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On Public Library Service Brands

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Abstract: This paper makes a comprehensive analysis of the building of public library service brands in China since the initiation of the reform and opening up in 1978 and anticipate their future development in five aspects, i. e., critical interpretation of its established culture and analysis of its characteristics, logic of the time, vivid practice, virtuous approaches, as well as future development.

Keywords: public library, service brand, reading promotion, lecture service, public library development road with Chinese characteristics

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Introduction

Since the initiation of reform and opening up in 1978, public libraries in China have witnessed unprecedented development and significant progress in areas such as ideas development, venue construction, system layout, document arrangement, talents training, regulations formulation, services promotion, resources sharing, technological innovation and international exchange. More importantly, Chinese public libraries have made great progress in building their service brands. Over the past decades, a diversity of public library service brands have emerged and competed with each other in China. In such a context, the following questions need to be answered before further progress can be made: How to understand the cultural connotations of service brands? How to interpret the logic of the time represented by service brands? How to implement the creative ideas and

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vigorous practices of service brands with Chinese characteristics? How to generalize the intrinsic laws and methods of service brands? How to deal with the existing problems in building a service brand? How to further promote the transformation and upgrading of service brands in the new era in a bid to re-start while keeping with the times.

Exegesis Culture of the Established Culture and Characteristics of Public Library Service Brands

Exegesis Culture of “Brand” Both in Chinese and English

A critical interpretation of “brand” both in Chinese and English can help better understand the meaning of this word. *Pin-pai*, the Chinese correspondence of brand, is a compound consisting of two Chinese characters, i.e. *pin* and *pai*. According to the second volume of *Shuowen Jiezi (Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters)* by Xu Shen in the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220), “The Chinese character *pin* (品) consists of three *kou* (口, meaning ‘mouth’ in Chinese)” (Xu, 1963, p. 48), signifying something available to the general public, i.e. being popular. The word *pin* is also used to form compounds (such as *pin-lei*, meaning category; *shang-pin*, meaning commodity; *cheng-pin*, meaning finished goods) which refer to a category of items. The two basic meanings of *pin* (a. general public; b. category) have given rise to the derivative meanings of class/grade/standard (e.g. *shang-pin*, *zhong-pin* and *xia-pin*, respectively meaning first-class/grade, second-class/grade and low-class/grade), moral character (e.g. *pin-ge*, meaning one’s character and morals), and appreciation/tasting (e.g. *pin-cha*, meaning tea sipping and tasting; and *pin-shang*, meaning evaluating the degree of excellence). According to “Canon of Shun” in *Book of Documents*, “Without fraternity among the general public, the five ‘pin’, i.e., five morals about caring father, mother, elder brother, younger brother and son will not be effectively practiced.” Kong Yingda, a Confucianist in the Tang Dynasty (574-648) held, “*Pin* concerns social or official ranking. Within a family, it concerns a superiority-inferiority order from one’s father, mother, elder brother and younger brother, to son” (Kong, 2007, p. 100). The Chinese character *pai* literally means wooden board used for indicative and informing purposes. In ancient times, *pai* also referred to a small wooden or metal plate used as a certain voucher or household registration certificate (such as doorplate, guide board and signboard). Its original meanings (indication, sign, notice) have given rise to a derivative meaning, i.e., product name of an enterprise. Thus, *pai* is used to form compounds related to fame and word of mouth, such as *pai-zhao* (license plate), *pai-hao* (trademark) and *pai-zi* (quality brand). The compound word *pin-pai*, combining *pin* (meaning something available to the general public and the grade of goods) with *pai* (meaning fame, word of mouth), refers to an item or institution standing out from its peers by virtue of its high quality, good fame and significant influence.

The English word “brand” comes from the Old Norse word “brandr” meaning “sear” (National

Steering Committee for Cadre Training Materials, 2006, p. 384). In ancient Greece and Rome, as economy and trade grew, people began to claim ownership of their private properties and goods by making a special mark on them. Such a mark helped its owner distinguish his or her properties and goods from these of others. In Medieval Europe craftsmen branded their handicrafts in this searing approach to allow their customers to identify their products' place of origin and producer. That was how the earliest brand came into being. From the consumers' perspective, the quality of a product they saw or purchased was indicated by such a brand (Ellwood, 2003, p. 5). In the *International Brand Standardization Handbook*, which was compiled by the International Brand Standard Engineering Organization, brand is defined as follows, "Brand is a composite concept that consists of outer tags (name, terminology, pattern, etc.), brand recognition, brand association and brand image" (IBSEO, 2004, p. 2). Judging from its historical and cultural origin, brand features unique tags, information recognition and cultural connotations.

Nature and Characteristics of Public Library Service Brands

A public library service brand refers to a particular service item, or service institution, along with its value added. This means a public library's service item or service activity should demonstrate its service advantage, feature and strength to increase its reputation and influence. A service brand involves a variety of factors including creative planning, image recognition, core values, service content, service quality, promotion and marketing, reader satisfaction, technological innovation and intangible assets. For a library, its service brands are the most iconic presentations of its image culture. An outstanding service brand often becomes the cultural image of a library, a city or even a country.

As an identification mark, a public library service brand symbolizes its library cultural excellence, embodies its values and concepts, reflects its cultural pursuit and value orientation in public cultural space, and indicates its shift of service focus from quantitative growth to qualitative growth. A service brand is more than just marking a service item and service content. The key to a service brand lies in continuous satisfaction of readers' requirements and an increase of cultural value with its brand recognition and reputation. A successful service brand is not built in a day. Rather, it takes a long time and painstaking efforts and requires content innovations and influence enhancements. The establishment of a service brand is the inevitable result of a long-term pursuit of quality service and readers' recognition.

Unlike brands in the economic sphere, public library service brands in the cultural sphere, with their services targeting the general public, generally fall into the category of mass-market brands. They aim to provide readers with basic public services which are equal and convenient. By contrast, some high-end corporate brands specialize in serving niche markets with goods signifying wealth, privilege and status. In *Brand Royalty: How the World's Top 100 Brands Thrive and Survive*, British scholar Matt Haig subdivides brands into pioneer brands, entertainment

brands, brands for contrastive purposes, brands symbolizing identity, celebrity brands, sensible brands and designer brands (Haig, 2006). In the economic sphere, brand positioning is primarily about how much an enterprise's core value is recognized by consumers, and it highlights a brand subject's uniqueness and its object's recognition. Likewise, for public library service brands, their positioning should also highlight brand features, characteristics, differences among groups, as well as readers' recognition. Yet at the same time, public library service brands should attach more importance to readers' recognition and somehow downplay differences among groups so that their service brand items and content can to some extent be copied and promoted elsewhere. It is exactly such emphasis on readers' recognition and downplay of differences that make public library service brands different from corporate brands.

Public library service brands, public library brands and national cultural brands are closely related to, interact with and complement each other. From a micro-perspective, a number of outstanding public library service brands are combined to form a basic force to promote public library brands. From a meso-perspective, public library brands serve as an important guarantee to public library service brands. From a macro-perspective, China should advance its nationwide cultural brand strategy in an integrated and coordinated way, introduce more related service brands (such as the National Cultural Information Resources Sharing Project and the Digital Library Promotion Project), and guide and direct the new rush of building public library service brands and public library brands. These moves, crucial to confidence in Chinese culture and awareness of Chinese culture, will be effective tools for China to build cultural brands and enhance its soft power on the global stage.

Public library service brands can be analyzed from multiple perspectives. In terms of public library service items, there are activities such as library lectures, library exhibitions and library reading promotions. In terms of individual library entities, there are libraries such as National Library of China, Capital Library of China, Shanghai Library, Shenzhen Library, Guangzhou Library, Hangzhou Public Library, Suzhou Library and Dongguan Library. In terms of Chinese library sectors at the state level, there are projects like the National Cultural Information Resources Sharing Project, the Digital Library Promotion Project, the National Library Volunteers Initiative and the China Library Service Publicity Week.

“Logic of the Time” for Public Library Service Brands

The development of public library service brands is under the influence and restrictions of the times and environments. The past 40 years of reform and opening up has created a huge potential and an unprecedentedly favorable environment for the creation and development of service brands. At present, socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era, with new historical positions identified for future development. China's principal social contradiction has transformed into the contradiction between unbalanced and inadequate development and the

people's ever-growing needs. Such a context requires service brands to transform and upgrade themselves while creating new opportunities for their innovation and development. For further development, the Chinese public library sector should foster a large number of service brands and thereby stimulate its developmental momentum.

