In search of service innovations by public libraries in Chinese urban centers: A case study of Dongguan Library

LI Donglai
Dongguan Library, Dongguan 523071, China

Abstract This article introduces several of the more significant service delivery innovations and their resulting accomplishments instigated by Dongguan Library (thereafter abbreviated as DGL) in recent years. The textual exposition of this paper is based on a case study of DGL by this author about its user-centered vision, mission, immediate objectives and the exhibited service performance within a contextual environment of collegial support from its professional peers. After a five-year period of intensive efforts on such focused professional development and practice, DGL has completed its information service mapping and information delivery for the entire municipality of Dongguan on a 7-day and twenty-four-hour (7/24) basis. This singular feast of accomplishment seems to suggest the moral that any significant development of scale of a municipal library has to be in keeping pace closely with the progress of the society at large in general and with the changing information demands of its local clientele in particular.

Keywords 7/24 library service, Self-service library, Cluster management of libraries, Library consortium management, Dongguan Library

1 Introduction

The new library building of Dongguan Library held a grand opening on September 28, 2005. It has an area of 44,654 m² which ranked at the top among all libraries in the second-tier municipalities of China in terms of its size. In the past few years since its opening, DGL, based on its user-centered philosophy and library formation technologies assisted modus operandi, has undertaken a series of service expansion projects with remarkable sound results. In 2007, DGL was awarded the Cultural Innovation Prize by the Ministry of Culture of China. In 2008, DGL was bestowed the International Innovation Award by the Chair of American Library Association. This article will make an in-depth study so as to draw lessons from the significance and implications of those remarkable achievements that DGL has made.

Correspondence should be addressed to Li Donglai (E-mail: dllist@gmail.com).
2 The background and strategy of DGL’s drive for service innovations

2.1 Background

2.1.1 A compelling demand of rapid urbanization

Situated in the center of the Zhu Jiang (also known as the Pearl River) delta, Dongguan is the commercial center connecting such major metropolises as Guangzhou (Canton), Shenzhen and Hong Kong. It covers an area of 2,465 m² and has a regular population of 6,949,800[1]. It is a microcosmic reflection of the fruition of China’s national policy of reform and opening-up of 1979. The population of Dongguan has increased from 1.1 million dramatically during the past thirty years and the city has transformed from a rural county to one of the most economic bustling cities in China. As such being the case, Dongguan is increasingly in high demand of a modern cultural establishment, such as a modern public library, in order to meet the growing needs of the reading and information needs of its residents. Concurrently, there was another grave social concern related to the ever growing inflows of large number of migrant workers. That was to raise the level of cultural bearings of these new urban dwellers. In 2002, Dongguan decided to build a new modern municipal library and also to have the project carried out with an underpinning objective of making itself a true city of libraries so as to advance concomitantly the professional stature of librarianship in Dongguan area.

2.1.2 The necessity for further development of DGL

For a long period of time, some of the traditional and fixed modus operandi of DGL has greatly compromised its service effectiveness and efficiency to meet the changing information needs of its reading clientele. Specifically, these included but not limited to the passivity in its service rendering, the targeted servicing clientele was of uniform social composition and the bibliographic support provided was superficial in nature[2]. In the mean time, it confronted with several insurmountable challenges such as

- The development of DGL was conspicuously behind that of the local economy and also behind servicing the information needs of the local residents, whose average share of monographic resources per person was only 0.25 volume of all the combined monographic collections of its 32 subsidiary township libraries in 2004. Moreover, this web of township libraries spread thinly in a large geographical area. This resulted in an extremely low rate of library service coverage;
- The low level of library service was reflected in its misconception about collection management as if it were about managing an aggregated clusters of
printed physical objects only rather than focusing on the more important business dimension of assisting their users to access pertinent intellectual contents located both on-site and off-site and storaged in both print and digital formats. And

- The funding for these subsidiary/branch libraries came directly from separate channels and was administered independently by these subsidiary/branch libraries themselves. Each library in Dongguan, large or small operated either autonomously or semi-autonomously vis-à-vis DGL administrative structure, which operated without having a meaningful mechanism for their coordinated operation of scale either vertically or horizontally.

