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# Reading Promotion: Conceptual Models and Category Frameworks Analysis

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# Reading Promotion: Conceptual Models and Category Frameworks Analysis

## Abstract

The paper summarizes the practical and theoretical development of reading promotion in various countries in the world, and reveals the status of the magnificent practices and active researches of reading promotion in China. According to the conceptual object, the existing definitions of reading promotion are divided into the “goal-oriented conceptual model” and the “content-oriented conceptual model”. The defining principles and conceptual scopes of these two models are analyzed. Starting with confirming the defining principle and analyzing the scopes of conceptual elements, the definitions of reading promotion and library reading promotion are given. The research is beneficial for librarians to better cognize the conceptual scope of reading promotion and to plan the work.

## INTRODUCTION

As reading plays a key role in the transmission of culture inheritance and improvement of national literacy, thus fostering a culture of reading is a main concern among countries around the world. From the practical perspective, reading promotion has already become a common practice in many developed countries with lots of influential reading programs like "Bookstart", "the Big Read", "One Book, One City", "Common Book", etc. Over the past ten years, China has also made leaping progress in reading promotion field. Although there has been a tradition of recommended bibliography since ancient times in China, and modern Chinese libraries before the 21st century usually offer reading instruction service, along with irregular book exhibitions, book club etc., none of these is comparable with the scale of "nationwide reading campaign" in China today. "Reading promotion" in the present sense in China was inspired by the establishment of World Book Day by UNESCO in 1995 and highlighted by the Chinese government. Nowadays, Reading promotion has become a social undertaking in China from the perspectives of the idea, the governments' supports, the multiple promotion agencies involved, the promotion methods, the audiences and the promotion effects.

Firstly, the current reading promotion follows the idea of building a reading society for all to inherit the excellent cultural heritage and improve the people's quality. Secondly, the Chinese government attaches great importance to the issue of social reading by continuous advocating in the government files and formulating relevant laws. The Chinese government has continuously advocated national reading campaign in the government work reports since 2012 and listed the National Reading Project as one of the major cultural projects in the 13th Five-Year Plan period in 2016. The Development Plan for the 13th Five-Year Plan for National Reading, the Law on the Guarantee of Public Cultural Services and the Law on Public Libraries of the People's Republic of China have been promulgated intensively from November 2016 to November 2017. Thirdly, reading promotion has attracted a wide range of institutions or individuals in the whole society. Organizations highly relevant to reading, such as libraries, bookstores, and publishers, are not only actively involved in reading promotion, but are also innovative in space, service, and event design. The media agencies launched new programs such as "Chinese Poetry Conference", "See the Word/Letters Live" and "Long Readers", which have received rave reviews and played a part in broader outreach efforts. The government and related public welfare organizations, education and research institutions, medical organizations, etc., have joined the tide of society-wide reading promotion with their strengths. For-profit institutions, such as parenting instruction agencies, Sinology study institutions, membership-based book lending organizations, telecom operators, e-commerce providers and digital content owners, all have entered the reading promotion territory by various ways of providing reading materials, reading guidance services and mobile reading platforms. In addition, social organizations and individuals such as volunteers who organize "Story Mom" also promote social reading using their comparative advantages. Fourthly, in terms of the promotion audiences, people who lack reading interest, reading capability and

come from low social and economic conditions are important targets for reading promotion, which can be a wide range of populations. Fifthly, new reading promotion projects, modes and methods are constantly emerging and combined in three-dimensional way, which promote social reading in various aspects. Sixthly, the effectiveness of reading promotion is remarkable. On the one hand, relevant data has expanded significantly, which include the numbers of reading promotion activities, the audiences, the mobile reading platforms and the public social reading facilities (such as 24-hour smart library, book-bar, community cultural center, farmer's reading room, mobile library, etc.). On the other hand, with the increased awareness of reading promotion of librarians and relevant social workers, the public can more easily obtain reading materials, reading instructions, and participate in reading activities. The improved usage experience of libraries and bookstores also help to continuously enhance public reading interests. Overall, the current reading promotion scale is large and the social influence is wide. It is by no means comparable to occasional events sponsored by a few institutions with a small number of audiences in the past.