From General Demand to Higher Needs: Readers' Logic

Ever since its coming into being, a brand must remain consumer-oriented. Likewise, a public library service brand must be reader-oriented. Service brands indicate the direction for the improvement of supply-demand relationships (relationships between public libraries as the service subject and readers as the service object) and reflect readers' longing for a better cultural life. As the public library sector keeps developing and progressing, public libraries' primary task has been upgraded from the previous supply of library services to the improvement of service quality.

Readers' needs now keep upgrading in an all-dimensional way, forming an inevitable trend. After all, given China's steady economic growth, education popularization, social harmony and cultural prosperity, Chinese readers naturally expect comprehensive improvements in public library services, which means more diversified service items, more convenient service approaches, more individualistic service modes, more novel service forms and more elegant service spaces. That is to say, Chinese readers need more and better library services, expect novel content, innovative designs and individualistic services, and pursue emotional satisfaction, reading convenience and equal service access. To fulfill their requirements for a diversity of individualistic quality library services and experiences, public libraries should create and develop more service brands attractive to readers by giving equal consideration to public-orientation and high quality.

From Quantitative Growth to Quality Improvement: New Logic of Transformation

In the beginning of China's reform and opening up in 1978, public libraries in China suffered a severe shortage of human resources, funds and materials. At the 23rd Meeting of the Secretariat of the CPC Central Committee held in 1980, *Outline of the Report on Library Service* was discussed and adopted. According to the *Outline*, there were problems in the Chinese library sector, such as small business scale, poor library infrastructure, a lack of necessary coordination among libraries, professional staff shortages and insufficient attention from competent departments (Zhang & Zhang, 2008). Over the past 40 years of reform and opening up, public libraries in China have witnessed an astonishing increase in number; accordingly, their weak areas have been significantly improved. According to the statistics in *China Library Year Book 2017* published in May 2018, the number of public libraries increased to 3,153 in 2016 from 1,651 in 1979; the number of public library staff increased to 57,208 in 2016 from 29,350 in 1985; the total public library collections of books increased to 901,630,000 copies in 2016 from

183,530,000 copies in 1979; the per capita public library collections increased to 0.65 in 2016 from 0.27 in 1995; the annual number of readers at public libraries increased to 660,370,000 persons in 2016 from 77,870,000 persons in 1979; the annual number of checkouts from public libraries increased to 547,250,000 copies in 2016 from 96,250,000 copies in 1979; the number of library cards issued by public libraries increased to 55,930,000 in 2016 from 5,230,000 in 1986; the annual budgetary allocations to public libraries increased to RMB14,156,680,000 in 2016 from RMB50,400,000 in 1979; and the share of public library area per 10,000 residents increased to 103 m² in 2016 from 34.3 m² in 1995 (Library Society of China & National Library of China, 2018, pp. 420-435).

Quantitative increases inevitably trigger a requirement for quality improvements, which is in line with the general law of the development of things. And public library service is no exception. Chinese public libraries' rapid quantitative increases are overshadowed by their unsatisfactory quality improvements, which is reflected by insufficient service brands, poor influence and relatively low reputation. In fact, the building of public library service brands in China began in the early years of reform and opening up. As the number of public libraries increased, the service brand building approach transformed from being spontaneous to self-conscious, from being independent entity-based to aggregate-based, from being "woods"-like to "forest"-like, from being unitary to diverse, from being bottom-up to top-down, and from being China-focused to world-oriented. Such development trends and characteristics demonstrate public library services' new logic of transformation from quantitative increases to quality improvements. The Chinese government has successively launched a number of awards and continued optimizing corresponding evaluation indicators to substantially promote service brands' ideas, content and technology (Public Library Research Institute, 2010, p. 296). Among these awards are the Galaxy Award and the Innovation Award, which were launched by the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China^① respectively in 1991 and 2006, and the Public Library Evaluation, which was initiated in 1994.

In the new era, China's public library sector is still faced with two primary development challenges, i.e. insufficient number and unsatisfactory quality. As the public library sector further develops with China's domestic reform, the building of public library service brands plays an increasingly important role in promoting the development of this sector and improving service efficiency. Service quality and service brands are combined to form an organic whole. Service brands are a symbol for service quality, while service quality, to a large extent, is reflected by the reputation of a service brand. This means while pursuing quantitative increases, public libraries should at the same time strive to improve quality, facilitate the public library sector's quality development with their quality service brands in the new era and enhance their brand service chain by further gathering quality development elements in order to allow the

① Now the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People's Republic of China.

development achievements of public library culture to reach a larger readership. In the *Report on the Work of the Government 2018*, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang said, “We should take action in all sectors to improve quality, and work toward meeting the highest international standards. We should... and ignite a quality revolution in Chinese manufacturing” (Li, 2018). Li’s vision of the Chinese manufacturing sector is also inspirational and of guiding significance to the building of public library service brands in the new era. The intrinsic implication of “quality revolution” lies in quality breakthroughs and, more importantly, brand enhancements. The building of public library service brands precisely follows the logic of transformation from quantitative increases to quality improvements.

From Independent Building to Joint Building and Sharing: New Logic of Development

The building of public library service brands concerns overall service capacity. The independent approach to service brand building, due to a lack of systematic and relevant development concepts, could not adapt to the new development trends characterized by digitalization, networking, platforms, integration, ubiquitousness and sharing. As individual public library brands emerged, the Internet-enabled service of joint building and sharing was added to the Chinese government’s agenda. In 2002, the National Cultural Information Resources Sharing Project (hereinafter referred to as the Culture Sharing Project) was co-launched by the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Finance of the People’s Republic of China. As a national key project of cultural development and part of the national system of public services building, the Culture Sharing Project processed and integrated outstanding Chinese cultural information resources and utilized digitalized and automated cultural infrastructure, digital and multi-media cultural information products, as well as the Internet-based popular communication channels in both rural and urban areas to gradually develop into a service model with extensive influence in the public library sector. As of September 2010, the Culture Sharing Project, via the connected national centers and 33 provincial-level sub-centers, had shared cultural services with 2,896 country-level sub-centers and 28,344 township/urban community-level service stations. The Project, in collaboration with the Modern Distance Education Project for CPC Members and Cadres in Rural Areas and the Modern Distance Education Project for Rural Primary and Secondary Schools, had established and operated 800,000 community-level service stations, serving an accumulative population of 890,000,000; by extensively integrating quality digital resources from the sectors related to culture, education, technology and agriculture, the Project had increased its volume of digital resources to 105.28TB and created 207 theme resource libraries with unique characteristics, satisfying readers’ basic needs for knowledge, intellectual wealth, health and happiness (Zhang, 2010, Foreword). Such efficiency and effectiveness are beyond the reach of any individual brands.

From independent building to joint building and sharing, the new logic of development has enhanced connectivity among libraries, extended service time and space, and significantly

improved the capacity and quality of service brands. For example, during the practice of library services, the Culture Sharing Project has been in combination with the following eight aspects; major national event and holiday planning, local reality, regional information and cultural development, distance education for CPC members, cadres and primary and secondary schools, online references and consultancy, information service markets, rural area-oriented missions, as well as digital library joint conferences (Public Library Research Institute, 2010, pp. 123-126).

During the transition from independent building to joint building and sharing, nationwide, regional and city-wide service brands came into being. This can be exemplified by the city cluster-based lecture/exhibition service alliance and the urban-rural integrated library service alliance (such as the one-card system launched by Shanghai Library, Hangzhou Library, and Capital Library of China, and the 24-hour self-service library system at the urban community level launched by Shenzhen Library). These moves have brought public library service brands closer to readers, offering readers faster and more convenient services. The building and development of these public library service brands has invariably followed the logic of development from independent building to joint building and sharing.

