

# **An Analysis of Public Library Service Standard of China:**

## **An Information-rights Point of View**

ZHOU Yi (周旂)

School of Information Management, Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, China.

E-mail address: zhoyi37@mail.sysu.edu.cn

**Abstract:** Public Library Service Standard (GB/T28220—2011) was published by General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine of the People's Republic of China (AQSIQ), and Standardization Administration of the People's Republic of China (SAC) on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012, which is the first national service standard about public culture, and also the first in library standard system of China. The Standard includes 8 parts: area of application, standard files cited, items and definitions, general rules, resources, efficiency, promotion, supervision and feedback. The standard bases on the construction of public cultural service system covering the whole of society, and focusing on building public library service system with the main line of provinces, cities, counties, towns and villages. Meanwhile, the standard identifies the basic principle of basic service free, and defines the rights and duties of the various levels of government, directors and librarians, and users. By analyzing the Public Library Service Standard in the view of information-rights point, the paper thinks that the indices of the standard reflect the Chinese social cognition for the public library which is an information center, a culture center, and a facility for social education and leisure. But the standard evaluates public libraries by quantitative methods and pays attention to the input of public libraries. The ideas and method of the evaluation is different from the international trend. From the beginning of 1970s, the new trend encourages public libraries to develop and implement individual plans based on needs of the local community. The changes indicate the transformation from the input to output model library as well as from national standards to local standards based on the community needs. From this perspective, Public Library Service Standard doesn't emphasize the measurement of the effectiveness of library services and the needs of the local community. However, the ideas and method of the standard takes full account of the current actual level and conditions of economy, culture and social development of China. There are several phases of protecting citizen's information rights. And at this stage, the urgent priority for China is establishing public library service system.

**Keywords:** Public Library Service Standard, Public Library, Social Roles, Information Rights

# **1. Introduction on *Public Library Service Standard* of China**

## **1.1 The drafting of *Public Library Service Standard***

China began to draft the Public Library Service Standard (hereinafter referred to as “the Standard”) from January 2008. This program aims to improve the conditions of public library services, overall quality of the of public library services performance and management efficiency, also to promote rational, inclusive and sustainable development of Chinese public library services. On May 1st, 2012, Public Library Service Standard (GB/T28220—2011) was published by General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine of the People’s Republic of China (hereinafter referred to as “AQSIQ”), and Standardization Administration of the People’s Republic of China (hereinafter referred to as “SAC”), which is the first national service standard about public culture, and also the first in library standard system of China.

In fact, the Social Culture and the Library Division of the Ministry of Culture had decided to draft a standard on public library services, and appointed Wang Shi-wei (王世伟), the director of User Research and Services Committee of Library Society of China, as the director of the drafting committee back in the end of 2007. The drafting work was led by Shanghai Library. Zhejiang Library and Changchun Library also participated the drafting work. Since the project started in January 2008, the drafting committee designed a preliminary survey plan in that year, adjusted and improved the framework by widespread consultation in 2009, and sum up achievements and undertook modification from 2009 to 2010. <sup>[1]</sup>In May 2010, the Standard got through with a vote by National Technical Committee for Library Standardization, and was reported to the Ministry of Culture, AQSIQ and SAC for approval. <sup>[2]</sup>And then after a year and a half for reviewing, complementing and improving, AQSIQ and SAC sanctioned and issuing the Standard numbered GB/T28220—2011 in the beginning of 2012.

According the article of *The Formulation of Public Library Service Standard and Its Characteristics* by Wang Shi-wei, the drafting committee conducted a survey in a broad range of areas including the library service standards published by all levels of organizations of China Eastern, Central and western regions and all the countries in the world. On this basis, the committee conducted case study, as well as questionnaires, online consulting, on-site interview and expert advices. What’s more, the committee held more than 30 tomes industry seminars, expert consultations and research group meeting, and collected more than 300 pieces of suggestions submitted by nearly 70 experts from all over the country. There are more than 20 editions of revisions during the drafting process.

