

A discourse on creating and rendering educational and cultural enrichment services to rural migrant workers by public libraries

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Abstract As far as China's enormous success in her economic reforms and development is concerned, Chinese rural migrant workers indeed have had their biggest share of contributions. Yet ironically in return, they have only received a disproportionate meager share of benefit rewards. These people represent a huge economically deprived group at the bottom of the social totem pole in China's metropolises. On the whole as a social group, their educational attainment is relatively low as compared to their average urban co-workers. As such being the case, their rights to access some of the cost-free cultural and educational enrichment programs in the society are limited and not always assured. Nevertheless and in general speaking, they manifest a strong and consistent desire to acquire all sorts of new and practical knowledge by means of accessing the resources and facilities of their local public libraries. It is suggested in this paper that public libraries are in a good position to give strong support to the central government's strategic planning for the development of a public culture service system^{a)}. In implementing such a government initiative with an unswerving purpose of advancing social justice and equality, public libraries should strive to provide as many as possible their library services at no cost to the public, especially to those socially deprived rural migrant workers.

Keywords Rural migrant workers, Library instructional services, Public libraries' support of the national cultural policy

Rural migrant workers evolved into a huge social group in China under some peculiar circumstances in a specific period of Chinese history that took place since the last couple of decades. Sufficiently to say that these rural migrant workers have contributed stupendously to the success of China's national policies for economic reforms and for her opening-up to the outside world. The mass media of Western countries call these rural migrant workers as the dynamic engine for China's current



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^{a)} Public culture service system is the summation of the variety of non-profit culture institutions and services sponsored by central and local governments, benefiting whole society and ensuring public culture demands.

economic prosperity^[1]. Had it not been for the large-scale physical participation of rural migrant workers, China could not have achieved a result to such an extent of a government initiative. However, despite the fact that they are the prime movers of Chinese societal progress, Chinese rural migrant workers are actually ranked at the bottom of the social totem pole in terms of personal income, social status, and personal financial security-nest protections. They are the most vulnerable and helpless group which could be easily hurt by other individuals and/or groups. It is really ironic that they have contributed to the prosperity of China's national economy so much and yet they have received so little in return. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the social conscience of all segments in the Chinese society to lend their helping hands to improve the well-being of the rural migrant workers at present time as well as to assure them a brighter life in the years ahead. It follows logically that library professionals should also enthusiastically join in the collective efforts of a mass movement in rendering their unique knowledge and culture oriented services more vigorously and effectively at a low or no cost to these rural migrant workers so as to fulfill the high callings for social equality of their own profession as well as that of their nation.

1 The low level education of Chinese rural migrant workers

According to the announcement made by the director of the Office of Rural Migrant Workers in the Chinese State Council, there were 0.21 billion rural migrant workers as by the end of 2008. This number represents 16% of the total Chinese population^[2]. They are scattered in all types of trade and industries across China's economy^[3]. Specifically, they occupy 68% of the manufacturing industry; 80% in each of the construction and mining industries; respectively and over 50% in each of the following industries, such as: environmental protection and sanitation, domestic aide service, food and beverage service, etc. Their average personal monthly wage was only RMB¥ 780 and the average personal annual wage was RMB¥ 7,200 (on a 9-month working basis) in 2004^[4]. Even though their personal income rose to RMB¥ 1,201.9^[5] and an average personal annual income reached to RMB¥ 10,898.1, it is, nevertheless, still quite low on the whole as compared to the average annual wage of urban dwellers whose average annual wage was RMB¥ 24,932, a 56.29 percentage point lower than them by comparison.

Although most of the young rural migrant workers who are now working on jobs in the city possess certain amount of practical skills and learning ambitions, their education level on the whole was quite low. According to the facts and figures released by the Research Office of Chinese State Council in a report in 2006, which entitled *An Investigative Report on Chinese Rural Migrant Workers* (Zhongguo Nongmingong Diaoyan Baogao), the average age of Chinese rural migrant workers



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was 28.6 years old in 2004. Among them, 2% were illiterate, 16.4% had a elementary school education, 65.5% had a junior high school education, 11.5% had a senior high school education, 4.6% had a junior college or above education. In other words, these rural migrant workers who have a formal education at a level of junior high or below take about 83.9%^[4]. In a separate survey made by several library professionals on the need of using library services and facilities (and along with other demographic characteristics) of these rural migrant workers in Beijing and Wuhan in 2006 (188 people being surveyed in Beijing and 495 people being surveyed in Wuhan), the education level of those surveyed was 89.4% at the junior high school level and 66.1% was at a education level below junior high^[6-7]. These surveys further confirmed the fact that there was a fundamental issue of low level education among rural migrant workers.

