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## Library Service in Minority Communities in China

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### **ABSTRACT:**

*China minority area libraries possess plenty of national documents and local documents. So far, minority area libraries have relied on these documents, and offer characteristic service for the readers. Along with the arrival of network times, the routine of the reader service of minority area libraries has changed basically, such as the changes of service ideas, service contents, service ways. In this paper, we talked about the present service situation, the library service under network environment, existing problems of Chinese minority area libraries. And also have given suggestions and thoughts for Chinese minority area libraries, as well as introduced the special aspects in the reader service routine of minority area libraries. At the same time, also have analyzed and studied on the series of problems as how to improve the minority area library service abilities and levels, under the network environment, hoping to get some valuable methods and experiences that is helpful for development of Chinese minority area libraries.*

**Keywords:** Minority area libraries    Reader service    China

China is a unified multinational country, has 56 nationalities. The most of the population is consisted of Han nationality, and a small part is consisted of other 55 nationalities

comparatively, because of the population size, the small part is called as minority on habit. The minorities have the population of more than one hundred million, takes the 8.41% of the total population. China now has the 5 Autonomous Regions, the 30 Autonomous Areas or Zhou and the 120 Autonomous Counties. The area of minority territory takes the 64% of the whole territory and these places mostly locate in the border areas and western China. This is the Chinese national area that this paper claims.

According to an incomplete statistics: There are 596 minority area public libraries, 210 college libraries. The quantity of the whole collections in these libraries is more than 50million volumes, in China now. China has 55 minorities, except Manchu and Hui people have adopted to use Chinese characters; the others of 29 minorities have their own written languages that consistent with their own languages. There are more than 500,000 volumes of documents in minority languages in China. There are 36 national or minority publishing houses, have been printing over 3,000 kinds of books and more than 400 periodicals in minority languages in each year in China. These documents are playing important parts on developing our country's minority culture, cultural exchanges between nationalities, minority area economic growth, advanced science and technology, education etc. And they are the material foundations for developing information services in minority area libraries.

## **1. The Present Situation of the Library Services in Minority communities in China**

### **1.1 Offering Service for Construction of Nationalities Studies**

There are two aspects in offering service for construction of Nationalities Studies: On the one hand, offer service for the construction of the nationalities research subjects. As some of the minority area libraries maintain the minority documents resources as their main construction, improving investment and setting up special funds, so that ensure the collecting and development of minority document resources for our Nationalities Studies. Concerning Nationalities Studies, taking a full advantage of the library resources, these libraries have compiled and published various bibliographies, indexes and abstracts. Some of such works have already been done, for instance, *the Catalogue of Ancient Mongolian Books of China* and *Catalogue of Mongolian Ganjuur and Danjuur* and *the Index of Mongolian Studies Works* by Inner Mongolia University Library; *Catalogue of Tujia Documents* and *Catalogue of Miao Documents* by Jilin University Library; *Catalogue of Chinese Minority History Research Works Index* and *Abstracts of China Minority Ancient Books* by Library of Central University for Nationalities, etc. These have very high academic values and reference values, and also have been playing an important role in the construction of Nationalities Studies. On the other hand, with various ways and means, developing the research service programs of all-directional, high level and poly-sided. For instance, in recent years, Inner Mongolia University Library have carried out some service programs, such as “Nomadic Culture of the Nation”, “An Encyclopedia of Mongolian Customs”, “An Encyclopedia of Mongolian Studies”, “A Study on Mongolian Historical Materials of Qing Dynasty and Relationship between Manchu and Mongols”, “the Present Situation of the Steppe Animal Husbandry and a Countermeasure Research”, “a Study on the Cell Standing in Mongolian Sheep Ovary

Occurrence”, “a Biological Research on the Camel Intestines Muniment Elements”; the service programs of JiShou University Library are: “a Research to the Cultural Pattern and the Social Market Economy of Minority Area of Southwest China”, “a Research to the Economical Development Pattern of the Minority Area of the Hunan Province”, “a Study on the National Sport Culture of Mountain Village Inhabits in Minority Area of Southwest China”, etc. All of them are based on reality of these places. These research programs have put forward a lot of valuable viewpoints and countermeasures, and the accomplishments have gotten certain social benefits.

## **1.2 Network Information Service**

### **1.2.1 Library Resource Searching --Web OPAC Service**

Among the minority area libraries, province-level public libraries and college or academic libraries’ network level are higher than other libraries generally, most of them have built websites, and have developed a series of network information resource services. As the Library OPAC Service is greatly welcomed by the users, as it offers possibilities of searching or reading no local limitations. There are new book introductions or notices, borrowing appointment, giving suggestions or ideas, book comments, guide to the information searching, and almost everything on the network, and it is easy to communicate between the librarians and readers; besides, some national area libraries have carried out the cooperation between library in nation-wide or regional scope, built integrated retrieval system, and offered joint catalog inquiry service.

