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On the Applicability of IFLA Standards in Different Local Contexts: The Case of IFLA School Library Guidelines in China

Jing Zhang, Lin Lin, A. D. Madden, and Ying Zhang

ABSTRACT

This article reports responses to the IFLA's school library guidelines by school librarians in South China. The IFLA's 16 guidelines-based recommendations were presented to representatives of eight schools, and a workshop was organized in response to their feedback. Librarians and principals from 42 schools in Guangzhou assessed the guidelines both before and after the workshop. Most recommendations were considered applicable, but several areas were thought to be poorly suited to the Chinese situation. Many participants' concerns about the relevance of the recommendations were allayed by the training provided during the workshop. However, the training not only informed the participating school librarians of the areas in which the recommendations were appropriate but also highlighted areas where they were not. In particular, participants felt that some elements of the recommendations were politically insensitive and that the lack of status of school librarians in China would make some of them impractical.

An important task of the IFLA is the development and promotion of international guidelines to ensure high-quality library and information services. Currently, this is the responsibility of the Committee on Standards, which was established in 2012 and is directly affiliated to the IFLA's governing board. The governing board is responsible for coordinating the standardization work of the IFLA and other relevant organizations and supports the standardization activities of IFLA professional bodies, especially specialized sections. On April 30, 2017, the IFLA issued 54 international standards, including guidelines, conceptual models, digital format codes, and rules for resource description. The standards covered information resource management, information resource records, library activities and services, and other related activities.

Internationally, the IFLA is the most authoritative and influential professional organization for librarians and related professions. In the development of IFLA standards, a key consider-

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ation is that they should be widely applicable in different contexts around the world. The introduction to the second edition of the "IFLA School Library Guidelines" (IFLA 2015) reminds readers to think globally and act locally when striving to provide library services that help to enhance "teaching and learning for all." Such advice is relevant even in today's increasingly globalized context because local standards vary considerably. The applicability of IFLA standards, especially in non-Western countries, is a subject that deserves more attention. This article reports on an investigation into the applicability of the guidelines in China and suggests ways in which they could be made more appropriate.

Background and Literature Review

School Library Policies

In China, the IFLA's guidelines will be considered against a background in which much thought has been given to the role of school libraries. Over the past 30 years, China's Ministry of Education has introduced various initiatives relating to the "Regulations of Primary and Secondary School Libraries" (Ministry of Education 1991, 2003, 2018). Other initiatives by the Chinese government have included a "Notice on Further Strengthening the Book Allocation and Management of Primary and Secondary School Libraries (Reading Rooms)" (Ministry of Education and General Administration of Press and Publication 2011) and "Opinions on Strengthening the Construction and Application of Primary and Secondary School Libraries in the New Period" (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Culture, and State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television 2015).

According to recently issued national policy, a *school library* is defined as the literature and information center of a school (both primary and secondary). It is regarded as an important place for teaching, education, and research; as vital to the development of school culture and curriculum resources; and as a valuable platform for promoting the all-around development of students and the professionalization of teachers. In addition, a school library is key to the modernization of basic education and plays a part in public cultural services in China. Among the responsibilities of a school library is the support of teachers in their teaching and research, the equipping of students with the knowledge and skills to retrieve and use information, and the organization of reading programs designed to promote the habit of reading among students (Ministry of Education 2018).

These policies and regulations clarify the role of school libraries in improving the level of education and teaching services and provide guidance on the construction of school libraries to ensure that they are compatible with their role within a school. However, adoption of these policies and regulations has been patchy, so the IFLA guidelines can make a valuable contribution if their relevance can be demonstrated.

Chinese Schools and School Libraries

Under normal circumstances, children in China enter elementary school at the age of 6 (after kindergarten), and then graduate to secondary school at age 12. Their first 3 years of secondary education are spent in junior high school and the next 3 (until the age of 18) are in high school. University-affiliated schools mostly cater to the children of university employees, whose tuition fees are subsidized. However, the schools also allocate a quota of unsubsidized places to other local children. The limited research that has been done into libraries in Chinese schools indicates that they vary significantly in quality, suggesting a clear role for many of the recommendations in the IFLA guidelines (Zhang et al. 2016). As of 2015, China had 65,645 secondary schools and 190,525 primary schools (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2016). Most of these have libraries, but because there is no LIS program specifically targeted at school librarians in universities or other education institutions, the professional development of school librarians has relied mainly on continuing professional development (Zhang et al. 2018).