From Traditional Brands to Network Brands: New Logic of Innovation

The rapid development of the Internet keeps advancing social digitalization, bringing mankind to a new era of information civilization. Alvin Toffler, an American writer and futurist predicted in his 1980 book *The Third Wave* that the Third Wave would accelerate information flow and, more importantly, profoundly transform the information structure on which people's action and conduct are based (Toffler, 1984, p. 17). The Internet flows like water into people's lives and work, generating in-depth changes to society's way of production, way of life and way of learning, and reshaping the modes of library service and management and the information structure of reader services. According to the *1st China Statistical Report on Internet Development* issued by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) in October 1997, there were only 620,000 netizens in China, most of whom were users on dial-up networks (CNNIC, 1997, p. 1). According to the *42nd China Statistical Report on Internet Development* issued by CNNIC in July 2018, as of June 30, 2018, China had 802,000,000 netizens, with an Internet penetration rate of 57.7 percent and 788,000,000 mobile netizens, with a "mobile access to Internet" rate of 98.3 percent (CNNIC, 2018, p. 1). The Internet's phenomenal development has shaped a new environment and generated new resources and more readers for libraries. Such a context impels public library service brands to transform from traditional brands to Internet brands and explore new logic in innovations to embrace digital innovations. It is worth mentioning that Shanghai Library and Sun Yat-sen Library of Guangdong, with sharp insights and relentless efforts, managed to launch their respective brands of online reference services.

In 2001 Shanghai Library seized the momentum and became the first to launch online reference services on its newly created online platform "Collaborative Online Reference

Services”. This online platform was built and developed thanks to the joint efforts of experts on library references from Shanghai Library, the Library of Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, libraries of universities and colleges, public libraries, as well as research institutions in Shanghai. Later, library experts elsewhere joined in the further development of this online reference service, from the Yangtze River Delta region, Hongkong and Macao SARs, and also attracted library experts from countries including Singapore, the US and Canada. In later practice, Shanghai Library also offered real-time online references, responders and supplementations, forming a sound and complete Q&A system and building a database for reference and Q&A purposes (Zhang, 2007, pp. 104-105). The Sun Yat-sen Library of Guangdong, supported by the Culture Sharing Project, began its development of a united online reference service platform in 2005 and quickly expanded its membership to 78 public libraries, college libraries and research institute libraries in over 20 provincial-level administrative regions, including Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, Tibet autonomous region and Macao SAR. The united reference service platform thus became a new channel for online references and distance document data transmissions. In 2008 the platform was upgraded into the United Combined Digital Reference Service (UCDRS) (Zhang, 2010, pp. 272-273).

These online reference service brands have enabled public library services to go digital and online, providing readers with quality services which are free from the constraints of time, space and carrier and which are beyond the service scope of traditional library brands. By significantly extending public library services, these online reference service brands have gained popularity among readers and highlighted their new logic of innovations, i.e. transforming from traditional brands to network brands.

From Urban Services to Global Services: New Logic of the Time

From the late 20th century to the early 21st century, the global landscape was characterized by political polarization, economic globalization, social informatization and cultural diversification. In particular, the co-existence of diverse civilizations and the change of varied cultures became defining features of global cultural development. Through communication and mutual learning between the Chinese public library sector and the world library sector, public libraries in China began to extend their service coverage from local urban area to urban agglomeration and even the entire country, and eventually went global. Shanghai Library, by virtue of its advantageous location in an international cosmopolis, designed and launched the Window of Shanghai, a project of foreign exchange and services in 2002. In June 2018, the Window of Shanghai was respectively launched in the library of the University of French Polynesia (Université de la Polynésie française) in the South Pacific and the Richard Nixon Presidential Library in California, US. Thus, as of June 2018, the Window of Shanghai project had been in partnership with 156 public libraries, college libraries and specialized libraries in over 60 countries and regions across the world (Yang, 2018). Another project called the Window

of China is a sub-program of the China Book International program operated by the State Council Information Office of the PRC. From 2006 to 2010, this service program, via inter-library exchanges, facilitated several Chinese libraries (National Library of China, Shanghai Library, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Library, Peking University Library) to donate over 80,000 copies of Chinese books to 133 overseas libraries in 65 countries across the world so that overseas readers could access Chinese books more conveniently. These “gifts” were well received among these overseas libraries and their readers. In addition to book donations, the National Library of China also set up special reading rooms or special Chinese bookshelves at local libraries to collect these Chinese books, launched the Window of China website and offered some customized services to these libraries. Among them is the British Library, which began to receive Chinese books from the Window of China program in 2006, became a special donee library in 2008, and collected a total of some 3,500 donated Chinese books in 2010 (Embassy of the PRC in the UK, 2010). Service brands such as the Window of Shanghai and the Window of China have helped to vividly present Chinese culture through hundreds of overseas libraries.

The building of public library service brands in China has also drawn attention from the international library sector. In *China Library Yearbook 2017*, there was a feature story entitled “Award-winning Chinese Libraries in 2016”, which covered the news that the Inner Mongolia Library’s Cloud Service Project was honored with the ALA Presidential Citation for Innovative International Library Project. The Project won the title mainly for the following four reasons: First, it proved to be an innovative solution to a continued decline in public borrowing and user complaints about the unavailability of newly published books or high-demand items. Second, it built a strong partnership between libraries, bookstores, and readers to strengthen demand-driven acquisitions and increase the use of the library collection to promote reading. Third, it allowed bookstore and library patrons to access library book recommendations through the service and enabled patrons to exchange borrowed books with other patrons through the mobile app’s book exchange platform. Fourth, it developed a replicable service model to contribute to a readership-oriented reading atmosphere nationwide (Library Society of China & National Library of China, 2018, pp. 17-18).

In the 2010s, the Chinese economy was undergoing three major transformations, namely, the transformation from Made in China to Created in China, from China Speed to China Quality, and from Chinese products to Chinese brands. The key to the completion of the three transformations lies in improving China’s creativity and product quality and enabling China’s manufacturing upgrades by shaping competitive Chinese brands. This should be the action plan for the Chinese manufacturing sector and also an important guideline for Chinese public libraries to build their service brands in the new era. To advance cultural development, meet the new needs of readers and foster new momentum for cultural development in the new era, China should shift its focus to creation, quality and brands, build public library service brands and create more room for service brands to grow and prosper. Contemporary public libraries should

follow the new logic of innovative development to transform traditional public library services to library service brands, upgrade traditional service brands to well-known service brands, and extend China-focused public library service brands to global brands. This is in line with the development logic of public libraries in contemporary times and is also part of China's efforts to enhance cultural awareness, cultural confidence and strong socialist culture.

Dynamic Practices of Public Library Service Brands

Public libraries today are all striving for better development of higher quality services. In such a context, whether possessing a service brand, or rather a well-known service brand becomes a key indicator by which to assess the service capacity of a public library or library system. A service brand is a valuable resource for a public library providing cultural services and also a yardstick used to evaluate the quality and level of public library services. Over the past 40 years of reform and opening up, characteristic public library service brands in China have witnessed sustained shaping, emergence, increases and developments. The dynamic building and practice of service brands is shaping the value orientation and cultural ethos of China's public libraries' mission and bringing this mission to a new height.

Wenjin Book Award: Seizing the Momentum

The idea of establishing the Wenjin Book Award was put forward by the National Library of China in 2004, when the "Everyone Reads" campaign did not yet have much influence either on the Chinese library sector or the society as a whole. Nevertheless, concepts such as "life-long learning," "reading classics," "learning society" and "reading as the most beneficial habit" were going deeper into the hearts of the Chinese people. Under such circumstances, it became a top priority for the National Library of China to seize this "reading good books" momentum to advocate, guide and demonstrate this "Everyone Reads" fever. The Wenjin Book Award was set up to go with the tide and to support learning and reading, which is the core library mission. The award derived its name from "*wenhua jinliang*," meaning cultural bridge, in the hope that this award could play a guiding role and promote communication and exchanges between libraries and readers, between authors and readers, and between publishing houses and readers. In addition, the word "*Wenjin*" also carries distinctive features of the National Library of China, which holds "*Wenjin Ge Siku Quanshu*" (*Complete Library in Four Sections*) and has an ancient works-specialized library branch on Wenjin Street. Right from the beginning, the National Library of China introduced several principles to this award. First, the award should be of a non-profit nature, for which the organizer should not charge authors any review fees. Second, the award should adhere to the principle of fair competition, safeguard the prestige of this award and make it reader oriented. To this end, the award should not accept any sponsorship from its stakeholders, such as publishing houses. Third, the award should feature openness, which means

