

## Chapter 5

# The Practice of Outreach Services in Chinese Special Libraries

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Outreach services are defined as those based on traditional library services. Libraries utilize resources, improve social education, expand service range, and enrich service content and methods, not only providing the public with diverse and customized services, but also deepening the scope and depth of outreach services. Library outreach services refers to the extension of service ideas, content, space, time, object, and range. Different libraries have distinct meanings and forms of outreach services. Based on the example of the documentation and information system in the Chinese Academy of Science (CAS), this chapter briefly states how Chinese research-oriented libraries implement outreach services for various levels of needs in different user groups through persistent innovation. This will provide meaningful guidance and implications for future research on the outreach service practices of special libraries.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Special libraries are libraries established by associations, government departments, congress, research institutions, the academic society, museums, commercial corporations, industrial enterprises, and chambers of commerce. Their missions, which relate closely to scientific research, production, and other areas of their organizations, include collecting, classifying, maintaining, and offering domestic and foreign literature of science and technology. To provide safeguard service on scientific and technical literature for scientific research and production in the same system and place, libraries participate in professional exchange activities, keep track of conditions and tendencies of technological development in this area, serve as consultants to help with the creation of scientific policies and professional development plans,

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organize activities with scientific and technological information, coordinate and translate publications for the system, disseminate the latest scientific theories and technology, and coordinate document delivery services.

In China, special libraries is a complex field, which is not only varied in terms of industries and systems, but also in research institutions, systems of government, institutional organizations, and non-governmental organizations. Longitudinally speaking, each system has its own information network system, which is equipped with a central library for coordinating the relationship between operation services of the library and its information and academic activities (Zhang, 2012). Their main characteristics are: 1) primary users who are staff members of the parent institution; 2) resources which mainly serve the development of the parent institutions; and 3) powerful services that primarily include research and consultation. They are referred to for answering simple questions, providing bibliographic search and notification services, delivering current periodicals, offering new book notifications, providing abstracts and content on relevant topics, organizing the information around constant themes, and monitoring bulletins of specific research fields. Finally, the librarians have a broad horizon of both specialized knowledge in libraries and professional knowledge of their fields. For example, the Document and Information Center of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS), including Lanzhou, Chengdu, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the Institute of Agricultural Information of CAAS, the Institute of Medical Information & Library, and the National Geological Library of China (Meng, 1992) all belong to the system of Library Cooperation Network and play a guiding role in promoting the development of Chinese special libraries. This chapter discusses the practice of outreach service under a new research paradigm.

## **OUTREACH SERVICES IN LIBRARIES**

The origin of outreach services in the library can be traced back to the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Various libraries were breaking through traditional boundaries as well as expanding new services in content and form. The American Library Service Act was published in 1956 in the United States, promoting the service of public libraries in the nation's rural areas. Therefore, outreach services were on the cutting edge of practice (Fry et al., 1975). In the 1960s, American scholars Westbrook and Waldman defined outreach services as a whole of library service except reference and consultations which are the main parts of libraries. (Boff et al., 2006). In 1993, they redefined this term as all of the services provided outside of libraries. According to confirmed stipulation from ALA and OLOS, the mission of this organization is to care for vulnerable groups who can't enjoy regular services, including illiterate and disabled individuals, people who live in rural areas, people with low incomes, and groups discriminated against due to race, language, age, and sexual orientation (American Library Association, 2012).

In the early 1990s, outreach services became prevalent in the service industry as a conception with common sense. The term of outreach service refers to providing prominent service or extra service based on the core and support of service, which aims at promoting the value and the quality of service. In 2007, the library industry gradually focused more on outreach services. Chinese scholars Wu Hanhua and Li Guo described outreach service in libraries. Wu pointed out that outreach service enlarges the scope of the basic service, which overlaps with the services of individualized orientation, innovation, self-help, and characteristics. Utilizing coordinates in time, space, and content, referred to as three-dimensional service, can depict its boundary. Foremost, the vague conception of outreach service resulted in its having

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