IFLA Standards

Academic discussions on IFLA's international standards focus mainly on catalog standards. Whether it is because of conceptual models such as FRBR (functional requirements for bibliographic records), FRAD (functional requirements for authority data), and FRSAD (functional requirements for subject authority data) (Oliver 2015) or cataloging rules such as RDA (resource description and access) and ISBD (international standard bibliographic description) (Galeffi 2015), scholars' attention has been attracted to discussions on the transfer of cataloging ideology, innovations in cataloging methods, and other aspects at all levels, along with the diversification of library literature resources.

As for the applicability of IFLA international standards in a specific local context, academic research has focused mainly on cataloging, emphasizing in particular the development and revision of local standards in response to international standards. For example, De-ming Zhou (2014) discussed the application and development of RDA in China. The RDA application research team in the Shanghai Library formulated the "Western Language Literature RDA Cataloging Guidelines" (Wang 2014). In a Chinese paper based on pilot research into the IFLA School Library Guidelines, Jing Zhang, Lin Lin, and Ying Zhang (2017) considered the applicability of the guidelines based on a study of eight elementary and secondary school libraries. Elsewhere, Mohammad-Karim Saberi and Fatemeh Pazooki (2015) compared Iranian public library standards and IFLA standards and found a significant gap between the two, based on assessments of the current state of public libraries. In contrast, earlier IFLA standards inspired the set of guidelines used in Catalonia, Spain, although they diverged from IFLA's 2015 guidelines (Baró, Mañà, and Cosials 2015).

IFLA School Library Guidelines

In June 2015, the IFLA Section of School Libraries published the second edition of IFLA School Library Guidelines to replace the first edition, developed in 2002 by the School Libraries Section (then called the School Libraries and Resource Centers Section). As was specified in its preface, the guidelines were "developed to assist school library professionals and educational decision-makers in their efforts to ensure that all students and teachers have access to effective school library resources and services, delivered by qualified school library personnel." During the drafting, international feedback and contributions were invited and collected to ensure that the document would "be both inspirational and aspirational" and would represent "a compromise between what we aspire to achieve and what we can reasonably expect to achieve" (IFLA 2015).

Research Design

This article reports on a piece of action research that was designed to gauge the response of practitioners to the IFLA guidelines and to determine their level of understanding (phase 1).

Action research is rooted in the work of the psychologist Kurt Lewin and "seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities" (Reason and Bradbury 2001, 1). It is a research methodology that should seek "to effect desired change" and should happen in the context of action within an organization, and the researchers should be engaged with the practitioners (Bradbury-Huang 2010).

In the light of the findings from phase 1, we sought "to effect desired change" by means of an intervention intended to improve understanding. Not only did the intervention allow participating school librarians to offer a more informed evaluation of the guidelines (phase 2, pts. 1 and 2), it also provided insights relating to areas where the IFLA guidelines were misunderstood or are inappropriate. These insights will be of considerable value in shaping future training programs.

Research Location

The research was carried out in three cities in Guangdong Province in South China, one of the country's most economically developed regions. Guangzhou is one of the four largest cities in China. It is the capital of Guangdong Province and is one of eight "National Center Cities" in China. As such, it is helping to shape economic and cultural policy and is playing a major role as a center of international communications. Yunfu is a mining city, rich in mineral resources in the west of the province, and Zhuhai (one of the first special economic zones in China) is in the southwest of the Pearl River estuary in Guangdong Province, with Hong Kong in the east

