

	<p style="text-align: right;">Date : 08/06/2007</p> <p>A Broad Library with Social Inclusion: Reaching out to Vulnerable Groups in China</p> <p>Li Zhaochun and Huang Qunqing Sun Yat-sen Library of Guangdong Province 213 Wenming Road, Guangzhou 510110, China Email: qunqing@zslib.com.cn</p>
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Abstract

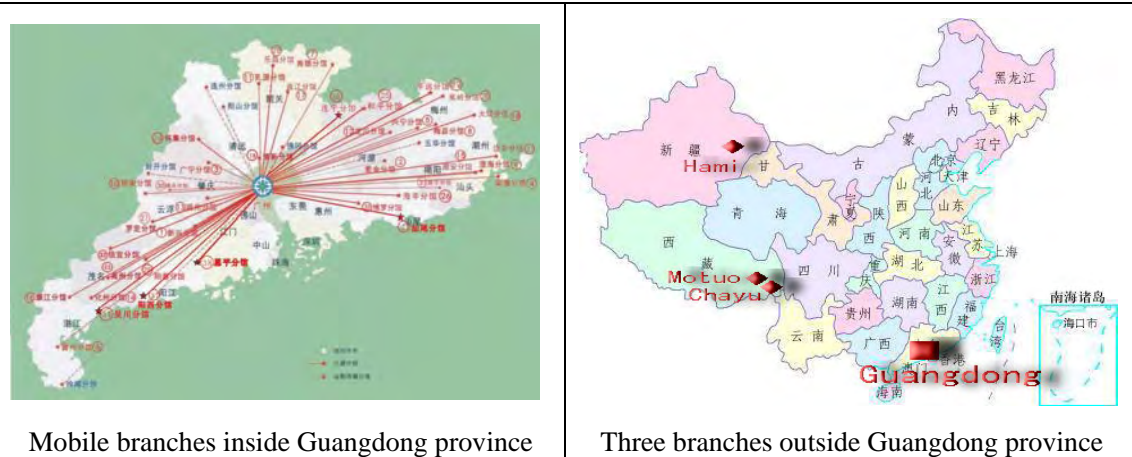
In the developing China, groups of people are facing social exclusion. They are the citizens unemployed or with ill health, laborers with poor skills, teenagers in prisons, residents suffering a disaster, and peasants in remote countryside. As we know that library service is crucial for these vulnerable groups, great efforts have been made in recent years, for example, Sun Yat-sen Library of Guangdong Province has reached out to 48 branches countrywide, becoming a broad public library. Some stories with pictures or video may demonstrate our social inclusion and responsibility.

Introduction

At present, China's economy has been developing rapidly and unevenly. With the transformation of social structure, the rich-poor gap is becoming wider. While more rich groups of people emerging, there exist vulnerable groups of people, who are facing social exclusion. They are the citizens unemployed or with ill health, laborers with poor skills, teenagers in prisons, residents suffering a disaster, and peasants in remote countryside. They have social resistance in front of them. It would lead to serious social problems if this situation is not changed. We realize that as an essential part of social public services, public library is likely to do its part to offer service to the vulnerable group, which can improve their comprehensive abilities and competence and enhance the stability and harmony of the society as well. This is what we are striving for.

Sun Yat-sen Library of Guangdong Province, set up in 1912, is a large provincial public library named after Dr. Sun Yat-sen, carrying forward his great spirit of *humanity* and *for the sake of all the public*. It has a collection of 5 million and 200 thousand items and over 450 staffs up till now. We have set up 49 branches inside or outside Guangdong Province and 25 *Reading Bases* in the prison system of Guangdong Province by cooperation, of which the services are accessible to general public, making itself a broad

public library. Here are stories of five branches with pictures or video to demonstrate how we reach out to vulnerable groups.



Part 1: Tangxia Branch, reaching out to disadvantaged citizens

1.1 Where did we reach out to disadvantaged citizens?

We had a strong sense to reach out to disadvantaged citizens, but they were too scattered. In Sep 2002, we read a report on newspapers that in Tangxia street on the outskirts of Guangzhou, came together more than 4000 poor families, 20,000 disadvantaged persons, 200 handicapped persons and a large number of laborers with poor skill. They live in Tangde Garden, the largest community special for the families with financial difficulty. These communities are supported by government, of which the apartment area is small and the price is lower. Registered families in Guangzhou with poor per capita house and income can apply to buy. If the per capita income is under 300 Yuan each month, a family can rent an apartment with a rental of only 1 Yuan for each sq. m. each month.