From the research perspective, the circumstances are very different in English and Chinese literature. There is very little English literature on "reading promotion" as a research objective. Relevant literature focuses on extracurricular reading<sup>1</sup>, common reading programs<sup>2</sup>, reading problems for minors and case studies on reading promotion<sup>3</sup>. There is no literature to specifically study and define the theoretical foundation of reading promotion. However, there is a large amount of Chinese literature on reading promotion. According to the search results of "reading promotion" as part of the "article title" field search in the database "China National Knowledge Internet," the number of articles published has reached a tremendous number of 4,618 from the first article published in 2006 to the search date on November 11, 2018. From 2011 to 2018, there were 86 articles, 153 articles, 306 articles, 469 articles, 704 articles, 854 articles, 1091 articles, and 880 articles published each year. The rapid growth of publication indicates an extremely popular research trend on this topic. This research literature focuses mostly on general discussion, case studies, reading promotion initiatives for special groups, promotion special materials, new media and digital technology application in reading promotion, and reading promotion methods, etc. In terms of monographs published, Wu Xi (the former director of Shenzhen Library), Wang Yuguang (Professor of Peking University), Xu Yan (Professor of Nanjing University), Fan Bingsi (Professor of East China Normal University), Wang Bo (Professor of Peking University Library) and other leading researchers had published related books such as *Library Reading Promotion Research*<sup>4</sup>, *Basic Theory of Library Reading Promotion*<sup>5</sup> and *National Reading Promotion Handbook*<sup>6</sup>, etc. Since 2009, the National Social Science Foundation of China has also granted more than 40 projects on library reading promotion. Among the studies, a small number of articles define the concept of reading promotion. Fan Bingsi led the research on the basic theory of reading promotion. He and Wang Dan divided the concept ideas of the current literature into four genres: mission driven, practice driven, recreation driven and subject driven<sup>7</sup>, which demonstrated different types of conceptual frameworks. However, there still has not been a

clear uniform definition of reading promotion, with many ambiguities in the conceptual categories of reading promotion.

In 2011, the IFLA Literacy and Reading Section released the report “Using Research to Promote Literacy and Reading in Libraries: Guidelines for Librarians”. The publication not only indicated that research should be applied to guide and advance practice, but also noted that libraries play a vital role in almost every aspect of reading and writing abilities, from obtaining materials to training, and from promotion to collaboration<sup>8</sup>. Mr. Wu Xi, the leading figure of the National Reading Campaign of China, pointed out that no matter how the environment and reading form may change, libraries, especially public libraries, will still be the integral part of literacy and reading development for the Chinese nation<sup>9</sup>. With the fast development of reading promotion, it is essential to analyze and define its concept connotation and denotation, which will provide an effective theoretical framework for library reading promotion planning, implementation priorities and service system design. Due to the situation, this paper intends to analyze the types and characteristics of existing definitions, and to analyze the concept from the perspectives of defining principles and elements explanation, so as to effectively further reading promotion practices in libraries.

## THE CONCEPTUAL MODELS AND CATEGORIES

When outlining the concept, it is necessary to clarify the defining principles and the key elements. Reading promotion includes elements like the promotion goals, the promotion subjects, the promotion contents, the promotion methods, the promotion audiences and the promotion effects. According to the elements identified, the existing definitions of reading promotion can be divided into two categories. The first one is using promotion goals as the major defining principle, without clarifying the promotion contents, which can be summarized as the goal-oriented defining model. The other kind helps to define the main promotion contents, which can be briefly described as the content-oriented defining model.

## THE GOAL-ORIENTED DEFINING MODEL

As a behavioral practice, the goal of reading promotion is often set to improve reading-related variables. Reading behavior involves the reading body, the reading content, the reading medium and the interaction between the reading body and the reading content. The reading body, namely the reader, subjectively encompasses reading interest, motivation, habits, abilities and other elements, while it objectively associates with the number and type of readers. Reading contents are numerous books of various types with a variety of functions. Reading medium involves such reading facilities as libraries, featured reading rooms and mobile reading applications. Due to differences in readers' needs, interests, and abilities, there are also large variances in the number of books they read, the level of comprehension and other interactive factors between books and readers. The specific objectives of reading promotion are reflected in the enhancement of various elements of reading, that is, the

increase of the mobile reading applications and facilities, the number of readers, and the increased amount of books read objectively, and the improvement of social reading willingness, reading ability and reading quality subjectively. Most of the existing definitions use the promotion goal as the principles for concept distinction. According to the concept scopes, there are also "activity based", "profession or occupation based" and "service based" types of theories.

"Activity based" theory is represented by Wang Yuguang and Wang Bo. Wang Yuguang defined public library reading promotion in his research report for the National Social Science Fund Key Project "Building a Learning Society and Library Social Service Research." He held that "Public library reading promotion is a strategically planned social activity that is independently sponsored or co-organized by public libraries for the public, in order to promote universal reading, to enhance the reading environment, and to improve the literacy outcome"<sup>10</sup>. Wang Bo defined reading promotion from the perspective of strategic goals and enhancement of reading factors. He believes that "Reading promotion means various activities held by institutions or individuals to cultivate people's reading interests and habits, and to improve people's reading quality, ability and effect, with the strategic goals of promoting reading for everyone, improving the cultural quality of human beings, strengthening the soft power of all ethnic groups and accelerating the process of national prosperity and rejuvenation"<sup>11</sup>.