2.2 The strategy for the development of DGL

Based on the revealed drawbacks of the current modus operandi, DGL concluded that it faced with four major changes and challenges in the society that it had to cope with. Accordingly, it mapped a strategy for library rejuvenation in the following way:

- Redesigning the interior and exterior appointments of the library building in accordance with the changing information needs of contemporary library users. For instance, the purpose of the library users has changed from the past of a sole need to seek knowledge in a self-directed way to the current pluralistic desires for seeking both knowledge and relaxation. Using the new library building construction as a hard to come by opportunity, DGL took this changed behaviors and yearnings of the library users into full account in designing the architectural layout of its library building. It strives to enhance the functionality of the library, as the best it can. Specifically, the new library was made to be more attractive and inviting to the users by enhancing its physical appearance such as its cleanliness, neatness, brightened lighting fixtures and a host of amenities for sitting, reading and relaxation, etc.

- Format multiplicity of library collections. In the past, libraries used to manage predominantly print resources such as books and periodicals but they now have to manage their collections increasingly in multifarious formats including not only those in traditional formats (i.e. handwritten, print, etc.), but also in digital formats (i.e. microform, online datum, CD-ROM, video, etc). DGL has made an organic amalgamation of their resources of varied formats into an integral unit as a base of functional support for the advancement of its various professional services including its collection development in a rational way.

- Readjusting the administrative structure of library resources management. Its modus operandi is being changed from a compartmentalized management
style, focused primarily on the physical format of the resources, into one that is based on the subject contents of these resources. The implications of such conceptual and operational changes were exemplified by its development of several repository collections of special subjects/themes.

- Service enhancement. It orchestrated a coordinated library operation of 46 subsidiary/branch libraries within the heretofore loosely structured library federation into a more centralized administrative hierarchy under the aegis of DGL in 2009. Such networked operation strengthened the overall library services significantly with a collective perspective and coordinated way. It was believed that the quality of library service would be raised concomitantly for the entire municipal library system.

Through the launching of these four creative measures mentioned above, DGL has also shifted its focus of operation from a book-centered one to that of a reader-centered one. In consonance with its shifted new philosophy of operation, DGL will continue to explore further potentially applicable new concepts and new methods of operation so as to cope adequately the ever changing information environment that it is in.

3 Specific measures for the implementation for DGL’s strategy of development

By taking into account of the above mentioned four measures for its strategic development, DGL strives to raise the level of its service capability and to fulfill the high callings of its professional missions by upholding steadfastly such work ethos as “library services are indispensable commodities, not optional ornaments to people” and “libraries are beneficial to all for who use them,” etc[3]. In all functional aspects, DGL adheres to a work guideline, which states that “quality service is the ultimate goal of the DGL and a selective use of applicable information technologies paves the road to the destination.”

3.1 Carrying out the user-centered library operation credo

The difference between a traditional library operation and that of a modern one is whether its modus operandi is based on a book-centered principle or a user-centered one[4]. DGL’s operation adheres to the user-centered principle by factoring the profile of its readers and their specific information needs into consideration for devising a unique custom-tailored information delivery service operation. Such practice will concomitantly maximize DGL’s service capacity further with its superior physical facilities and staff talents.
3.1.1 Creating several innovative service programs