Tangde Garden special for poor families



A handicapped mother and her daughter

1.2 Who did we cooperate with for the branch?

After reading the report, we understood that these disadvantaged people were in great need of cultural life, but they were lack of cultural resources, which would play an important role for them. We realized that it was exactly a place to reach out, so we talked with the Street Committee the next day. Fortunately, there were rooms over 500 sq meters in the Tangxia Street Cultural Center, so we come to an agreement on starting a library branch soon. We offered books and training and the Street Committee was responsible for rooms, staff, management and maintenance. We put in 30,000 books, 39 periodicals and 2 computers, which were connected with our digital databases. It took

us only one month from the decision to its opening on Dec 2, 2002.



1.3 What praise was given from the community residents?

Tangxia branch was the first of its kind started in a community for disadvantaged citizens. Since its opening on Monday, the branch had become popular with readers doubled at weekend. The immigrated workers in this community came to have fun in groups, residents came to read with families, and unemployed citizens came to refresh their knowledge. A gentleman said that he graduated in a middle school, he wanted to improve himself by reading, but he had not read any book for nearly two years, because the books were too expensive for him, and he had to change buses to visit a library in downtown. Now the library branch near his house is free and convenient. Besides reading, residents also enjoyed free computer training. As a whole, the residents in this community spoke highly of the library services as cultural timely rain.



1.4 Which service has become the most popular recently?

A child is the hope of a family, especially for poor families. We found that the poor families put great attention to education of their children. Besides the nine-year free compulsory education in school, many parents let their children develop an interest such as piano, singing, dancing or sports. And we understood that the education fees are a big problem for them, even bus fares to downtown may become their burden. Therefore, we started a free painting and calligraphy class in the branch for the children from poor families since Sep 2005. We sent a qualified teacher, who is a member of the Art Association of Guangdong Province, to give lessons every Sunday. Children have made great progress in their painting skill, and enjoyed the happy hours.



A lesson for the children



A lesson for the teenagers

Part 2: Reading Bases, reaching out to the prison system

2.1 Reading Bases for all the 25 prisons

Prisoners, who served their sentences for the crimes they ever committed, receiving punishment and reform, were usually looked down upon by people. However, when we change our view a little bit, they are just a special vulnerable group who has lost their freedom; why not let them share the achievement of social cultural construction inside the high walls? To enrich the cultural life in prisons and encourage the prisoners to turn over a new leaf, we have signed with all of the 25 prisons in Guangdong Province to build the Reading Bases called *Seek Knowledge for New Life* since April 2004. We have donated over 120,000 books worth over 3,200,000 Yuan successively. We hope that “One book more, one mistake less. One library more, one prison less.”



Prisoners at the signing ceremony



A library in prison

2.2 Various activities for juvenile prisoners

Juvenile prisoners are mostly with poor literacy, but they are energetic, they want to learn in playing like other juveniles. Therefore, we have built a partnership with the Juvenile Offender Correctional Institution of Guangdong Province for a long time to help teach the juvenile by various mutual activities, such as chat, letter, performance, sport, competition, story or lecture by famous person. For example, we invited Ms. Cheng Xiaomin, a weight lifting champion of Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, to give a lecture in Sep 2004, confirming the truth that “no pain, no gain”. In addition, most of our young librarians have been volunteers to help the young prisoners face to face in pairs bimonthly. Although juvenile prisoners have to spend their youth in prison, meanwhile they could enjoy social inclusion as much as others.



Young prisoners at a birthday party with volunteers



Young prisoners learning computers with volunteers

2.3 Picture exhibition for women prisoners

Women prisoners are mostly puzzled by problems from love, marriage, drugs or finance for lack of laws understanding, but they are sentimental and long for family-love. So we run a large picture exhibition called “Under the sky of learning laws”, which took us three months preparing the pictures, together with the women prison in Nov 2004, and families were also allowed in. At the opening ceremony, a patter -- “How much law do you know?”, a lecture competition -- “Law and life”, and a keep-fit performance were carried out by women prisoners. Through the visual exhibition, women prisoners could learn easily what is legal or illegal in daily life, and how to protect their legal rights and interests. The prison, library and family help teach the women prisoners jointly.



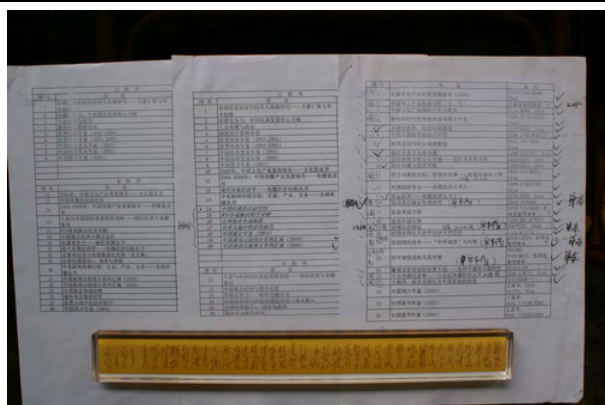
Sign board of the exhibition



Patter -- “How much law do you know?”

