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Mobile libraries in groups : an innovation to improve the library service in the depressed area

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Abstract

The paper has reviewed the whole course from tentative ideas to the establishment of the mobile libraries in groups in Guangdong province, China. It introduces the principles and functioning modes of the mobile libraries in groups, and an overall assessment for its operating condition has been carried out. The conclusion of the assessment is: This innovative service of mobile libraries in groups can help the poor areas to improve the condition of library services, it can also improve the management ability and the service level of local libraries, and help to train higher quality professional librarians for these areas.

1 The Introduction of Mobile Library in Guangdong Province

Guangdong is a province, located on the south part of China, shortened form is Yue, the whole total size is 178,000 sq. km, with a population of approximately 80 million people, in which the development of the public librarianship is quite imbalanced. The modern public library service system has been built up in the Pearl River Delta Area central with Guangzhou, but backward in most areas of the east, west and north of the province. The main reasons are the imbalance of economic development as follows: The former is the area of rapid development of economy, the latter is also the backward and depressed area, and the investment from local government is so limited that it has restricted the development of librarianship in those areas.

Firstly, the public libraries in these backward and depressed areas have not enough book budget, the old and outdated books can't attract the reader. Please look at Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1 Outlay of some public libraries in the depressed areas of Guangdong in 2001

(Unit: CNY Yuan)

Item Library	Total outlay	Book budget
Duanzhou district	685,000	140,000
Yunfu city	480,000	40,000
Heyuan city	320,000	60,000
Lechang city	264,000	30,000
Xinxing	250,000	30,000
Deqing	220,000	12,000
Gaoyao city	200,000	60,000
Fengkai	190,000	33,000
Zijin	160,000	60,000
Yunan	153,000	50,000
Guangning	150,000	120,000
Huaiji	150,000	5,000
Lianping	150,000	45,000
Dianbai	130,000	20,000
Xinfeng	130,000	12,000
Liannan	120,000	34,000
Ruyuan	117,000	50,000
Nanxiong	115,000	15,000
Yangchun	100,000	15,000
Longmen	96,300	15,000
Lianshan	96,000	15,000
Shixin	80,000	40,000
Heping	76,000	10,000
Renhua	24,000	21,000
Wengyuan	20,000	0
Lianzhou	60,000	0

Table 2 Outlay of some public libraries in the depressed areas of Guangdong in 2002

(unit :CNY yuan)

item library	Total outlay	Book budget
Xinxing	245,000	30,000
Zijin	180,000	53,000
Guangning	390,000	20,000
Nanao	87,000	4,000
Xingning	630,000	12,000
Leizhou	136,000	30,000
Nanxiong	151,000	6,000
Dabu	438,700	69,000
Chenghai	426,000	57,000
Yunan	247,000	32,000
Longchuan	153,000	30,000
Ruyuan	117,000	29,000
Duanzhou	1,076,000	88,000
Huazhou	180,000	40,000
Lianjiang	46,000	9,000

Notes:

1. On 31 Dec 2001, Europe Dollar change CNY is 1:8.80
2. In 2001, average price of Chinese books is CNY15.72

3. *On 31 Dec 2002, Europe Dollar change CNY is 1:8.00*
4. *In 2002, average price of Chinese books is CNY16.22*

Table 1 and Table 2 are the outlay spot-check of the part local public libraries, which was checked by the Culture Division of Guangdong Province in 2001 and 2002, most of their book budget each year is below 50 thousand Yuan, not enough for 1000 volumes. According to the statistics of the Culture Division of Guangdong Province in 2001 and 2002, among 130 local public libraries, there were 16 libraries whose accession records were 0 in 2001, 19 libraries in 2002. The typical case was Nanao library, which has not bought any book in the past twenty years.

Secondly, the management, technology and service mode in the depressed areas were rather backward, and couldn't attract the readers.

Lack of library funding, there is not any change from information technological revolution, most of them can't afford computer management systems, purchase security facilities such as magnetic needles. Basic work such as classification, cataloguing and supplementary processes also remained at the primitive manual operations. In order to protect the humble collection from losing, most of them are still managed by closing and half-closing stack, while the readers also retrieved bibliography with card catalogues. Taking the 28 local libraries in the north as example: six (6) had multi-media reading-room, (21.4%) ; six(6) had more than two(2) work computers, (21.4%); four(4)adopted automated library system, (14.3%) ; four(4) used guard monitors; (14.3%). These libraries were not only modernized slowly but also service modes were outdated, most of them could only ensure lending services, haven't carried out reference and research service, and the reader activities were limited extremely.