It is very difficult for rural migrant workers to make even a low standard of living in urban centers. They are constantly facing severe challenges of such adversities as strenuous physical labor, long working hours, discriminatory attitude and demeanor of their supervisors, low wages and frequent delays in receiving their wage payments, poor housing, less security, inadequate health care and educational subsidies and/or facilities for themselves as well as for their children. Moreover, there is none or inadequate insurance policy for workman's compensation or occupational hazards. Among all these adversities, their extremely limited opportunities to participate in any meaningful cultural and educational events are particularly noticeable. In 2005, the Ministry of Culture asked the Huazhong Normal University to conduct a national survey on rural migrant workers. The resulting survey, which covered 14 administrative regions and 6,000 rural migrant workers, revealed that, among other characteristics of these rural migrant workers, their cultural and educational activities were rather scarce and also of poor quality. They spent their hard-earned leisure time primarily this way: sleeping (35%), watching TV (34.7%), chatting (25%). In addition, there were a small percentage of people, who would instead read books and magazines (15.1%), and there was another group of the same percentage who used their spare/leisure time to play cards or to play Ma Kiang. Another 11.7% of them would use their leisure time to listen to the radio. There were relatively only a very small percentage of them who would spend their leisure time in the following manner: navigating the Internet (9.1%), watching movies (5.3%), watching video (3.9%) and getting entertained at singing parlors and/or night clubs (2.8%)^[8].

We did a survey in Beijing and Wuhan on rural migrant workers' learning ability and their need of library services and facilities in 2006. In that survey, we found that the way the rural migrant workers in terms of obtaining their information and knowledge were quite traditional and restrictive. Rural migrant workers in Beijing considered televised broadcasting (55.32%), interpersonal communication



(34.57%), and newspapers (30.85%) to be their main sources of information and knowledge. Similarly, rural migrant workers in Wuhan also took televised broadcasting, newspapers, and interpersonal communication respectively as their primary instruments, in a descending order of importance, in terms of getting their information and knowledge (over 50% people surveyed responded this way). There were only a small percentage of migrant farm-workers regardless whether they worked in Beijing or in Wuhan who would use the Internet or from the opportunities of taking the on job training classes to expand their knowledge base^[6-7]. The report of the Research office of the Chinese State Council entitled *An Investigative Report on Chinese Rural Migrant Workers* (Zhongguo Nomingong Diaoyan Baogao) revealed that there were only 28.2% of all migrant farm-workers who received a certain amount of job-related special training in 2004. Within this group of skilled/trained labor force, those who received on job training from government sponsored programs took 10.7%, from industry or corporation sponsored programs took 30%, from personal initiative took 59.3%; those who had never gone through any job related training program took a whopping 71.8%. They make a living simply by means of selling their physical strength^[4].

2 Public libraries and rural migrant workers' knowledge-seeking endeavors

2.1 Migrant farm-workers' yearnings for learning and for free access to library service

The backwardness of a basic educational system and the lack of cultural services and facilities in Chinese rural areas which have inadvertently led most rural migrant workers with an educational background of mediocrity in nature results in a significant weakening of their competitive edge in a modern economy. Subjectively speaking from their own perspective, a great majority of the rural migrant workers wish to have more opportunities to read and to study. The Huazhong Normal University conducted a national survey on 6,000 rural migrant workers in 2005. Their research findings revealed that under the current poor living circumstances, rural migrant workers spent their leisure/spare time for the following cultural and entertainment activities in this descending order: watching TV (33%), sleeping (19.9%), chatting (18.4%), reading books and magazines (18.2%), playing cards and/or Ma Jiang (13.6%) and navigating on the Internet (11.0%). But at the bottom of their hearts, they expressed a true desire in participating in more company sponsored education and culture related programs such as providing sufficient TV sets (37.4%), more on-job training classes (33.4%), more books and magazines (27%), and more computers (23.2%), etc. Their desired items also included company sponsored athletic and recreational events (15%–20%)^[8].