The "profession or occupation based" theory is similar to the "activity based" theory in the defining principle. It characterizes reading promotion as a profession and occupation, which is more inclusive and can accommodate reading promotion initiatives and practices into the concept scope. Wan Xingming believes that reading promotion is the general term of all the work that libraries and other social related parties do to cultivate people's reading habits, stimulate their reading interest, improve their reading level, and further promote national reading<sup>12</sup>. Wang Xinpei believes that reading promotion is a series of activities and works carried out by libraries, publishers, the media, networks, governments and related departments to cultivate readers' reading habits, stimulate reading interest, improve reading level, and promote reading for all<sup>13</sup>. Zhang Huaitao thinks that reading promotion is developed from the concepts of "reading instruction", "reading advocacy" and so on. It is a kind of cultural activities and undertakings engaged by social organizations or individuals, aiming at improving the impact and reach of reading programs in society and enabling people to participate in reading with more aspirations and better conditions<sup>14</sup>.

Despite differences in the conceptual categories, the "activity based" theory and the "profession or occupation based" theory have similar limitations because of the same defining principles. At present, the mobile reading market has attracted telecom operators, e-commerce, digital content providers, etc., which has spawned mobile reading applications like Tianyi Mobile Reading App, QQ Reading App, Yunzhong Book City App, Baidu Reading App, WeChat Reading App, etc.. The subjective goal of such agencies lies in commercial interests, but their initiatives to develop and occupy the user market can objectively promote reading promotion. Therefore, if improving reading-related variables is set as the defining

principle, it is unsuitable to incorporate the above-mentioned new mobile reading promotion practices into the concept category.

The "service based" theory was proposed by Fan Bingsi, a scholar who paid early attention to the study of reading promotion theory in China. Although he did not give a definition to reading promotion, he analyzed the fundamental theories of library reading promotion from the angles of its literal meaning, attributes, targets and goals, and considered that reading promotion was a kind of library service with activity based, fragmented and interventional characteristics. Its targeted population is all citizens, with its focus on special groups. The ultimate goal of reading promotion is to enhance the quality of citizens through reading, to make those who do not love reading fall in love with reading, those who can't read learn to read, and those who have difficulties in reading overcome their obstacles<sup>15</sup>. This view has a strong research paradigm orientation of library science, positioning reading promotion as one of the important library services, which can effectively remind librarians to understand the importance of reading promotion in the overall work of the library, and has a strong guiding significance for strengthening librarian's reading promotion awareness and making library's work plan. Since there is no description about the promotion contents and the promotion methods, the view has a limited role in helping librarians to clarify the focus of reading promotion and understand the boundary between reading promotion and other related library services. Also, it is not easy to incorporate such promotion measures as the library's initiative of launching mobile reading application because of the idea that library reading promotion is a kind of activity-based service.

## THE CONTENT-ORIENTED DEFINING MODEL

Defining the main promotion contents has important practical significance for the overall library work planning, for setting the focus of reading promotion work, and for staff to clarify the relationship between reading promotion work and other library work. However, only a few existing definitions of reading promotion has described promotion contents. According to the prescribed contents, such kind of definitions could be divided into "recreational reading theory", "library collection theory" and "reading and information literacy related theory".

The idea of "recreational reading theory" has originated from the western library circle and is represented by Yu Liangzhi, a professor of Nankai University in China. She considers that library reading promotion mainly refers to book publicity and promotion or reader activities aimed at cultivating general reading habits or specific reading interests. The goal of cultivating reading habits or interests determines that reading promotion attempts to influence leisure reading behavior, that is, reading behavior unrelated to work or learning tasks<sup>16</sup>. This view is beneficial for libraries to plan the focus of reading promotion. Based on the impact of book contents on human beings, reading can be divided into several kinds. The first kind reading is developed for learning, work and living needs. The second is recreational reading just for killing time, which can't enhance readers' humanistic accomplishment. The third kind is developed for enhancing humanistic quality, which mainly refers to consciously reading