### **1.2.2 The Information Searching and Reference Service on Network**

The reference service on web is an important part of library service under network environment. If we want to develop minority area local documents, we should put forth our efforts to strengthen national local documents digitalization and network construction, and it is the prerequisite of developing reference service and information retrieval on network. For instance, Library of Dali Bai Minority Autonomous Area based on *the Collections of Documents of the NanZhao Dali State* and has established the database of *Special Topic Index of Research Library of Dali of NanZhao*, which has clear local characteristics after digitalized, from its establishment, has carried out computer retrieval. These secondary documents, stimulate readers’ demand for the original documents; the thought of “Possess and Get” is recognized, and made the information searching and reference service on network become more and more popular, have improved the service level of minority area library greatly. The users can exchange the requests through the network, such as Email, and then librarians or computer could give the answers at once. The network information service that minority area libraries develop has opened up the scope and depth of library information service. Inner Mongolia University Library, as being the CALIS document information service center of Inner Mongolia, has run the fictitious reference consulting system in Inner Mongolian college system, are offering real time reference and information retrieval service on network now.

### **1.2.3 Network Resource Navigation Service**

Minority area libraries, according to the demand of reader, should specify the user crowd, and select the resources that have regional characteristic, subject characteristic, national characteristic and language characteristic, and establish the special subject navigation database. The libraries also legally download the related websites and related web pages, form the special subject mirror database for readers. At the same time, have to solve the problem of

network information stability further. The key subject academic resource navigation is the part of CALIS project plan, to realize unified platform, unified interface, unified style and unified standards step by step. Inner Mongolia University have undertaken the construction task of the subject navigation database of Mongolian Studies and Life Science, now have formed its beginning scale, and has offered plenty of services for the key subject constructions.

### **1.3 The Local Characteristic Service**

The local characteristic service is the key service and important development of minority area libraries. The local characteristic service of minority area libraries changes along with the change of the times. Under network environment, its service intension of the development is towards localization and elaboration. This major expression is in some following aspects:

#### **1.3.1 Compiling and Establishment of Catalogues, Indexes and Summary Databases**

Bibliographies, indexes, abstract databases are the foundation of developing computer service, and the effective channels of developing characteristic service, too. By establishment of these bibliographies, indexes and abstract and databases, can reveal the local document resources efficiently, and it is convenient to offer characteristic service. Such as *Guangxi Documents' Index*, *Guangxi Local Documents' Information Index* by Guangxi Library and Guangxi Tongzhi Library; *Korean Documents' Bibliography Database* by Library of Yanbian Korean Autonomous Area; *Bibliography Database of the Books* by Library of Xinjiang Uigur Autonomous Region; *Tibetan Bibliography Database* by Tibetan University Library; *Ningxia Local Documents Bibliography Database*, *Ningxia Local Characteristic Documents Bibliography Database* by Ningxia Library; *Special Topic Index of Research Library of Dali of Nanzhao* by Library of Dali Bai Minority Autonomous Area; *Mongolian Documents Bibliography Database*, *Ancient Mongolian Books Bibliography Database*, etc.

#### **1.3.2 The Constructions of Full Text, Special Subject and Characteristic Databases**

The full text, special subject and characteristic databases are extension and development of the bibliographies, indexes, and abstract databases, and the necessary of developing the characteristic service of high level and high quality. Such as *Yunnan Travel Database*, *the Yunnan Nationalities Customs Information Database* by Yunnan Province Library; *the Southwest Minorities Historical and Cultural Database - Qiang Nationality Volume*, *the Bashu Culture (Local Documents) Database*, *the Southwest National Cultural Database* by Sichuan Province Library; *the Collections of Guangxi Famous Person*, *the Collections of the Guangxi National Custom Pictures*, *the Guangxi Travel*, *the Guangxi Figures*, *the Guangxi Popular Science* by Guangxi Zhuang Minority Autonomous Region; *Guizhou Minority Cultural Database*, *the Yelang Culture Database* by Guizhou Province Library; *Qiang Minority Documents Information Database*, *the Western China Development Project Information Resource Database*; *Mongolian Studies Database*, *Mongolian Studies Characteristic Database* by Inner Mongolia University Library; *Hui Minority Documents and Islam Documents Database* by the Library of Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, which just under establishing. These databases offer various retrieval searches; have offered very convenient and time saving condition for users.

