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New Developments of Chinese Government Publications and Library Collections¹

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ABSTRACT

Chinese government publications constitute a significantly large portion of print and digital information output in China. This material genre is critical to the operation of the country, to people's lives, and therefore, is important to research and scholarly work. Overseas scholars rely heavily on libraries to access and use Chinese government publications, however, collecting this type of materials has been a challenge since the scope of Chinese government publications has not been clear, and the collecting channels have been limited. This paper intends to discuss the scope of Chinese government publications, its availability in digital format, the types of publications library normally collects, and opportunities and challenges in collecting them.

Keywords: Chinese government publication, Government information policy, Digital government information, Collection development, Government website

INTRODUCTION

For many years, there has not been a clear definition for “government publication” in China. It was therefore not clear what constitutes government publications, except for perhaps laws and regulations, which clearly were issued and published by the government. This situation lasted until 2008, when the Chinese government issued the *Regulation of the People's Republic of China on the Disclosure of Government Information* (hereinafter referred to as “*Regulation*”). For the first time, government information was officially defined as “the information produced or acquired and recorded or kept in certain forms by administrative organs in the process of performing their duties (‘政府信息·是指行政机关在履行职责过程中制作或者获取的·以一定形式记录·保存的信息’)” (State Council, 2008). This definition specifies four

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fundamental aspects of Chinese government publications: publisher or compiler; producing process; the nature and content are, and the format. First, publisher or compiler should be a government administrative body; second, a government publication shall be produced or acquired during or for government operations; third, the nature and content of government information embody the will of the government and are guidelines to its operations; fourth, the format of government publications can vary.

The term of government information has been used interchangeably with government publications (Ministry of Culture, 2010). The term of government information has been used more often in recent years, likely because government publications have been increasingly produced in digital format. In this paper, the term of government publication will be used interchangeably with government information, to reflect this trend.

By the definition above, Chinese governments at all levels have published massive official publications, just as many other countries' governments have done. The *Regulation* cited above requires central ministries and provincial governments to compile a catalog of the information they disclosed; many have done so and posted such catalogs on their government websites. The *Regulation* also provides a list of government information that should be made available to the public. In the Chapter Two of the *Regulation*, twenty-three types of government information produced by national, provincial, city, county and township governments are required to be disclosed to the public. In principal, they fall in these four categories: government information that concerns vital interests of citizens, corporate bodies and organizations; government information that requires awareness and participation of citizens; government information that illustrates the organizational structure, functionality and operational procedure of a government body; and other government information that is required by law and regulations to be disclosed to the public (State Council, 2008).

The author reviewed twenty randomly selected government websites to gain insight of the scope of government information and the level of compliance with the *Regulation*. Those selected government bodies are the National People's Congress, the State Council, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Civil Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, National Health Commission, Shandong Province, Anhui Province, Liaoning Province, Zhejiang Province, Hubei Province, Guangdong Province, Beijing City, Shanghai City, Ningbo City, Fuzhou City, Kunming City, and Lanzhou City. All websites reviewed publish their information online, and about ninety-five percent of the government publications are comprehensive. Combining findings from various official government websites and comparing to the list from the *Regulation*, this paper intends to discuss the scope of the Chinese government publications and its increasing availability in digital format, the types of publications libraries normally collect, and the opportunities and challenges in collecting them.

THE SCOPE OF CHINESE GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS

The scope of Chinese government information or publications is very broad. To make the massive publications easier to understand, this paper attempts to categorize them by the functionality or nature of administrative duties: laws and regulations, national plans and policies, statistics, documents related to policies issued at ministries, regional and lower

levels, documents issued at all levels related to operational procedures, requirements and implementation.

Laws and Regulations

Laws are prepared and enacted by the National People's Congress (NPC), the legislative body of China. Regulations can be issued by any of the following government bodies: the Communist Party of China Central Committee and its General Office, the State Council, ministries and other institutions of the central government, provincial government, municipal governments, local people's congress, county governments, Supreme People's Court (SPC), Supreme People's Procuratorate (SPP), local judicial bodies, and military institutions. Regulations include a number of different types of documents, as they are usually enforced by a regulatory agency formed or mandated to carry out the purpose or provisions of a legislation.