Table 1. Cities in Which the Study Took Place

City	Area (km^2)	Population (Million)	GDP (Billion RMB)	Per Capita GDP (RMB)	No. of Secondary Schools	No. of Elementary Schools
Guangzhou	7,434	14.044	1,961.094	139,639	514	953
Yunfu	7,779	2.989	71.314	23,859	102	162
Zhuhai	1,711	1.675	222.637	132,918	71	116

Note.—GDP = gross domestic product; RMB = renminbi.

and Macao in the south. It is a key point of the "21st-Century Maritime Silk Road." Summary statistics are presented in table 1 (Guangzhou Statistics Bureau 2016; Yunfu Statistics Bureau 2016; Zhuhai Statistics Bureau 2016). Both Guangzhou and Zhuhai are prosperous, economically developed cities. Yunfu, with a per capita gross domestic product of around a sixth of the other two cities, provides a useful contrast. The choice of cities was largely determined by the location of the research team, but the prosperity, well-developed infrastructure, and first-class libraries of Guangzhou probably make the guidelines more applicable there than in other areas of China, making it a useful testing ground.

The study was performed in two phases. The first was in April 2016, and the second phase was carried out the following year in two stages: stage 1 took place in late March 2017, and stage 2 was in early April 2017.

Phase 1

This phase sought to assess responses to the guidelines across a range of schools. The eight schools recruited included four elementary and four secondary schools. To ensure diversity, the study included a mixture of university-affiliated schools and independent schools (table 2).

The IFLA guidelines are captured in a set of 16 recommendations (IFLA 2015, 10–11; see appendix), each of which summarizes some of the guidelines presented in the subsequent six

Table 2. Schools Participating in Phase 1

Sample Group	Group Description	City
A	Independent secondary schools in developed cities	Zhuhai, Guangzhou
B	University subsidiary secondary schools in developed cities	Zhuhai, Guangzhou
C	Elementary schools (1 independent and 1 university subsidiary) in developed city	Guangzhou
D	Independent elementary school libraries in undeveloped city	Yunfu

Table 3. Questions Asked of Each of the 16 Recommendations

Please: (1) Check whether the corresponding recommendation is in line with the current situation of your school and library and choose the appropriate option. (2) Specify your choice.				Please: (1) Check whether the corresponding recommendation can guide the development of your school and library and choose the appropriate option. (2) Specify your choice.			
Fully applicable	Partially applicable	Not applicable	Not sure	Fully applicable	Partially applicable	Not applicable	Not sure
Comments:				Comments:			

chapters. The principal and chief librarian of each school was presented with Chinese translations of these recommendations, together with explanatory notes based on chapters 1–6. None of the 16 participants had seen the guidelines before. Their response to each recommendation was assessed using the questionnaire in table 3. The recommendations were grouped according to themes identified (table 4). This was done to help participants concentrate on one specific topic (as defined by the themes) before moving on to another. The themes also provided a useful focus for analyzing participants' spoken and written comments.

While the participant was reading and responding to the recommendations, the researcher remained on hand to answer questions, thereby ensuring that all the recommendations were fully understood. Discussions were recorded and, along with comments written in response to the recommendations, helped to highlight areas where there was a need for further clarification. A workshop was planned around the findings and provided the focus for phase 2.

Phase 2

The schools that participated in phase 1 were selected to represent as wide a variety as possible (table 2). Elementary and secondary schools differed in their responses to the guidelines, mostly because, whereas secondary schools employ full-time librarians, in primary schools it

Table 4. Themes Used to Group IFLA Recommendations

Theme	IFLA Recommendation
Mission and purpose	1, 2
Legislation	5, 6
Roles of library staff	7, 8, 9, 10, 13
Services and programs	4, 11, 14, 15
Integrating libraries	3, 12, 16

is a part-time post, usually filled by a teacher. All participating secondary schools, however, expressed similar views on the guidelines, regardless of which city they were in or whether they were university-affiliated or independent.

To address the issues that phase 1 identified, phase 2 stages 1 and 2 were implemented. These stages used a slightly different questionnaire. Again, it was based on the IFLA's 16 recommendations, each of which was evaluated according to the questions in table 3. However, some translation issues became apparent during phase 1, and these were addressed. In addition, the guidance notes were removed. These notes had prompted discussions of up to 2 hours, making it impractical to use them in the time available.