Thirdly, the staff structure was not reasonable, and the quality of librarian was not good, either.

In 2003, the Culture Division of Guangdong Province investigated the staff structure of the local public libraries, involved 239 librarians of 18 depressed public libraries in the east, west and north, it revealed that there were 143 person below senior high school, (60%) ; 14 middle technology person, (6%) ; 8 accepted library science education, (3.3%) ; not a computer professional person at all.

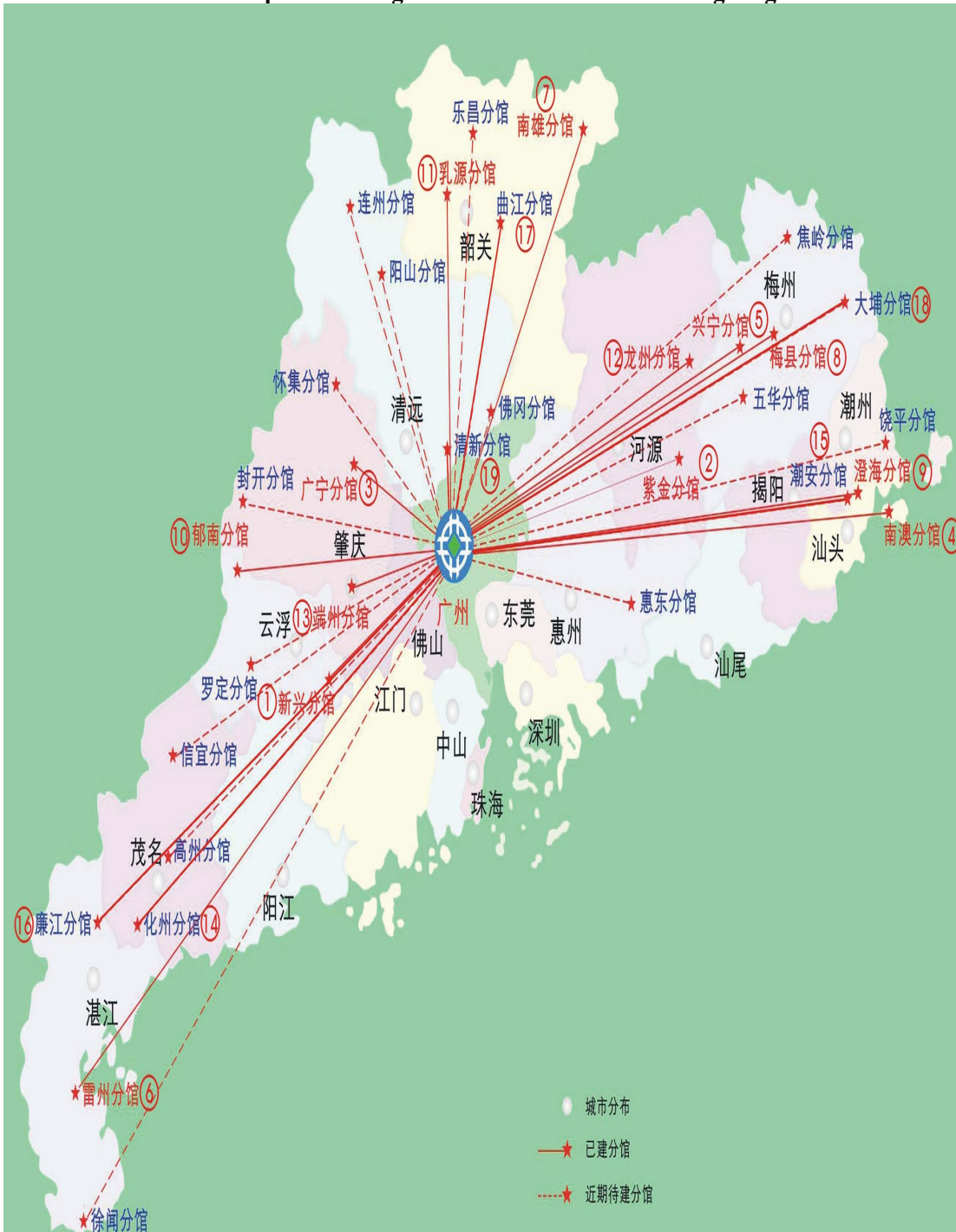
The difficulty of library funding brought a puzzledom about collection, management, technology, service and staff quality, and there was not real perfect library service the local people could enjoy, and these conditions couldn't change only depended on the local government in the short time. How to improve the library service in the depressed areas in the east, west, north? It has become a theme making government and specialists to think about. After studying the development and condition of these areas, Mr Li Zhaochun, director of Sun Yat-Sen Library of Guangdong Province, brought up that it could be conformity social resource with a tentative idea to improve the library service in the depressed areas by using the limited funding within a short time. After argumentation and consummation, in Mar 2003, Mr Chen Kaizhi, Liu Sifeng, Yan Xianqi, Cao Chunliang and Li Zhaochun etc, the famous person in the culture department, presented a proposal in due form, that is "*A Suggestion on Setting up Guangdong Mobile libraries in Group*", which it supported by government to buy books and normal service facilities, carried out by the Sun Yat-Sen Library of Guangdong Province, constructed a lot of branch libraries in the local library, and formed a new library network, the books would be exchange and supplied among the branch libraries periodically, that is Guangdong mobile libraries.