Laws and major categories of regulations are listed below:

- Law 法律. Examples: Supervision Law of the People's Republic of China 中华人民共和国监察法; Constitution of the People's Republic of China (2018 Amendment) 中华人民共和国宪法 (2018 修正). In 2008, the National People's Congress Standing Committee regulated that in general, legislative bills are required to collect comments and feedback from the general public through major news media and NPC's website. Feedback and suggestions are summarized and published in NPC Gazettes.
- Resolution 决议. Resolutions are normally issued by the NPC or the State Council. Example: Resolution of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress on Intensifying Legal Publicity and Education 全国人大常委会关于加强法制宣传教育的决议.
- Regulation 条例. Regulations can be issued by central government ministries, provincial governments and its bureaus, municipal governments and its divisions. Examples: Regulation on the Implementation of the Environmental Protection Tax Law of the People's Republic of China 中华人民共和国环境保护税法实施条例; Interim Regulation of the People's Republic of China on Value Added Tax (2017 Revision) 中华人民共和国增值税暂行条例 (2017 修订); Regulation of Shanghai Municipality on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Overseas Chinese (09- 14-2016) 上海市华侨权益保护条例.
- Rule 规则. It can be issued by the central government and ministries as well as local governments. Examples: Rules for the In-flight Security of the Public Air Passenger Transport (2017) 公共航空旅客运输飞行中安全保卫工作规则 (2017).
- Provision 规定. It can be issued by governments at county and above level. Example: Provisions on the Administrative Reconsideration involving Land and Resources (2017 Revision) 国土资源行政复议规定 (2017 修订).
- Decree 命令. It is normally issued by the central government and ministries. Example: Decree of the State Council Concerning the Use of Uniform Legal Measures in the Country 国务院关于在我国统一实行法定计量单位的命令.
- Order 条令. It can be issued by the central government and ministries. Example:

Order on Rewards for the People's Policemen of Public Security Organs 公安机关人民警察奖励条令.

- Decision 决定. It can be issued by governments at all levels to communicate a decision on regular operational issue. Example: Decision of the Ministry of Transport on Revising the Measures for the Supervision and Administration of the Safety Production of Highway and Water Transportation Projects (2016) 交通运输部关于修改《公路水运工程安全生产监督管理办法》的决定 (2016).
- Notice 通知. It can be issued by governments at all levels, normally to notify subordinates a particular matter. Example: Notice of the State Administration for Industry and Commerce and the State Administration of Taxation on Strengthening Information Sharing and Joint Regulation 工商总局、税务总局关于加强信息共享和联合监管的通知.
- Announcements 公告. It can be issued by governments at all level to communicate a decision on a particular issue. Example: Announcement of the State Administration of Taxation on Issues concerning the Collection and Administration of Consumption Taxes on Refined Oil 国家税务总局关于成品油消费税征收管理有关问题的公告.
- Opinion 意见. It can be issued by governments at all level. Example: Opinions of the State Administration of Taxation on Standardizing Administrative Examination and Approvals and Improving Administrative Examination and Approval Work 国家税务总局关于规范行政审批行为改进行政审批有关工作的意见.
- Measure 办法. It can be issued by government at all levels, generally applies to management issues. Example: Measures for the Administration of the Utilization of Insurance Funds 保险资金运用管理办法.
- Reply 批复. It can be issued by government at all levels, but more often at the central government and provincial government level, as it replies to subordinate bodies. Example: Official Reply of the State Council on Approving the Cancellation of the Control Line of Shenzhen Special Economic Zone 国务院关于同意撤销深圳经济特区管理线的批复.
- Letter 函. It can be issued by government at all levels, and commonly used for operational matters. Example: Letter of the General Office of the State Council on Approval of the Establishment of the Inter-Ministerial Joint Meeting System for Market Regulation 国务院办公厅关于同意建立市场监管部际联席会议制度的函.
- Interpretation 解释. It is normally issued by the central government, the Supreme People's Court and the Supreme People's Procuratorate for further explanation of law or decision on cases. Examples: Interpretation of the Supreme People's Court on Application of the Administrative Litigation Law of the People's Republic of China 最高人民法院关于适用《中华人民共和国行政诉讼法》的解释; Interpretation of Article 104 of the Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress 全国人大常委会关于《中华人民

共和国香港特别行政区基本法》第一百零四条的解释.