Guangzhou has 11 districts and 510 schools. Representatives of 42 of them attended the "Advanced Training Program for Guangzhou Primary and Secondary School Professional Librarians" workshop in the School of Information Management, Sun Yat-sen University (table 5). The program ran from March to April 2017 and was commissioned by the Guangzhou Education Equipment Center. It was an 8-day training program that comprised a total of 48 learning hours. In addition to covering the IFLA guidelines and their applicability in China, the program covered the following topics: the development of school library collections; the application of information technology in a school library; the mission and action strategy of school libraries; the evaluation of school library reading projects; the transformation and development of school libraries; students' information needs and behaviors; programming in a school library; the international development trends of school libraries; the management of projects to promote reading; and students' information literacy education in the digital age (Zhang et al. 2018).

Table 5. Locations of Schools Participating in Stage 2

District	No. of Schools
Liwan	6
Huangpu	6
Panyu	6
Yuexiu	4
Haizhu	4
Tianhe	4
Baiyun	4
Huadu	2
Nansha	2
Conghua	2
Zengcheng	2
Total	42

A total of 53 curators (who are responsible for the library) or key teachers from primary and secondary schools in Guangzhou attended the program, and 42 agreed to take part in this study. They were invited to a workshop about the guidelines on April 10, 2017. Approximately 2 weeks beforehand, on March 28, they were sent the 16 recommendations and asked to respond to the questions in table 3. During the workshop, each recommendation was explained in turn. After each explanation, participants were asked to assess it and to write down any comments.

Results

Quantitative Feedback

Tables 6 and 7 summarize the feedback to the 16 recommendations, and figures 1 and 2 indicate the impact that the workshop had on participants' evaluations of the recommendations. The assessments "fully applicable," "partially applicable," "not applicable," and "not sure" are all based on the responses provided to the questions in table 3, so they provide an insight into the participants' perception of the recommendations and whether their perceptions were affected by the workshop.

Table 6. Assessments of the Applicability of IFLA Recommendations 1–16 by Participants in Phase 2, Stage 1

	In Line with Current Situation				Can Guide Development			
	Fully Applicable	Partially Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Sure	Fully Applicable	Partially Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Sure
R1	45.24	52.38	2.38	.00	40.48	59.52	.00	.00
R2	35.71	57.14	7.14	.00	38.10	61.90	.00	.00
R3	66.67	28.57	2.38	2.38	33.33	66.67	.00	.00
R4	52.38	38.10	9.52	.00	38.10	59.52	2.38	.00
R5	35.71	52.38	11.90	.00	28.57	66.67	4.76	.00
R6	42.86	45.24	11.90	.00	35.71	57.14	7.14	.00
R7	52.38	40.48	4.76	2.38	38.10	59.52	2.38	.00
R8	54.76	38.10	7.14	.00	50.00	47.62	2.38	.00
R9	38.10	61.90	0.00	.00	23.81	76.19	.00	.00
R10	57.14	38.10	4.76	.00	38.10	59.52	2.38	.00
R11	33.33	66.67	0.00	.00	30.95	69.05	.00	.00
R12	40.48	42.86	14.29	2.38	35.71	57.14	4.76	2.38
R13	50.00	40.48	7.14	2.38	42.86	54.76	.00	2.38
R14	61.90	30.95	4.76	2.38	42.86	54.76	.00	2.38
R15	47.62	42.86	7.14	2.38	33.33	61.90	2.38	2.38
R16	47.62	45.24	4.76	2.38	30.95	64.29	2.38	2.38

Note.—Values are percentages, $N = 42$.

