the number of university libraries rose to “229 with collections of 14 million items” (as cited in Wu & Huang, 2003, p. 249). The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) made the development of academic libraries stagnated.

From 1950 to 1965, the library science education programs developed well. In 1953, the Boone School of Library Science was merged into Wuhan University and became Wuhan University’s Department of Library Science. In 1956, the department of library science to recruit undergraduate students was respectively established in Beijing University and Wuhan University. In 1964, graduate students were recruited by the library science department at Beijing University. From 1951 to 1958, other four departments of library science in three universities and a college were set up, but were closed soon (Wang, 2009, p. 74). Many training classes provided for national library professionals were sponsored by the Ministry of Culture. The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) damaged the development of the library science education. “In 1966, the classes of library science were stopped at Beijing University and Wuhan University and books and equipments were lost” (Wang, 2009, p. 75).

Post-contemporaries (1978-present)

It is since the reform and opening to the outside world in 1978 that Chinese libraries have developed at a rapid and steady speed. With the rapid developments of science and technology, technologies of computer, information, digitization, multimedia, network, optical disc, microforms and audio and video have been widely used in libraries and quickened the library automation and modernization. The wider uses of these technologies have resulted in the great achievements.

Only after the National Science Conference in 1978 could the essential policies and tasks for science and research libraries to carry out and complete be correctly understood, and all activities of scientific and technical information work should focus on the general objective of China to realize the four modernizations (Luo, 1983, p. 23). According to Luo (1983, p. 25), “the total amount of accessions in ISTIC by the end of 1979 includes 12700 foreign periodical titles accumulated since 1968, 671000 foreign documents (chiefly research reports, conference proceedings, dissertations and theses, etc.), 6600000 patent specifications, 278000 standards, 350000 foreign product catalogues, 4000 Chinese periodical titles, 200000 domestic documents, 1000000 plates and reels of micro material, 33000 reference books, and 1200 scientific and technical films”, which shows that the ISTIC developed at a great speed.

In the 1990s, the regional cooperative cataloguing initiatives were established, and the successful approaches including “home-made systems, acquiring foreign-made systems and acquiring domestic systems” were used to automate library systems, services and resources (Zhou, 1997, p. 26). Chinese digital library pilot projects started in the mid-1990s, and now “many national, regional, and commercial digital libraries systems have been established” (Zhen, 2010). The developments of the China Academic Digital Library Information System (CADLIS) projects with the six functions including “coordinative acquisitions, online cataloguing, OPAC, ILL, document delivery and internet navigating” (Zhu, 2003, p. 401), and with the aim of “increasing the variety, functionality, and scope of CALIS' (China Academic Library Information System) services and resources both for end-users and academic libraries from 1,800 universities in China” demonstrate the wider applications of all new and advanced technologies and the rapid developments of digital libraries (Wang & Chen, 2010). Computers and digital reading rooms are popular in libraries. For example, “China's public libraries contain about 140,000 computers and 80,000 digital reading rooms, nearly triple the number in 2005” (Deng, 2011). In 2010, “China launched a scheme to promote the building of digital libraries at the county level in a bid to equip the country's over 2,900 county-level libraries with digital services”, and a national digital library network is being established now (Mo, 2011).

Table 3 below demonstrates the number of public libraries during 1978-2007. The growth rate for 1978 was much higher than that for any other year. From 1978 to the end of the 1980s, the growth rate was much higher than that since 1990s, and “since the 1990s, the growth rate has not been much higher than before” (Bao & Huang, 2009a, p. 13).

Table 3: Statistical Results of the Number of Public Libraries during 1978-2007

Year	No. of Libraries	Year	No. of Libraries
1978	1218	1993	2579
1979	1651	1994	2596
1980	1732	1995	2608
1981	1787	1996	2620
1982	1889	1997	2628
1983	2038	1998	2652
1984	2217	1999	2669
1985	2344	2000	2677
1986	2406	2001	2696
1987	2440	2002	2697
1988	2485	2003	2709
1989	2512	2004	2720
1990	2527	2005	2762
1991	2535	2006	2778
1992	2565	2007	2791

Source: (Bao & Huang, 2009a, pp. 12-13; 2009b, pp. 2-3) (Bao and Huang obtained the above information from 2 original sources of National Bureau of Statistics.)

Since 1978, Chinese educational libraries, especially university libraries, have made spectacular achievements. The development scale in term of the number of libraries, facilities, collections and personnel is expanding; Advanced technologies are widely used to improve the libraries from manual operation to automation; advanced tools and methods are being used to manage libraries successfully; and client-based services and resources are continuously enhanced (Yu, 2009, pp. 218-220). The number of academic libraries in 1980 was 675 and rose to 1908 in 2007 (Yu, 2009, p. 219).

