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The Innovative City Classroom - Public Lectures at the Shanghai Library

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Abstract:

As a center of life education, the Shanghai Library has formed a lecture system that integrates lecture organizing, editing, VOD and online broadcasting. In 2002, the Shanghai Library has organized a lecture once every other day, providing an excellent platform of life long education for the development of Shanghai as a learning city.

Background

Shanghai is building itself into a modern international metropolitan city. It is striving to create a learning city and cultivate city spirits, following the trend of life long education in the information age. Today, let's focus on a "city classroom", the public lectures at the Shanghai Library and feel the rhythm of this city.

On the large Knowledge Square and in front of the main gate of the Shanghai Library, there is an eye-catching board displaying information about lectures at the library. Everyday, thousands of readers walk up the steps and stop in front of the board to read the information about lectures. Many of them even take out their pens and write down notes. Attending lectures at the Shanghai Library, acquiring knowledge about the world and observing the new century have become an intelligent and fashionable choice for the Shanghai residents.

We are in an age of information explosion. Knowledge Economy has changed people's way of production, work, life and study with unprecedented width and depth. Learning accompanies people's life and will increasingly permeate into everyone's work, life and social activities. To survive and work, people need to continuously acquire knowledge, enrich experience, attach importance to efficiency and establish a compound knowledge structure, in order to adapt to the interactive modern science and technology and the harmonious development of economy and the society. The lectures at the Shanghai Library first appeared with this social background.

Meeting the needs of the public, and focusing on innovation and services

Continuous innovation and expansion of the content

The lectures at the Shanghai Library started in 1978. This was a year of reform and opening up. To meet the needs of the public for acquiring information, the Shanghai Library organized "Large Macro-information Lectures", focusing on the current affairs and political and economic theory. With the development of technology, the advancement of time and the improvement of life, the public began to have higher requirements for the content of the lectures at the Shanghai Library. They expect the library to provide them with "knowledge fast food."

For 25 years, the Shanghai Library has followed the trend of the historical development and understood the needs of the public through consultation and investigation. It has made continuous innovation of the lectures to expand their sizes and scope, and make them into regular activities. Currently, there are 10 series of lectures that are well-received by the public, covering areas such as domestic and international affairs, politics, economy, education, culture and arts, law, informatization, health and innovation.

There are the "Large Macro-information Lectures" that have been held for 25 years continuously, and the "New Century Forum," "Special Informatization Reports" and "Students Forum" that were started a few years ago and are still expanding. There are also the lively "City Life," "Famous People Interpreting Masterpieces," "Youth Forum," "Academy Members' Forum" and "Talking about Health" series. The lectures are on many new topics, including "On the Development One Year after Entering WTO", "Informatization In Daily Life", "Interpreting *the Scarlet Letter*, an American Literary Masterpiece", "How to Live until 100 and Enjoying Liangzhu", a Violin Concerto. These lectures have received great attention from the public. According to statistics, the Shanghai Library organized over 700 lectures in the past 25 years, and over 700,000 listeners attended the lectures. With the increasing social demand, the number of lectures is increasing, too. In 2002, the library organized altogether 170 lectures.

New development in the form of lectures and the extended services

There are large, medium-sized and small lectures to meet the needs of different Shanghai residents. There are large lectures for 1,000 listeners, medium-sized lectures for 300 listeners and small lectures for less than 100 listeners. In addition to the speaker's oral presentation, there is state-of-the-art screen demonstrations, displaying data, tables and dynamic images. There is also interaction between the speakers and listeners, providing a warm atmosphere to the lecture. Sometimes, lectures and exhibitions are held together. The New Book Promotion Hall combines new book display, book introduction and book review lectures together. The

library organized an E-learning Exhibition, inviting famous information experts from home and abroad to give lectures at the same time, making both the exhibition and lectures more interesting and instructive.

