



Promote Popular Cultural Literacy throughout the Countryside in China --A Case study of the National Cultural Information Resources Sharing Project

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Abstract

Cultural works are products of human thought made by a particular group of people at a particular time. We can understand popular cultural literacy as the condition of enjoying the cultural works, which are liked or needed by most ordinary people. In China, half the 1.3 billion population are still living in the broad countryside, where they have a variety of cultural needs, but the facilities and resource are deficient. Fortunately, the National Cultural Information Resources Sharing Project goes into village with its large service network, rich digital resources, new electronic facilities, modern transmission ways and overall staff training. Looking into the typical stories of traditional culture, farming culture, cyber culture and video culture, we can see that the popular cultural literacy is being promoted throughout the countryside.

1. Introduction

1.1 How to understand popular cultural literacy?

According to the Longman Dictionary Contemporary English, one of the meanings of Literacy is “state or condition of having studied or read a great deal”; one of the meanings of Culture is “customs, beliefs, art, music, and all the other products of human thought made by a particular group of people at a particular time”; one of the meanings of Popular is “liking, or needs for most ordinary people”. So we can understand *popular cultural literacy* as the state or condition of studying or enjoying cultural works, which are liked or needed by most ordinary people, include, but are not limited to, books, films, music, stage arts, fine arts, food, games, buildings, etc.

1.2 A variety of popular cultural needs in villages

In China, a little more than half of the 1.3 billion populations are still living in the broad countryside. There are fifty-six nationalities. They speak different languages or dialects; they have different religions or customs; they have different folk festivals or

ceremonies; they have different costumes or foods; they have different historic or natural sites, and they have different ways to express their lives, such as music, dances, or dramas. Furthermore, villagers need not only traditional or farming culture, but also newly emerging culture, and they may enjoy watching more than reading. All in one sentence, they have a variety of popular cultural needs.



1.3 The cultural facilities and resources were lacking.


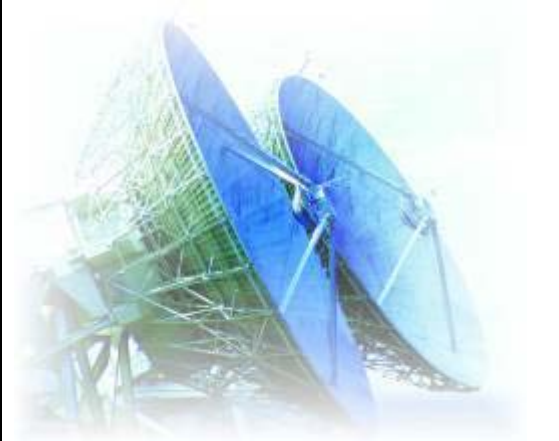
Up till the end of 2000, the number of readers in all the 2,675 public libraries accounted for only 15% of the populations; the number of audiences in all the 1,900 theaters accounted for only 3% of the populations; the number of visitors in all the 1,384 museums accounted for only 6% of the populations. Even the worse, there was a big gap between cities and rural area. Most of the readers, audiences and visitors were citizens. The villagers usually spend their spare time mainly by watching TV, listening to radio or playing cards. The facilities and resources to meet the popular cultural needs throughout the countryside were to be improved.



1.4 Can a library meet more popular cultural needs?

As a reading place, can a library also be a learning center, an information center, a cinema or a theater? Can it reach to the countryside in an effective way in low cost? The National Cultural Information Resources Sharing Project is giving its answers. It

is a public cultural project, launched in April 2002, sponsored by the Department of Culture and Department of Finance, and undertaken by public libraries, aiming to enrich the cultural life in grass roots with digital cultural resources. The project goes into villages to meet popular cultural needs. Looking into a few typical stories, we can see the popular cultural literacy is being promoted throughout the countryside.

	
<p>Pic5 Logo of the project</p>	<p>Pic6 Satellite transmission</p>

2. How does the project go into villages?

2.1 Its service network

The project goes into villages through its large service network, which is undertaken by public libraries of different administrative levels and town/village cultural stations. Led by the National Center in the National Library, it has set up 33 provincial sub centers and over 400, 000 village serving sites by the end of 2008, covering 65% of all the villages countrywide. For example, the Guangdong Provincial Center, which is undertaken by Sun Yat-sen Library of Guangdong Province, has set up 21 city sub centers, 300 county/town sub centers and 20,600 village serving sites, covering 100% of all the administrative villages throughout Guangdong Province by the end of 2008.