#### **1.3.3 Establishment of the Local and National Document Resource Databases**

To fit the regional and national characteristics, some minority area libraries have established some local document resource databases; have stressed the local characteristics more. Such as *Guangxi Historical Figures*, *Information Database of Inner Mongolian Regional Aspects*, *the*

*Full Text and Picture Database of Guilin Local Resources* has been built by Guilin Library, etc. are concerned with many aspects of politics, economy, science and technology, culture, education and travel, including more than 450,000 data and more than 30,000 pictures, and these databases offer regional information service for readers; Library of Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region has built a website called “Mongolian Digital Library”; Inner Mongolia University Library has opened up websites called “Mongolian Studies Information Net” , “China Mongolian Periodicals’ Web”, and offering information to both of readers in home and abroad; The Library of Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, emphasizes to collect books of Ningxia local documents, Hui minority and Islam characteristic documents. *The Ningxia Local Documents Joint Catalog* is the only one with the most complete information and comprehensive large scale retrieval reference book, has filled Ningxia’s the blank of local document retrospective retrieval; *Catalogue of the Ancient Mongolian Books* and *the Catalogue of Mongolian Ganjuur and Danjuur(Tripitaka)*, have established reporting and the modern document service system of retrieval means for the Mongolian Studies, with complete coverings and document collecting.

## **2. Existing Problems of Chinese Minority Library Service**

### **2.1 National Documents Network and Digitalization Service Level Will Be Improved**

Because of less developed conditions of economy and culture of minority areas, IT isn’t got extensive application in libraries. Although some libraries have computer management, have no network, and hardly to form an overall advantage. Among the 55 minorities of our country, 53 of them have their own national languages, 29 of them have their own national written languages. So far, only ten of the written languages, such as Mongolian, Tibetan, Manchurian, Uigur, Khasakh, Khirgis, Tai, Yi, Zhuang and Korean, can carry out computer word processing, with other languages as Chinese and English. Lack of network and digitalization standards and unifications, the complex physical materials and different shapes, the bottleneck on digitalization handling of minority documents, have caused certain difficulties to minority area digital library construction, as made some obstacles for network interconnection and data exchanges. These brought some difficulties for computer network management and minority language documents.

### **2.2 Popularized and Personalized Local Characteristic Service and Its Overall Situation Will Be Improved**

The popularizing means the general acceptance of the reader to the service, personalizing means the particularity of the serving ways and contents, and overall situation means the service scope. Since some minority area libraries lack of modern equipments as computer modernizing facility, come to certain limitations for network information and the service of characteristic database.

### **2.3 The Development of Network Reference Service is Disequilibria, and Having Less Efficiency Service**

Some of the Email Service only has addresses, but without hint and help. And the web table sheet has relatively simple design, only offers the information of user’s basic information and consulting program input, lacking of reference background, the other information hints such as what kind of information have checked; Some navigation construction managements of key subject is scattered, and lack of cooperation. There are many repetitive construction problems

in the same subjects, and overlapping repetitions in a lot of information. Besides, because of lacking of standardized management, some service project installations have been disordered; it seriously affected the service efficiency.

#### **2.4 Lacking of the Network Resources of National Documents in Minority Written Languages, the Network Information Retrieval Service of Minority Written Documents Have Been Restricted**

According to the present condition, the information searching on web and reference service that are running by minority area libraries, are still confined only in Chinese and English. But the network information retrieval of minority languages is still remaining to develop further. Taking Mongolian documents as example, *the Mongolian Documents Bibliography Database*, digitalized products of Mongolian documents are still in single machine editions only. And also, *the Mongolian Studies of Characteristic Database* and “Mongolian Studies Information Net” are running in Chinese, too. But “the Mongolian Periodicals Web” is only a preliminarily try on network retrieval of minority written language documents. So, if we want to develop minority area local documents, we should put forth our efforts to strengthen national local documents digitalization and network construction, and it is the prerequisite of developing reference service and information retrieval on network.

### **3. The Suggestions and Thoughts for Service Development of Chinese**

#### **Minority Libraries**

Minority area libraries will found on personnel, maintain the local characteristics and national characteristics of the document resources around the service purposes. The network, digitalization and service level of the national documents will be improved. These are recognized as the basic guarantee of minority area libraries’ running in the information society.

##### **3.1 Set up the Ideas of Good Service, Offer Excellent Quality Service for Readers**

The thought decides the behavior of a person. Therefore, set up the thought of “Reader Is God, Service Is Supreme”, strictly obeying professional morals, then can treat the work and readers carefully, respecting readers’ reading behavior, and could offer excellent quality service for the readers; On the other hand, libraries will develop national document information resources, process information products, as information wall bulletin and special subject bibliography etc. and then do some document secondary processing and to form “summaries”, “reviews” and “research reports”. These forms are helpful to improve the high quality service abilities of the minority area libraries.