## **1.2 The Contents of *Public Library Service Standard***

The Standard includes 8 parts: area of application, standard files cited, items and definitions, general rules, resources, efficiency, promotion, supervision and feedback. Thus, the Standard gives all aspects of public library services an all-round and specific stipulation, especially develops a detailed quantitative indicators, such as the number and use of computers, the indicators of internet and broadband access, the proportion of users and librarians, funds investment for training librarians, hours of training librarians, the collection number and category of printed materials and digital resources, the quality and quantity of legal deposit copy, per capital acquisition funds each year, the length of service, the length of time for processing documents, the waiting time for accessing documents in closed stacks, the accuracy rate of shelving in open stacks.

The drafting committee considered and combined with current actual level and situation of economic, cultural and social development in China in order to make relevant regulations and quantitative indicators have feasibility. Meanwhile, the committee also took account of international and overseas guidelines and standards of library service, for example *the Public Library Service: the IFLA/UNESCO Guidelines for Development* published in 2001, ISO11620:1998(E)- *Information and Documentation-Library Performance Indicators*, Public Library Service Standards of Britain, *Wisconsin Public Library Standards* of USA, and so on.

In addition to comparing and referring to global library service standards, the standard bases on the construction of public cultural service system covering the whole of society, and focusing on building public library service system with the main line of provinces, cities, counties, towns and villages. Meanwhile, the standard identifies the basic principle of basic service free, and defines the rights and duties of the various levels of government, directors and librarians, and users.

## **2. Social Roles Reflected in *Public Library Service Standard* of China**

The Standard, as a service specification of the library standard system, is designed to provide the technique foundation for assessing the performance and management of public library services. So main contents of the Standard revolve around qualitative norms and quantitative indexes about resources, efficiency, advertising, supervision and feedback of library services. However, the design of any norm or index is founded on basic values, roles and functions. As a result, we can decipher the social roles of public libraries by analyzing the design of all indexes and data in the Standard, and then understand to what extent it protects the citizen's information right.

### **2.1 The Role of Keeping documents**

The Standard defines the concept of "Public Library" in part 3-Terms and Definitions.

It makes clear that Public Library perform functions of collecting, organizing and storing information resource. There are specific requirements about the acquisition principles, the collection total amount and types, and the legal deposit in “5.3 Document resource” of the part 5-Service resources. Furthermore, the quantity standard of acquisition funds is given to ensure collection building. Can see from this, the Standard thinks public libraries play the social role of keeping documents.

## **2.2 The role of Information Center**

Around the social role of information center, there are many requirements which occupy a large number of terms and length of the Standard. ‘Terms and Definitions’ of Part 3 defines that public library has the functions of conveying and researching documents, as well as providing services with them. In General Principles of Part 4, “Public Library Services” is expressed as “the work undertaken by public libraries to meet the growing public demand for ... information through a variety of resources and their professional ability”. In other words, one of the functions implemented by public libraries is to meet the information needs of citizens. In the aspect of public libraries as social information centers, there are some noteworthy points in the Standard:

(1) Focusing on the use of network technology and information technology to adapt to the change and development of information society. Therefore, in ‘5.1 Library Building indicators’ of Part 5 ‘Service Resources’, the third indicator is specifically set to ‘electronic information equipment’, which requires that “public libraries should be equipped with a certain number of computers for using by readers. And the various governments should support libraries to get the information technology equipment consisting with the economic and technological development level.” It also requires that public libraries should provide Internet and broadband as the foundation of network information service for readers, and develops detailed quantity index. calling that “the number of information nodes set in the reading room is no less than 30% of the number of seats, and the number of information nodes set in the electronic reading room is more than the number of seats. If it is possible, the reading room should offer Wi-Fi.”

(2) Undertaking responsibility of government information openness. “5.3 Document Resources” of part 5 “Service Resources” clearly states that public libraries should collect government publications, namely, “Public libraries should assume functions of collecting and keeping local government publications and providing service with them, as well as should set service desk for open government information, and do the service work well.