- Installed 10 sectional theme libraries within the main library. These include a Cartoon Library, a Cantonese Opera Library, a Living-style Library, an IT Library and a Toy Library, etc. These subsidiary theme libraries have greatly enriched DGL’s service programs. For instance, activities such as cartoon movie viewing, lectures on cartoon creation, computer-assisted cartoon drawing, cartoon artistry exhibitions, etc., are developed and put into practice at the Cartoon Library on a regular basis. In the Cantonese Opera Library, people can find a special fine collection on this subject matter. They may also view videos and artifact displays, etc. related to this art form. Indeed, it provides a special platform and service for Cantonese opera lovers to congregate and to socialize. The Toy Library provides motivational and educational toys for children in order to enable them to learn through playing and to play through learning as well.
- Established a fixed service schedule with fixed timetable, traveling route and stop stations for DGL’s Bookmobiles to make daily routine rounds so as to deliver the needed library services conveniently to the patron readers in a large number of carefully selected neighborhoods.
- Took the initiative to provide timely information and documentary support upon receiving requests from the leading legislative bodies such as the local People’s Congress and the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Council.
- Publicized and promoted the use of the Library’s digital resources by sending liaison librarians to pay site visits to a few selected business corporations and organizations.
- Opened free language remedial classes of English and Cantonese to meet the practical needs of migrant workers whose learning desire and educational level are usually in sharp contrast. These innovative efforts give ample manifestations to the multifarious functions of a modern library today.

3.1.2 Creating a user-centered humane environment for learning and relaxation

For the convenience of library users, DGL aims to make the library a comfortable, convenient and mind-satisfying place. In its interior layout scheme, it took the following operational aspects fully into consideration. They include but not limited to such elements as collection storage, book borrowing, reading, and information searching. In addition, the pyramid pattern of the traffic flow of people from the most to the least congested areas, the appropriate use of high and low book stacks
and the appointment of modern equipment and amenities including lounge chairs and cocktail tables that should spread the entire strategic areas of the library aesthetically and functionally, are all have been figured into making these floor planning. This floor plan scheme followed DGL’s commitment to create a convenient reading environment that “readers are surrounded by books and books are nearby the readers.” In terms of interior decorations, a socio-cultural ambience congenial to learning is enhanced by different types of paintings hung on the library walls and a plenty supply of live botanical plants of varieties are strategically placed on each and every floor of the library.

3.1.3 Unprecedented new thrilling library experience gained from the detailed and caring service arrangement of the library

In order to make library users to gain a new thrilling experience of comfort and satisfaction about DGL as their hosting library, it paid a great of attention about its servicing details from the standpoint of view of humane caring and practicality. For instance, in designing the attached writing board mounted on the chair arms in the conference hall, writing boards on both the left and right hand sides were mounted for the convenience of either hand users. Furthermore, both of these mounted writing boards could be pulled up at the same time for writing and/or for operating a personal computer (PC). This thoughtfulness met great praise from the library users. The library also installed boxes for readers to return their dead batteries. This measure had not only provided the convenience for the readers but also raised the level of the reading public’s awareness about the necessity for environmental protection. It also entered into a legal-binding agreement with a local Zhen Gongfu Restaurant (a member eatery of a fast-food chain restaurant of national brand) to allow its library holders to enjoy discounts on certain designated items. The library also tried in a subtle way to foster the civility of its users by providing several nice amenities such as placing a dispenser of umbrella covers at the front door of the library in the raining days for incoming visitors to use and also by placing some necessary reminding note-cards on the reading desks about the use of various library services, etc.

3.2 Enhancing library services with cutting-edge information technologies

The development of information technologies has opened up whole vistas for library resource production, acquisitions, storage, information retrieval and distribution. Accordingly, DGL has applied these high technologies in enlarging its service capacity, in devising more efficient and effective methods for its service delivery
In search of service innovations by public libraries in Chinese urban centers: A case study of Dongguan Library and in insuring a quality standard in its service renderings. In fact, its services have transcended beyond both the temporal and spatial restraints and to have reached practically to the private computer desks at a large amount of common households[5].

3.2.1 Coordinated library management covering all public libraries in Dongguan City through the structuring of a library consortium

Under the aegis of DGL, a library consortium consisting of all public libraries in Dongguan was established in 2006 for the collective development of DGL Consortium as a whole. Its specific mission was to implement Dongguan government’s library development strategy of making Dongguan “a city of libraries.” DGL would exert its leadership in forging a coordinated service rendering structure by joining force in a coordinated modus operandi of all its branch libraries of various sizes and shapes at various neighborhoods heretofore administered and operated by each of them semi-autonomously.

