Chapter 12

Public Information Service for the Disadvantaged in China’s Towns: Case Study of Two Chinese Towns

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ABSTRACT

This study uses the methods of questionnaire and group discussion to conduct field research in A and B towns, which are located in the eastern developed region and the western undeveloped region of China, respectively. According to comparative study on the status of providing public information service for the disadvantaged between A and B towns, the author finds that the public in A town are superior to the ones in B in terms of information literacy, public information service expenditure, and satisfaction rate of public information service. Similarities exist in terms of differences in accessing public information service between town and village, among social groups, and the causes resulting in imbalance of public information service and features of the information-poor’s group distribution. The author discusses the differences in development policies between city and village, as well as differences in financial investment of public information service, education, and individual’s income level between A and B towns.

INTRODUCTION

Owing to low education and knowledge level and much weaker capacity of identified information, the farmers are short of expenditure consciousness in public information service in China. Meanwhile, because of lacking of effective mechanisms for demand expression, in fact, they enjoy less quantity and lower quality public information service, leading to scarcely meet their basic needs of production and living (Wang, 2009). What’s more, in China, many webs don’t consider the disableds’
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needs, page layout, typography, color matching, operating methods and forms of multimedia, etc., which have serious impairment to the disabled (Guo, 2009). That proves preliminary that the public information doesn’t meet the disadvantage’s needs in China.

In order to understand the status of China town government provides public information service for the disadvantaged, the author conducts field research in A town of the developed region in eastern and B town of the undeveloped region in western of China, hoping to find the differences and similarities in the process of public information service provided, and discuss the causes of differences and similarities by carrying out comparative study on the situation of providing public information service for the disadvantaged between A and B towns.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The discussion of the foreign scholars on public information service for the disadvantaged mainly centers in the study on digital divide (Fuchs, 2009; Aerschot & Rodousakis, 2008; van Deursen & van Dijk, 2009). Christian Fuchs (2009) conducts comparative study by multivariate regression analysis on 126 countries, and contends that income inequality is an important factor to influence Internet usage, and is a main reason for digital divide. Aerschot and Rodousakis (2008) maintain that the digital divide affects low socio-economic status groups in particular; socio-economic factors—especially age and level of education play a role in determining whether a person is an Internet user or non-user. Van Deursen and van Dijk (2009) discuss the equity of public information service from the proposition of digital divide, and argue that digital is bridged by improving digital skills for the use of online public information and services. These study results have been involved the problem of public information service for the disadvantaged, but lacked of in-depth analysis in terms of communication between government and the public and the measures improved to public information service for the disadvantaged. According to Fuch’s study results, in this paper, the author divides the sample group into the high and low income group. According to the study results from Aerschot and Rodousakis, the author emphasizes efforts of education in two towns during the interview. Using the study results from van Deursen and van Dijk, the author designs the twenty-first and twenty-second questions in questionnaire to research the public’s information literacy.

China scholars on the study of public information service are mainly from the proposition of macro level, and short of measures study in terms of improving public information service. Li (2008) only discusses the problems and measures of government public information service from the proposition of government information openness, but doesn’t involve in the disadvantaged problem. Feng and Zhou (2010) discuss the equity of public information service superficially, and argue that public information management and service should take the public as the center, and emphasize that the public may access and enjoy public information service equity, which requires the means of public information service are diversify, and the content of public information service is rich. Wang (2009) discusses the problems that local government offer public information service for the peasant from the proposition of lacking of effective express mechanism of the peasant’s demands, low efficiency decision-making mechanism of public information service supplied from up to down, and lacking of stable funding guarantee mechanism. Xia (2004) discusses diversification of public information service from the interaction relationship between government and the third sector in public information service. These results don’t in-depth discuss the causes and measures of the problem of public information service for the disadvantaged. According to the study results from Feng and Zhou, the author designs twenty-fourth question to research the causes of imbal-
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