publicly known famous books to increase one's knowledge and to improve self-cultivation. The fourth is conducted to improve life wisdom and to cultivate the wisdom to live in harmony with nature and society by reading classics, especially the philosophical classics, that integrate human great wisdom and require reading and re-reading for comprehension and appreciation. Under the current situation of low national reading rate and the urgent need for citizens' quality improvement in China, the library as a cultural heritage institution must not only promote recreational reading, but also promote the reading for study, work and life. The integration practice of reading promotion and subject service in Chinese academic libraries has emerged, which has resulted in the view of "professional reading promotion" proposed by Yang Li. She discussed the concept framework and reported the reading events of promoting mathematical classics jointly launched by Shanghai Jiao Tong University Library and Zhiyuan College<sup>17</sup>. Also, Shanghai Jiao Tong University Library has launched the reading activity of the Reading Star Award together with the School of Electronic Information and Electrical Engineering and the freshman reading program named The books of Antai in collaboration with Antai College of Economics and Management. Obviously, "recreational reading theory" is insufficient to accommodate all reading promotion practices. The "library collection theory" is proposed by Wang Bo, who considers that library reading promotion refers to the activities carried out by libraries to draw readers' attentions to small-scale attractive collections through meticulous planning and orchestrating to increase the circulation and utilization of the collections<sup>11</sup>. It is not easy to distinguish the boundaries of library reading promotion by applying this theory.

Proposed by Xie Rong etc., the "reading and information literacy related theory" categorizes information literacy instruction practice into the scope of library reading promotion. According to the view, library reading promotion includes various practices which aim to encourage all types of people to become readers of the library, to cultivate their reading interest, to develop their reading habits and to improve their information literacy through various types of library resources, facilities, professional teams and other social collaborations"<sup>18</sup>. As reading promotion and information literacy instruction are both important areas of library service, this theory is not suitable for the division and management of library work.

## **THE DEFINITIONS OF READING PROMOTION AND LIBRARY READING PROMOTION**

Under the background of building a universal reading society, the promotion subjects, contents and methods are very diverse. It is necessary to combine the diversified reading promotion practices into a concept frame and to distinguish it from the other related concepts. We need to clarify the defining principle and the key factors of reading promotion, so that the connotation and denotation of the definition can be clear and be served as a strong guidance for the practice.

## DEFINING PRINCIPLES AND CONCEPTUAL ELEMENTS

The defining principle is the basis of the delineation at the macro-level, which must be both discriminative and inclusive. As the above analysis indicates, the majority of existing definitions set the promotion goal as the defining principle, which does not encompass the reading promotion practice that subjectively does not set the improvement of social reading related variables as the goal, but objectively achieves the effect of reading promotion. Therefore, in setting the defining principle, these two situations need to be taken into consideration to form a more comprehensive concept delineation. The core element description can reflect the scope of the concept concretely and microscopically, and can effectively guide the positioning, planning and the focus of library reading promotion work. In the process of building a national reading society, interested individuals or institutions can become the main participation bodies of a reading promotion undertaking. Due to the different levels of reading interest, reading ability, environmental conditions, etc., anyone can also be the promotion audiences. Therefore, reading promotion subject and audience can't constitute the distinguishing conceptual elements of reading promotion. However, the delineation of promotion goals, contents, methods, and effectiveness can accurately define the concepts and clarify the scope.

The promotion contents are directly related to the focus of reading promotion. As Mr. Wu Xi said, reading is a very big and broad concept. The serious reading is admittedly one kind of reading. Reading the newspapers and popular magazines from the curb stand is also reading, and opening the mobile phone to browse microblog and WeChat is reading as well<sup>19</sup>. In an era when reading promotion targets are omnipresent, attention must be focused on certain reading promotion contents according to the need. The ever-changing times and needs have led to the emergence of reading promotion, thus the key promotion contents and areas are required to meet the requirements. As for the Chinese society, the real development after 1949 came after the enforcement of the reform and opening policies. The impetus of this development process is more in the economic, scientific and technological fields, but not as much in the cultural and spiritual areas. Yet, the international development trend is increasingly showing that culture has become the core source of national competitiveness. It is in this situation that the Sixth Plenary Session of the Seventeenth Central Committee of the Communist Party of China adopted the "Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Deepening the Reform of the Cultural System to Promote the Great Development and Prosperity of Socialist Culture". The importance of cultural development, the calling for the construction of a public cultural service system and the promotion of reading for all have increasingly been mentioned in the subsequent government working reports. In terms of the latest demand, the focus of current reading promotion should be on materials integrating human beings' collective wisdom, which can play a role in culture inheritance and self-cultivation. Professional or learning materials can be part of the promotion contents but should not be the main focus of the promotion. Recreational reading materials which have a negative impact on society should not be considered as the promotion

contents. Balancing the focus and the ordinary reading materials is critical to the effectiveness of reading promotion. Mr. Wang Yuguang also pointed out that the classics should be the focus of reading promotion (Wang 2015b).