##### **3.2 Strengthen the Network Information Service Idea, Improve the Digital Service Levels**

College libraries must take the advantage of ways or forms of network service, will change the traditional service that only limited in document borrowing and reading into high-level information service, in order to make information service has its depth and scope. Since the limitations of minority areas’ less developed economy and society, and the some difficulty of computerizing of minority written language, the documents of Chinese minority area have not been fully used and developed yet, and the library services have not been digitalized and have no network. Therefore, minority area libraries need the fortunes of digital library development more than other areas. The western minority area libraries, under certain network and tech

supports, with the ideas of having no limitations of the resources and services, make their services approach a new stage, in order to get more efficiency from less investment. By doing this, to reduce the gaps of information and wealth between the western and eastern areas; By the way, come to the important channel that develops the estate of the western national area library contents; The extensive application of digital library new technologies still makes western national area digital libraries bring up a new huge business chance for industrial circles, and formed a new market. Thus digital library is not only a developing tendency of the western area library development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is also the main developing tendency of the western entire information industry, it will drive the economic development of western national area maximally. The present China Academic Libraries Information System or CALIS and the West China College Network System, under construction by the State Education Commission, are being built on the very subject and idea. Under network environment, libraries adopt modern technical means and reinforce development of the national documents resources, for improving service level, satisfying the demand of readers for national document information, and then can develop the deserved values of the national documents fully.

### **3.3 Create New Service Ways, Develop Characteristic Information Service**

At first, the new service ways should be created and undertake the regional construction projects according to the specific condition of the Western China Development Project, with building purposes and planning. Secondly, should stress national characteristics and local characteristics in the document information service. Should establish characteristic collections fully using the resource advantages of the western area, and offer better characteristic services. According to the local resources that the western area possesses, such as mineral resources, travel resources, ecological resources, water resources and the resources of natural gas, etc. And establish a series of characteristic collections like minority language documents, historical documents and the local documents of the western area's characteristic resources. And offer service for the research of the distribution of the national area's natural resources, the quantity of the deposit, the market value, the market demand, technique development and the information of the market. Take Yunnan Province as an example, in recent years, the Province especially maintain own national characteristic cultural resources, organizes the relevant experts and scholars of the cultural departments or libraries in a great respect, develops the national characteristic document information fully, and has gotten the excellent economic benefits. They have investigated more times, surveyed and studies on the materials, pointed the Yunnan Naxi Dongba culture, pictographs, the ancient Naxi Music and the Sifang Ancient Street, as high developing information aims. And have introduced the Yunnan Diqing Shangrila and beautiful river Lijiang that having the most cultural and regional aspects, to the whole world. Thus successfully made them have gotten the reputation of world cultural legacy, driven the economic increase swiftly in these world famous sceneries. This is the successful example of Yunnan Province, using the characteristic cultural information combined with the development of the national travel estates.

### **3.4 Train Innovation Service Teams, Promote the Minority Area Library Service**

The characteristics of different languages and different nationalities of the national area library readers, have decided the multi-nationalities of its professional teams. A talented professional personal of minority librarians who needed to master more than one kind of minority languages, then can offer the service of high level and diversity for each national reader, this is

the crucial place that maintains and develops the national characteristics of minority area libraries; At the same time, along with the promotion of library automation level and service contents improved, the national area librarians also study many knowledge, besides the traditional abilities, such as network knowledge, retrieval or searching abilities, service means ( inter-library borrowing, network transmission , dispatch Email, long-range registration and answer consulting or reference ). They have to study and master these subjects, and must understand the information demands of different users. Only so, they can satisfy the reader demands, offer the high quality services to the readers.

### **3.5 Establish Minority Area Cooperation Net, Realize the Document Information Mutual Share Service**

The development of modern techniques of computer network as its core, to establish minority area cooperation network, has offered fast and convenient technical means to realizing mutual share of the resources. Since the less development and investment of minority area economy and culture, it is hard to satisfy demands of the multiple levels of different groups of readers, with a single library's financial resources and manpower. Therefore, libraries have to come to network cooperation, according to each library collections and service characteristics, will coordinate mutually, reduce repetitive constructions, run unified programs, develop minority area document resource advantages fully, offer high quality service to the minority areas. Minority area document resources only through the development and use, and realize the mutual share of the resources, and then could play their increment affects, and could fit the social information demands that increased day by day. By mutual share of the resources, on the one hand, take advantage of information of document resources that other libraries collected, offer service for social progress, construction of the economy of the minority areas. On the other hand, establish the system of national document retrieval for the mutual share, offer national document information service, and play the deserved role of national document fully for the entire society. Accelerating the step of modernization is the basic channel of realizing the mutual share of resources of the minority area libraries.

In a word, minority area libraries under network environment, will not only organize the resources on the net in a planned way according to the reader requirements, but also satisfy various, multiple levels of demands of the readers, and to innovate service systems, fully excavate and use the values of local national document resources and strengthen self liveliness, keep the characteristic development, make the services of minority area libraries have a good running.

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