During this period, trade union and factory libraries and libraries or reading rooms in civil administrative organizations and army units have developed well. In 1988, the number of libraries of the military system was 32264, while the number of trade union libraries or reading rooms was 192357 (Huang & Huang, 1999, p. 2). In 2000, there were over 90000 high schools; and libraries were established by 100% of senior high schools and comprehensive high schools (Ji & Rui, 2004, p. 5).

The post-contemporary period (1978-present) is the best period of China's library and information science (LIS) education. From 1980 to 1990, the number of library and information science education programs increased from 2 to 52 in different types of colleges and universities (Wang, 2009, p. 75). Since the beginning of the 21st century, the graduate students' education of information and library science have steadily developed. The number of the graduate LIS programs increased from 18 in 2001 to 42 in 2009 (Xiao, et al., 2008, as cited in Ke & Li, 2011, p. 3).

In 2005, the 21st Century New Library Movement was launched with the aims of "coordinating the relationships between library and society, promoting equal access to services, bridging the digital divides, and establishing an information fair and secure system" in order to develop current public libraries (Ling & Cao, 2007, p. 11).

3 SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Chinese library developments during these five periods demonstrate some similar features from a social, political, economic, scientific, technological, cultural, and educational perspective.

The social, political, economic, cultural and educational elements are important factors influencing the library development. Only when the social, political, economic, cultural and educational environments are stable and harmonious, which is a prerequisite condition for library development, can libraries steadily develop to satisfy people's information needs and use. The post-contemporary period (1978-present) is the best period of Chinese librarianship and information and library science education, while the Cultural Revolution stage (1966-1976) made the library development stagnated. In the post-modern period, the development of the library cause was greatly damaged by the social unrests, especially the wars. "In 1936, the number of China's libraries was as high as 5196; in the late 1943 of the war against Japanese invasion (1937-1945), the number of China's libraries fell to less than 1000" (Lu, 1998, p. 8).

Social development is always driven by the constant developments of science and technology. The science and technology development and application of new technologies quicken the library development's steps and are always a driving force for library development.

Economic development is the most essential guarantee for library development. Looking back the library development history, we can find that the best development period is the one when the economic situation is good. When the national economy develops very well, the governments at all levels can have more investments in the library buildings and the improvements of services and resources for the public.

Since 1949, emphasis has been put on the educational and cultural developments. Especially, during recent years, cultural construction has been an important and significant area for governments at all levels to invest in. Library development is one of the cultural construction elements. This has strengthened the library developments.

During all periods of library development history, the external influences have quickened the steps of library developments. In the ancient and modern periods of library developments, western missionaries introduced western library concepts, methods, and technologies to China. In post-modern and contemporary periods, American librarianship has played an important role in Chinese library developments.

The differences of the social, political, economic, scientific, technological, educational and cultural environments for each library development period result in many various characteristics.

General speaking, in ancient times, China was a large agricultural country and science and technology were not developed. Especially, the patriarchal system, the royal families of feudal society divided by blood relationship with the country power in order to establish a system of hereditary rule, resulted from lack of public awareness. Therefore, the collections of ancient libraries were not open to the general public (Huang, 2011, p. 1).

During the periods of ancient library, modern library and post-modern library, religion played an important and significant role in the library developments. However, the religion's role has not been so significant since the founding of the People's Republic of China.

The ancient libraries were only for a small number of people. The modern library was for most people. Since the contemporary period, all types of libraries are open to the public.

Before the late Qing dynasty, ancient books were mainly made by hand. Because of the use of mechanical book printing, the amount of book collections of modern libraries increased. The wider use of computers has quickened the developments of library automation and modernization.

4 PROBLEMS

In terms of the current developments of public libraries, the whole development situation is good and the growth rate of public libraries seems to keep the same pace with the national growth level of GDP. Actually, the growth of economy and public library is uncoordinated. For example, "taking into account the past 20 years' inflation rates, especially book price's continuously increasing, the investments for public library books and other constructions have not increased too much. In the central and western areas, it can be said that the investments are declining" (Huang, 2011, p. 106).