that its evaluation criteria and procedures should be entirely open to the public and that the list of winners should be kept strictly confidential before the official announcements (Liu, 2014). As of April 2018, thirteen Wenjin Book Award ceremonies had been successfully held, building its reputation among libraries, publishing houses and readers. In November 2009, the Wenjin Book Award, along with the Wenjin Reading Salon, was awarded the “Nationwide Reading Award for Excellence” by the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee, the Central Civilization Affairs Office, and the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of the PRC (2018). More about Wenjin Book Award can be found by reading the General Preface of the 13th Wenjin Book Award by writer Liang Xiaosheng. According to Liang, the Wenjin Book Award has always followed these six rules. First, the judging panel selects and recommends the general public-oriented quality books and also gives consideration to the reading needs and interests of niche markets. Second, the judging panel selects and recommends quality books in Chinese and also gives consideration to some quality Chinese translations. Third, the judging panel, out of consideration for serving the public, also places popular science books into a separate category. Fourth, the judging panel selects and recommends children’s books based on two standards, i.e., being interesting and being meaningful. Fifth, the judging panel selects and recommends books based on the fact that the publishing sector, just like the farming sector, has ups and downs and cannot expect a good harvest every year. Sixth, the judging panel are well aware that their panel members should be calm-minded readers. After all, they are not selecting books for themselves, but for the general public on behalf of the National Library of China (Liang, 2018). One defining feature of the Wenjin Book Award lies in the fact that it advocates and supports the nationwide reading trend, helping public libraries to build a service brand for their core business, i.e., reading promotion. Celia Lury, a professor and head of department (from 2007-2010) in the sociology department at Goldsmiths, University of London, defined a brand as a marker, “A marker is very different from a message in the sense that the content of a marker is much less, but nevertheless the fact that it points to something recognizable is as important as the meaning in a message” (Ellwood, 2003, p. 11).

City of Libraries: Covering the Whole of Shenzhen

Innovation and creativity form the soul and quintessence of Shenzhen. In 2001 the Shenzhen Municipal People’s Government mapped out its future development strategy, which contained a new development vision of “striving to build a socialist demonstration city with China’s distinct vision, style and values.” In the wake of this, the Shenzhen Municipal People’s Government proposed to forge a “City of Libraries” to promote the vitality and creativity of Shenzhen. As a pioneer and test case for China’s reform and opening up policy, Shenzhen has forged a series of cultural brands, such as the City of Libraries, the Shen International Cultural Industry Fair, the Shenzhen Reading Month, the Shenzhen Civil Lecture on Culture and the One Hundred Community-oriented Lectures. These quality cultural activities created a favorable cultural

environment and a solid basis for the further improvement of the Service Network of the “City of Libraries”. Benefiting from its innovation ability, creativity and priority to cultural development, Shenzhen has been on the forefront of urban library innovation and development in China. Driven by the service brand of City of Libraries, Shenzhen’s library sector has played a leading and pioneering role nationwide in terms of talent cultivation, library information management, 24-hour self-service library development at the urban community-level, open and public library services, study of public library theories, smart library practices, as well as reading promotions. Through 15 years of development, the City of Libraries has developed from a general framework to a “real thing”, with public libraries opened across Shenzhen to shape a unique cultural landscape. As of the end of 2017, Shenzhen had a total of 638 public libraries at various levels, 249 self-service libraries at the urban community level, 35 self-service newsstands, one community-level library service point per 13,600 people and 2.52 public library books per permanent resident. Extending its scope of resource development and reader services from individual libraries to the entire city, Shenzhen has formed a city-wide network of public library services (Wang, 2018, p. 2). The popularization of the “Internet+reading” mode has broadened the service vision of the City of Libraries, further lowered the threshold of reading in Shenzhen, a most “Internet-enabled” city, and made it easier and more convenient for tens of thousands of readers to access libraries. In October 2013, Shenzhen was honored with the title of Global Model City for the Promotion of Nationwide Reading by UNESCO (Yang, 2015, p. 2).

The research group of the Shenzhen Library compiled and published the *Study of the Index System for “City of Libraries” Construction* in 2010 and *Shenzhen Mode: Exploration and Innovation of Shenzhen’s “City of Libraries” Program in 2017* (Zhang & Wang, 2017). Shifting the research focus from the index system to mode exploration, the two books were systematic summaries of Shenzhen’s building of the City of Libraries service brand, including its previous exploration, innovations, achievements and prospects. They reviewed the past and present development of urban libraries in Shenzhen and also outlined a vision for future development, demonstrating the Shenzhen library’s professional cultural consciousness in building service brands and their cultural confidence in paving a way for urban library development with Chinese characteristics.

Shanghai Library Lecture: A Timeless Trend

The Shanghai Library Lecture is a public library service brand that has developed with the reform and opening up since 1978. Over the past 40 years of development, the Shanghai Library Lecture has continually focused on innovation and made relentless efforts to create a huge borderless “Urban Classroom” transcending time, space and carrier in the library sector for its audiences. According to the statistics revealed in August 2018 by the Lecture Division of Shanghai Library, as of July 2018 the Shanghai Library Lecture program had hosted a total of over 3,400 lectures and various cultural activities for 1.54 million direct live audiences and numerous online and indirect audiences over the past 40 years. Initially focusing on current

affairs and politics, the Shanghai Library Lecture has gradually expanded its lecture scope to 18 series in six areas, among which are lectures on macro information, lectures on urban culture, international experts' forum and "Voice of the Sea" poetry recitals. The service brand also developed a series of new forms of lecture services, such as the Shanghai Library recital, "wisdom hall", the member's salon and volunteer services, and launched a string of multi-media channels for knowledge communications ranging from WeChat public accounts, an audio-sharing platform, TV lectures, radio lectures, lecture books and lecture websites to lecture disks. Headquartered in the Shanghai Library, the Shanghai Library Lecture continually expanded its network to the branches of the Shanghai Library, other libraries in the Yangtze River Delta, libraries in Central and Western China, and eventually to libraries nationwide. Meanwhile, it has also extended its partner scope from public libraries to libraries in colleges and universities, enterprises, military camps, communities, prisons, hospitals and metro stations. Consequently, its influence has been enhanced and its brand reputation has been improved. The "Urban Classroom", a Shanghai residents-oriented lecture held at the Shanghai Library won the first Innovation Award given by the Ministry of Culture of the PRC in 2006, and its creativity was valued and appreciated by The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), too (PLI, 2010, p. 299).

Audience is the key to the timeless trend of the Shanghai Library Lecture, which keeps injecting audience-oriented innovation vigor. Readership is the object of lecture services and also the subjective creator and presenter of the service brand of the Shanghai Library Lecture. From the Q&A at the end of each lecture to online consultation and messaging, from "Shanghai Library Lecture and I" article solicitations to volunteer services, from WeChat interactions to "readers' micro-lectures", the service brand's extensive interactive activities have injected more innovation vigor and made this brand more relatable to readers. MIT research associate Michael Schrage says, "The real value is in the interaction. . . real interactivity isn't about giving people more content to choose from. It's about letting people create their own content" (Ellwood, 2003, pp. 95-96). It is precisely in real practice that the Shanghai Library Lecture has developed such a capacity. The abovementioned public library service brands (the Wenjin Book Award, which seizes the momentum; the City of Libraries, which covers the whole of Shenzhen; the Shanghai Library Lecture, which shapes a timeless trend) are of demonstrative significance. They have summed up the new development experience of the Chinese public library sector, demonstrated the vivid practice of public library service brands with Chinese characteristics, contributed innovative Chinese wisdom to the development of the global library sector, and highlighted the boom of the Chinese public library sector in coordination with the rapid growth of the Chinese economy.

Virtuous Approaches to Public Library Service Brands

The innovation and development of public libraries in China invokes the following questions:

How do public library service brands explore the law of their endogenous development? How do they properly use the key to innovation and scientific development? How do service brands maintain their vigor and vitality? How do service brands embody their Chinese characteristics and Chinese wisdom? These questions remind me of a paper by Feng Qi (1915-1995), a contemporary Chinese philosopher who proposed the “two transformations” (i.e., transformation of theories to ethics and transformation of theories to methods) in the 1950s and always adhered to it. According to Feng, philosophers should transform theories to methods and utilize theories to improve cognitive ability and critical thinking (Gao, 1995, pp. 80-81). Although the “two transformations” was initially put forward to guide philosophers in their academic pursuits and self-cultivation, it can also serve as reference for service brands in intellectual enquiries and law exploration. In other words, service brands should combine theories with practice. More specifically, they should sum up laws and theoretical approaches from rich practical experience, highlight their brand ethics, values and pursuits, and apply theoretical approaches to various practices to find the key to next-step service brand innovations. Based on the theoretical approaches applied, I have categorized China’s public library service brands relative to the following seven aspects.