Pic7-8 Service Network

2.2 Its electronic facilities

The project invests a large number of new electronic facilities on the service network. For example, the Guangdong Provincial Center has standards for facilities. It requires every county sub center to be equipped with one server for the project, one server for LIS, one server for digitization, a storage capability of at least 3.6 TB, one backbone switch, two fast switches, one firewall, a bandwidth of at least 10M, a server room, an electronic reading room of 20 computers, a satellite receiver and a projector, etc. And it requires every village serving site to be equipped with one computer, one TV set, one DVD player, one projector, one set of sound boxes and Internet access, etc.



Pic9 Facilities in a reading room



Pic10 Computers for town serving sites

2.3 Its digital resources

The project provides a wealth of digital cultural works. For example, the Guangdong Provincial Center has cumulated up to 25 TB data storage, among which 10TB is mainly videos selected from the National Center, including films, series, music, lectures, pictures, stage arts, fine arts, animated cartoons, knowledge of agriculture or health care, etc., totally about 9260 hours in length; the other 15TB is mainly e-books/journals or local featured resources purchased or collected by Sun Yat-sen Library of Guangdong Province. The rich digital resources cover almost all kinds of cultural activities, and the videos are very popular in villages.



Pic11 Yue Ju, a drama popular in Guangdong



Pic12 Lychee, a local fruit in Guangdong

2.4 Its transmission ways

The project delivers digital cultural resources throughout the countryside by making use of modern transmission and storage technologies, such as Internet, satellite receivers, mirror servers, CATV, mobile hard disks or DVDs, etc. The Internet has been available in all cities and most of the counties. The satellite receivers are used in the remote rural areas where the internet condition is poor. The digital resources can also be accessed by TV sets and set-top boxes through CATV networks. For towns and villages where neither Internet access nor CATV is available, the digital resources could be delivered to villagers by mobile disk, DVDs and easy-to-use players.



Pic13 Setting up a satellite receiver



Pic14 DVDs from the national center

2.5 Its staff training

The project offers overall staff training through the service network. The national center gives training to staff from all provincial centers; a provincial center gives training to staff from its city/county sub centers; a city/county sub center gives training to its town/village serving sites. The courses are designed for different groups of trainee. For example, staff from city/county sub centers can choose courses of teaching, digitization or management; staff from town/village serving sites can take courses of computer skills. All librarians and employees, including those in village serving sites, accept training in turn. They are all qualified and skillful.



Pic15 A lesson for teaching



Pic16 A lesson for skills

3. Typical stories

3.1 Literacy of traditional culture

Ruyuan County, located in the mountainous area of north Guangdong Province in south China, is a central habitation of Yao nationality, who has developed its own traditional culture in the long past. About 12% of the population in the county is Yao people. They like to enjoy their own traditional cultural works, which are also very important for their nationality to be carried forward. The County sub center, set up in 2007, plays its part to meet this popular cultural need, offering a multimedia reading room with 20 computers and a website (www.yxwhw.net) with colorful and rich resources of Yao's traditional culture, such as folk customs, festivals, costumes, craftworks, songs, dances, poems, paintings, stories, relics, etc. The digital resources are available via Internet and extend to all towns and villages in the county.



Bibei Town in Ruyuan County is one of the birthplaces of Yao nationality. Among its 7,314 population, 5,914 are Yao people. They are born singers and dancers; they make music with leaves, dance with long drums or bamboo poles. However, their local entertainments, which are facing challenges of outside culture, need to be promoted. In 2002, a cultural art performing team was organized in the town to give performances from village to village in their local folk festivals. The performers often visit the town serving site, where they can access internet for digital resources of their Yao's culture and the latest performances. They enjoy the videos via computer or projector to improve their performances. The performing team has produced several excellent programs, won a prize in the county and performed in Macao in 2008.