The library also developed extended services according to the needs of the public. There is the “Information Salon” extended from the “Large Macro-Information Lecture” series, allowing better communication between listeners and lecture organizers. Using its rich collections, the library has provided Reference Abstracts to help readers acquire more information. It offers “field tours” for the combination of theory and practice. There are also “Films and TV Programs Enjoyment” activities to help with listeners’ appreciation of arts. There are also “Lecture Consultations” to provide channels for social organizations and institutes to invite speakers. These services have provided more opportunities for the public to acquire knowledge and information.

The library has independently organized such lectures as the “Large Macro-Information”, “City Culture” and “Reader Assistance” series. It has also organized lectures together with different circles of the society. It has given influential series lectures such as the New Century Forum and others, together with the City Educational Committee, Shanghai Writers Association, City Judges Association, Shanghai Life Science Institute of the Chinese Academy of Science, City Information Office and Youth Organization. It has established a wide channel of organizing lectures with other institutes.

The library staff is working hard to conduct continuous innovation in this changing society and has made the lectures famous to the public.

Improving the quality of lectures and focusing on their dissemination and expansion

High quality of lectures is essential for attracting the public

The practice of many years has proved that the content of topics are the premise of successful lectures, speakers are the key to successful lectures and listeners are the basis of successful lectures. These three “wheels” must turn together. The organizers of the lectures at the Shanghai Library have always started with analyzing the current situation and focused on hot topics such as current affairs, economics and social development, culture, technological innovation, environment and quality education. They try to catch appropriate topics with strong social sensitivities and emphasize efficiency. They select good speakers to give a full presentation of the topics and guarantee the quality of lectures. For instance, for the “Large Macro-Information” series, they have invited 22 guest professionals with good reputation and competence for giving lectures. These efforts have helped to raise the profile of the lectures to a new level.

But just like a performance, a lecture cannot be successful with only good actors but without an enthusiastic audience. The library cultivated listener groups according to the orientations of different lecture series. For instance, the “Shanghai Youth Forum” has distinguished young people in different areas as guest speakers, demonstrating the spirit of contemporary youth. The library delivers lecture tickets to the youth organizations in every district, inviting young people to attend the lectures. The “Literary Writers Interpreting Masterpieces” series are given by well-known writers and meant to enhance people’s literary cultivation. Professors and students from university literary organizations and literature

lovers are invited to attend the lectures. The “Talking about Health” series focus on introducing health concepts and discussing the prevention and treatment of diseases, so most invited listeners are middle-aged and old people, and the lectures are oriented towards neighborhood communities.

Multi-media broadcasting has enhanced the dissemination of lectures

If the library only confines itself to providing lectures, it is far from enough. Time and space limit the number of listeners. So the library began to consider establishing new broadcasting system. In recent years, the library has used modern communication techniques, cable TV, computer network, newspapers and periodicals and publications to create a social learning environment, strengthen the cross-media cooperation and establish a new platform for delivering information about lectures.

Organizing lecture resources inside the library

- The library established a database of lecture resources, and with the permission of speakers, has made video recordings of lectures and collected the recordings into the database.
- The library delivers information about the lectures on its web site (<http://www.library.sh.cn>) and has created a special web page for the lectures (<http://www.library.sh.cn/jiang>), which provides the content of recent lectures (such as the lectures given by TV director Ms. Yang Lan and Economist Mr. Wu Jinglian). Readers can “attend” the lectures without leaving home.
- The library has opened a multi-media lecture room and provides lecture VCDs for readers to watch inside the room.
- The library has selected some lectures that have long-lasting effects and large influence to be published in “series books,” with the cooperation of the library affiliated publishing house. At present, the library has published 11 titles of the Shanghai Library Lecture Series Books, including *Management Models in the 21st Century*, *WTO and China*, *Information: the Cross-Century Challenge*, *Economic Globalization and China's Policy* and *New Economy, New Regulations and New System*. To be published are lectures on culture and health.

It is important to make the lectures at the Shanghai Library better known to the public and distribute their effects through the cooperation with various new media. In recent years, the library has broadcasted information about its lectures, their contents or selected parts through TV stations, radio stations, newspapers and web sites. For example, the Oriental TV Station broadcasted more than 10 lectures held at the Shanghai Library in its “East Forum” program in the past 6 months.