Culture: The “Height” of Service Brands

Culture is the soul and symbol of public library service brands; it paves the way for the sustainable growth of these service brands and represents the height of their development. Therefore, culture is closely bound with public library service brands and the two are inseparable. Culture can enrich a brand and also gild a brand. It allows a service brand to represent a service item and, more importantly, a cultural pursuit and a lifestyle.

Fine traditional Chinese culture is the cultural root of the Chinese nation. Its ideas, humanism and moral norm are at the core of Chinese philosophy and ideology and are also of great significance to the settlement of major human issues (Zhang, 2018, p. 1). A successful example is the Baiyun Academy service brand launched by Dalian Library in August 2000. This service brand manages to invigorate its services by touching the “soul” of readers with culture. Since its establishment, Baiyun Academy has kept to its tenet of carrying forward the excellent traditional culture of China, enriching the cultural life of the general public and raising the cultural profile of Dalian. It strives to increase its presence in revitalizing the study of Chinese culture domestically. Baiyu Academy attaches great importance to the education of traditional culture and focuses on preparing juniors for future studies of Chinese culture. Its architecture follows the style of academies of classical learning in the Ming (1368-1644) Dynasty and Qing (1644-1911) Dynasty and is equipped with Ming-style furniture and artifacts. Students in traditional blue Chinese gowns recite Chinese classics in the classrooms of Lixue Hall, Bowen Hall, Yiren Hall, Yangshan Hall and Yili Study. Outside the classrooms is an enchanting view of bamboo woods and lush mountains. *Baiyun Academy* also hosts a series of lectures such as

the *Baiyun Forum*, the Baiyun Information and the Baiyun Night Talk, and publishes the journal *Baiyun Forum* (Baiyun Academy, 2018). In various approaches Baiyun Academy extracts and exhibits the symbol and essence of excellent traditional culture and instills it into the readers' minds to inspire admiration and love of traditional Chinese culture. Likewise, the service brand of the National Library Volunteers Initiative, which was launched in 2006, has also exhibited its high-level cultural pursuit. The initiative follows a basic principle of non-profit, public welfare and altruism, advocates the ideal of smart services, and practices its volunteerism, namely, "dedication, friendship, mutual assistance and progress." Consequently, it satisfies the desire of many library theorists, management staffs and educators to give back to society, help others, and engage in social and cultural services. The initiative has started a new trend of volunteer services to improve the services of community-level libraries and libraries in remote poverty-stricken areas, ethnic neighborhoods and frontiers. The initiative was included in the Guidance Project of Continuing Education administered by the China Association for Science and Technology and was granted the Innovation Award by the Ministry of Culture of the PRC. It sets a good example for all volunteer services in the Chinese library sector (PLI, 2010, p. 297). The reason why the Chinese matrix of public library service brands can maintain constant innovation lies partly in their high-level culture. The service brands' cultural pursuits and missions (the Hangzhou Public Library's cultural mission of "being the people's library and study hall"; the Shenzhen Library's cultural goal of "building a city of libraries"; the Shanghai Library Lectures' cultural orientation of "being an urban classroom"; the Guangzhou Library's cultural vision of "connecting global wisdom and enriching reading life") have transcended the level of service brand functions and become an inexhaustible driver for service brands to continue thriving, prospering and innovating.

Content: The "Depth" of Service Brands

Many public library service brands in China have won extensive recognition and loyalty from numerous readers. One important reason for such an achievement lies in their content's strong attraction and appeal. The lectures organized by the National Library of China were the crystallization of many speakers' life-long academic attainments. Early in the 1950s, Lao She, along with many other men of letters of his time, gave lectures at the National Library of China to "propagate the doctrine" (*chuan dao*), impart professional knowledge (Confucian thought) (*shou ye*) and resolve doubts (*jie huo*)." In the beginning of 2001, the National Library of China launched the Wenjin Forum, a program specializing in hosting a diversity of lectures on literature, history, politics, economics, music and fine arts. The speakers invited to the forum were mostly renowned scholars and men of letters who dedicated their lives to their research (NLC Wenjin Branch, 2002). In April 2015, the National Library of China, drawing on the IMOOC's concept of being massive, open and online, launched the National Library Open Course (NLOC) to conform to the general public's new reading trend and the changed way of learning in the age

of the Internet (Wang, 2018). The National Library of China chose “Chinese characters”, the very source of Chinese culture, as the first topic of the NLOC lectures, and invited Wang Ning, a famous linguist to be the speaker for the first ten lectures, during which Wang explored the relationships between Chinese characters and Chinese culture. Based on the lectures, Wang and his students compiled a more comprehensive book entitled *Ten Lectures on Chinese Characters and Chinese Culture*. The book also presented the interactions between Wang and the audiences after each lecture, allowing readers to feel an on-the-spot atmosphere and a strong resonance of the in-depth lecture content among audiences. In addition, other lecture series hosted by the National Library of China, such as the Wenjin Forum, the Chinese Classics and Culture series and the Lectures on History and Culture for Ministerial Leadership also exhibit the profound depth of its service brands.

The Shanghai Library is known for a rich and diverse collection and a variety of exhibitions and in November 2005 they held an exhibition on its exclusive documentary collections. Since then, this exhibition has been a major annual event. Each year, the exhibition focuses on one particular theme, such as the 2005 exhibition on rare editions and inscription rubbings, the 2006 exhibition on manuscripts of renowned artists in the Ming and Qing dynasties, the 2007 exhibition on original copies of historical photos, the 2008 exhibition on the archives of Sheng Xuanhuai’s family, the 2009 exhibition on rare copies of family trees, the 2010 exhibition on the collection of artworks of the Song Dynasty, the 2011 exhibition on the manuscripts of Chinese cultural figures, the 2012 exhibition on special documents in celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Shanghai Library, the 2013 exhibition on Chidu manuscripts, the 2014 exhibition on diary manuscripts, the 2015 exhibition on biographical documents, the 2016 exhibition on the Weng family’s selected collection of books and documents, the 2017 exhibition on Zhang Yuanji’s works and related materials and the 2018 exhibition on the designs and decorations of ancient Chinese books. Striving for the best in all exhibition procedures (theme planning, material selections, artwork displays, catalog publications, special lectures, guide services), these annual exhibitions have attracted a large number of ordinary readers as well as professionals both in China and abroad. This annual exhibition service brand, with its profound content, has grown into a much-anticipated annual event in Shanghai. Benefiting from the success of this exhibition brand, the Shanghai Library has completed its creative transformation from a service resource to a service brand.

Talents: The “Length” of Service Brands

The lasting success of public library service brands in China relies primarily on talents. According to “On consolidating the authority of the throne” (*Quanxiu*) in *Guanzi*, “It takes ten years to grow trees and a hundred years to nurture talents” (1986). To put it another way, the realization of long-term development requires more input in talent cultivation. Out of these public library service brands have emerged some library-controlled service brands whose growths to

a large extent is due to their decision-makers' relentless efforts and innovations. For example, the directors of Hangzhou Public Library (Zhejiang), Pudong Library (Shanghai) and Dongguan Library (Guangdong) were successively conferred the honorary title of Model Librarians of China in 2012 and 2013 for their unique contributions to the management and strategic development of library service brands. The sustainable development of service brands cannot be achieved without an intrinsic motivation formed by the combined efforts of relevant exhibition curators, lecture presenters, speakers of volunteer actions, and technical engineers specializing in innovating network service, self-service and mobile service.

In 2013 the Hubei Provincial Library launched the Yangtze River Forum. Consisting of a series of lecture programs such as weekend lecture hall, reading hall and other series, the Yangtze River Forum invited many well-known scholars of literature, history and philosophy to give lectures and share their views. And it took only a few years for this forum to rise to be among the top three cultural brands of Hubei province and eventually the top of all cultural brands (Yao, 2015, p. 27). Essentially, talent cultivation, which determines the length of a service brand, plays a decisive role in its rapid rise.

When the 1,000th lecture was hosted at the Shanghai Library in 2004, the presenter of that lecture wrote the following words, "The first Arabic number '1' (in 1000) looks like a fluttering flag; the first '0' (in 1000) symbolizes completeness; the second '0' is an end to the past; the third '0' (in 1000) is a new starting point. There is still a long way to go before we usher in a more brilliant future. To this end, we must always dare to start from scratch" (Wang, 2005, p. 116). It is precisely talent cultivation that paves the way for the growth of the service brand matrix and allows these service brands to advance towards a better future.