3.2 Literacy of farming culture

Tancheng County, located in the south part of Shandong Province in east China, is well known as the hometown of ginkgo for its top production in the world. Ginkgo is one of the oldest and mysterious plants. All its leaves, fruits, trunks and even colors are valuable for food, medicine, ecology, tourism and economy. The Ginkgo Cultural Festival in every Sep shows that, rural planting, the origin of human civilization, has developed into a culture combined with global market and new technologies. Villagers need updated knowledge and new business skills. The County sub center, set up in 2006, plays its part to meet this popular cultural need, offering a reading room with 20 computers and a website (www.tcwhj.com) with agricultural knowledge, expert lectures and guides to market information online.



Pic21 Ginkgo



Pic22 A lecture in the County sub center

Yucun is a ginkgo village in Tancheng County with a population of 1009. Among its income of 9 million Yuan in 2008, 4 million is from ginkgo industry. Though some villagers have their own computers at home to do ginkgo business online, they expect further helps from the village serving site, which is equipped with a multimedia reading room of 20 computers, one 52-inch screen digital TV set, one projector, one DVD player, one satellite receiver, internet access and two staff. For example, once a time, when some ginkgo trees became ill due to over fertilized, the village serving site invited an expert to give a lecture on proper fertilization, and the lecture was digitized and shared by more villagers online. It was estimated that this help villagers reduced their fertilizer cost by 200,000 Yuan and increased the ginkgo yield by 1 million Yuan.



Pic.23 Doing business online at home

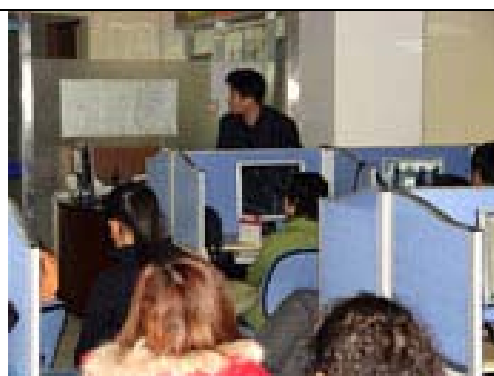
Pic.24 In the computer reading room

3.3 Literacy of cyber culture

Daxing County, located in the south suburb of the Capital Beijing in north China, is an agricultural base of vegetables and fruits. A few years ago, a news report said that a villager in Daxing County earned 4 million Yuan within 3 months by selling watermelons online at home. Actually it also showed a trend that millions of villagers living in suburbs were starting to learn computer. Surfing online, which has become a cyber culture in cities, is still a newly emerging thing for villagers. They need to learn. The County sub center, set up in 2004, plays its part to meet this popular cultural need. It offers a multimedia reading room of 40 computers and has the National Center (www.ndcnc.gov.cn) and Beijing city sub center (www.bjgxcn.cn) linked to the County Library website, from which villagers of all ages could enjoy what they like.

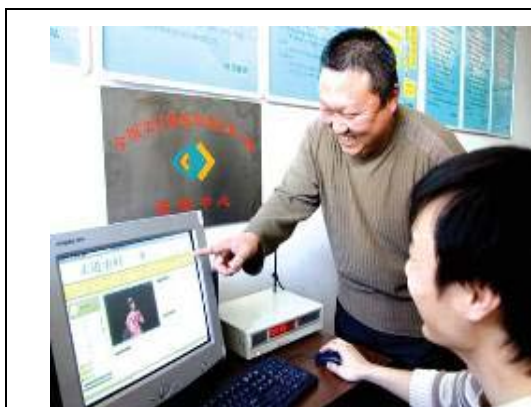


Pic.25 A computer training center



Pic.26 A training in the County sub center

Houdayingcun is a village in Daxing County with a population of 1,000. The village serving site was started in 2004 with a server, a satellite receiver, a DVD player, a projector, a projection room, a multimedia reading room with 10 computers linked to a wireless LAN, a website (www.dxhdy.cn) and Internet access. Villagers enjoy it and benefit in many ways. For example, elder Li is very interested in newly emerging things. He became skillful at computer here in a short time. He always comes early for the Beijing opera <Yu Tang Chun>; Ms Wang is another regular visitor who feels grateful for the educational knowledge on websites that help her find the right way to supervise her young naughty daughter. Furthermore, villagers also enjoy movies, and search for information on farming, market, health cares, and governmental affairs.