The “Famous People’s Classroom” of the Shanghai Radio Station broadcasted “On the National Spirit of Films” given by Xie Jin, a famous film director, at the Shanghai Library. The Wenhui Daily published the 100 Years of the Nobel Prize given by Mr. Yang Fujia, a famous educator, at the Shanghai Library, and the “Methods of Literature” given by Mr. Wang Meng, a famous writer. The Literature Weekly published lectures given by famous writers, such as Ms. Wang Anyi and Mr. Zhao Changtian. The Eastday.com and Online.sh.cn also broadcasted their interviews with the fashion specialist Ms. Yue-Sai Kan and the

musician Mr. He Zhanhao, when they were giving lectures at the Shanghai Library, accompanied by photos of the lectures. This cooperation has helped to establish a multi-level information-delivering network, making it convenient for the public to know and acquire information about the lectures at the Shanghai Library.

The lectures at the Shanghai Library have the leading position in the lecture circle of the Yangtze River Delta and their influence has radiated to over 10 cities in the surrounding areas. At present, the lectures are extending their influence still further.

With a careful organization of the topics, speakers, audience and broadcasting, oriented towards the public and based on the principles of “developing advanced culture, disseminating science and increasing knowledge,” the lectures at the Shanghai Library are well-received by the public.

Serving the public as the purpose and striving to cultivate the city spirit

The participation and enthusiasm of people from different social circles

With their high quality and frequency and good reputation, the lectures at the Shanghai Library have been held for many years, having the longest history and the largest number of regular audience in the country.

Many people have given lectures at the Shanghai Library, including Prof. Chen Zhu, a member of the Chinese Academy of Science, Mr. Xu Kuangdi, a member of the Chinese Academy of Engineering, Mr. Cao Jianming, a judge at Supreme Court of China. Academy members, celebrities, experts and scholars have all contributed to this activity. Prof. Liu Jianhang, a member of the Chinese Academy of Engineering and famous subway expert said after giving a lecture: “As a scientist, I have the responsibility to disseminate scientific knowledge, because science is not the business of one or two persons, but needs the work of all the people. The Shanghai Library has given me such an opportunity.” Thanks to the experts’ generosity and their profound knowledge, the lectures at the Shanghai Library have attracted a large audience.

The listeners of the lectures come from different circles and groups of the society, including government officers, government employees, professionals, management personnel, scientific researchers, university and middle school teachers, students, soldiers, retired people, unemployed people, private company owners, disabled people and journalists. Some of them have been regular listeners for the past 20 years. The lectures have given people of different ages opportunities for lifelong learning.

Mr. Fei Shuwei, a retired teacher from the Shanghai Engineering Technical University, is a regular listener of the lectures. He has organized the notes taken from these lectures and has himself given over 100 lectures in his neighborhood and the surrounding communities, and his lectures are well received in the communities. He said that it was the Shanghai Library that gave him further opportunity to learn and teach in his old age.

Today, whenever there is a lecture given at the Shanghai Library, the lecture room is always packed. When famous people are giving lectures, tickets are hard to obtain. The listeners are full of enthusiasm, and the speeches are brilliant. In addition, thousands of Shanghai residents can receive information about the lectures from TV, online network, radio broadcasting, newspapers and periodicals. It reflects the rhythm of the current society and the

social advancement.

Regarded by the public as “a large classroom of the modern city”

In today’s society, people’s life and work have a faster rhythm. Innovational knowledge and information are important sources of wealth. But life is short and learning is infinite. People have the urgent need for an “education supermarket” in which they can acquire new knowledge and the achievements of innovation in a convenient way, at low cost and with high efficiency. Obviously, attending lectures is one way for them to learn rapidly and conveniently. The following are the listeners’ observations about these lectures:

a) They are an important window for delivering knowledge

The lectures at the Shanghai Library are well known for having a prompt response to the current situation. They meet people’s needs for acquiring knowledge and understanding new policies. When the East Asian economic crisis affected the world, people were worried. The lecture “East Asian Economic Crisis and China’s Policy” helped to answer their questions. In July 2001, when Beijing won the bidding for the 2008 Olympic Game, the Shanghai Library immediately organized the lecture “An Unforgettable Journey – Bidding for the Olympic.” In addition, lectures on the topics of social securities and reemployment, tax reform, WTO and China, the development of life science, and immigration and Shanghai are all related to people’s life. The public has acquired new information and knowledge, understood the new situation and policies and maintained the spirit of the time from this large variety of lectures that follow the development of society.

