

Tongwei County Library: Practices of Social Cooperation in Grassroots Libraries in Western China

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ABSTRACT

Through the cooperation with the Evergreen Education Foundation in the United States, the Tongwei rural library network has been set up and a cooperation service alliance between a public library and school libraries has been built; using project funding by Evergreen, it reached out to the local communities, and meanwhile, it carried out small projects to enhance its service capacity. Through participation in the Evergreen-sponsored international conferences, training, and projects, librarians have improved their service capabilities and sharpened their awareness of library services. Based on the local cultural characteristics and user needs, and funded by a grant from Hangzhou Library Foundation, Tongwei County Library has established a reading room as a space where people can read calligraphy and painting materials. In addition, it carried out special collections services, shot the documentary film “Autumn Story,” and held “Tongwei impression.” It is the first county library to achieve management automation, and the national-level library in the fifth national public library assessment.

KEYWORDS

American Evergreen Education Foundation, Hangzhou Library Foundation, Social Cooperation, Tongwei County Library

INTRODUCTION

Tongwei is located in central Gansu, China, with a total area of 2,908.5 square kilometers, administrating 18 towns, 332 villages, and 10 communities, with a total population of 405,100 (*Tongwei County Editorial Committee, 1990*). Located in the hilly and gully region of the Loess Plateau, Tongwei County’s arable land amounted to 183 million mu. It is 1,410-2,521 meters above sea level, with the average annual temperature of 7.5 °C, and the annual rainfall of about 380 mm. With gully slopes in its territory, it suffered from serious soil erosion, frequent natural disasters, and mainly droughts. Its production and living conditions are backward, which means its urban and rural residents per capita disposable income was 18,078 yuan and 5,289 yuan, respectively, in 2016, and it is a national poverty-stricken county.

Tongwei has a long history and splendid culture. Since it was set up as a county in Han Dynasty (Year 114 BC), there has been more than 2100 years of history. The ancient ruins and pottery found in the territory belong to “Yangshao” and “Qijia” culture. Tongwei is famous for “the hometown of Chinese painting and calligraphy art,” “the hometown of Chinese folk art,” “national advanced

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sports county,” “national advanced grain production county,” and the Bangluozhen conference venue is listed in the “100 red tourism¹ classic scenic area.”

Tongwei County Library has a long history. According to the “Tongwei County” yearbook, its origin can be traced back as early as the Ming and Qing Dynasties. In 1950, when the cultural center was established, there was a library set up in the center. The library was formally established in November 1979, and it was moved into its new building in July 2006. It was rated as the national-level library in the fifth national public library assessment in 2013. The Library has collected more than 130,000 volumes of publications of various types, including 17,500 electronic books, and more than 8,000 ancient books; digital resources amount to 6TB. There are 16 workers in the center, including three with vice senior professional titles, and five with intermediate titles. Its books are borrowed up to 110,000 times on average annually. It has won such honorary titles as “municipal model unit,” “advanced unit in ideological and moral cultivation for teenagers,” “advanced support center of Gansu Province’s cultural information resources sharing project,” and “advanced unit of Gansu Province public electronic reading room construction.”

Figure 1. Location of Tongwei County Library in China



In the fifth national public library assessment in 2013, of the 98 public libraries in Gansu Province, only 11 were rated at the first level and 12 at the second level (*Ministry of Culture, 2013*). The Tongwei County Library achieved such results mainly due to years of its social cooperation practice.

OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL COOPERATION IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Library social cooperation is a relatively general concept, which means, in the narrow sense: the various forms of cooperation and co-construction between a library and other social institutions and

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