The DGL Consortium strives to fulfill its mission and discharge its responsibilities in two strategic areas: namely, the technical area and the administration area. It is believed that substantial savings and enhanced service effectiveness will result from each and from both of these areas. In the technical area, DGL Consortium successfully developed an integrated library automation system named “Interlib” to serve as a platform for the coordinated operation among the entire membership of the Consortium. Interlib was officially approved for operation by Ministry of Culture in May 2005. Thus, a centralized administration for distributed cataloging and resources-sharing was made a reality through such a single unified platform. In the area of a new centralized administrative operation, DGL, based on its superior strength in material and personnel resources, promoted through the authority of DGL Consortium a coordinated scheme of library service delivery to cover all of its constituencies in the city. It was hoped that a concomitant positive result would emerge in association with this collective development of all member libraries as a whole yet would still be able to retain the unique features of each of these member libraries (Fig. 1).

By delegating certain segments of library operation and management authority to a library consortium for the overall library development in a region in a cluster way, such as that practiced in Dongguan city, has attracted great professional interest and positive comments from a large number of libraries outside of Dongguan Library Consortium jurisdiction. Currently, there are more than 1,200 public libraries nationwide that have formed various kinds of library consortia for centralized library management coordination patterned after DGL Consortium. These libraries
have enthusiastically adopted Interlib as their backbone technological support of operation.

3.2.2 Library business hours extended to 24/7

Since the beginning of its grand opening days in September 2005, DGL, in implementing its operational philosophy of making its collection resources and reading facilities readily available to all users with equal and convenient access, it actually pioneered a nation’s first library practice in the following experimentation. DGL established a new subsidiary library within the confine of its new library building with a user self-assisted modus operandi in providing services for book circulation and reading needs on the premise of this special library after the main library is closed for business. This user self-service library currently has a book collection of 10,000 volumes and an automated book circulation machine (checking books out and in). According to a statistical report for the first half year of 2008 (January to June 2008), this user self-service library had a book circulation record of 35,496 volumes, representing 3.9% of the total number of book circulation of...
In search of service innovations by public libraries in Chinese urban centers: A case study of Dongguan Library

900,000 volumes at DGL during the same time period. This user self-service library obviously brought tremendous convenience to its users and made the library accessible “anytime of the year, the day and the hour.” President of ALA Loriene Roy exclaimed in admiration about DGL’s modus operandi by pointing out that DGL is a “Never-Closed-Library”.

In December 2007, DGL Consortium installed a reader self-assisted electronic book loaning station, which had a function similar to a bank’s ATM, and could handle book borrowing/returning transactions and also such related functions as automatic and instant book retrieving and re-shelving in accordance with the command of a patron user. This was the nation’s first creation of such a novelty. This mobile book loaning station had a book storage capacity of 500–1,000 volumes. As of 2008, DGL had placed five such mobile book loaning stations in different strategic locals of the city such as one being placed at a residential community, another one at a hospital, a third one at a commercial center, etc. These book loaning stations further augmented the service role and professional image of DGL and the library consortium.