b) They are a convenient channel for high-efficiency studies

The lectures contain rich information. People often describe the lectures as “hardtack” because of the rich information they contain. For instance, speakers of the “New Century Forum” and the “Academy Members’ Forum” are all famous people and scientists who have written much or are unique in their own areas. Such famous writers as Mr. Jin Yong and Mr. Wang Meng each gave a lecture of over 2 hours, reviewing their writing career and discussing their ideas about literature. The audience enjoyed listening to their speeches.

The famous economist Mr. Wu Jinglian gave a lecture on economics, offering detailed analysis of China’s current economic situation, original ideas and useful advice. His profound knowledge left the audience a deep impression. Prof. Chen Zhu, a member of the Chinese Academy of Science, gave the lecture “A Review and Perspective on China’s Life Science and Biotechnology.” Prof. Ge Xiurun, a member of the Chinese Academy of Engineering, gave a speech on the Yangtze Three Gorge Baiheliang Inscription. By giving lectures, these famous scholars revealed their profound knowledge, provided large amounts of information and ideas, which attracted a wide range of listeners and enriched their knowledge.

c) They are delightful education that touches people’s heart

During the lectures, you can feel the warm atmosphere, and listeners often linger a long time after the lectures are over. The speakers expressed their ideas and feelings with eloquent words, rich facial expressions and body language. Screen demonstrations also help to convey the content of the lectures. The listeners have to concentrate on the speech, listening and taking notes at the same time, and also preparing to ask questions later. The speakers are full of enthusiasm and the audience is fully attracted. The listeners’ smiles, exciting tears and

warm applauses have established a close communication between the speakers and the audience in the unique atmosphere of the lecture rooms. When Prof. Pei Gang, an academy member, and Ms. Yue-Sai Kan gave their lectures, the listeners raised many intelligent questions, and the speakers gave insightful answers, which inspired wisdom and filled the lecture room with excitement. The listeners have conducted a special learning in this delightful interaction and received education and enjoyment at the same time. In addition, they have increased their knowledge, strengthened abilities to acquire information and obtained unforgettable experience.

d) The lecture room is a place for people to demonstrate their talent

The lectures at the Shanghai Library are organized with the principle of double opening, which means opening to the audience and opening to the guest speakers. People with abilities, eloquence and rich information and from various circles have given lectures at the Shanghai Library, and they demonstrate their values in the process of serving the public. In 1998, at the 20th anniversary seminar celebrating the beginning of the lectures at the Shanghai Library, Mr. Shi Zihong, a famous scholar, made the remark that he himself received benefit from these lectures. During the reform and opening-up, he has given many lectures in different parts of the country, and the farthest place in the country is Tibet and outside the country is the United States. The lectures at the Shanghai Library have helped to train a group of people who can make the government's policies well received and understood by the public.

e) The lecture room is a classroom that provides social practices for young people to grow up

Since 2001, the Shanghai Library, the City Education Committee and the City Educational Newspaper Publication have jointly organized "Towards the 21st Century – Student Forum." This forum has invited students to give speeches on topics such as APEC meeting, environmental protection and faith.

On each topic, students from several middle schools were invited to give speeches. Guided by teachers, the students were divided into groups of 3 or 5. They wrote outlines for the speeches, conducted social surveys, field inspections and interviews, collected materials, organized and analyzed the materials, wrote articles, and designed computer demonstrations. They gave bilingual presentations and answered the questions raised by the schoolmasters, teachers, students and experts. Such creative activities have given motivation to the students for learning, strengthened their sense of social responsibilities and improved their abilities to analyze and solve problems. These activities have also enhanced their team spirit and their abilities to meet emergencies. No wonder an academy member observed after listening to the students' speech: "they are better than I when I was young." People have reason to believe that many future scientists and talented people will appear from this series of "Student Forum."