National Plans and Policies

This type of documents plays a critical role in economic development, government operations, and all aspects of people's lives. A number of different types of documents are included in this category:

- National economy and social development plans and policies, example: Outline of the 13th Five-Year Plan for the National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China 中华人民共和国国民经济和社会发展第十三个五年规划纲要 2016-2020.
- Special project plans and policies, example: The 13th Five-Year Plan for the Development of National Environmental Protection Standards 国家环境保护标准“十三五”发展规划. The 13th Five-Year Plan for the Development of Railway铁路“十三五”发展规划. The 13th Five-Year Plan for the Development of Informatization in Countryside 十三五”全国农业农村信息化发展规划.
- Other national policies, example: China's Arctic Policy 中国的北极政策.
- White papers, example: Judicial Transparency by People's Courts 中国法院的司法公开.

Statistics

Statistics constitute a large portion of government information. Enterprises and institutions may also produce statistics; however, official statistics are the only resource that carries authority and has been systematically collected nationwide at all administrative levels. Official statistics concern all aspects of national economy at macro and micro scale, it also concerns people's daily life. It promotes informed decision-making by government officials, monitors the overall economic and social development, and provides critical information to scholars in social sciences, science and humanities disciplines. Some of the major types of statistics are listed below:

- Census data. Examples: population census 人口普查, economic census 经济普查, agricultural census 农业普查, industrial census 工业普查, basic unit census 基本单位普查, the third industry census 第三产业普查.
- National statistics that cover 25 categories ranging from national account such as GDP to the development of regional sectors, example: China Statistical Yearbook 中国统计年鉴
- Provincial, municipal and other regional statistical yearbooks that cover categories similar to national statistics, example: Beijing Statistical Yearbook 北京统计年鉴, Xinjiang Production and Construction Group Statistical Yearbook 新疆生产建设兵团统计年鉴.
- Subject statistics at national and lower levels, example: China Civils' Statistical Yearbook 中国民政统计年鉴, 《2015 年全国收费公路统计公报》; Beijing Input-Output Table 北京投入产出表.
- Statistical Bulletins produced by the central government ministries, provincial and

municipal governments, examples: Statistical Bulletin of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security 人力资源和社会保障事业发展统计公报; Statistical Bulletin of Ministry of Education 教育部教育发展统计公报; Statistical Bulletin of Investment in Science and Technology in Jilin Province 吉林省科技经费投入统计公报; Statistical Bulletin of Average Wages in Urban Institutions in Shenzhen 深圳市城镇单位平均工资数据公报.

- Surveys conducted by national and provincial statistics bureaus, examples: China Countryside Statistical Survey 新中国农村统计调查; 2000-2011 Shanxi Statistical Survey 2000-2011 山西统计调查.
- Budgetary plans and reports from governments at all levels, example: Collection of Budgetary Plans for Selective Provinces and Cities in 2015 部分省（区、市）财政预算报告汇编2015.
- Financial accounts report from governments at all levels, example: Report on the Final National Accounts in 2016 by the Central Government 关于2016年中央决算的报告.

Documents Related to Plans and Policies Issued at Regional and Lower Levels

This type of documents includes a wide range of publications and information, and has been issued by central ministries, provincial, municipal and county government bodies. They are ranging from regional plans to interpretation of policies and regulations.