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Rural migrant workers are well aware of those disadvantages that organically linked to their insufficient knowledge base. In the survey we made on rural migrant workers in Beijing and Wuhan with regard to their learning ability and their related needs of library services and facilities in 2006, we found that they took the following two elements as the most important ones to assure them a happy life:

- Health (62.8% for those in Beijing; 67.5% for those in Wuhan);
- Income (57.4% for those in Beijing; 54.2% for those in Wuhan)

Educational accomplishment ranked the fourth (33.0% for those in Beijing; 43.4% for those in Wuhan). We asked in which way, their insufficient knowledge or education would have a dramatic impact on their lives. The responses that we got from these rural migrant workers from both cities claimed that such deficiency would adversely impact their lives seriously in several ways^[6-7]. (See Table 1)

Table 1 Life is adversely affected by insufficient knowledge

Options		Percentage for rural migrant workers in Beijing	Percentage for rural migrant workers in Wuhan	Rank
The ways in which the insufficient knowledge affects the rural migrant workers' lives	Income	72.9%	81.3%	1
	Right protection	48.4%	47.9%	2
	Social position	43.1%	44.3%	3
	Human dignity and respect	19.7%	43.1%	4
	Body health	17.0%	24.8%	5
	Others	8.5%	4.7%	6
Total effective samples		100%	100%	

When asked of these migrant workers where they usually got their information and knowledge, most of them replied that their primary channels in obtaining knowledge were from: 1) Televised broadcasting (55.32 for those in Beijing; 63.64% for those in Wuhan), 2) interpersonal communication (34.57% for those in Beijing; 50.00% for those in Wuhan), 3) newspapers and magazines (30.85% for those in Beijing; 56.36% for those in Wuhan), 4) books (26.19% for those in Beijing; 46.06% for those in Wuhan). The rest channels of their information sources were proportionately less significant, which consisted of: 1) Navigating the Internet (17.56% for those in Beijing; 35.15% for those in Wuhan), 2) taking remedial on-job training classes (20.74% for those in Beijing; 8.5 for those in Wuhan)^[6-7]. We can see from this survey result that migrant workers depended on traditional means in getting their information/knowledge internalized such as through televised broadcasting, newspapers and magazines, chatting with people, books, etc. Significantly fewer people were actually using modern information technologies to obtain their needed information/knowledge such as accessing networked online information resources.



2.2 The purpose and book contents of rural migrant workers' reading interest

Rural migrant workers showed varied interests and purposes in selecting their readings. Their reading selections reflected not only their purpose of reading but also the subject matter of their interest. In the survey of migrant farm-workers in China conducted by the Huazhong Normal University in 2005, it showed that their reading purposes were varied; some took it as a way to get amused and entertained, whereas some others wanted to satisfy their yearnings for learning and to raise their level of general education as well as cultural bearings. For instance, 44.2% of the surveyed rural migrant workers considered their reading habit as recreational in nature; 25.8% of them took their reading as a way to enlarge their knowledge base; 23.1% of them wished their reading would help them understand the current events better; 16.2% of them used readings to search for jobs; 15.4% of them wanted to improve their knowledge in science and technology through reading and 14.4% of them wanted to cultivate their interest in reading literary works. As far as the subject matter of their reading content, 47.1% of them preferred recreational readings, the rest preferred their reading subjects in the following descending order: current policies and events (20.4%), science and technology (19.5%), literature and fine arts (18.1%), their children's text books (10.8%), and geomancy (7%)^[8]. In our survey of rural migrant workers in Beijing and Wuhan on their reading subject matters, we found that health and entertainment subjects to be their top preferred subjects (42% for those in Beijing; 50.5% in Wuhan). The rest is listed in a descending order as shown in Table 2 below^[6-7]:

Table 2 Preferred subjects of reading for rural migrant workers (In a descending order of interest),

Preferred subjects of reading for rural migrant workers in Beijing			Preferred subjects of reading for rural migrant workers in Wuhan		
Options	Percentage	Rank	Options	Percentage	Rank
Health and entertainment	42%	1	Health and entertainment	50.5%	1
Economy and law	36.2%	2	Current policies and events	47.8%	2
Application technologies	27.1%	3	Economy and law	30%	3
Current policies and events	20.2%	4	Application technologies	27.5%	4
Literature and fine arts	19.1%	5	Literature and fine arts	25.6%	5
History and geography	14.4%	6	History and geography	12.8%	6
Reference book	14.4%	7	Others	11.5%	7
Others	7.4%	8	Reference book	9.9%	8
Total effective samples	100%		Total effective samples	100%	

As for the reading purposes of these rural migrant workers, those in Wuhan indicated, by majority choice, the following top three in a descending ranking order: improving personal skills and knowledge (269 persons, 35.3%), self-entertainment



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(190 persons, 41%), and meeting job requirement (119 persons, 15.6%). This research finding shows that rural migrant workers' reading purpose and the subject matter of their reading are not in uniformity but actually quite varied instead.

