



A History of Reference Services in the National library of China, 1928-2008

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Abstract:

This article reviews the history of the reference services in the National Library of China. This article notes that the history of the reference services in the NLC may be divided into four stages since its establishment in 1928: before the anti-Japanese war (1928-1937), after the foundation of the PRC and before the ice break of the Sino-American relations (1950-1972), after the Chinese Economic Reform and with the popularity of the internet (1978-1997), since the establishment of LDMRD (1998-). The reference service has changed greatly in its methods, contents, results and efficiency. This essay analyzes characteristics of the four stages and development of the reference service for the government.

I. Establishment and Exploration (1928-1937)

Reference service is one of the important patterns of serving readers in modern libraries. It was put forward the first time by Samuel Swett Green who was the curator of Worcester Public Library of Massachusetts in 1876. Then Reference Service was accepted by the libraries all over the world. In 1928, the reference service of the National Library of China was set up under the auspices of the Council for Intellectual Education Assistance of the League of Nations. At the beginning, the reference service was scattered in the Reading Department, Index Department and Research Department. The mission of the reference service was to provide reference service domestically and internationally, compile bibliographies, collect materials for clients and guide reading directly and indirectly. These bibliographies, replies and materials would be collected and cataloged in a reading room and then could be used by readers. The Research Department also compiled many useful reference books. The Reference Service stopped after the Anti-Japanese War broke out. It wasn't renewed until the foundation of the People's Republic of China.

To sum up, this period was the beginning of Reference Services of the NLC. Although the Reference Services developed slowly and was attached less attention due to the low

economic development level and historical conditions, plenty of famous scholars and experts worked hard and made the reference services accomplished some after all. It set an example in reference service for other libraries.

II. Reestablishment and Development (1950-1972)

After the foundation of the People's Republic of China, the Reference Department of the National Library of China was set up due to the need for economic development in August 1950. It was the first special reference institution of the PRC. Its development could be divided into three phases during 1950-1972:

1. Reestablishment (1950-1952)

This phase began with the setup of the Reference Department and ended with the Reference Research Department in place of the Reference Department. From the beginning mission of the Reference Department was to allocate personnel, establish pattern and emphasis of service, set up the rules and regulations. There were only four people at the start and nine in 1958. They compiled more than 260 bibliographies on special topics in sum from 1952 to 1955, 50 of which were published.

2. Development steadily (1953-1966)

This phase started with the establishment of Reference Research Department and ended with the broke-out of "Culture Revolution". It was the one of the most important period of the development of the NLC's Reference Service. The National Library of China attached much importance to the reference services as means to serve the economic development and reconstruction. Especially on the Eighth National Congress of the Communist Party of China held in September 1956, Premier Zhou Enlai pointed out in his report on the intellectuals, "We must prepare indispensable conditions for the scientific research in order to advancing towards modernization. So the first and foremost thing is to supply necessary books and archives for the scientists. " Thus the libraries were endowed glorious and important historical missions to serve the scientific research. In order to adapt the situation the Reference Department was replaced by the Reference Research Department at the beginning of 1957 and the scientific research services was laid on the table. The Department included Social Science Unit, Scientific Unit and Bibliography Unit. In 1960 Reference and Inquiry Room was set up to help the readers find out the materials they needed. There were many reference books in this room that could be used to solve the problems and telephones to answer questions on line.

In 1960s there were more than 30 reference librarians in the Reference Research Department who majored in philosophy, history, literature, economy, law, physics, chemistry, mathematics, biography. And some of them were experts as junior and senior librarian invited from other departments of the NLC and other institutions. They finished many

important reference projects for governments and organizations of scientific researches, such as “investigation on petroleum materials in developed countries” for the Scientific & Technological Commission, “the trends of development of the science and technology in developed countries” for the Science and Technology Committee of Beijing. In order to assist some government agencies to make rural policy, they found plenty of materials about American rural problems, the level of mechanization of other countries, the problems of the yield per unit area of Japanese agriculture, and agricultural information on electrification, mechanization, transportation and fertilizer of the principal capitalistic countries. They sometimes made case study of retrieval service and provided the newest information.

This phase was the prosperous one for the Reference Services of the NLC. It was estimated that they finished nearly 30,000 consultations in fourteen years and gained much praise from governments, academe and clients.

3. Intermission (1966-1977)

The Reference Services was influenced to some extent by the Culture Revolution. In 1972 President Nixon’s visiting China provided an opportunity for the Chinese international exchange activities. The Premier Office asked the Reference Department of the NLC to look up documents and conversations about China that Andre Malraux (Culture Minister of French) published after his visiting China, since Nixon had invited Malraux to the White House to talk about his impressions on China. Thus the Reference Services resumed so that it could assist to finished many research programs about foreign affairs. In 1975 the Reference Department set up a special document research room for the central state agencies and changed its name with the Reference Research Department in order to provide research services for the government.