- Regional plans and policies, example: General City Plan for Beijing (2016-2035) 北京城市总体规划 (2016年—2035). The Plan for Coastal Line Protection and Utilization Plan for Zhejiang Province 浙江省海岸线保护与利用规划.
- Annual report on government operations, example: Report on Government Operations for Shandong Province 2018 山东省政府工作报告 2018. Report on Government Operations for Shanghai City 2018, 上海市政府工作报告 2018.
- Report on implementation of regional or provincial plan, example: Report on the Implementation of the 13th Five Year Plan for Utilizing Foreign Investments by Anhui Provincial Government 安徽省“十三五”利用外资和境外投资规划实施进展情况. Report on 2016 Governing by Law for Guangdong Provincial Government 广东省人民政府关于2016年法治政府建设情况的报告.
- Regional or provincial policy on important economic or political issues, example, Support the Development of Digital Economy (Anhui Province) 支持数字经济发展若干政策 (安徽省). Policy on Further Expanding Opening and Utilizing Foreign Investments for Guangdong Province 广东省进一步扩大对外开放积极利用外资若干政策措施.
- Interpretation of regional or provincial policies, example: Explanation for the Policy of the 13th Five Year Plan for Public Health in Anhui Province 安徽省“十三五”卫生与健康规划政策解读. Explanation for Measures of the Protection of Intellectual Property in Liaoning Province 辽宁省知识产权保护办法解读.

Documents Related to Operational Procedures, Requirements and Implementation

Governments at all levels issue documents for their daily operations. There are many different types of documents included in this category: proposing or implementing projects or activities, reviewing and approving requests, plans for dealing with emergency, and announcing appointment or removal of officials. Major types of documents are listed below:

- Report on implementing an order from upper-level government bodies, example: Shandong Province's Report on Implementing the 8th Decree of the State Archives Administration 关于贯彻落实国家档案局8号令情况的报告 (山东省).
- Notice on implementation of plans, example: Jiamusi City's Plan for Dealing with Major Emergency of Road Accidents 佳木斯市立即启动重大交通事故应急预案.
- Appointment or removal of officials, example: List of Shandong Province's Approval of Appointment and Removal of Officers 山东省人民政府任免的工作人员名单.
- Approval and implementation of major projects, example: Approval of the Relocation of Haerbin Railway Freight Port by Heilongjiang Provincial Government 黑龙江省人民政府关于哈尔滨铁路货运口岸迁址的批复.
- Implementation of policies and measures concerning people's lives such as education, social services, health care, and employment issues. Example: Implementing Measures for the Prevention and Resolution of Medical Disputes in Anhui Province 安徽省医疗纠纷预防与处置办法.
- Measures for requisition of land, housing demolition and compensation and similar cases. Example: Measures for Adjusting Comprehensive Prices of Requisition of Land by Shandong Provincial Government 山东省人民政府关于调整山东省征地区片综合地价标准的批复.
- Reports on distribution and use of funding and donation for disaster relief. Example: Report on Disaster Relief Donations by the Bureau of Civil Affairs of Haikou City 海口市民政局关于赈灾捐款接收情况的报告.
- Announcement or reports on land use plan at village and township level. Example: Announcement for Taking back the Use Right for Eleven State-owned lands (Fushun County, Liaoning Province) 关于收回11宗国有土地使用权的公告 (辽宁省抚顺县).
- Reports on family planning, example: Report on Health and Family Planning Work in 2016 and 2017 Plan by the Health and Family Planning Department of Jingmen City 荆门市卫生计生委2016年工作总结和2017年工作计划.
- Details about service charges for administrative services, reasoning and criteria. Example: Anhui Highway Toll Rates, issued by the Department of Transportation of Anhui Province 安徽省高速公路收费标准-安徽省交通运输厅.
- Announcement or report on government procurement, items and criteria. Example:

Announcement on Landscape Project of Dashi Street of Guangzhou City 广州市大石街市政绿化养护工程结果公告.

- Requirements, documents, conditions, procedure, length of time for applying for administration permits or licensing. Example: Approval Procedure of Business License for Telecommunications by Zhejiang Communications Administration 电信业务经营许可申请审批 – 浙江省通信管理局.
- Notice of approval of application for a project or service, example: Approval of Establishment of Shanxi Zhongsheng Firm of Tax Accountants 关于新批准设立山西中昇税务师事务所的公示.
- Reasons and occasions for imposing fines. Example: Announcement on Imposing Administrative Penalty – Daxing Office of Beijing Administration for Industry and Commerce 行政处罚决定书 – 北京市工商行政管理局大兴分局公告.