2.3 Rural migrant workers' attitude toward using public libraries

Owing to many objective barriers and subjective limitations, most migrant workers can seldom avail themselves physically at the library door for their information needs. In our survey conducted on rural migrant worker in Beijing and Wuhan in 2006, it revealed that there were 63.8% of those rural migrant workers in Beijing who had never been to a library, about 27.7% of them had visited a library occasionally and only 8.5% of them who had frequented themselves at a library. By comparison, there were 37.2% rural migrant workers in Wuhan who had never been to a library, 50% of them had visited a library occasionally and only 12.8% had frequented themselves at a library. The main reason for these migrant workers not going to a library was because that they could not find enough spare or leisure time to visit a library. Besides, there was the fact that they had absolutely no ideas about what a library is there actually for in addition to their perceived problems of finding the library's accurate address and distance, etc.^[6-7] (See Table 3)

Table 3 Reasons for rural migrant workers not using a library

Rural migrant workers in Beijing			Rural migrant workers in Wuhan		
Options	Percentage	Rank	Options	Percentage	Rank
Do not know the address	24.5%	1	Long distance	38.1%	1
No interests	17.02%	2	Do not know the address	37.1%	2
Expensive charge	16.0%	3	No interests	31.1%	3
Long distance	6.3%	4	Outdated library collections	11%	4
Discrimination from others	4.8%	5	Expensive charge	10.7%	5
Outdated library collections	4.8%	6	Discrimination from others	3.1%	6
Total effective samples	100%		Total effective samples	100%	

When asked whether these migrant workers would have used a library if inconvenience had not been an issue for them, most of them responded positively or indicated a willingness to give it a try at any rate. For instance, 51.68% of migrant workers in Wuhan expressed a willingness to give it a try; 35.08% of them said that they would definitely use a library. Those who indicated that they had no such interest constituted only a small percentage of them (13.2%). Therefore, it can be concluded that there is potentially a strong desire for rural migrant workers to have the access to a library. In other words, 86.8% migrant workers in Wuhan are our potential library patrons. In our survey, rural migrant workers responded with great interest about our questionnaire with regard to a range of possible service programs that they might need. They confirmed all those library service programs that we



suggested for possible future development in a positive way as shown in table 4 below^[6-7]. (See Table 4)

Table 4 The most needed library services as perceived by rural migrant workers

Rural migrant workers in Beijing			Rural migrant workers in Wuhan		
Options	Percentage	Options	Percentage	Options	Percentage
Free service	55.3%	1	Skill and technology training	52.5%	1
Skill and technology training	39.9%	2	Free service	52.1%	2
Setting up the reading room nearby to the migrant workers' working or living place	31.4%	3	Setting up the reading room nearby to the migrant workers' working or living places	35.1%	3
Book mobile service	31.4%	4	Benefits offered for children	31.7%	4
Free online training	30.9%	5	Free online training	27.8%	5
Job information via telephone	9.6%	6	Book mobile service	25.8%	6
Others	8.0%	7	Job information via telephone	25.6%	7
—	—	—	Others	6.3%	8
Total effective samples	100%		Total effective samples	100%	

Table 4 shows that those surveyed rural migrant workers in Beijing and Wuhan showed their high hopes for all library services rendered are at no cost to them and public libraries should sponsor various remedial classes for the enhancement and/or development of their trade-related and/or marketable skills.

3 Developing innovative library policies to serve rural migrant workers' pursuits of practical knowledge better

3.1 Abolishing all fee-based library service barriers and implementing a policy of free loaning of library books

As a component team member of the public culture service system, public libraries should exert greater efforts in reaching out their services to each and every individual and every social segment of the society with a sense of social fairness and equality. One of the important ways to achieve such fairness and social equality for public libraries is to offer as many of their services free as possible in order to benefit evenly to those underprivileged social groups such as those rural migrant workers. Public libraries at all administrative levels should waive all of their fee-based services such as fees for library cards for book borrowing, fees for document authentications, fees for navigating the Internet, etc. As long as a rural migrant worker shows a valid ID/document (e.g. a nationality identity card or a temporary resident card) to the library staff, s/he is eligible to get a library card free of charge. As for other types of library administrative fees such as fines for overdue books, payments for book and property damages, etc. can be collected with a reasonably assessed replacement value as such practice is closely related to the fostering of a



citizen's sense of credibility on the one hand and to the protection of public property on the other hand. It ought to be emphasized here again that any fee assessed for the payment by any individual rural migrant worker should not go beyond his or her reasonable means to pay. In principle, public libraries should provide copiers for migrant workers to make copies free of charge. Libraries may collect a fee only to recoup the cost of their capital investment if they cannot provide such service absolutely free.