2 Planning and Construction of Mobile Libraries in Guangdong Province

In September 2003, the Government of Guangdong Province agreed to allocate special funds for the establishment of the Mobile Library, which has been carried out by Sun Yat-Sen Library of Guangdong Province, a famous provincial public library in China. It has perfected service system and applied automation, modernization all-sidedly, and has more than ninety years history (More information about it can be found at <http://www.zslib.com.cn>). The Mobile Libraries in Groups have been started up in November 2003, and an interim development program has also been drawn up. According to the program, it is constructed by a standardized mode : each branch library has the same volumes of books, same level of service facilities and management systems, it will implement the service regulations of Sun Yat-Sen Library of Guangdong Province, the branch libraries would be constructed in an orderly way and step by

step. From the end of 2003, 10~15 every year and more than 100 branch libraries are planned to be set up in 2010, serving about 10 million people.

The Map of Planning for Mobile Libraries in Guangdong Province



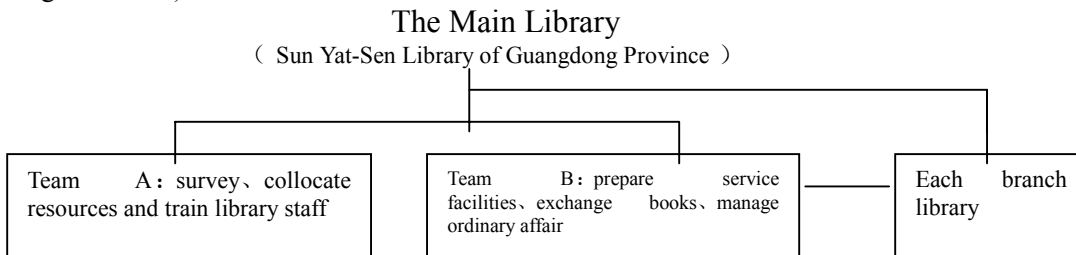
Notes : This is a map of Guangdong, real line represents the set up branch libraries (from no.1 to no.19), imaginary line represents those awaiting to be set up. The first one is Xinxing branch library (no.1 in above map) , started up on Nov 23, 2003 . Three up to the end of 2003, ten in the all year of 2004, about ten will be set up within 2005, four up to the Mar of 2005, and it will be carried on methodically.

3 The Management of Mobile Libraries in Guangdong Province

3.1 The mode of management

The Mobile Library of Guangdong are managed by the main library and branch library mode, Sun Yat-Sen Library of Guangdong Province is the main library, the newly built network groups are the branch library, respective property and job responsibility between them are defined by the written agreement, their relationship is cooperating and sharing.

A distinct organization and regulations have been set up to accommodate with its development (see the diagram below).



The work content of Team A :

- According to *Application to join in the group of mobile libraries of Guangdong*, survey and confirm the joined library.
- Purchase books according to *Book collocating principle and scope of mobile library of Guangdong*,
- classify and catalogue according to *Book classification and catalogue flow and criterion of mobile library of Guangdong*.
- Collocate computer system, network and normal service facilities.
- Train library staff centralizedly or alone according to *The management ordinance of mobile library of Guangdong* and *The administration handbook of mobile library of Guangdong*.

The work content of Team B :

- Organize the collocation of books and facilities and exchange books.
- Set up intercommunion with video photo and other communication, correspond ordinary management.
- Collect operation data and status of the branch libraries.
- Caller of annual conference of mobile library for intercommunion and summing-up.