3.2.3 Enriching the library’s modus operandi to facilitate distant learning at home

With the rapid development of information technologies, the Internet has increasingly become an indispensable instrument in knowledge seeking. DGL, by taking advantage of its competitive edge in this area, expanded its services both in scope and in innovative measures. It made an exploratory study on the feasibility of creating a platform, under the Web 2.0 environment, whereby a seamless connection between the public library and individual home sites for self-directed learning purposes. As a result, DGL established a website for such self-directed learning called the Learning Network for Dongguan Residents. More than 2,000 courses are being offered at this website now. People can study their subjects of interest comfortably at home and thus make the societal calling of learning for life a realistic proposition. During the same period, DGL also offered special remedial lectures 280 times. These lectures drew an accumulated number of audience of 12,000 people. Moreover, DGL established a website to facilitate the online development and management of individual private library collections including digital resources in a professional way. It is believed that this particular endeavor will bring about a heightened interest in exchanging bibliographic information and in taking up literature reading among the reading public in the society. In giving support to these Web-based undertakings, DGL also submitted two grant proposals to Ministry of Culture which it received approving recognitions and funding support for both.
These two proposals were: 1) “A proposal for the establishment and implementation of a feasible platform under the Web-based information service environment for the purpose of self-directed leaning by the reading public” and 2) “On the development and management of a digital library at private homes and their related issues of resources sharing under the Web-based information service environment.”

4 Accomplishments of innovative undertakings

Owing to the development of several innovative service measures as mentioned above, DGL is able to put into better use of its many passive resources including its physical facilities.

4.1 The great transformation of DGL

Since 2003, DGL has evolved from originally a library consisting of a monographic collection of 400,000 volumes, a work team of 60 staff and a traditional modus operandi service delivery focused primarily on book circulation into that of a modern metropolitan library today (Table 1). It now consists of a print collection of 1,200,000 volumes, a digital collection of 30 TB, a staff of 120 personnel and a record of annual reception of more than 2,000 library visitors. As of June 2009, Dongguan city has developed a main library, 46 branch libraries and 102 bookmobile stations networked under the aegis of DGL Consortium. The combined services of these libraries cover an area of 2,400 m². It has made the idea of “having a library card obtained at any member library of DGL Consortium will be honored by all for book borrowing and returning” a reality. This achievement brought DGL an Innovation Award from Ministry of Culture at its second such award-giving ceremonial event. This award was in recognition of the professional excellence of DGL Consortium’s innovative modus operandi for coordinated and collective library development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Size of library building /m²</th>
<th>Print collection / Volume (∗10⁴)</th>
<th>Digital resources /TB</th>
<th>Personnel</th>
<th>Educational level (bachelor and above) (%)</th>
<th>Service counters (Unit)</th>
<th>Library visitors (∗10⁴)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>9,000</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>28.30</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>44,654</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>66.90</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 An advancement for the profile of librarianship as whole in Dongguan

Library users’ registration has also increased dramatically on a yearly basis. This phenomenon can be attributed largely to the DGL’s policy that a library card issued
In search of service innovations by public libraries in Chinese urban centers: A case study of Dongguan Library

by any consortium member library will be honored in the same way by all member libraries within this library consortium. For instance, the library card holder can read, search and view information from all available print and electronic resources, checking out books, etc. at any Consortium member library. Statistically speaking, the main and branch libraries of DGL received 2,300,000 visitors in 2007, which was a 69% increase in percentage over 2005 (Fig. 2). Its library card holders increased almost in geometric proportion from about 30,000 people in 2003 to 920,000 in 2006 and then to 1,100,000 and over in 2007 (Fig. 3).

This sustained growth of library users year after year are most encouraging and noticeable especially when taking into consideration the volume surge of library card holders in some of those more remote or smaller branch libraries. For instance, after Changping Branch Library had joined DGL Consortium in 2004, its library card holders increased from 579 people to 1,950 people in 2007, representing a percentage increase of 336% (Fig. 4). Its book circulation also showed an increase.
from 6,628 volumes/transactions in 2004 to 66,537 volumes/transactions in 2007, representing an increase of ten-fold (Fig. 5). One other Shijie Branch Library also had its library card holders increased from 347 people to 1,037 people, representing a percentage increase of 347 % (Fig. 4). Its book circulation increased from 2,050 volumes/transactions in 2004 to 37,329 volumes/transactions in 2007, representing an increase of eighteen-fold (Fig. 5).