In order to implement the unbiased equal delivery of cultural services to all the populace in China as advocated by the central government, an effective system has to be developed specifically to deal with such a national calling. The equal delivery of cultural services is not meant to level all cultural services delivered but rather to afford an equal opportunity and to safeguard equal fundamental rights for all individual citizens. It is through the principles of compensatory justice and of complementary justice that we should make the culture service contents to the socially deprived groups transparent to the general public. It is only when public libraries give preferred treatment to rural migrant workers in a reversed way, can we expect that their basic cultural rights be secured to a certain extent.

3.2 The establishment of an interlibrary cooperative mechanism for the enhancement of service capacities of public libraries

Public commodity has a unique feature—its ubiquitousness. As a kind of public commodity, educational and cultural services have to be made available ubiquitously for the benefit of all segments of the society. Only when our educational and cultural services have reached to such a sophisticated level, can the basic cultural rights of the common folks be expected free from wanton infringement. The most effective way to achieve this objective is to establish a networked online system to coordinate the culture services offered by all the participating member libraries. The current prevailing practice of many public libraries in many major Chinese cities that followed a modus operandi of central-branch library model is a significant step forward toward this service networking direction. In practical terms, public libraries should construct more temporary or semi-permanent (relatively with a long-range operational outlook) book loaning stations. Only in this way, can library service to rural migrant workers achieve the desired objective in large scale.

From a broader and a more general perspective, migrant workers may show characteristics of wax and wane in their formation as a social group. However in reality, they are relatively bound securely together as a social group by the nature of their jobs and living accommodations. For instance, most construction workers live in temporarily erected tents close to their work sites. Most rural migrant workers in manufacturing enterprise and labor-intensive industries normally take abode in a corporation provided dormitory. Furthermore, a good percentage of rural migrant



workers in retail and restaurant business usually rent their own apartments. These rural migrant renters usually rent their apartments in those less expensive areas of the city outskirts in order to reduce their living expenditure. For instance, 64% of migrant workers in Hunan province lived in the city outskirts and 7% of them lived in the city suburbs. In Beijing, there were 62% migrant workers who lived in the nearby suburbs and 29% lived in distant suburbs. In Shenzhen, there were three million migrant workers who lived either in an urban habitat-village or in an illegally constructed substandard living quarter^[4]. Owing to concentrated living of rural migrant workers in certain localities, there emerged such concentrated living clusters as village of Anhui natives, village of Henan natives, etc. at the boarder lines of a city.

Major public libraries can negotiate, based on their own environmental impact studies, with those entrepreneurs to build temporary or semi-permanent library reading rooms jointly on the latter's land or inside their apartment complex where a large number of migrant workers are usually present. They can also solicit the consent and support of local resident organizations to construct initially some semi-permanent small libraries together in a joint-venture model in the urban habitat villages with an eye to their possible further development in the future. For instance, local business firms and social organizations can provide physical sites, facilities, equipment; public libraries can provide collection resources and administrative staff (alternatively, inviting a few librarian volunteers to do the job). In recent years, some labor unions in different parts of Chinese localities have launched a movement of library reaching-out service. They have made an initial capital investment of RMB¥ 20 million in the construction of 1,000 library reading rooms for rural migrant workers as show-cases^[9]. Therefore, it is incumbent upon public libraries to work closely with local labor unions to make these library reading rooms to have a practical appeal and long lasting effect.

3.3 Supporting privately funded libraries for rural migrant workers

Among those privately funded public libraries for rural migrant workers, a portion of them were developed jointly by local labor unions and the local Chinese Communist Youth Leagues. For instance, the Metropolitan Labor Union of Chengdu and the Labor Union of Wuhou District jointly developed the first public library for rural migrant workers in Chengdu, which located on Jinhuaqiao of Wuhou district, had its official grand opening to the public in August 2007. It has a book collection of over 20,000 volumes. It had already conducted a limited operation for several months before it announced its official grand opening. During that trial period, they received about 50 rural migrant workers each day for book borrowing^[10]. In June 2008, the Metropolitan Labor Union of Guangzhou built a Baiyun District Public Library for rural migrant workers at the Service Center for Rural Migrant



Workers at Baiyun Station. This establishment gave 300,000 rural migrant workers in Guangzhou's Baiyun district a library the first time ever, which they can proudly call it their own. It has a book collection of 15,000 volumes available for borrowing and it offers regularly scheduled classes for teaching computer skills and/or computer literacy for free of charge^[11]. In 2006, the Communist Youth League of Dongxin Street of Hangzhou opened a library for rural migrant workers on the fourth floor of the # 25th building at Desheng East Village with its own private source of funding. This library has a book collection of over 8,000 volumes^[12]. In addition to these public libraries for rural migrant workers, which are under the aegis of various prominent social groups, there were also such libraries created and financially supported entirely by private individual citizens. For example, Feng Pingliang, a native of Xiangshan county, Zhejiang province, who, in seeing the difficulties that faced by these rural migrant workers to read books, donated over RMB¥ 100,000 to buy books, computers, book stacks, etc. and employed two full-time library staffs, had a free migrant workers' library established on Juexi Street under the name of Xiangrong Library in 2005^[13].