Technology: The "Strength" of Service Brands

The next-generation information technology, represented by the Internet, big data and artificial intelligence, is constantly iterating, creating spacious room for public library service brands to transform from incremental innovations to unparalleled innovations.

The Shenzhen Library is known for technological innovations in the Chinese public library sector. In 2017 the Shenzhen library compiled and published a book entitled *Shenzhen Mode: Exploration and Innovation of Shenzhen's "City of Libraries" Program*, which had an introduction and summary of relevant technological innovations. The staff of the Shenzhen Library transformed a string of fantastic ideas which combined technological essence with humanistic care into meticulous and convenient services, well integrating high-tech elements into the daily lives of local residents (Zhang & Wang, 2017, pp. 65-89). The technological charm of its service brands was thus highlighted. Over the years the Shenzhen Library has researched and developed a framework for a regional digital library, a central management system for the City of Libraries program, an omni-media service platform, an Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) document management system, a 24-hour self-service library system at the urban community level, an

urban platform for literature resource integration and services (in collaboration), an urban library network and data center, as well as a “smart library” system under constant improvement. The Shenzhen Library has continually upgraded the technology in its service brands, enhancing its service capacity and influence, exploring new technological breakthroughs in its services and inspiring readers’ passion for reading. It has managed to impress the public library sector of China and even the world with service brands with unique Chinese characteristics. In particular, the “24-hour self-service library at the urban community-level” was granted the Innovation Award by the Ministry of Culture of the PRC. This technologically innovative service brand also won extensive recognition both in China and abroad and its mode has been promoted in cities across China and some overseas public libraries.

The Dongguan Library (Guangdong) is also a technologically leading public library in China. Through “cluster management and coordinated development of regional libraries,” the Dongguan Library has adopted a new service model which allows “holders of one library card to access and borrow books from multiple libraries, and return the books borrowed from one library to any of its partner libraries.” In 2008 the Dongguan Library won the ALA Presidential Citation for Innovative International Library Project, becoming the first library outside the US to win this award. The reason for Dongguan Library’s winning this award lay in the outstanding technological innovations in its service brands. More specifically, it built a readers-oriented library with abundant digital resources, set up an “always-open library” and a “library ATM”, enabled 24-hour operations of a physical library (traditional offline library), offered readers better-than-expected, accessible and convenient “luxurious” services, and had one million in-library visitors annually. “It is arguably a role model in the global library sector” (PLI, 2010, pp. 304-305).

China’s technological innovations in the public library service brands has brought about unprecedented service capacity to the Chinese library sector. It has equipped traditional public libraries with information technology, enabled rapid library development, which is boundless, space-time transcending, threshold free, individualistic, experiential and interactive, and allowed readers to acquire more public cultural services.

Integration: The “Width” of Service Brands

Contemporary economic growth and social development are characterized by integration, which can be exemplified by the overlap of the Internet+, culture+, library+, and smart+. As new concepts (connections of ideas, inter-disciplinarity, media integrations, industry collaborations, social interactions) continue to emerge, contemporary society is exhibiting a new development form in which “people have become members of a close-knit community”. Inter-library cooperation and social coordination are the key to expanding public library service brands. A review of the growth of public library service brands can help identify an approach to the integration of these brands.

In this regard, the Culture Sharing Project is an excellent example. As a vast coordinated and integrated system, the Culture Sharing Project unites competent government authorities at state and local levels and corresponding cultural services to realize “balanced urban and rural development, unity and joint-development.” The extensive coordination (among relevant ministries and commissions under the State Council, government service units at all levels and social forces) is also an important mechanism of integration for the Culture Sharing Project. Zhang Yanbo, ex-director of the Culture Sharing Project analyzed the project’s environment for coordination and integration from four aspects, i.e. the inside, the outside, the superior and the subordinate. According to Zhang, the inside refers to the coordination within a cultural system, the outside refers to cross-sector collaboration and coordination; the superior refers to competent cultural authorities’ top-down policy guarantees and coordination; the subordinate refers to horizontally progressive service coordination aiming to satisfy the basic cultural needs of the general public (PLI, 2010, p. 111). In addition, in terms of the technological path, the Culture Sharing Project combines a variety of technological means (the Internet, satellite networks, cable/digital TV networks, private networks for e-government, mobile players, removable disks) to advance according to local conditions and form a new service brand form and model of integrated development with Chinese characteristics.

The wide integration of service brands is also reflected in the so-called “blending innovation” brand strategy (Holt & Cameron, 2013, p. 11). Such an innovative view, which is increasingly influential and combines different services and technologies in unexpected ways, is bringing novel learning experiences and perceptions to readers. For example, to celebrate the World Book and Copyright Day on April 23, 2018, the Shanghai Library held the “Night of the Shanghai Library—Where Great Writers Gather”, a special event integrating the following reader services into an organic whole: Exhibitions, lectures, music, drama, recitations, paintings, classics and translations (Shi, 2018). This service model adds fashionable “mix-and-match” brand services to the conventional brand services of lectures and exhibitions. In terms of brand creativity, this “mix-and-match” innovation can be interpreted from the perspective of customers’ sweet spots, a term invented by David A. Aaker (2017). That is to say such a mix-and-match exactly fills the readers’ sweet spots (points of interest). This new service design, which transcends time and space, in combination with other elements, can further help public libraries promote reading. It also enables people to catch a glimpse of the new explorations and trends of public library service brands’ wide integration and their corresponding new characteristics (openness, integration, diversity, abundance, novelty, extension, coordination).

Full coverage: The “Extent” of Service Brands

One major mission for public library services in contemporary China is to build and improve a public cultural service system that encompasses the entire society. This concerns the “coverage density” of public library services. In this regard, many public library service brands have made

useful explorations and generated positive results. Some award-winning public library service brands (including a few winners of the Innovation Award granted by the Ministry of Culture and the ALA Presidential Citation for Innovative International Library Project) can stand out from numerous brands precisely because of their extensive coverage.

The urban one-card or urban-rural one-card library service system is now commonly practiced in public libraries around the world. Drawing on the experience of global library services, based on the actual conditions of the “local city” (Shanghai) and the country (China), the Shanghai Library took the lead in building a central library in December 2000. Via an integrated platform of information system service chains, it sought to realize “universal-circulating” service (i.e., holders of one library card can access and borrow books from multiple libraries, and return the books borrowed from one library to any of its partner libraries). Right from the beginning, the Shanghai Central Library One-card Information System (also known as the Community Service Station Extension Project) has endeavored to expand the coverage of its library services. This project is a new-type of library services alliance with the Shanghai Library at the core and other public libraries in Shanghai (those at the district and county levels, college libraries, scientific technology-themed libraries) being the branches. Being Internet based, knowledge driven and resource sharing, the project continuously improves its service quality to provide readers with convenient services that transcend time and space. This one-card library service system, allowing “universal-circulation” of books among libraries and extending public library services to readers, is now extensively applied in major cities in Eastern China and has been introduced to cities in Central, Western and Northeastern China, forming a huge user base for the one-card service brands. Many service projects of this type, such as the Shanghai Central Library One-card Information System, the Suzhou Library Service Network and the Hangzhou Public Library One-card Service System have been successively granted the Innovation Award and the Galaxy Award by the Ministry of Culture of the PRC.

The Suzhou Library’s “Little Migratory Birds” Project won the ALA Presidential Citation for the Innovative International Library Projects in June 2018. It was one of the four winners of this award in 2018. The purpose of this award is to recognize innovative international public library services with extensive brand coverage and service segmentation for smaller reader groups. The “Little Migratory Birds” Project was launched by the Suzhou Library for the children of migrant workers in May 2010. The Project consists of many reading promotions during summer and winter vacations to help these children develop a reading habit, learn more about the local culture of Suzhou and feel at home in Suzhou (2018).

System: The “Thickness” of Service Brands

Although different public library service brands have their distinctive characteristics, they share a common methodological route to development, namely, forging a “thick” multi-layered system of service brands. Such a system can be group-based, network-shaped, linear or circular.

One important characteristic is the service brands' cluster array (with a vertical and/or horizontal design). The structure demonstrates the service brands' "thickness" and multi-layered effect of the "flying geese paradigm".

