Toward Digitization and Increasingly Diverse Collections and Services: Strategy and Experiences of the Shanghai Library

面向數位化及日益多樣化的館藏建設與服務：上海圖書館的經驗與策略

張奇
上海圖書館文獻提供中心副主任
Zhang Qi
Deputy Director of Document Supply Center, Shanghai Library
E-mail: qzhang@libnet.sh.cn

INTRODUCTION

As an indispensable part of society, libraries are experiencing the changes, enjoying the progress, and hoping to benefit from the promises of digitalization. With consolidation of collections from many local libraries, The Shanghai Library must continue to provide traditional services and explore and implement appropriate development opportunities offered by 21st century technology.

The Shanghai Library is the second largest library in China, with a total collection of 50.95 million titles. Since its establishment in 1952, the Library has grown rapidly through some historic mergers. In 1958 the city government combined four municipal libraries (Municipal Historical Document Library, Municipal Periodicals Library, Municipal Science and Technology Library, and the Shanghai Library) with some other collections including the Bibliotheca Xujiahui and SMC (Shanghai Municipal Council) Library. In 1995, the Institute of Scientific and Technical Information of Shanghai (known as ISTIS), one of the country’s leading information institutions, was merged with the Shanghai Library, resulting in the first combination of a library and an information institution in the country. This was an epoch-making event in Chinese librarianship. The merger between library and information institute has provided a significant opportunity for the Shanghai Library to redefine itself as a center of information resources, an information clearinghouse, a knowledge repository, a school of life-long literacy, and a meeting place for recreation.

STRATEGY

Information technology and digitization are now critical elements in the survival of both libraries and human beings and they are the context for modern social development. In this environment, the libraries must adapt in order to survive. Adaptation is not only required by the environment but also by the demands of the users whom the libraries serve and by the libraries’ own mission.

The present situation in the library is
characterized by the coexistence of diverse types of resources and swift increases in the volume of digital resources. In view of this, the management of the Shanghai Library realized that policies, procedures, and services must be transformed. The collection development policy, the workflow, the management pattern, and the service methods, which had matured in an environment focused on print resources, must adapt to an environment focused on the coexistence of various kinds of media resources, especially digital resources. In 2001 the Library proposed “developing a borderless, hybrid library” as its development strategy.

Experiences

Under the framework of “the boundless, hybrid library,” the Shanghai Library has developed a 3-I policy [1]: Innovation, Integration, and Inter-library collaboration. And, the library has made some progress in building a new resource model, service model, and management model.

Resource Model

New goal

The Shanghai Library recognizes that in order to serve the varied information needs of its users, a hybrid collection should be developed. The library collection development policy is based on continuing acquisitions in all traditional formats for its collection in print and its special collection while, vigorously promoting digital resource purchases and subscriptions, especially commercially available electronic resources. With this foundation, the Library has formed a new collection development policy in which the relationship between the print resources and the digital resources is mutually interdependent, complementary, and conducive to coordinative growth.

New idea

To establish a world-class metropolitan library with the trend of rapidly increasing demand for digital resources in mind, the Shanghai Library has adopted broadly defined concepts of “access rights,” “ownership,” and the idea of “holdings.” First, the main principle is that with print materials great emphasis is placed on “ownership” and with digital resources the emphasis is placed on “access rights.” However, the Library pays attention to “ownership” in Chinese digital resources and “access rights” in foreign language digital resources. Second, the Library has expanded the concept of library “holdings” from the service point of view, to include holdings of the library’s actual collections, the actual collections of other libraries in world that are accessible to its users, as well as virtual collections.

New measure

According to the Electronic Resources Acquisition and Service Report in 2001, the Library has taken concrete measures to purchase and subscribe to commercially available electronic resources in accordance with the priorities below: 1) With respect to languages, Chinese digital resources are given priority in purchases and subscriptions. 2) With respect to document types, e-journals are given priority in purchases and subscriptions. 3) With respect to data types, full text digital resources are given priority in purchases and subscriptions. 4) With respect to discipline contents, multidisciplinary digital resources are given priority in purchases and subscriptions while we continue to strengthen the specialty of each subject collection such as that of business and management, chemistry, or engineering and technology, etc.. 5) With respect to media types, remote e-resources are given priority in purchases and subscriptions and stand-alone CD-ROM resources will gradually be replaced by network-based CD-ROM resources or remote e-resources.