Many such libraries/reading rooms are being created under wide-spread strong social support, which have attracted increasingly a large number of migrant workers to utilize their facilities, services and resources. However, many of these library administrators are not professionally trained. They often confront with a host of insurmountable technical difficulties. As such being the case, it is incumbent upon major public libraries to devise effective ways and practical implementing mechanism to assist these libraries of migrant worker to solve their problems, to enhance their service capabilities, and to insure their continuous healthy development. For those richly endowed public libraries, they should systematically give funding and resource support to these rural migrant worker libraries with an eye that they may one day developed into their networked information stations.

4 Major public libraries' strategic initiatives in advancing the knowledge base and cultural bearings of rural migrant workers

4.1 On the good management of the temporary and semi-permanent libraries

One has to recognize that those temporary libraries and semi-permanent libraries created for the rural migrant workers are not the same as those branch libraries of a major metropolitan public library. Neither are they the same as a small community library. Their special characteristics of these rural migrant workers' libraries as created jointly by a major metropolitan public library and a local business corporation are 1) simplicity and 2) flexibility. The minimum facility and resource requirements for their operation include but not necessarily limited to the following: a sufficient



size of lot, a book collection of 1,500 volumes, a magazine collection of more than 10 titles, a video collection about 100 items, one set of computer, and other basic facilities for exhibitions, book loaning and library management task. Those better endowed libraries for rural migrant workers can have their libraries installed for Ethernet and/or wireless connection to the Internet and/or other networked digital resources. Such electronic resources will surely raise the level of information literacy of rural migrant workers greatly. In 2005, the Capital Library and the Beijing Construction Engineering Group cooperated to develop 17 library reading rooms scattered in the third terminal of the Capital Airport and along the stopovers of subway stations of Line 10 of the Beijing subway. In the same year, the Shanghai Jing'an District Library cooperated with the Shanghai Labor Union to have established one after another an aggregated number of over 10 library reading rooms around the construction site of the International Lidu City of Shanghai metropolis^[14]. Ever since this time, many major public libraries have followed suit to join the movement of reaching out to the migrant workers by creating convenient neighborhood libraries/reading rooms to serve their information needs.

As far as for the management of such temporary or semi-permanent libraries for rural migrant workers, special attention should be paid to the following two issues. One is the currency of the collection holdings. If there is no new library materials keep on coming, the level of readers' interest and enthusiasm in using this library will decrease as time passes by until it becomes a place with no visitors one day. The other issue is to strengthen the sense of responsibility of the library staff. As most of those library staff are from rural migrant workers themselves or from local resident volunteers (major public libraries usually have no trained extra staff to spare), who use their spare time or work overtime at the library on a shift rotating basis, they are usually ill equipped to handle their library jobs in a satisfactory manner due to either their poor training or their self-identified occupational role as being only an amateur. As such being the case, it is necessary for the organizers of this type of libraries to write a detailed job descriptions, along with a list of job responsibilities and the required standards for job performance (including but not limited to such items as property auditing, expected rate of property natural depreciation, etc) at the onset of their staff recruitment and appointment.

4.2 Assuring book loaning service available at rural migrant workers' living quarters via book-mobiles

In those economically deprived areas that even none of the small libraries or reading rooms could be made available to those localities where migrant workers congregate, major public libraries should establish a book-mobile service route with stopovers along those densely populated streets of migrant workers on a 20-day service interval basis. The "making-rounds service" that a book-mobile provides is part and parcel



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of the overarching “reaching-out service program” of a major public library. Similar to the nature of a city bus, the beneficiaries are those mobile individuals who happen to be at the right place and at the right time for bus service that coincided with the scheduled bus arrival time. The service impact of book-mobiles are different than that as reflected in the combined functional relationship between a central public library and its several branch libraries that the radius of their combined areas of service coverage determines quantitatively the size of their beneficiaries in a positive proportion. Book-mobile service can greatly ease the inconvenience imposed upon migrant workers who usually have to work too long and too hard each and every day to visit a library on a regular basis.