In June 2004, the first mobile library work conference was held at Sun Yat-Sen Library of Guangdong Province, at the same time, conducted training sessions of library professional knowledge for four days, more than forty library staffs from six branch libraries and twelve to be join in have received professional training, the course involves computer application, the use of network information resource and library automation system, collection of local document.

3.2 The exchanging mechanism

Exchanging mechanism of mobile library is being constructed, the constructing principle is : perfecting the network of branch libraries firstly, then carrying out the exchange orderly. In 2004, five branch libraries began books' exchanging test, more than 60 thousand books were exchanged in all. The result indicated that exchange is good for making use of resource effectively (see the underside Table 3). Up to the end of 2005, about 30 branch libraries will be set up, and formed the reasonable network in the areas to the east, west and north of the province, at the appointed time the exchanging of books will be outspreaded within above-mentioned areas orderly.

Table 3 The operation statistic of average month after exchanging books

item library	readers	reading volume	consultant (piece)
Zijin(filled up new books)②	3090	8538	102
Zijin flowed to Meixian⑧	2230	2188	441
Nanao(filled up new books)④	1342	4267	144
Nanao flowed to Chenghai⑨	438	960	105
Xinxing(filled up new books)①	4209	5805	13
Xinxing flowed to Qujiang⑦	6011	7262	564
Leizhou(filled up new books)⑥	1650	3322	143
Leizhou flowed to Lianjiang⑩	1113	2425	61
Xingning(filled up new books)⑤	5391	14580	44
Xinning flowed to Dabu③	5211	7410	149

4 Improvement of the Library Service in the Depressed Areas

Up to the March,2005, 19 mobile branch libraries have been established in the East Area, West Area and North Area of the Guangdong Province. The Guangdong Mobile Libraries have brought over 230 thousand new books to the local people, which have been read by more than 570 thousand readers for more than 1.72 million times. Also, over 12 thousand people have accepted the train to surf the internet in these mobile libraries. The Guangdong Mobile Libraries have improved the status in the absence of books for the people in the poor areas in the ways as follows(see the underside Table 4).

Table 4 The operation statistic of 19 affiliated libraries in 2004

item library	time of starting up	opening time (hour/a week)		staff (person)	readers	reading volume	consultant (piece)	exchange (time)
		before	after					
①Xinxing	2003.11.23	37.5	55	2	48097	62089	600	1
②Zijin	2003.11.25	40	60	5	103052	82624	531	1
③Guangning	2003.12.04	48	58	2	52010	133513	1848	
④Nanao	2004.03.26	48	54	2	48153	178459	540	1
⑤Xingning	2004.05.22	42	60	2	38694	105800	114	1
⑥Leizhou	2004.06.05	48	54	2	40604	91402	606	1
⑦Nanxiong	2004.07.10	42	57	2.5	46704	113180	1301	
⑧Meixian	2004.08.07	42	59	2	5487	5100	106	
⑨Chenghai	2004.08.08	48	66	2	25486	50256	4035	
⑩Yunan	2004.09.23	48	47	2	8250	10756	256	
⑪Ruyuan	2004.09.24	48	53	2	16965	63860	141	
⑫Longchuan	2004.09.25	42	48	2	9006	10938	31	
⑬Duanzhou	2004.09.30	47	56	2.5	17788	31180	35	
⑭Huazhou	2004.11.26	30	39	2	3115	4238	3	
⑮Chaoan	2004.11.29		48	2	7836	12980	68	
⑯Lianjiang	2005.01.07	33	43	2	3865	12302	25	
⑰Qujiang	2005.01.15	56	66	6	6081	12162	416	
⑱Dabu	2005.02.25	45	48	2	7300	8450	52	
⑲Qingxin	2005.03.05	49	55	2	7615	19060	161	

Notes : For those branch libraries starting up in 2004, the statistic is up to 31 Dec of the same year , for those branch libraries starting up in 2005, the statistic is up to 31 Mar of the same year.

4.1 The status that few people visited the libraries for the old books has been changed, because the new books have been attracting much more readers. With the open of the mobile libraries, the amount of the readers of each libraries has increased in a big extent, especially for the branch mobile libraries that

established early, such as Zijin, Guangning, Xinxing, Nanao, Xingning, Leizhou and Nanxiong. For example, the Nanao Library had not bought any books for years before the mobile library established, and mobile library has aroused the great reading passion of the people. In the whole 2003, only 1410 people visited the library. But since the mobile library set up on March 26, 2004, more than 48000 readers have visited the library by the end of the year.