PUBLISHING OF CHINESE GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS

Before the *Regulation* taking effect in 2008, there were no laws or regulations specifically determining how Chinese government publications should be published, except one regulation on publishing laws and regulations. The State Council issued a regulation in 1990 stating that no individuals are allowed to compile and publish laws and regulations. Laws should be compiled by the NPC, regulations should be compiled by the State Council, military regulations should be compiled by the Central Military Commission, departmental regulations should be compiled by responsible departments, and local regulations should be compiled by local NPCs and local government (State Administration for Industry & Commerce of China, 1990). There was another document issued by the former General Administration of Press and Publication stating that without approval, any publishing house should not publish government white cover report (政府白皮书) (General Administration of Press and Publication, 1998). The major regulation concerning publications - *Regulation on the Administration of Publication* (2016 Revised) (State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of the People's Republic of China, 2006) stipulated that how publishing and publications should be approved and managed in general, but nothing specifies if government publications should be approved and managed differently. In practice, laws and regulations and statistics tend to be published by designated publishing houses, such as China Law Press and China Statistics Press.

Regulated by these orders, only certain types of government documents have been published in print format. One major type is gazettes, which carry laws and regulations, as well as feedback on proposed laws and regulations, appointment and removal of officials, decisions, notices, reports, and other policy documents. Major gazettes include:

- Gazette of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China 人大常委会公报.
- State Council Gazette 国务院公报.

- Gazette of the Supreme People's Court 最高法院公报.
- Gazette of the Supreme People's Procuratorate 最高人民检察院公报.
- Gazettes of ministries and commissions 各部委公报.
- Gazettes of provincial governments 各省政府公报.
- Gazettes of municipal governments 各市政府公报.

While the regulation about publishing laws and regulations is still valid, the *Regulation* in 2008 mainly focuses on publishing government information online, as government information goes digital. It clearly stipulates channels of publishing or releasing government information. This will greatly improve the availability of government publications when implemented widely. One major requirement that the *Regulation* emphasizes is that governments at all levels should “actively” publish their information follow these requirements:

- Administrative offices should actively publish government information through government gazettes, government website, press conference, newspapers and televisions.
- Governments at all levels should designate a reading room in archives and public libraries, and actively provide government information to these institutions. Equipment should be provided to facilitate public's access to government information.
- Individual government offices are responsible for their own information publishing. Laws and regulations should be published by following certain regulation.
- In general, government information that is required to be released to the public by law should be published within 20 working days.
- Individual government offices should compile and publish their own catalog of government publications and keep it up-to-date. Catalogs should classify information by category, include document title, abstract, date and index. It should also include institution name, office hours, contact information and email.

In 2017, the State Council issued a notice to provide further guidelines on developing official government website. It regulates the management responsibility, rule for domain name for government website, functionality and maintenance of government websites. It further specifies how government information should be published, and particularly emphasizes that governments at all levels should publish information accurately and in a timely manner. Laws and regulations should have effective and expiration dates and should be searchable; statistics should be kept up-to-date and downloadable; and operational procedures should be accurate and indicate who is the issuing authority (The State Council, 2017).

CHINESE GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS AND LIBRARY COLLECTIONS

Libraries used to collect Chinese government publications in traditional ways and formats through publishers and book vendors, and publications are in print format. Now that government publications are published both in print format and increasingly in digital format, the way that library collects government publications needs to be re-considered. The fact that Chinese government publications go digital will greatly increase their availability and provide more accesses to scholars and the general public. It also has enormous impacts on how library should collect and manage those materials.

Current Practice of Collecting Government Publications

It has been a tradition that library collects some of the Chinese government publications, as they are important information resources for scholars in social sciences, humanities and science disciplines. The main types of government publications that many libraries normally collect are:

- Gazette of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress
- State Council Gazette
- Collections of laws
- Collections of national regulations
- Selective collections of national plans and policies
- National population census data
- Statistical yearbooks and surveys

Since there was no clear definition for “government publications” before 2008, only those core publications, including laws, regulations and statistics listed above had been published in print format by designated publishing houses. Publishers were either not authorized to compile government publications other than those core documents or not clear about what else can be compiled as government publications. Therefore, many important policies and documents were not available for libraries to collect in old days, ultimately, not available to scholars and other users. Required by the *Regulation*, nowadays, not only those core publications have been available in digital format, other types of government publications such as regional/local regulations and policies are also available in print and digital formats. Commercial publishers and aggregators have also developed valued-added databases based on officially released information and data. These new practices have prompted the vigorous development of government information publications, and therefore provide libraries with more government information to collect, and users with easier access to such information.