New method

The selection of digital resources is regarded by the Shanghai Library as the most significant part of the process; this is mainly embodied in the two aspects of trial and evaluation. During the trial, the Library emphasizes usage statistics and feedback from the trial. During evaluation and assessment of the digital resources, the Library places great emphasis on “three comparisons”: comparison between the digital resource being considered and the same or similar title in print,
comparison between the digital resource being considered and the same or similar title of other digital resources already purchased, comparison between the digital resource being considered and the same or similar title of other digital resources that have not been purchased. Simultaneously, the Library actively participates in nationwide consortia purchasing, and actively promotes regional consortia purchasing.

Management Model

Digital resources and print resources have vastly different characteristics. Along with the establishment of the goal of a hybrid collection, the Shanghai Library has reengineered library processes in purchasing digital resources and adopted a new management model more suited to the features of digital resources.

Multi-Department Collaboration

The new organization has three departments—Acquisition and Cataloging Center; Service Department, including such as the Readers Service Center and the Document Supply Center; and the General Management Department. All three departments work together in selecting and purchasing digital resources. The Service Department and the Acquisition and Cataloging Center are mainly responsible for evaluating and assessing the use of digital resources and submitting the digital resources purchase suggestions to the General Management Department. The Service Department is also in charge of resource life cycle management. The General Management Department is in charge of examination and approval of purchase suggestions.

Resource Life Cycle Management

In establishing the new digital resources management flow, the Library has practiced digital resources life cycle management from trial, selection, purchasing, to licensing, web presentation, user support, and ongoing evaluating and preservation. Changes in the scope of digital resources, usage statistics and feedback, and vendors’ support services are all regarded as key criteria in deciding whether to renew the digital resource subscription.

Service Model

With the increase in the number of digital resources, the Library has the capacity for providing the public with simultaneous, quick-access, and 24 hour digital information services whenever and wherever possible.

“One place” service

The Library’s Newspaper Reading Room is an example of “one place” service, which provides easy access to the different forms of the same subject in one reading room. The room displays about 1,000 titles of current Chinese newspapers. To integrate all the sources of news, and also to overcome the space problem, the Library has changed its Newspaper Room to a Multimedia News Room, putting all the newspapers in printed or electronic form in one room. Now readers can search the electronic newspapers on the net or on CD-ROM through 10 desktop computers, watch TV with earphones, and read the printed papers, all in one place [2]. Most of the reading rooms in the Library now provide “one place” service.

“One card” service

In 2001, the Library started a “one card” circulation system for the 20 public libraries in the city of Shanghai. The Shanghai Library has been developing a Central Library System since 2001, trying to unite all the local public libraries and to share resources with all the university and research libraries. It is so successful that the first goal of “one card” system in the 20 district or county libraries has been realized. Books can be borrowed and returned in any member library by using the same card. Readers can enjoy the same public library service in both the urban areas and in the counties. [1] Now “one card” service is available in local public libraries, which includes 23 district/county libraries and 45 community/township public libraries.

“One interface” service

Electronic resources navigation, which provides the public access to various digital resources of the Shanghai Library, is the most
common “one interface” service. Document supply is one of the distinctive “one interface” services, integrating all kinds of service methods, such as fax, telephone, e-mail, MSN, mobile phone short message, and website access, into one interface for the convenience of users. Another distinctive “one interface” service is the Shanghai Library mobile phone short message service which provides lecture booking, virtual reference, and document supply application via cell phone. In addition, the self-help service for Chinese full-text journals is very effective. On this platform users can quickly receive documents electronically after searching the index of Chinese journals, applying for document delivery, and completing their payment online.

CONCLUSION

In the past five years, the Shanghai Library has made progress in building a borderless, hybrid library. Digital resources have increased from 86 titles in 2001 to 164 titles in 2007. Various kinds of services have emerged because of new demands. After completing the Chinese Rare Books Digitization Project, the Library has started several collection digitization projects such as the Chinese Genealogy Digitization Project, the Min Guo Books Digitization Project, and the Shanghai Memory Project. Shanghai Memory Project is the most special one among them because it is the first attempt to focus on value-added processing rather than digitization itself.

The 21st century is full of energy and challenge. For libraries, paying more attention to change management as well as innovation is essential. The Shanghai Library, through greater cooperation, is working diligently to follow the lead of more advanced libraries, and to strive for the establishment of a world-class metropolitan library.

NOTE


[2] Ibid., 311

[3] Ibid.

REFERENCES

Shanghai Library Site [online]. Available at http://www.library.sh.cn/english/ (accessed on June 15, 2007)
