

COMMUNITY LIBRARIES : THE UNBARRIERED

COMMUNICATION OF SCIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Without government financial support, the first private library named the “Scientific Education Library” achieved sustainable development. In order to provide more libraries for the public in communities within cities and to advance public understanding of science, the “Scientific Education Library” has spread member-libraries all over the country and holds all kinds of activities for the communication of science in these libraries. Now the public in the community in which the “Scientific Education Library” is located has the opportunity to go to the library whenever they want and to take part in the activities of science communication usually which helps them to understand science more deeply. The library has probed a way of developing by the private library itself without the government’s financial support and has explored the successful model of science communication in local areas of the city.

KEY WORDS : Community convenience private take part in

INTRODUCTION

A recent survey conducted by the China Association for Science and Technology (The Survey Report of Scientific Literacy of the Public of China in the year 2003), shows that one third (28.7%) of the Chinese respondents said they went to the library once or twice in the past year and a majority of them said that there are no libraries or public reading rooms available in their residential areas. In western countries, the service radius of a library is 1.5 - 3 kilometers and in some countries there will be a library located within one to twenty minutes walking distance.[1] There are 5183 public libraries in Britain. That means a thousand inhabitants have access to one library on the average. It is the same as other English speaking countries such as Canada. In German 6,600 people have access to one library and 5000 people in Finland, and 4000 people in Austria.[2] Compared with these developed countries, the libraries in China are very backward. There were 2708 state owned libraries at the end of 2003, which means 4,600,000 people have access to one library. According to the report of the *Guangming*

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Daily, there are 57 libraries spending less than ten thousand yuan to buy new books, which is only enough to afford newspapers and periodicals and 39 libraries haven't bought even one book for many years.[3] These libraries are far from meeting the needs of the public. Especially, some libraries only have symbolic buildings in the city and don't provide books for readers. Some libraries were only open to the reader who has certain academic titles or professional degrees. Some libraries were located in the center of the city, which cause transportation difficulties for citizens who live far from there. Some libraries are not funded enough so that the books of the library are not available to the public. Obviously, there are many barriers between the library and the public. As is known to all, libraries, which are the information center of a community, play a major role in science communication. But in our country the state owned libraries are not satisfactory in meeting the needs of the Chinese citizens.

In this circumstance, the first private library named the Scientific Education Library was founded by local people and achieved sustainable development without government financial support. The purpose of the library is to provide an excellent reading environment for the public in local areas of cities and to hold science communication activities.

THE SCIENCE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

The Scientific Education Library was originally founded in Shan Dong Province, and the founder was only one person. In the year 2001, the library began to develop member-libraries all over the country. At present, there are 25 member-libraries and the general headquarters is the "Bei Jing Scientific Education Library," which is located in Shi Jing Shan District, Beijing. These libraries are mainly open to all the residents of the communities, including teen-agers, which accounts for 70 percent of the users, adults, and retired people.

Where do the funds of the library come from?

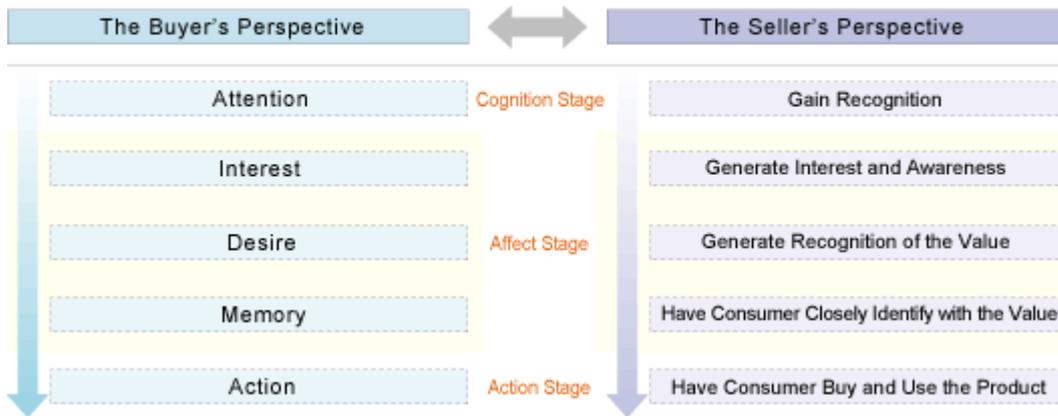
First of all, although the Scientific Education Library doesn't receive government financial support, the government encourages a fund run by local people enter library business and gives preference to them. For example, as for the earnings of library gained by holding activities, it is free of business tax. [4] Secondly, the Scientific Education Library is a comprehensive cultural group, such as training, retail and information retrieve Service. The earnings from these cultural businesses can support the development of the library. Thirdly, the Scientific Education Library is not completely public welfare, so readers should have book cards, which cost 36yuan for one year, if they were going to borrow books, and the earnings can be used by the library. People who live in poverty can receive free book cards.

The science communication process and theoretical bases for the practical processes carried out by Scientific Education Library:

I. Application of AIDMA Law

The AIDMA Law is characteristically taken from the standpoint of the buyer. The Scientific Education Library considers the reader as the buyer and they do well in attracting the reader. Please look at the picture below [5]:

A Look at the AIDMA Law from the Buyer's Perspective and from the Seller's Perspective



Attention

The Scientific Education Library was located in the community of general residents and always holds all kinds of activities, which can attract the public's attention easily. This is the first step to advance them to enter the library and take part in the public understanding of science.