(3) The main responsibilities set around the role of information center match all kinds of local laws and regulations about the library, and focus on organization and revelation of collections. For example, in “7.3 Organization and Revelation of Collections’ of part 7 “Service Promotion”, the Standard stipulates that public

libraries should organize and reveal collection catalogs with basic searching approaches including Title, Author, subject and others in paper, electronic and microform or other forms by using computer management and bibliographic retrieval system.

### **2.3 The Cultural Role of Public Libraries**

The cultural role of public libraries is reflected in Part 3-6 of the Standard. Firstly, Part 3-Terms and Definitions thinks the public library as a nonprofit public culture facilities. Secondly, Part 4-General Principles mentions that the content of public library services includes the work to meet the public's growing demand for cultural activities. And then, 5.3 Document Resources of Part 5-Service Resources expressly states that one of acquisition principles is to benefit to accumulating and enriching history literature.

In Part 6-Service Performance it has considered “the services that protect and satisfy the public’s basic cultural demands” as the basic services of public libraries, from which we can learn that the Standard has attached great importance to the cultural role of public libraries. It has regarded “providing readers with multilingual, multi-carrier literature and general reference services for free as well as organizing various of reader activities and commonweal activities” all as services that secure and meet the public’s basic cultural demands.

### **2.4 The Role of Protecting Citizen Cultural Right and Social Justice**

The role of protecting citizen cultural right and social justice is directly related to their cultural role, and has been emphasized repeatedly in national policies since the year 2005. Consequently, it makes up for the highest proportion of the Standard. Not only has the Standard defined public libraries as “public interest” cultural facilities in the Part 3-Terms and Definitions, but makes a lot of provisions in relevant clause.

The Standard has also stipulated how public libraries protect citizen cultural right and social justice in several respects: (1) the basic service free principle, (2) service object of public libraries, (3) the buildings designed to facilitate disabled/ visually impaired persons, (4) the collection policy about document written in minority languages, (5) mobile libraries and Main-Branch Library System.

By analyzing the content of the Standard we can find out that it has mainly talked about the social roles of public libraries mentioned above. It has also mentioned the social educational role and recreation role. For example, in Part 3- Terms and Definitions, it has defined public libraries as social educational facilities. It is a pity that there are fewer specific regulations about the social educational role of public libraries. The frequent expressions commonly adopted internationally, such as “Formal or Informal Education Support”, “Basic Literacy”, “Lifelong learning” and

so on, don't appear in the Standard. As for recreation role, it is somewhat involved in "5.1 Library Building Indexes" of Part 5-Service Resources which gives a rule on general arrangement of building functions.

### **3. Summary and Conclusion**

The *Public Library Service Standard* is a national standard voted by National Technical Committee for Library Standardization, and reported to the Ministry of Culture, AQSIQ and SAC for approval. Therefore the social roles reflected in the Standard can stand for social cognition for public libraries more than the *Library Service Manifesto*, a industry policy published by Library Society of China.

By analyzing the *Public Library Service Standard* in the view of information-rights point, I think that the indices of the standard reflect the Chinese social cognition for the public library which is an information center, a culture center, and a facility for social education and leisure. But the standard evaluates public libraries by quantitative methods and pays attention to the input of public libraries. The ideas and method of the evaluation is different from the international trend. From the beginning of 1970s, the new trend encourages public libraries to develop and implement individual plans based on needs of the local community. The changes indicate the transformation from the input to output model library as well as from national standards to local standards based on the community needs.<sup>[3]</sup> From this perspective, the Standard doesn't emphasize the measurement of the effectiveness of library services and the needs of the local community. However, the ideas and method of the standard takes full account of the current actual level and conditions of economy, culture and social development of China. There are several phases of protecting citizen's information rights. And at this stage, the urgent priority for China is establishing public library service system.

### **REFERENCES**

- [1] Wang S. W. (2012). The Formulation of *Public Library Service Standard* and Its Characteristics. *Journal of the National Library of China* (2), 6.
- [2] Wang S. W. (2011). Issues Concerning Public Library Service Standards. *Journal of Library Science in China*, 37(3), 25.
- [3] KAWASAKI, Y. (2011). Historical Development of Standards of the American Public Library : From National Standards to Local Planning. *Lifelong education and libraries*, 11,1-11.