4.3 Economic benefits stemming from the centralized management of libraries through DGL Consortium

Any individual library, if its management/operation is in close association with a library consortium, can result not only in its management efficiency and effectiveness
In search of service innovations by public libraries in Chinese urban centers: A case study of Dongguan Library

but also in great savings derived from such expenditure areas as hardware, software, collection development, personnel retention policy and the regular library maintenance cost, etc. For instance, we may take a closer look at the savings that have actually resulted from those 26 subsidiary libraries of DGL after they have become *bona fide* member libraries of DGL Consortium in 2006 as a concrete case on mind. If these 26 libraries had not yielded their management to the Consortium, it would have cost them an aggregated amount of 7,829,000 Yuan (including the one-time initial lump sum investment of 4,280,000 Yuan and the first year operation cost of 3,549,000 Yuan) to run their libraries singularly and separately from the Consortium affiliation in order to get a comparable result in the same time frame.

In comparison, it cost the Consortium only 2,244,000 Yuan (including the one-time initial lump sum investment of 1,040,000 Yuan and the first year operation cost of 1,204,000 Yuan) to do the same job for all member libraries in the Consortium as a whole (Tables 2 and 3). The savings that these 26 member libraries derived from

**Table 2** A comparison of the cost of one-time lump sum initial investment to start a library operation between DGL Consortium and a singular library in 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Budgeting of one-time lump sum initial investment</th>
<th>Centralized consortium management</th>
<th>Decentralized library management by a branch library</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Main library /Yuan (×10^8)</td>
<td>Branch library /Yuan (×10^8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For hardware equipment</td>
<td>39 /0</td>
<td>31 /5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For software usage of system for library operation</td>
<td>65 /0</td>
<td>30 /4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For union cataloging</td>
<td>0 /0</td>
<td>32 /0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Inter-lib. loan</td>
<td>0 /0</td>
<td>3 /3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>104 /0</td>
<td>96 /–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>104 (×10^8)</td>
<td>96 (×10^8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>104 (×10^8)</td>
<td>96 (×10^8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3** A comparison of an operating budget between DGL Consortia and a branch library

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Budgeting of operational expenditure</th>
<th>Centralized consortium management</th>
<th>Decentralized management by a singular branch library</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Main library /Yuan (×10^8)</td>
<td>Branch library /Yuan (×10^8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For digital resources</td>
<td>100 /0</td>
<td>100 /10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For technicians</td>
<td>10 /0</td>
<td>10 /2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For routine maintenance</td>
<td>10.4 /0</td>
<td>9.6 /1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>120.4 /0</td>
<td>119.6 /–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>120.4 (×10^8)</td>
<td>119.6 (×10^8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the centralized library management and operation of the DGL Consortium in percentage term amounted to 2.5 fold.

5 Conclusive remarks

5.1 A reader-centered conceptual orientation for library service innovations

The value of libraries relies on these libraries’ ability to satisfy the information needs of the reading public. The changing information environment including but not limited to information users’ changing behavior is one of the important sources of motivation for libraries of all types and sizes to delve themselves deeply into making service delivery innovations responsively[6]. In modern times, the rapid advancement of information technologies including the Internet has changed the way and the scale about how we produce, storage and access information. Readers nowadays are increasingly veering toward an alternative route for information-seeking, such as veering toward commercial digitized information vendors and free online information providers rather than keeping up a sustained habit in meeting their information needs at a local traditional library. Accordingly, DGL took up the task to study how libraries should cope and take advantage of these emerging high profile issues of considerable professional interest. The focal point of their study was concentrated on a careful analysis of the profile and the information seeking behavior of their readers in a society under great transformation. After a period of systematic and dedicated study and analysis of its own work environment vis-à-vis its missions and resources, DGL developed a host of new ideas and new service measures to meet the new and changing expectations of its reading clientele. Its new operational strategy is evidenced by such inviting slogans as “let more people enjoy coming to the library” and “take a good look at your new library; take a seat and a book to read and to relax at your new library,” etc. It was recognized that the needs of the reading public is the library’s dynamic source of motivation for the fulfillment of its missions through rendering quality service.