Opportunities and Challenges in Collecting Digital Government Publications

Digital publishing has developed very fast in China, many scholarly publications are available in digital format, including born-digital and digitized publications. Going along with this trend,

government information goes digital, which is a critical step forward, for the transparency of government administrative operations and services. The development of digital government information since the 2008 *Regulation* has direct impact on libraries in several aspects.

Opportunities provided by this new trend benefit both libraries and users: First, the *Regulation* makes it clear what the scope of government information is and what types of documents or information are openly available; second, individual government offices are required to compile and publish a catalog of their information, which provides a useful tool for library to view and select; third, major types of government publications are required to be published through official government websites, which provides great convenience for library to aggregate those documents; last but not least, the visuality and browsability of government information make it easier for librarians to provide research consultation to scholars. Instead of viewing many hard copies of books, librarians can easily browse and search relevant government websites for information. Libraries in China as well as overseas have utilized advanced technology and matured online catalog platform for managing library collections, they are in a good position to further build Chinese government publications in digital format.

It takes time for Chinese governments at all levels to implement the *Regulation* and other requirements, fully develop their website, and publish their publications, documents and data at a full scale. Currently, libraries also face challenges in collecting and using government publications in this new era.

First, there are too many individual government websites, it is impossible to search each and every individual website, in an occasion when someone is researching on a nationwide topic. The National Library of China has developed a central platform: *Chinese Government Public Information Online* (<http://govinfo.nlc.cn/>). It is a great tool to get started in aggregating government information; however, as many central government offices and local governments may not yet provide their documents and data to this platform, the information there is far from being comprehensive. Based on local academic community's needs, libraries may need to create their own digital government publication collection by subject, region or issuing agencies. Documents from different sources in different formats and different versions will need value-added work in aggregation.

Second, many, if not all, government offices compile and publish their own catalogs, which is a huge difference than before. However, it is not easy for libraries to fully use them as catalogs are sometime organized in different ways and publication are classified in a way different from library's practice. There have been studies in library and information literature on how government publication catalogs should be compiled. Researchers praise this positive development (Chen, 2013; Zheng, 2011); however, they focus more on how to improve the usability of these catalogs by standardizing classification and metadata and enhancing searching functionality (Bai, 2013; Zhang, 2009). Libraries may need to take action in integrating and re-compiling some of the government publications catalogs based on local academic community's needs.

Lastly, librarians need to gain professional knowledge of Chinese government publications through professional training. Individual copies of Chinese government publications may have been in some libraries for a long period of time; however, many librarians may not realize that those books are actually government publications, or are unsure whether they are officially published or not. Since digital government publications have become much more

widely accessible via government websites now, the brand and identity of those websites would help define the nature of government publications. Librarians would learn from their daily work in collecting government documents and serving scholars, and gain professional knowledge of this publication genre.

CONCLUSION

The *Regulation of the People's Republic of China on the Disclosure of Government Information* and the guidelines on developing government website released in 2017 set the direction and requirements for publishing or releasing government information. Now that there is a definition for "government information" and there are also requirements for publishing government information online, libraries and scholars would benefit greatly from the new policies. Based on the increased availability of government information in digital format, libraries need to actively build digital Chinese government publications, develop a richer collection based on previously built print collection. While relying on the *Chinese Government Public Information Online* developed by the National Library of China and government websites, libraries need to consider developing their subject or regional collections to meet local academic community's needs. Libraries may also need to consolidate or integrate catalogs produced by various government offices for their own local academic needs. By collecting and using more published government publications, librarians would develop their professional knowledge and serve scholars in a more efficient way.

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