The lectures at the Shanghai Library try to serve the public in the widest range, achieving their functions as "city classrooms." The warm atmosphere of the lectures has attracted the public and the content of the lectures have inspired the audience's imagination. The audience has formed a "lecture complex" with the lectures at the Shanghai Library. The lectures have increased the listeners' wisdom and innovational power. The lectures have improved the

listeners' work and life qualities. The lectures have strengthened people's sense of social responsibilities and social values. The lectures have created a learning atmosphere in the city and promoted the city's qualities.

Guiding the public in learning, inspiring wisdom and concentrating on new breakthroughs

In the 21st century, China has entered a new historical period to build a well-off society in an all-round way and participate in the global economy. Shanghai will try to be the first to reach the target of the "well-off society in an all-round way." When people have a good material life, they will begin to have more leisure time and will naturally have higher requirements for cultural life and self-development. They want to improve their comprehensive qualities and increase knowledge. Regarding its achievement, the Shanghai Library has remained modest and rational. It emphasizes the importance of making plans for the future and always establishes new goals.

These efforts include:

- Inviting famous scholars from home and abroad to give lectures, disseminating scientific ideas and technical information;
- Organizing the lecture resources from over 20 branches of the Shanghai Central Library System, giving priorities to the branch library readers and further expand the influence of the lectures;
- Issuing special bulletins about the lectures, publishing information about the lectures and the readers' comments, and drawing more people's attention to the lectures and to themselves;
- Inviting famous management personnel and experts to form lecture advisor teams, organizing consultation and advisory meetings regularly and seeking for stronger innovational power;
- Paying attention to the accumulation and long-term management of lecture resources, establishing rich and useful lecture databases, including expert database, famous people's database and listener database, and encouraging the participation of the public;
- Producing extended products by publishing the lectures on the Internet, TV, radio stations and in books, newspapers and periodicals, realizing the link between the lectures, "watching" the lectures and "reading" the lectures, giving the public more options, and gradually establishing series of lecture "value chain" and "production chain."

The Shanghai Library will deliver the high-quality learning products and excellent services of the lectures to the neighborhood communities, towns, villages, islands and sea ports. The lectures will become "one of the major methods to acquire new ideas and new concepts," "one of the important ways for positive leisure" and the true friends of the public.

Conclusion

In establishing the target of achieving a "well-off society," the Chinese government has proposed to "build a learning society for all the citizens and for life long learning and promote people's full development." This is a great call and a natural historical process. In the process of developing in the 21st century, the Shanghai Library has taken leading learning and inspiring wisdom as its own responsibilities and established its functions as knowledge portal, life long learning school, and civilization basis and information center. The lectures at the Shanghai Library will play a brilliant role in the process of building a leaning city and

establishing city spirits.

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Biography on Wu Jianzhong



Dr. Wu Jianzhong is Director of the Shanghai Library and the Institute of Scientific and Technical Information of Shanghai (ISTIS, merged in 1995). He has actively participated in the planning and design of new public services of the institution. The new Library's innovative services attract more than 8,000 visitors each day.

Dr. Wu started the project "Shanghai Information Resource Sharing Network" in 1994, which consists of 30 research and university libraries, and now it becomes the Shanghai Library Consortia. He has been taking an active role in international activities. He serves on the IFLA Professional Committee and Publication Committee and as editorial members of *Libri*, *Library Management* and *Lifelong education and Library* (Japan). As a sociable person, Dr. Wu can make direct academic communications with others in two foreign languages: English and Japanese, and has given many lectures at professional conferences home and abroad. He has published 7 books and over 100 papers on various topics. To acknowledge his achievements, the State Department of China granted him a special award for his outstanding contribution in 2002. For more information, please visit Dr. Wu Jianzhong's personal webpage <http://www.libnet.sh.cn/wjz/english/>.