Interest

Scientific Education Library adopted the follow strategies for the public's interests:

☀ All of the facilities and rules show the care for the humanism, breaking the detail barriers between the library and the public. Readers are allowed to bring school bags etc. into the library; they are allowed to fetch any books by themselves without any complicated procedures. All the days of a year and each day from 8:30 am to 22:30 pm are open to readers. Theses facilities and rules are all for the reader's convenience, which can develop their interest.

☀ All kinds of books, newspapers and periodicals can be found in the Scientific Education Library, and popular science books accounting for 80%, such as *The Little Doctor Asks the World*, *Juvenile Encyclopedia*, *Childhood Stories of Scientists*, *Insect Family*, etc.

Desire

Because of the first two steps, the public has the desire of entering the library and is easily satisfied. No requirements are necessary for the readers, as the state-owned libraries do. They provide equal opportunity for all citizens to access to science information. There are simplified ID cards for readers. Any one who wants to access the science books are only required to have "the card for all services." These realize the removal of barriers to the utilization of public and scientific resources.

II The application of the public participation model

"Scientific Issues And Public Participation" is a monthly activity held by the Scientific Education Library and *Science Times*. This activity is different from other popular science speeches. The speaker will make the audience who have a high school education understand the history, present situation, the benefit to human beings and

unsolved problems of their field within 40 minutes. This speech should arouse the audience's interests in science and then, after the speech, there is a forum for the exchange of the public's opinion about science.

III Hold kinds of activities to communicate science in order to outreach the function of libraries

Except the function of the library itself, the Scientific Education Library organizes varieties of activities in order to make the library become an important science and culture site for the community residents.

1 The activity of books enter communities and mining area

2 The activity of science communication in little dining tables

In order to solve the problem of students having lunch, the "Scientific Education Library" and neighborhood committees found "the little dining table." The library presents more than 700 science communication books as gifts to the "the little dining table." "The little dining table" is a place of science communication for the children.

3 The activity of Reading Competition

4 The Colorful Reading Project

The "Scientific Education Library" and several unions, including people from the political consultative newspaper, the China Colorful Career Promoting Committee, hundreds of excellent presses of China and hundreds of excellent entrepreneurs, founded the 1000 "Colorful Community Library" groups which can initiate the entire people into reading and making reading become the public's way of life.

5 The activity of books enter into each family

Present books as gifts to the residents of the community, students near the library and the workers at local factories. Especially, they present books to the residents who can't afford to buy books. In May, 2004, the library gave books worth 100,000 RMB to a primary school, which located in a poor county.

6 April 23 is World Reading Day. It is founded by the Scientific Education Library, the National Culture Ministry, and the Library Society of China together.

7 Scientific Salon Scientists and the public discuss scientific issues in daily life each month. It is the application of the public participation model.

8 The information on preventing AIDS and handing out reading matter freely.

EVALUATION

The Scientific Education Library has already created 25 member-libraries in such areas as Liaoning, Henan, Jiangsu, etc. The total business floor area is more than ten thousand square meters. There were 15 million readers one year, and more than 380 activities were held in science communication. Because of the library, the frequency of the public in communities entering into libraries increased greatly and reading has become a living style for the community. The students come to the library to read after

school, the self-study students has a wonderful learning place to study and the old people come here to read newspapers in their spare time. By means of different kinds of science communication activities, the public has changed their attitude to science. They realize that science is part of their daily life and the issues of science have become a daily topic.

The Scientific Education Library has made great explorations for opening barriers to the communication of science in communities within cities, which causes positive affects, represented by the following:

① Theoretical support given by experts. Professor Li Guoxin of Beijing University said: “The birth of the Scientific Education Library not only made positive contributions to the reformation and development of the library in China, but also made meaningful explorations into the development of other developing countries’ libraries.”

② Explored the successful model of science communication in the community within the city.

③ Provided the referential examples of outreaching the function of libraries.

④ Promoted the foundation of community private libraries. The growth of the Scientific Education Library is still going on like a raging fire.

The Scientific Education Library holds all kinds of science communication activities, especially “Scientific issues and public participation” in an exploration of the public participation model in China, and the effect is satisfying, which can be followed by other similar activities.

DISCUSSION

I. “Scientific Education Library” proves an opening of barriers to communication of science as a key factor by supplying a place of learning for the user’s convenience.

First of all, located in the community within the city is very important because the location is the first step to advance the public to enter libraries. The residents who lived around the library said that their spare time life style changed greatly after Scientific Education Library was founded. During their spare time they chose to come into the library to read and take part in the popular science activities, not only because it is very convenient for them to do but also because it is very interesting. Secondly, all the books are open to readers, which is different from state-owned libraries. Besides traditional books, there are electronic reading areas, providing electronic books, VCDs and DVDs, etc. The subjects of these readings are very extensive.

II The tactics adopted by the “Scientific Education Library” for communicating science in communities within cities can be popularized.

The Library altered the traditional way of managing a library, and outreaching as a function of the library. After the alterations, it not only brings convenience to the local readers, but also organizes varieties of activities, achieving unbarriered communication of science successfully. The Scientific Education Library does exploration of the science of communication by means of outreaching as a function of the library.

Except for the “Scientific issues and public participation” mentioned above, there are all kinds of cultural forums every weekend.

III Probed a way of developing the private library by itself without any financial support from government.

CONCLUSION

I The local community is a good choice to communicate science in a city. Science communication activities, which are held in communities, can attract the public's attention easily because communities are the places where they live and work.

II The public will take part in the activities of science communication on condition that they should feel comfortable and take delight in it because it's not obligatory for the public to take part in these activities.

III Combining mass communication with group communication is a good way to communicate science.

IV The "Scientific Education Library" is an exemplification of Local Organizations holding activities to communicate science.

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