The Shanghai Library's service brands feature a cluster array in the horizontal direction. Guided by its core values of "dedicated service, sincere cooperation, pioneering learning and intellectual inspiration," the Shanghai Library has been carrying out its mission of "accumulating culture and optimizing knowledge services." Through decades of efforts, it has formed a cluster of service brands, including the general public-oriented projects (the Shanghai Library Lecture, the Shanghai Library Exhibition, the Shanghai Central Library One-card Information System, the "E-card" Remote Electronic Resource Service, the Collaborative Online Reference Services), research groups, enterprises and institutions-oriented projects (the Shanghai Information Service Platform, the Chuang Zhi Yuan SME Information Services, the "Creation-New Space" Reading Room, the National Press Index), decision-making CPC and government bodies oriented projects (the Shanghai Library Express, the Media Review) and global projects (the Window of Shanghai Project). Inside these service brand clusters, member brands operate independently while complementing each other, and possess characteristics of their own while integrating into an organic whole. The resulting brand arrays generate an overlaying "forest effect". These service brands, through mutual support, re-arrangement, advantage complementation and agglomeration have enhanced their individual brand influence and at the same time formed a brand matrix with strong service capacity, creating a spectacular and diversified scene and significantly increasing their service "thickness" and "richness".

By contrast, the Hangzhou Public Library's service brands feature a trunk array in the vertical direction. At its 60th anniversary in 2018, the Hangzhou Public Library launched the "YUE Hang Tu" series, a vertical derivative model of library services. The word "YUE" in "YUE Hang Tu" can be understood as many different homophones which respectively mean "reading," "joy," "dating," "music," "jump" and "surpass." This means the "YUE Hang Tu" brand is a "trunk" which consists of seven "branches" (sub-brands), including "YUE Hang Tu—Reading", "YUE Hang Tu—Joy", "YUE Hang Tu—Dating", "YUE Hang Tu—Music" and "YUE Hang Tu—Jump" (Jiang & Liu, 2018, p. 3). Such a brand structure overcomes the existing limitations of isolated development, injects more vigor into each of the "YUE Hang Tu" sub-brands, follows the steps of the "trunk" (parent brand) and enriches and diversifies its sub-brands so they can better serve the parent brand and consolidate this service brand system.

Some urban libraries' service brands feature a comprehensive structure in both vertical and horizontal directions. For example, urban libraries such as the Capital Library of China, the Shanghai Library, the Pudong Library (Shanghai), the Hangzhou Public Library, the Suzhou Library, the Guangzhou Library and the Shenzhen Library have become the "flagship library service brands" or the central library in a local city and region, playing a leading role in the local library sector and topping library service brands in a vertical direction. These service brands

also collaborate with many other local libraries to form a “flying geese” matrix in a horizontal direction. The development of the Shanghai Central Library’s service brands exhibits a comprehensive development model in both vertical and horizontal directions. Over the years, the Shanghai Central Library has successively launched the following service brands: Collaborative Online Reference Services (CORS) in 2001, Regular Quarterly Curators’ Meeting (a long-term management mechanism) in 2002, a specialized branch model in 2002, the full-coverage of the one-card system in library branches at district and county levels in 2003, a central-branch system for the extension of the one-card policy to towns and community levels in 2005, non-governmental sector enabled central library construction in 2006, the socialized management of logistics in 2007, a development vision for urban libraries in 2008, a theme library promotion in 2009, the full-coverage of one-card in all streets and towns of the same city in 2010, and the extension of one-card coverage to children’s libraries in 2011. These continuous innovations should be attributed to their “thickness”, diversity and maximization of service efficiency.

Future Development of Public Library Service Brands

Challenges to the Future Development of Public Library Service Brands

Through 40 years of reform and opening up, public library service brands in China have significantly expanded, giving rise to a batch of service brands in different categories with distinctive characteristics. These service brands’ development progress is increasingly apparent. Many service brands with Chinese and regional characteristics continue to emerge and grow, some of them cutting a striking figure on the global library stage. A series of public library-related laws, regulations, policies, standards and systems have been successively formulated and implemented to better support the development of library service brands. Among these are *Law of the People’s Republic of China on Public Libraries*, *Evaluation Criteria of Public Libraries* and *Public Library Service Standards*. The Chinese public library sector has also continued enhancing its awareness of service brand building. These moves helped lay a solid foundation and create a favorable environment for service brands to restart and further accelerate development.

Yet, a review of the development of public library service brands in China indicates that there are still some pain points and challenges to be tackled, such as a shortage of top-down designs and academic research; an insufficient number of service brands; unsatisfactory quality; development imbalances among regions; incomplete structures to support service brand development; failures to effectively align innovative service brands with constantly developing information technology and readers’ growing needs; inadequate increases in international influence, communications and reputations; and the fact that the overall service brand building still lags behind the development of the public library sector. The abovementioned pain points and challenges require examination and must be tackled through further reforms and innovations.

General Approach to the Future Development of Public Library Service Brands

At the national conference on publicity and ideological work convened in August 2018, the mission of “invigorating culture” was put forward, which concerned the following aspects: keeping to the socialist cultural road with Chinese characteristics, inspiring the whole Chinese nation’s passion for innovation and creation, as well as increasing people’s cultural acquisition and happiness by offering them quality cultural products (Zhang, 2018, p. 1). It is noteworthy that service brand building does not just concern the development of individual libraries and local library sectors, but also the overall development of the library sector from a meso- or even macro-perspective; it matters for the development of a public cultural system which will cover all of society, and even more to the fulfillment of the new mission of “invigorating culture” and the enhancement of China’s soft power. Therefore, service brand building is by no means the business of a particular library or a particular city. Rather, it should be deemed part of the national cultural development strategy.

For public libraries, “increasing people’s cultural acquisition and happiness by offering them quality cultural products” means working unswervingly to further deepen the building of service brands, continue to inspire library professionals’ passion for service innovations and creations, and advocate the idea of rebranding to continuously improve service qualities and levels. On the historical threshold of a new round of reform and opening up, public library service brands in China need to see the big picture, enhance top-down design and draw up a roadmap for further development. From a state perspective, the Chinese government should offer increased general guidance to the enhancement of public library service brands nationwide, take active measures to improve the capacity of service brand building, further improve the evaluation system for brand building based on the existing “evaluation driven brand promotion” model and create an environment suitable for contemporary brand building. The Chinese government should develop a long-term mechanism for service brand building and place service brand strategies at the core of library service management. Also, it should give full play to the role of media, telling vivid stories about service brands with Chinese characteristics, showcasing Chinese service brands’ achievements in independent innovations, quality improvements, transformations and people orientations, and creating a favorable public opinion environment for service brand building.

Roadmap for the Future Development of Public Library Service Brands

Planning for the expansion and upgrading of service brands.

To keep up with the times, public library service brands should strive for evolution and upgrades (Li, 2008). To this end, they should start with top-down designs, focusing on capacity expansions and quality improvements.

When it comes to service brands’ capacity expansions, there are two aspects worth additional efforts. First, the number of service brand matrixes should be increased. As of the end of

2017, China had a total of 3,166 public libraries (Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the PRC, 2018). Since then this number has increased year by year. If public libraries funded by non-governmental organizations were included, the number would be much larger. Yet overall, there are not many service brands, particularly those with significant influence and a brand reputation, for which it is necessary to take corresponding measures to transform service projects and resources into service brands in a creative way. Second, the content of service brands should be enriched. Currently service brands mainly focus on lectures, exhibitions and the universal circulation of books. As the Chinese culture industry further develops, more service items such as intangible cultural heritage (ICH) service should be included into the service brand building plans. After all, China is a country with abundant ICH resources. Relevant statistics show that (as of 2017) China had a total of 870,000 representative items inscribed on the ICH list at the district/county, municipal, provincial and state levels, 1,372 national ICH items and 1,986 national ICH inheritors. Li Yongjun, Chairman of Global Hope Asia (under UNESCO) held that intangible cultural heritage items should be combined with brands, as well as the industries of the times. Such a statement indicated a great opportunity for public library service brands to collaborate with ICH brands in content development (Shi, 2017, p. 18). In 2009 the “Shu Feng Ya Yun—Chengdu ICH Digital Museum”, launched and operated by the Chengdu Public Library, won the Innovation Award conferred by the Ministry of Culture of the PRC. The project is the outcome of a pioneering combination of ICH items with a service brand. In 2018 a new round of institutional reforms led to the establishment of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the PRC, creating spacious room for the organic combination of public library service brands with “poetic and enchanting tourism.” If circumstances warrant, some service brands can provide readers with multi-media documents on domestic and overseas tourism, design tourist programs and routes for both tour groups and individual tourists, and take advantage of their own libraries to develop new travel themes, such as architectural tours, roots-seeking tours, eminent persons’ manuscripts appreciation, original historical photographs appreciation, children’s games, intelligent logistics, high-tech experience and popular social sciences. The continuous increase in service brands and the expansion of services will certainly give play to public library service brands and inspire service brands to reach their full potential.