Pic.27 Villagers enjoy the dramas online



Pic.28 Computer room in the village

3.4 Literacy of video culture

Mianzhu County, located in Sichuan Province in west China, is one of the severe disaster areas in the Wenchuan 8.0 earthquake on 12 May 2008. Suffered from losing families and houses, the survivals need material aid and spiritual refreshment. But the earthquake destroyed most of the buildings, including the library, cinema and theater. How to meet this popular cultural need in the ruined remote land? The County sub center plays its part. Though the librarians had to stay in the open air before they moved into tents a few days later, they began to play videos just two weeks after the earthquake, to help people learn about self-rescue, food safety, epidemic prevention and mental health, and recover from the shock by enjoying movies. Up till the end of 2008, the County sub center has set up 34 serving sites in the resettlement areas.



Pic.29 The destroyed library



Pic.30 Playing videos at a resettlement

Penghuacun is a village in Mianzhu County with a population of 1600. All its houses were ruined by the earthquake on 12 May, 2008. In the progress of reconstruction, it keeps getting more attentions and social financial supports, perhaps because it is a sightseeing village famous for its Chinese New Year Paintings, its Pear Flowers Festival each Spring and its Pear Fruits Festival each Autumn. The village serving site, which was destroyed and could not reopen before the reconstruction is completed in Sep 2009, used to take part in developing the sightseeing business in the village. For example, the staff downloaded digital resources about reception manners, food safety special dishes, and played these resources for villagers with an easy-to-use player. Villagers prefer watching to reading. As an easy audio-visual way, video is popular.



Pic31 After the earthquake



Pic32 Before the earthquake

Ending

Up till the end of 2008, the government has put 3.09 billion Yuan into the project, of which 1.56 billion is from the central finance and 1.53 billion is from the local finance. The central finance gives priority to the underdeveloped rural areas to hasten its progress of covering all villages by the end of 2010. We can see that millions of villagers are sharing the digital cultural resources conveniently; the condition to meet a variety of popular cultural needs has been greatly improved. Certainly, it is a huge, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable social business to promote the popular cultural literacy across the countryside. There are many other large public cultural projects involved books, radio, television, films, stage arts, exhibits, etc. But after all, library is playing its part; the popular cultural literacy is being promoted.



Pic33 Villagers reading online



Pic34 Villagers watching a film

Reference:

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2: All articles in the Chinese book <Collection of reports from the outstanding town/village serving sites of the National Cultural Information Resources Sharing Project>, Sep 2008.

Pic1: http://news.xinhuanet.com/photo/2005-09/17/content_3501742.htm

Pic2: <http://torch.2008.sina.com.cn/other/p/2008-05-08/184381961.shtml>

Pic3 http://www.yn.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2008-12/08/content_15123868_4.htm
Pic4 <http://www.dyrb.com.cn/Article/mszx/200807/8849.html>
Pic5 <http://baike.baidu.com/view/861297.html>
Pic6 <http://www.pzhlib.gov.cn/ShowArticleContent.asp?InfoId=72>
Pic7-8: <http://www.nlc.gov.cn/service/tsfw/whgx.htm>
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Pic13: <http://www.luoding.gov.cn/govmach/stsg/3230-13431.html>
Pic14: <http://www.xjlib.org/news/view.asp?id=2392>
Pic15: Guangdong Provincial sub center
Pic16: http://ycjy.zgwj.gov.cn/News_View.asp?NewsID=259
Pic 17-18: Ruyuan County sub center.
Pic19-20: Bibei Town serving site.
Pic21-22: Tancheng County sub center.
Pic23-24: Yucun Villager serving site.
Pic25-26: Daxing County sub center.
Pic27-28: Houdayin Village serving site.
Pic29-30: Mianzhu County sub center.
Pic31-32: http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4978019f01009o75.html
Pic33: http://www.sdwomen.org.cn/tpjj/200903/t20090324_4365243.htm
Pic34 <http://www.qzgw.gov.cn/news/whrd/2007/%7D02/08/1672.htm>

About the authors

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Graduated from the Department of Library Science at Wuhan University in 1985, she then began working at the Science and Technology Library of Guangdong Province, where she stayed until 2005. Since 2006, she has been working at the Department of Foreign Languages in the Sun Yat-sen Library of Guangdong Province.

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