At the end of 2007, the Central Committee of Communist Youth League of Gansu province, the United Youth Association of Gansu province, and Lanzhou Municipal Library jointly formed a “mobile library for rural migrant workers,” consisting of six large cargo containers filled with new books and were shipped to six labor-intensive work sites where there were densely populated migrant workers. They launched a reading movement by chanting it “reading one good book, learning one useful skill and you’ll live a wholesome life,” which was greeted enthusiastically by rural migrant workers. Within a period of six months, there emerged a book loaning record of 7,000 times. With this initial success, these three cooperating parties extended their mobile library service for migrant workers into four additional districts of Lanzhou; namely, Chengguan, Qilihe, Xigu and Anning districts. This was the first time that these type of library stations ever had a supply of books in the subject fields of literature and fine arts, law, management, and application technology and of a sizable quantity of as many as 260 volumes. All books are available for borrowing by local residents free of charge. There is a new shipment of book replacement at a two-month interval^[15].

A new innovative undertaking by public libraries worthy of special mentioning is they have established several reading corners inside subway stations for commuters to browse new books and current magazines free of charge. The low cost of public transportation is the preferred commuting vehicle for urban migrants, especially for migrant workers. Reading corners in these places have similar functional effects as that of book-mobiles. At the end of August 2008, Line 9 of Shanghai subway system pioneered the first self-assisted mobile library in China. There were initially deposited an aggregated collection of 40,000 items of books and magazines evenly into each of its reading corners located along its 12 subway stations of its traveling route. The policy of using this library service is that there is no registration requirement and passengers can pick up any amount of materials to read and have them returned to a shelf when they are ready to exit the subway. Such library service received raved review from the society. However, in less than two months, these books suffered a loss of at least 10,000 volumes (perhaps it was a testimony



to readers' enthusiasm)^[16]. In my case, I believe this unpleasant phenomenon will be gradually dwindled away as long as we keep on educating our commuting public with ethical slogans on the bill boards of the subway stations, strengthening library management techniques, installing more boxes for book returns in strategic subway locations and stamp conspicuous ink marks of "public property" on those library items.

4.3 Installation of special displaying book cases in public libraries for recommended books to rural migrant workers

There should be a special displaying book case in the public reading room of a public library for the exhibition of recommended books to migrant workers. Such practice will save rural migrant workers a great deal amount of time in finding their desired items by not through searching the online public access catalog (OPAC) on the one hand and for the library staff to introduce such materials to them prominently on the other hand. Public librarians have to be mindful about the fact that migrant workers have very little amount of leisure/spare time to spend in the library and it is not easy at all for them to take a trip to the library in the first place. The recommended books for migrant workers should cover primarily the following subject matters such as their rights and ways in exercising them, laws and legal readings, work safety, occupational hazards and their prevention, textbooks for various remedial skill-training courses, extra-curricular readings of grade schools and junior high schools, masterpieces of world literature, history, current events, and achiever-oriented motivating materials, etc.

In our society today, there are many unscrupulous business firms whose personnel policy is left much to be desired. They do not usually provide an employment contract to the employee at the hiring and they do not usually honor those contractual terms conscientiously even they do provide such an employment contract to their employees. Besides, among those signed contracts, there are often some invalid or unenforceable clauses contained in them, which effectively make these contracts meaningless. It is because of such terrible situation, books such as *A Compilation of Laws and Policies Concerning Migrant Workers* (Nongmingong Falü Fagui Zhengce Huibian), *One Hundred Questions and Answers about the Protection of Legal Rights of Migrant Workers* (Nongmingong Quanyi Baohu Zhishi Bai Wen), *Handbook of Legal Rights Protection of Rural Migrant Workers* (Nongmingong Quanyi Shouce) and so on are very useful to rural migrant workers. Furthermore many jobs that migrant workers handle contain potential occupational hazards. They usually work in an industrial environment full of poisonous chemical particles such as coal dusts, fiberglass shreds, noise pollutions, leads, benzene, and mercury, etc. Their degree of poisonous nature often exceeds the minimum standards set by the government by several times or even by tens and hundreds of times. Therefore,



books such as *Textbook of Training for Work Safety for Rural Migrant Workers* (Nongmingong Anquan Shengchan Peixun Jiaocai), *Handbook for the Prevention of Most Common Occupational Hazards* (Nongmingong Changjian Zhiye Bing Fangzhi Falü Shouce), *Questions and Answers for Treating Surgical Emergencies* (Changjian Waishang Yingji Chuli Wenda), etc. are very useful to the rural migrant workers. Other similar category of books such as *Fundamentals for Household Workers* (Jiazheng Fuwu Jineng Zhidao), *Car Repairing Handbook* (Qiche Xiuli Jiben Jishu), *Fundamentals for Landscapers and Interior Decorators* (Jianzhu Zhuangshi Zhuangxiu Gong), etc., even if to have these books classified and shelved by their call numbers will still result in having them placed in different book stacks scattered apart in a large book-stack housing area. If these books are otherwise placed in a “ready reference shelf” specially designated for the convenient use of rural migrant workers, they will become handy for readers to reach not only in an urgent and critical moment of need but also in meeting readers’ information need for gaining a wider exposure to books of such similar subjects in a concentrated location.