Reading promotion methods can be classified into three categories: 1) to create attractive reading promotion spaces; 2) to develop mobile reading websites or applications that adapt to current readers' preferences; 3) to carry out various forms of reading promotion activities or services, such as book exhibitions, reading clubs, lectures, book swap, reading contests, book lists. Different reading promotion subjects have their own preferences in the application of promotion methods. For example, libraries and bookstores spare no effort in developing new reading spaces and reading promotion activities. Publishing presses, digital reading contents providers are more devoted to the creation of digital mobile reading applications. Some libraries have also begun to dabble in this field. Parent-child educational institutions and training agencies have made great efforts to the construction of chain picture book libraries, reading advisory services. The "Story Mother" group has built its own sites or collaborated with schools and libraries to develop reading promotion practices. Through the various attractive reading promotion themes or brands, the different reading promotion groups began to cooperate more and more. They utilize their respective advantages to promote a positive social reading atmosphere and build a nationwide reading society.

## **THE CONCEPTS OF READING PROMOTION AND LIBRARY READING PROMOTION**

Considering the background and the key elements of reading promotion, we can define reading promotion from the perspective of the subjective promotion goals and from the objective promotion effectiveness.

Reading promotion refers to the practices conducted by organizations or individuals under the era requirements of inheriting culture and improving national quality, covering the construction of reading promotion spaces, the creation of mobile reading promotion applications and staging various reading activities, which can cultivate reading interests and habits for valuable works, improve reading skills and effects, and enhance the quantity and quality of social reading. This definition firstly uses the promotion effect as the basic defining principle. It has eschewed the concern of social practice that does not subjectively encourage social reading promotion as the direct goal but objectively produces reading promotion effects. It also clarifies the scope of promotion contents and the promotion methods which will help the practice communities to set the work focus and scope.

Although the library is also an information service organization, it can be described as a kind of social reading container, which has a natural and inextricably close relationship with reading. China's reading promotion from the initial rise to today's magnificent growth is mainly due to the advocacy of the leading organization of the library community—the Chinese Library Association and the efforts of various types of libraries. Mr. Wu Xi has mentioned that library is the main force for social reading promotion on a variety of occasions

and in a number of articles [19]. However, there is still confusion about the boundaries of reading promotion, library promotion, readers' activities, and information literacy instructions in the library practices. This confusion has caused inaccurate positioning and planning for reading promotion, resulting in insufficient promotion focus and features, lack of innovation and poor promotion effects. Library reading promotion is neither a simple extension of the reader service month, nor is a re-composition of reader activities.

Reading promotion has become an important and specialized area of library work, which can be reflected by the phenomenon that many libraries of China have set up special departments or posts for reading promotion. The main objectives of library reading promotion are to improve the reading quantity, reading skills and reading quality of valuable works, rather than to promote the library itself. As a cultural heritage institution, the library reading promotion content is not limited to its collection. The focus of the promotion content should be valuable works, and the library collection could be supplemented and enhanced based on the reading promotion practice. In view of this, while defining reading promotion, it is also very necessary to define library reading promotion to clarify some concepts that are often ambiguous in the work and to clarify the work fields and focus. With the tenet of promoting cultural inheritance and enhancing literacy, library reading promotion refers to the diverse reading services with promotion focus on valuable reading materials, especially classics, including creating featured reading spaces, developing mobile reading applications and staging reading events, that aim to promote social reading willingness, behavior and reading level.

## CONCLUSION

In his article "The theoretical self-consciousness of reading promotion", professor Fan Bingsi points out that the basic concept of reading promotion is one of the theoretical issues to be further studied. The discussion of these concepts is not pedantic research, but the service orientation to ensure librarians to carry out reading promotion appropriately<sup>20</sup>. This paper explores the differentiation principles and the key factors of reading promotion. On that basis, the concepts of reading promotion and library reading promotion are defined in order to create definitions with more clear characteristics and practical guiding values, and help to advance the research and practice of reading promotion. Building a universal reading society requires the joint efforts of the whole society. As the guarantor institution of social reading rights, the library should play an extremely important role in the construction of reading society. To define the concept of library reading promotion, the key objective is to clarify the ambiguity of the concept and to promote the work to be carried out effectively. The library circle needs to define the goals, scope, focus of the work conceptually, clarify the relationship between reading promotion work and other work of the library, carry out effective and innovative top-level design based on resource integration, so as to make the reading promotion work step into a specialized, normalized and professional development state. When

the work really achieves the effect of promoting reading, it will naturally promote the use of libraries and enhance the reputation of libraries.

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