III. Putting Things Straight and Transformation (1978-1997)

This was a transition period for the Reference Services of the NLC. China’s Reform and Opening-up policy became a source and new start of the reference services of the NLC. With the rapid development of modern science and technology, and with the library’s information function intensified and the traditional one weakened, the reference services experienced great transformation.

In May 1984 , the Reference Research Department set up some special units in order to expand its service scope and patterns:

- **Commissioned Service Unit.** Its mission was to provide fee-based service and settle accounts. In order to set up a value system and adjust to the commodity economy, the NLC set up such kind of services.

- Social Science Reference Unit. Its mission was to provide reference services in helping readers find the materials on social science. Serving the central state organs was one of its tasks. For instance, they found eleven countries' regulations and laws on perfecting the Law of Unfair Competition Act for Commerce and Industry Bureau. They compiled Foreign Parliamentary Supervising System which wrote constitutional supervise, judicatory supervise, financial budgetary supervise, personnel administration supervision, Clean Government supervision for the General Offices of the National People's Congress. They provided foreign regulative documents on administrative supervision and public officers declaring their assets for the Ministry Supervision to draft the Law of Administrative Supervision. They provided documents on foreign antitrust laws, unfair competition act and price discrimination for the State Economic and Trade Commission. They provided literatures of On American Research Policy and Its Effect on Economy in recent 30 years for the Ministry of Aviation and Aerospace of China.
- Science and Technology Reference Unit. Its mission was to provide reference services in helping readers find information about science and technology.
- Scientific Literature Retrieval Unit. It provided patterns of card retrieval and CD-ROM Searching. It also trained readers how to use the databases to look up materials.
- Reference books Unit. It was a comprehensive business unit which collected and provide and research reference books. It also provided reading service, reference service and training service.
- Marxism research literatures Unit. Its mission was to collect and research the materials about Marxism and provided reading service and reference service about studies on Marxism.
- Philosophy Literatures Research Unit. Its mission was to research documents about philosophy and to provide reference services on philosophy.
- High Technology Literatures Research Unit. It was an information research room that traced the new development of information technology, automatic technology, energy technology, new material technology, bioengineering, aeronautics and did research in these fields and provided reference service.
- Soft Science Literature Research Unit. Its mission was to collect, provide and research the soft science materials and provide reading service and reference service.
- Chinese Studies literatures Research Unit. Its mission was to do information investigation and research on international literatures about China's politics, economy and culture.

These units' main tasks were to collect literatures and information about its own business, compile bibliographies, construct databases and retrieval system, do research and hold academic exchanges activities, provide literature retrieval and reference services.

By 1988, there were 100 reference librarians who majored in more than 20 professionals in the Department, such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, biography, medicine, philosophy,

politics, economics, literature, history, library science. Most of them were junior and senior librarian with bachelor degree at least and worked in reference services for more than 20 years. They found optimized patterns of service for meeting the needs of the society and an administrative system of information reference and documents research. They accumulated experiences on methods of reference services and the training of reference service people.

With the development of national economy and the rise of the information industry in the 1990s, the Reference Department's functions were greatly strengthened and formed multi-level paradigm of reference services. The contents of services were deepened, the methods were modernized step by step and the fields of service were widened. Databases and documents search system were set up in order to serve the people more efficiently. Since the National Library of China introduced into the CD-ROM searching system during the middle of the 1980s, the number of the research projects finished was 85 in 1990, 584 in 1993 and 1424 during 1990 -1993.

IV. Growth and Development (1998-2009)

In 1997, in accordance with the decisions of the Fifteenth National Congress improving legislation's quality and thereby constructing a socialist legal system with Chinese characteristics by 2010, the Law and Decision Making Reference Department (LDMRD) of the NLC came into existence in 1998. It was affiliated with the Reference Department at the beginning and separated from it in 2007. Its mission was to provide information services for the legislative and decision making of state organs. Its birth indicates a new period of the National Library of China's serving the central state organs. The development of Law and Decision Making Reference Department could be divided into four phases since 1998:

1. Beginning (1998-2000)

The LDMRD investigated and studied the central government's demand on the reference services and its characteristics. At the mean time the investigators exchanged ideas on service mode and propagandized their service during 1998-2000. In 1998, the NLC began to provide reference services for the representatives of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and the National People's Congress (NPC). In 1999 , a 24-hour run information desk was set up offering service for the deputies during the "Two Sessions" of NPC and CPPCC, and the LDMRD finished more than 50 consultive problems entrusted by the deputies. In 2000 the reference librarians of the LDMRD lived with the deputies of the CPPCC and provide direct service. In this phase the NLC's serving for the central state organs just at the start of the race, the number of projects surveys finished rose from about 70 in 1998 to 300 in 1999. At the same time, the NLC also explored the possibilities of cooperation with central ministries or commissions on establishing branches of the NLC. Therefore a branch library of the Ministry of Personnel and macro economic branch library of the State Development Planning Commission under the NLC were set up in 1999 and in

2000. These branch libraries are still affiliated with its ministry and commission and would get assistance on services managing, document providing and staff training from the NLC. The existence of this kind of branch library ushers a new mode of services for the specific consultation on law and decision-making advice of governments.

2. Stable Progress (2001-2003)

The setup of the LDMRD and its endeavors greatly promoted the NLC's service for the legislative and decision making of the central state organs. With the services for the "Two Sessions" of NPC and CPPCC as well as the setup of the branch libraries of the ministries and commissions, the LDMRD's impact was enlarged and its business developed steadily. Since 2001 the LDMRD began to provide locale service during the "Two Sessions" of NPC and CPPCC; Since 2002, the cooperation between NLC and the National People's Congress Information Center has strengthened; Since 2003 the LDMRD also began to offer daily document service for the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress and its special committees besides the service during the "Two Sessions". In 2001 the NLC established business relationship with more central state organs. They entrusted more and more projects to the NLC. It is estimated that about 300 to 400 projects were entrusted every year.

This period the Reference Department finished daily reference services as well as prepared served the central state organs with modern information technology. In October 2003 "Database of the NLC" made by the NLC for the General Office of the State Council Secretariat was put into use. It was the first time that the NLC provided information service in the manner of websites. Furthermore, since 2002 the NLC began to hold lectures on history and culture for the ministry-level cadres in place of the Culture Ministry and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

3. Integrative Development (2004-2006)

The people's lifestyles and work styles greatly changed when the SARS spread all over the country in the spring of 2003. Transmitting information accurately and timely by modern technology became a problem that the central state organs and the NLC were thinking about. Thus the development of the LDMRD entered into an adjustment phase at the end of 2003.

Firstly, Customers in the central state organs grew more and more. The NLC established cooperation with ministry of finance and Civil Aviation Administration of China early or late and established branch libraries. The NLC signed with many government agencies to establish business cooperation. At the mean time the NLC furthered the service scope with the General Offices of CPC, the State Council and the National People's Congress. Secondly, the number of the reference projects has increased promptly. In 2004 the number of entrusted projects LDMRD finished was as much as 3 times of 2003. In 2005 more than 1100 have been finished. This trend grew consistently. Thirdly, the mode of service diversified. Besides

traditional way of services such as documents delivery and project reference, new service patterns have been explored such as public opinion monitoring, strategic information analysis, information report system, compilation of thematic bibliographies, collection of materials, writing specialized reports, holding thematic exhibition and lectures.

4. Developing a new service pattern (2006-today)

With the LDMRD's service for the legislative and decision making was widely accepted by its clients, the reference services for the state organs differed greatly from its predecessors in the service depth and service demand as well as its quantity. The indication is that the existing service pattern of the LDMRD conflicts with its continuous development and adjustment on either the development of service business or its operation administration. If this potential unfavorable factor was not attached much importance and solved, the development of the service of the LDMRD would be influenced. Consequently, it is a pressing problem to actively explore to manage human resources more reasonably and effectively and to construct business process and mode of service more efficiently and more scientifically with modern information means so that to make the service of the LDMRD transit from mode of individual service to collective service. With the development of the digital library project and the business operations of the NLC, it becomes a consensus for both the service provider and service object that we need to design and construct a platform in order to provide individual service for the legislative and decision making of the governments in digital way based on the existing LDMRD's service. The NLC began to build the platform in 2006 and put it into use in the next year. The platform has injected fresh energy to conduct specific consultative services, project surveys and decision making advices entrusted by various governmental agencies.

Serving for the central governments is always one of the functions of the Reference Department of the National Library of China since its establishment. In 1998 the LDMARD as a individual department was separated from the reference Department in order to elevate its function of serving for the central state organs. With the 10 years development, the reference services for the government have stepping into a brand new stage.

Conclusions:

The seventy-one-year development history of the reference services of the National Library of China shows that its fate is well connected with the government's principles and policies. The reference service has experienced rapid development though it once meets setbacks after the foundation of the PRC. In the new era, the reference services will meet many new problems; however it will play more and more important role in the decision-making process of the government and in the academic circles in the future.

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