China, a developing country, has a long way to go to equal the library developments of developed countries. The population of China is about 1.3 billion while the population of the U.S.A is about 315 million. "The number of Chinese public libraries was 2850, which suggests that there were 2.08 libraries for average per million population" (Huang, 2011, p. 106). But, in the same year (2010), "the number of American public libraries was 16600, which means that there were 54.43 libraries for average per million population" (Huang, 2011, p. 106). In China, public libraries have developed at a rapid speed during recent decades. The 2010 Chinese public library number (2850) mentioned by Huang (2011, p. 106) might not include the number of trade union and factory libraries and libraries in the army units. However, the number of Chinese public libraries is still very small.

In China, there is a cultural phenomenon that some people need to make use of books to complete some tasks, and a place that they first think of going to is a bookshop, not a library, even though the books are a little bit more expensive now, which might explain why in 2005, the national public library data showed that "the utilization rate of public libraries is very low, which is an indisputable fact" (Li, 2007, p. 57).

"The library development of all levels is extremely uneven" (Sheng, 2009, p. 1). The number of public libraries in the urban areas is higher than that in the rural areas. The number of public libraries in the eastern developed provinces is higher than that in the many central and western undeveloped provinces. There is no public library in lots of under-the-county-level cities and towns with a huge population because "by the end of 2009, there was no county-level public library in the 368 counties, most of which are in the central and western areas" (as cited in Huang, 2011, p. 107). The gaps of public library development are reflected "in the total collection amount and the number of total circulation as well as the library building and other hardware facilities" (Huang, 2011, p. 107). One of the key problems is that current libraries are in urgent need of a large number of highly qualified library professionals (Sheng, 2009).

Currently, academic libraries have gradually developed. However, there still exist some problems. “The library collection is not adequate; the level of digital modernization and standardization is not high; resource sharing is not comprehensive enough; and the librarians’ overall qualities need to be enhanced” (Wang, 2011, p. 60).

5 SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to guarantee the developments of all types of libraries at a steady speed, the library laws, policies and regulations should be made and carried out. The related library laws and regulations at the national, provincial, county and town levels should stipulate each level’s duties and responsibilities in terms of the improvements of the existing libraries’ facilities, functions, systems, services, resources and management, each year’s or five years’ financial investments at all levels, the establishment of how many libraries for each type for how much population, the enhancement and innovation of library systems, and the management of library professionals.

If there had been related laws and regulations to guarantee the developments of all types of libraries, these laws and regulations would have been reviewed and updated with the time on. If there are not related laws and regulations at all governmental levels, measures should be taken to make related library laws and regulations as quickly as possible in order to develop all types of future libraries at all levels at a steady speed.

Contemporary society has entered a digital era. The future developments of all types of libraries should focus on the construction of digital libraries. For public libraries, emphasis now also should be put on the development of patron-based functions and social service functions.

With the problem of the shortage of funds, the extensive resource sharing should be enhanced. In the changing library environments, emphasis should be put on professional training and continuous education for information professionals so as to provide high quality services for patrons.

The very low use of public libraries “may in turn weaken the government’s willingness to invest in the cause of public libraries” and it is recommended to establish “the Public Library Day” in order to raise the public awareness of the public library use (Li, 2007, p. 57).

The low quality of the related library services may impact the use of libraries. To solve this problem, it is recommended to establish “the Library Service Star Award” that will be annually given to those who always provide high quality services for patrons (Li, 2007, p. 59).

6 CONCLUSIONS

What is the historical and current status of library developments in China? What are the similarities and differences of the developments of libraries in terms of the social, political, economic, scientific, technological, educational, and cultural backgrounds of various periods? What are the main problems influencing the developments of post-contemporary Chinese libraries and suggestions and recommendations? This study focuses on the brief answers to these questions.

An overview of all the periods of China’s library developments displays that libraries have developed at a great speed during recent decades in spite of the existing problems and issues.

Although the numbers used in the discussions might not be accurate, they have demonstrated the library development speed and the attained achievements.

Since the reform and opening to the outside world in 1978, China has made great achievements in the developments of all types of libraries. The significant achievements include, but are not limited to: the wide applications of information technology, computer technology, digital technology and network technology in libraries, the constant construction of new library buildings, the constant improvements of library service resources for patrons, the constant enhancement of integrated library systems, the comprehensive development of library and information science education and research, the advanced tools and methods used to strengthen library and information management, and the rapid developments of digital libraries, systems and services.

There exist some similarities and differences among these development periods. Currently, library developments are facing some problems and issues. However, if governments at all levels take effective measures based on the given suggestions and recommendations, any problem and issue will be effectively solved.

This study is helpful for people to understand the general developments of Chinese libraries during all the periods, and for future libraries to be successfully developed in the digital age. Future research will focus on the in-depth explorations, discussions, comparisons and analyses of the specific types of libraries during the various periods.

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