As for those recommended books to be placed on the shelves specially designated book shelves for rural migrant workers, a serious screening process for book selection should be established by public libraries. The criteria for such books selection are normally based on: 1) Their authoritativeness such as those books compiled and/or published by the Ministry of Labor and Social Security (e.g. *Handbook of Rights Protection for Rural Migrant Workers* (Nongmingong Quanyi Weihu Zhinan)); 2) their practical nature and usefulness (i.e. scholarly writings in such areas are many but not necessarily all aimed at the reading level of rural migrant workers and thus it is inappropriate to place such books on the selves of recommended books for rural migrant workers); 3) the timeliness and currency of such publications (i.e. especially for books about government laws, regulations, policies, etc., the more recent publications these materials are, the more usefulness they are); and 4) a special consideration of readers’ different reading ability (e.g. the reading need of rural migrant workers’ children, who usually accompany their parents to the library and depend upon their advice to borrow books, should also be taken into consideration in the Library’s policy for a variant book shelving practice for a special purpose such as this above mentioned scenario).

4.4 Promoting regularly scheduled educational and cultural activities of public libraries

Although the average education level of rural migrant workers in urban centers is on the whole higher than those remaining behind in the rural villages, most of them have never received any trade related training. Public libraries should take leadership



in developing the needed skill training programs for rural migrant workers free of charge. For example, the Public Library of Western District of Beijing, the Committee of the Communist Youth League of Western District of Beijing, and Microsoft Corporation, and PlaNet Finance France, collectively developed a Community Technology Learning Center to teach primarily young rural migrant workers subjects related to computer technology, law, psychology, etc. As by the end of September 2008, they have conducted 11 sessions and have successfully trained 1,480 students^[17].

In addition to train rural migrant workers information literacy skills, well-equipped public libraries should also vigorously promote and sponsor various cultural activities to attract the participation of rural migrant workers. For example, beginning for July 2003, the Shanxi Library has sponsored a free movie-viewing program during the summer months for rural migrant farmers. As of 2006, they have shown 310 times of feature movies and entertained over 40,000 rural migrant workers^[8]. Since 2005, Nanning Municipal Public Library has organized an annual arts and cultural festival, which consisted of public lectures, library exhibitions, knowledge quiz, constructing mobile library stations around work sites, movie showings, etc. Many of these activities were conducted at the work sites of rural migrant workers who enthusiastically participated in such activities^[18]. In April 2008, Dalian Municipal Library, worked with Dalian Charity Association and Dalian Cultural Bureau sponsored a composition contest for the children of rural migrant workers on the theme: Compassion motivates me to act; reading makes me to become mature. The 100 winning child contestants received all kinds of awards including a fee-waived library book borrowing card for each. That event had a dramatic motivating effect of knowledge-seeking for the young participants^[19]. The Nanxiang Township Library of Jiading District in Shanghai metropolis conducted a “one-day bamboo culture touring” theme-oriented event for the children of rural migrant workers on the Children’s Festival Day each and every year on June 1. It is through such activities as listening to the lectures on the bamboo culture, visiting Jiading Museum, sampling the famed steamed-dumplings of Nanxiang, touring the Guyi Garden, etc. to make these children experience the attractiveness of Jiading Township’s history and culture and also their fortunate life in a migrating land as well^[20]. In short, it can be said that under the circumstance of stringent public cultural resources and services in current urban centers, the undertakings of public libraries on behalf of rural migrant workers have special significance for social progress.

To sum up, the educational and cultural services that public library extended to rural migrant workers are not, as a matter of fact, charitable works, but rather an inherent professional duty to be fulfilled. Their sustained growth can not be independent of the support and patronage of these rural migrant workers. It is reported that when the construction of the new Provincial Library of Haina



completed at the end of 2005, on the wall adjacent to the right front entrance engraved a roster of 626 rural migrant workers' names^[21], who had participated in the construction of that library building. This episode gives indication that public libraries are appreciative for the blessings that they received. They have learned how to show their respect to those noble characters including those rural migrant workers. If our library community is to continue to express their sense of indebtedness equally to the underprivileged populace as they do to the more affluent ones, the best way for them to do is to reach out to them with a helping hand in rendering some customized and sorely needed educational and cultural service programs.

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