The promotion of service brands requires improving brand profiles and reputations. One important indicator of a service brand’s influence is popularity. I have discovered that few Chinese service brands are widely known and recognized by professionals in the library sector, let alone by people outside this sector. There is an imperative need for service brands to carry out cross-sector collaborations (“length”) and service-segmentations (“depth”) for their different types of readers to raise the brand profiles and to improve the quality, taste, fun and individuality to enhance their reputations. They should strive to gradually lift their service grade from “qualified” to “good” and eventually to “excellent”. Essentially, a brand is an innovative cultural expression (Holt & Cameron, 2013, p. 303). The purpose of service brand promotions is

to enhance the service objects' cultural identity, sense of belonging and sense of attachment by profoundly raising the brands' profile and reputation through culturally creative and resonating approaches.

Promoting the balanced development of service brands among regions.

Public library service brands also feature the Matthew effect, i.e., “the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.” This can be exemplified by major public libraries in Eastern and Southern China such as the National Library of China, the Shanghai Library, the Hangzhou Public Library and the Guangzhou Library. Regional imbalances remain a weak area for public library service brands in their overall landscape of brand building. To strengthen that weak area, the Chinese government should work in accordance with the requirements of “invigorating culture” to improve the public cultural service system and increase the coverage and applicability of basic public cultural services. The building of public library service brands in the new era should seize every development opportunity and align with a series of national development strategies to strike a balance between regions in service brand building.

Specifically, these service brands should take the initiative to participate in the Belt and Road Initiative advancement, accelerate the extension from Eastern China to Central and Western China and support public libraries in Central and Western China in building their own service brands. They should also study the latest national strategies, map out a general layout, extend the existing service chain and promote factor flow to fit into the coordinated development in Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei, the integrated development of the Yangtze River Delta, the further development of the Yangtze River Economic Belt, and the building of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (Greater Bay Area). Step by step, multi-layered characteristic clusters and matrixes of service brands at the municipal, regional and state levels are expected to take shape. In Southern China, Hainan province is now comprehensively deepening the reform and opening up. Public libraries in Hainan province should seize this development opportunity to include service brand building into their provincial development plans to transform and upgrade the public library sector in Hainan, ensure quality cultural supplies and conform service brands to local economic and social development. In Central and Western China, the Inner Mongolia Library launched an innovative project called Cloud Service a few years ago and has gradually formed a unique path of service brand innovation since then (Duan & Wang, 2018, pp. 43-50); the Yunnan Provincial Library's Blind Reader Service Project won IFLA's Guust van Wesemael Literacy Prize in 2005 (PLI, 2010, p. 304). These inspiring achievements show that there is a huge potential in Central and Western China for service brand building.

Seizing the development opportunity for IT iteration.

It has become common for development in contemporary China to foster new dynamics through informatization, make new progress through new dynamics, and to achieve new accomplishments through new advancements. General Secretary Xi Jinping's call for building a “digital China” and a “smart society” has created a new opportunity to fulfill the mission

of “invigorating culture”, which involves standardization and equalization of public cultural services and adherence to the principle of government dominance, social participation, governance focus at the community level, as well as co-construction and sharing. It also allows many public libraries to go with the tide, creating service brands, enhancing famous brands and keeping existing brands current. It will be a challenge for the public library service brands to incorporate the next-generation technologies and continuously transform their service brands by developing services that the new technologies will make possible. Yet, failure to do so will put them on the sidelines as smart libraries are systematically gathering and integrating the next-generation intelligent IT elements in “all space” to create all possible chances for service brands’ innovative development. Mobile IT technology enables public libraries to promote reading in various urban and rural “organs” and “vessels” such as streets, communities, shopping malls, subways, bus systems, airports, primary and secondary schools, cultural venues, bookstores, apartments for the elderly and settlements at the village and township levels, creating a broad stage for service brands to enhance their service capacity and influence.

The idea of digital humanistic services adds new dynamics to traditional service brands. Again, take the Shanghai Library as an example. Based on its existing database of family trees, it has managed to break the limitations of time and space by selecting hundreds of family trees and uploading them online to satisfy the needs of readers from around the world. With the launch of the online “Family Tree of China—Family Tree Knowledge Service Platform”, the Shanghai Library has provided an efficient platform providing family tree data which facilitates most pioneering digital humanistic trials via linked data technology. The platform also features an “online editing” function to allow users to participate in compiling their own family trees. The Shanghai Library has successively developed a string of new online services, including the Sheng Xuanhuai Archives, the Chinese Ancient Books Union Catalogue and Evidence-based Platform, the Archives of Chinese Cultural Figures’ Manuscripts, the Name Authority Database and the “Shanghai Memory—A Walk along Wukang Road”. Thanks to this, the Shanghai Library has completed data gathering and integration, and is now striving to digitalize its family tree service brand through open and linked data, explore an innovative approach to transform “readers’ search for documents” to “documents ready for readers” and ensure a “quality cultural supply” to readers (Zhang & Yuan, 2016). What is certain is that all AI technologies, whether 3D printing, robotics, facial recognition or blockchain will equip service brands with intelligent, algorithmic and cognitive dynamics which will further enable technological and service innovations.

Increasing the international influence of service brands.

Forging public library service brands with international influence is an important move for China to integrate its library sector into the diversified global culture and increase China’s soft power. From the perspective of global library development, Chinese library service brands should initiate exchanges with library service brands abroad. That is why raising Chinese service

brands' international profiles should be placed high on the agenda of their future development. At present, China should actively promote Chinese service brands in the international arena and raise their visibility in the global library sector. To "tell China stories well," China should find proper and effective narrative approaches and adopt a diversity of communication methods to combine Chinese and foreign cultures, make China's voice heard in a proper, scientific, truthful and relatable way, generate cultural resonance, and avoid any possible misinterpretations of service brands or giving the wrong impression of stereotyped political propaganda. The international promotion of Chinese service brands is a long-term task. It is hoped that with relentless efforts, Chinese service brands can step by step build a positive image among library professionals and ordinary readers worldwide, enhance their appeal and global reputations, and have more say in the evaluation system of global library service brands.

Enhancing the theoretical study of service brands.

Public library service brands cannot expect to achieve healthy and sustainable development without proper theoretical guidance. Many public libraries already have a history of reviewing and doing case studies of their service brands, which is a good start and requires further improvement of theoretical research capacity. Public libraries should continue to optimize the overall strategic framework for service brand development, and strengthen their systematic research in aspects like development positioning, characteristics of brand names, architecture, scope of elements, planning and expansion, property rights protections, path methods, communications and promotions, intelligent networks, reader satisfaction and brand lifecycles. More importantly, they should truly advance and enhance such research aspects through concrete measures. They can establish an alliance or an expert committee, study and summarize cases of service brands with Chinese characteristics, model the development indices for service brands, and boost efforts to foster emerging brands with Chinese characteristics. With support from specialized think tanks, public libraries in China can analyze the development histories and future trends of service brands both in China and abroad, improve their diagnosis and early-warnings for failing service brands, compile annual reports on service brand developments, offer advice and suggestions on how to creatively transform and innovatively develop service brands, and put forward solutions to slow innovation and sluggish development, two major challenges facing service brands at present. Public libraries can host more forums on service brand development to facilitate communications and exchanges between library management practitioners and theorists and to build consensus among library professionals. Also, they can set up more communication platforms for service brands to showcase their innovative achievements, share successful experiences, promote service brand cultures and build good brand images. Through platforms such as the annual China Library Service Publicity Week and the Chinese Library Annual Conference, they can raise the profile and reputation of library service brands among readers and even the general public.

Conclusion

The building and development of public service brands in China can demonstrate China's cultural innovation, confidence and awareness during its development of its public libraries with Chinese characteristics. Enhancing the service brand building is sure to endow these service brands with a temperament and charm unique to China. In this way, these service brands will cast a light on the development path of public libraries with Chinese characteristics, further benefit hundreds of millions of readers both in China and abroad, contribute to the building of a country with a strong socialist culture and a global community of shared culture, prove that "library is a growing organism" through service brand innovation in China, and unfold a new chapter for future development of Chinese public library services.

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