2.4 Special service for student prisoners

Prisoners can continue their study inside the high walls, treating the prison term as a school term, further for a degree of Bachelor, Master, or Doctor. To help these students carry on their study, we provide reference and track services. For example, we sent 66 reference books totally, of which 16 were subscribed to his topic, and 8 were transferred from the basic preservation stack, to a man prisoner about 50 years old, who had passed all the subjects for a degree of doctor before he was imprisoned. With the help of our books, he has finished his dissertation in prison by April. He will take part in the dissertation defense for a doctor of science in journalism late in May this year. Completing a dissertation in prison is something unusual in the Justice history of China.



The list of reference books for the dissertation



The cover of the dissertation

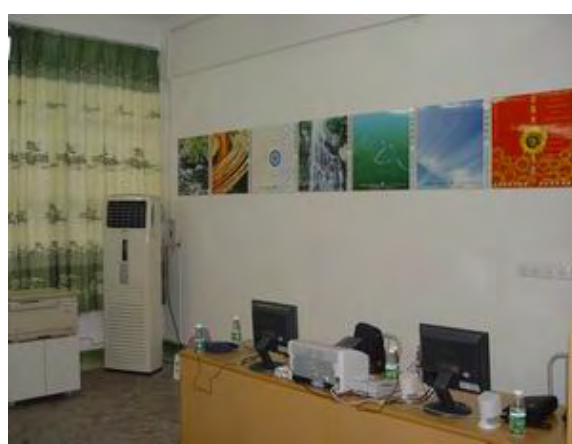
Part 3: Lechang Branch, reaching out to a disaster-hit county

3.1 What we had done for the county?

The county libraries in Guangdong province have been developing unevenly. Since 2004, the project of Guangdong Mobile Library has been put in practice as an important act to construct a Cultural Province and a Harmonious Society. A special fund of five million Yuan each year would be used to build mobile branches in public libraries of the underdeveloped counties. We take the responsibility of purchasing books and devices and then sending them to each branch, which has a standard quota of ten thousand new books at the beginning and exchanges their new books with other branches every six months. The branch in Lechang, a mountainous county in northern Guangdong, as the twenty second mobile branch, was built in July 2005.



Reading room of Lechang Mobile Branch



Computers and other facilities

3.2 How the flood had destroyed the library?

On July 14, 2006, a catastrophic flood caused by the hurricane *Bilis* reached Lechang. Early next morning, the library located at the riverside learned from the flood forecast department that the river would rise about one meter. Meanwhile, the staffs worked hard to move the books and devices to the second floor till the afternoon. However, the river was in spate, the librarians were unsafe and moved away by life boats. Late at night, the library was drowned over 5 meters; the mobile branch at the second floor was flooded over 1.62 meters. Almost all the 80,000 volumes of the Lechang public library, which had been collected for decades, and 20,000 volumes of the mobile branch were destroyed in a moment, so were the devices and furniture.



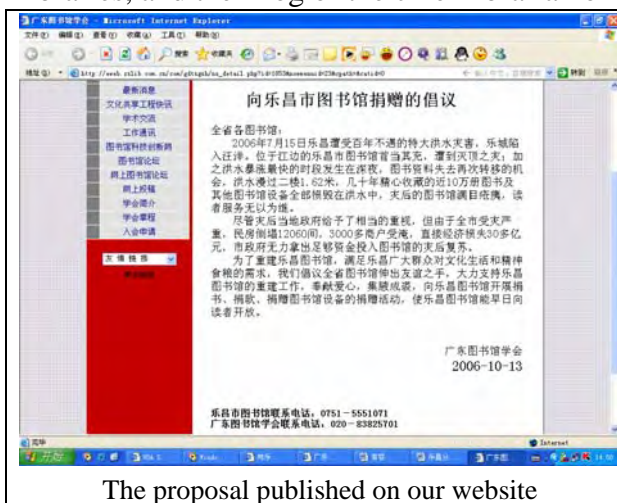
Bookshelves on the first floor after the flood



Books on the second floor after the flood

3.3 What could we do for the rebuilding?

The flood covered the whole town, ruined more than 12,060 resident houses and 3,000 shops, causing a large loss of over 3 billions Yuan directly. Although the government attached great importance to rebuilding the homeland, it was hard to rebuild the library in a short term. To meet the residents' urgent need for cultural life, chief librarians in Guangdong province got together for ideas in Oct and came out with a written proposal, appealing to all libraries and librarians in the whole province for assistance, donation of books, devices or money that would help the library rebuild and reopen earlier. The proposal was published in newsletters, on websites of public libraries and college libraries, and the Blog of the chief librarian of Sun Yat-sen University with pictures.