4.2 The mobile libraries activated the books resource that left unused in the poor areas. There are 27 local libraries that applied to join in the group of the mobile libraries in 2005. As limited by the admittance qualifications, only 10 of 27 local libraries could finally join in the mobile libraries. In order to hold the admittance qualifications, the local governments appropriate funds zealously to rebuild or decorate the local libraries, and set the complete establishment and add the book budget. As the local government pay more importance and investment to the libraries. Therefore, the books resources left unused have been activated, not only in the areas that could become branch mobile libraries finally, but also in the areas that could not become branch mobile libraries.

4.3 Both library workers and library directors obtained chances of training on library special service and management. They accepted specific training before the work, as well as collective training during the work. In the year of 2004, about 40 local library workers and 20 library directors had accepted the training. More than 20 management experts and technical experts of the Zhongshan Library had gone to the branch mobile libraries to give guidance for over 76 times. We are planning to give more training of library special knowledge, management knowledge and service skills to the library workers. Those people who had accepted the modern library management theory and service ideas would become the mainstay backbones that promoting the library business development forward.

4.4 The backward conditions of management level and technology level in the local libraries have been improved greatly. The user-based service idea is reflected. The computer management has been introduced complete into the library systems of the local libraries. All books are provided for reading in open shelves, with no need for reading cards and paying fees. In the 19 branch mobile libraries, the service hours have increased a lot. 13 of them are open more than 50 hours each week, and it is open over 60 hours one week in the branch libraries in Zijin, Xingning, Chenghai and Qujiang.

4.5 Readers in the poor areas can enjoy the fruits of information revolution. Through the computer terminals of the mobile libraries, they are free to view e-books, e-journals and other kinds of documents of the Guangdong Digital Library, of which the literature is extremely rich, including 500 thousand e-books, over 10 million pieces of articles in Chinese and foreign language, academic degree dissertations, and conference proceedings. Librarians are arranged to guide the readers how to get online and use the digital library in the mobile branch libraries. The cultural resources have been shared greatly in the poor areas through the whole province.

4.6 The library service has varied from single way to diversified ways. The services in the branch mobile libraries are beyond reading and borrowing, most mobile libraries provide reference and information service, of which the Chenghai Library, Guangning Library and Nanxiong Library have done well, they have carried out such service for 4035 times, 1848 times and 1301 times respectively. Xinxing Library and Zijin Library practiced project service and retrieval service, and achieved success. In the year of 2004, the reference and information service of all the mobile libraries had provided more than 10 thousand pieces of articles for the users.

5 Factors Affecting the Sustainable Development of Mobile Libraries

To establish the mobile libraries groups that cover the poor areas in Guangdong Province, and to keep them developing steadily, is the ultimate goal of the construction of the Guangdong Mobile Library. At present, the construction of the mobile library is making progress very well. In the future, perhaps there are two hidden problems that affecting the headway of the construction of the mobile library: the budget and the management.

5.1 The first hidden problem is the budget. With the present government budget, it is no problem to establish 10 to 15 branch mobile libraries each year, but the problem comes from the following aspects, for all the expenses are not among the government budget:

- Expenses for the replenishment of new books and the circulation of the books when the mobile libraries have increased in number.
- Expenses for the renewal of equipment and updating of the system of the mobile libraries.
- Expenses for the purchase of new computer terminals to meet the increasing need of the local people for the digital literatures.

5.2 The second hidden problem is the management. At the end of 2005 or the beginning of 2006, books circulation would be extend through the whole net of the mobile library. However, the management offices have not been ready yet.

Therefore, to keep the sustaining development of the mobile library, we should consider how to solve the two hidden problems. For the first problem, in addition to apply for more budgets, we can enhance the promotion, and win more support from the charities all over the world. For the second problem, we can make a overall planning to prepare the human resources and material resources in advance. Getting rid of these two hidden problems, the mobile libraries would develop steadily.

Mobile libraries have improved the backward condition of lacking books for the people in the poor areas to a great degree in Guangdong province. However, they are not able to meet the increasing need of the local residents for library services completely. To solve the problem through and through, we must rely on the local government budgets to construct modern public library service system. Mobile libraries play an important role during the construction in training skilled personnel of management and service. Therefore, it can not be ignored that the mobile libraries are pushing the library business in local areas forward.

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