5.2 Technicality-focused approaches in support of library service innovations

Library development along with the enhancement of its various services is closely linked to the application of pertinent information technologies in a timely manner. However, in library practice, we have to be mindful about some of the technical aspects of our approaches involved in order to give support and assurance of success to our endeavors. For instance, in the process in developing the reader self-service
In search of service innovations by public libraries in Chinese urban centers: A case study of Dongguan Library

library, we realized the importance to highlight and manifest such essential following principles as “assigning supremacy of readers’ needs”, “differentiating the different needs of readers”, “giving serious considerations to cost-effectiveness”, and “sustaining the legacy of library service innovations”. As such being the case, we, first of all, made the reader self-assisted library open for service on a 7/24 basis. This policy gives ample manifestation to our principle of reader supremacy. Secondly, as readership is thinning out substantially after the main library is closed for business, we assigned the location of this particular library to a secluded area of the main library building where it can operate separately and independently with a reasonable amount of support of reference resources, equipment, appliances, electric wiring as well as a separate entrance for its own use. This carefully considered arrangement evidenced our principle of making readers’ needs met differentially. Thirdly, since there is no need to staff the reader self-service library, the cost for staffing would be basically eliminated. This modus operandi gives evidence to our principle of running the library in a cost-effective way. Last but not least, many new technologies are applied for the operation of this library including the automated circulation system, the electronic monitoring system at the front entrance; the Interclub for information retrieval, etc., which altogether transmits a notion of Dongguan Library’s legacy in terms of giving resolute support to sustained library innovations.

5.3 An emphasis of the importance of interactions between public libraries and the society

The interactions between public libraries and the society are primarily through the instigation of some social movements such as calling the reading public in the nation to celebrate the “Library Day,” to promote a movement of reading for all citizens, and to advocating the important socio-cultural role of libraries to the society through legislations, etc. Such endeavors will undoubtedly raise librarianship to a higher profile in the society. Such social interactions with the society are critically important for libraries’ own sustainable development. In consonance with this perception, DGL took reading as a catalyst to instigate a socio-cultural movement in Dongguan in the last few years. As we know, the value/benefit of reading has been embedded deeply on the mind of Chinese people for hundreds of years (e.g. “books contain not only golden houses but also beauties of jade-like”). However, the methods and mechanics of reading are changing in a profound way in recent years. Machine-supported reading methods such as online reading, video reading, CD-ROM reading, etc., have come into being in the reading arena. These new reading device presents a real challenge to the simplistic traditional way of reading in print format. The capacity of these new reading devices for information storage
and retrieval is enormous. They can interact with readers instantly and make both textual and graphic displays simultaneously for reading [7]. In view of this developing trend in reading, DGL has been hosting an annual “Reading Day” event for Dongguan residents each year during the past five years since 2005. By the end of 2009, DGL has held five times of such events. The aggregated activities surrounded this event that they sponsored during the past five years were over 2,000 items. More than 15 million people have participated in these activities related to reading celebration. Such events nourished a new wide-spread cultural ambiance of reading for Dongguan city. In addition to these undertakings, DGL also devised other innovative measures to stimulate the residents’ interest in reading. These included its establishment of a cellular phone library, a new program of “library service reaching-out”, etc. Based on its professionalism, authoritativeness and unique rich resources, DGL has established a high profile for its leadership in fostering reading activities in Dongguan.

Library service innovations in modern times are only a process of field testing and experimentations. Nothing is definite and unchanging. This is the situation that libraries are facing today. They continue to search new meanings and justifications of their own existence and along with them, new possibilities for fulfilling their missions through a concomitant and responsive self-development and/or continuous self-rejuvenation. As such, we may gather that this is the true value and charm of the library profession.

References


(Copy editor: Ms. Jing CAO; Language revision: Prof. Charles C. YEN)