The proposal published on our website



The proposal published on a Blog

3.4 How long later did the library reopen?

The proposal attracted widespread support from libraries, publishers and librarians. Six months after the disaster, the library opened again. The ceremony of donation and unveiling was held on Jan 14, 2007. We renewed a mobile branch, still with the standard quota of ten thousand new books worth 400,000 Yuan, sixteen bookshelves, two book vehicles, computers, printers, a magnetic monitor and other devices. The Sun Yat-sen University Press donated 4,000 new books; a librarian from Urumchi, a city far away from Guangzhou city, contributed 2,000 Yuan, and so on. Totally the library received a new mobile branch from our library, 20,000 books from twenty other libraries and 20,000 Yuan from librarians. Its reopening meets the residents' reading thirst.



The children reading room after rebuilding



The mobile branch after rebuilding

Part 4: Two branches, reaching out to remote counties in Tibet

4.1 *Motuo, a beautiful place without road*

In the Yarlung Zangbo Grand Canyon in Tibet, there is a place called *Motuo*, with its meaning “Hidden Snow Lotus” in the Tibetan Buddhism. It is surrounded by high mountains, which would be covered with snow from Nov to April each year. Any of the four paths reaching outside leads to a mountain over 4000 meters high. All supplies have to be carried physically, and there have been deaths caused by snow or land slides on the paths every year. Actually, the government has tried many projects and invested a lot on the road in recent decades, but it was either too hard for construction or destroyed by landslides after completion. For its extremely complicated geology, *Motuo* is the only county in China that has no road for motors up till now.



Yarlung Zangbo Grand Canyon in Tibet



Snow mountains around *Motuo*

4.2 *A county library with great meanings*

Less than 1,000 books, no library in the whole county, the population had been suffering from poor literacy and cultural life. However, prospects would be different because the *Motuo* library, also as a branch of our library, has started in August 2006. We provided 17,000 volumes of books, computers, devices and training. It has taken a big stride forward, for its 1.7 volumes of collection per capita leaps to the top of all county libraries countrywide. Reaching out to 36 schools and teaching centers, the library services would benefit the residents in literacy, health, cultural life, economic activities and understanding the world outside. The books are *mental foods* and *cultural vaccines* to help the residents cope with the cultural impacts coming with the road and Internet.



At the unveiling ceremony



The library card of the branch

4.3 A unique transport with strong responses

The 17,000 books and devices we donated, totally weighed 7500 kg, and were carried into the county by 300 carriers on shoulders through the tough path for 4 days. From a digital video taken for this special transport, a nine year old girl carrier would catch your eyes. She carried a 25-kg load with her mother in turn to earn a carriage fee of 50 Yuan. In the isolated Motuo, being a carrier is the only way to earn money. Therefore, many children would be sent to be a carrier instead of going to school. After we published the pictures on our website, strong responses have arisen. The Guangdong S.F. Express Company, who had donated 150,000 Yuan to pay the carriers, donated another 240,000 Yuan to support 100 Monba nationality children to continue their school life.



The carriers



A long way



A muddy way



A steep way



Rip currents over the path



Rip currents over the path



A nine-year-old girl carrier



The girl carried the load with her mother in turn

4.4 Chayu Branch, another cultural fairyland

Chayu County, 1000 kilometers from Lhasa, is also located in the remote mountainous area in Tibet, with better condition comparing with *Motuo*. But residents still suffered from poor cultural life, because there was neither bookstore nor public library here. In May 8, 2007, *Chayu* library, also as a branch of Sun Yat-sen Library of Guangdong Province, was born beneath the holy Demula Snow Mountain. We donated 15,000 new books, computers and other devices, and sent a work team to help set up the library. They traveled a far way from Guangzhou to *Chayu*, got over the 4700-meter-high Sejila Snow Mountain and the 5,080-meter-high Demula Snow Mountain, and started to work in spite of sick feeling of highland reaction. It was not easy, but they were pleased that the cultural life would be improved, and the digital gap would be narrowed evidently, because this library could share the mass storage digital resources in our central library.



The roaring Yigong River



The 4700-meter-high Sejila Snow Mountain



The 5080-meter-high Demula Snow Mountain



A snow slide at the Ranwu Lake



A cable wooden bridge



The earth road



A road section made up of logs



Passing through a dangerous point



A road section under a cliff



Everyday vehicle for the residents



The engineer was setting up the computers



Librarians were sorting the books



New books were taking to the shelves



Volunteers were processing the new books



A banner for the opening ceremony



One of the posters in the library



Cut the ribbon at the opening ceremony



A Tibetan blanket as a gift



A large number of new books on shelves



Students were dressed up for the festival



The chief librarian introduced the collection



The residents were applying library cards



The children were delighted by cartoons



The girls were reading story books



The boy was absorbed in animal world



The girl was reading a fairy tale

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