Table 7. Assessments of the Applicability of IFLA Recommendations 1–16 by Participants in Phase 2, Stage 2

	In Line with Current Situation				Can Guide Development			
	Fully Applicable	Partially Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Sure	Fully Applicable	Partially Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Sure
R1	59.52	28.57	11.90	.00	64.29	35.71	.00	.00
R2	57.14	21.43	21.43	.00	52.38	40.48	7.14	.00
R3	66.67	26.19	4.76	2.38	52.38	47.62	.00	.00
R4	57.14	26.19	16.67	.00	47.62	45.24	7.14	.00
R5	38.10	14.29	42.86	4.76	40.48	45.24	11.90	2.38
R6	59.52	16.67	23.81	.00	61.90	33.33	4.76	.00
R7	71.43	23.81	4.76	.00	47.62	52.38	.00	.00
R8	57.14	26.19	16.67	.00	47.62	47.62	4.76	.00
R9	57.14	33.33	9.52	.00	30.95	66.67	2.38	.00
R10	66.67	23.81	7.14	2.38	42.86	57.14	.00	.00
R11	59.52	30.95	9.52	.00	61.90	33.33	4.76	.00
R12	61.90	19.05	19.05	.00	57.14	38.10	4.76	.00
R13	73.81	21.43	4.76	.00	59.52	40.48	.00	.00
R14	69.05	16.67	14.29	.00	52.38	42.86	4.76	.00
R15	50.00	19.05	28.57	2.38	54.76	33.33	9.52	2.38
R16	66.67	26.19	7.14	.00	45.24	52.38	2.38	.00

Note.—Values are percentages, $N = 42$.

Table 8 provides further insight into where the training had an impact. To generate this table, the recommendations were considered to have validity if respondents ranked them as either fully or partially applicable, but an assessment of "fully applicable" was given greater weight.

Analysis of Participants' Comments and Observations on the Guidelines

Because elementary schools do not routinely employ librarians, many recommendations were not relevant to the participants in phase 1, and this was reflected in some of the comments.

Mission and Purpose (Recommendations 1 and 2)

Evidence from phase 1 suggests that clear statements of mission and purpose may be uncommon, and there was some skepticism about the validity of such statements. For example, in phase 1, the IFLA's explanation of the role of a mission statement as aligning "with the educational purpose of preparing students for their future work and as citizens" (IFLA 2015, 19) led one principal to observe that "library resources cannot meet the needs of the school community to prepare qualified citizens."[1]

1. 图书馆的资源无法满足社会对合格公民的需求

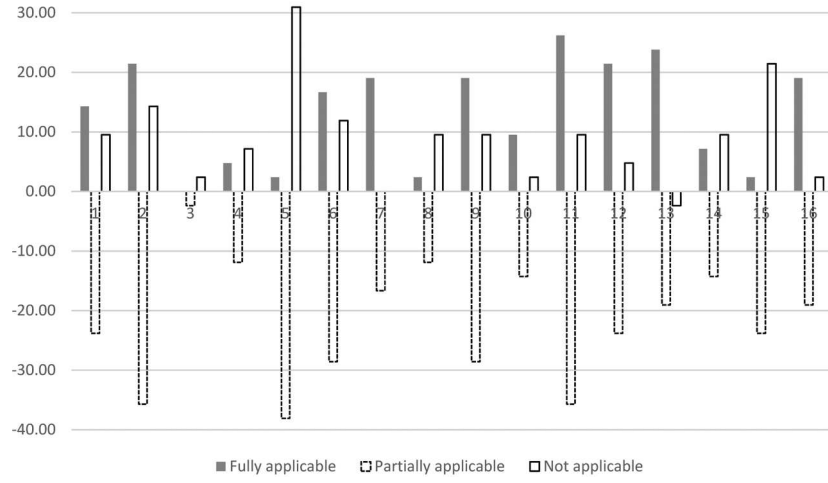

Figure 1. Change in response to assessment of current relevance of guidelines to school and library following workshop. "Not sure" responses are not included. Color version available as an online enhancement.

Of the schools participating in phase 1, only one elementary school and one secondary school library had an established mission and purpose. This lack of mission statements led to participants questioning the relevance of recommendations 1 and 2. The relevance of recommendation 1 was further called into question because most respondents were unaware of the international documents it referred to and did not know about the IFLA's core values (Zhang et al. 2017).

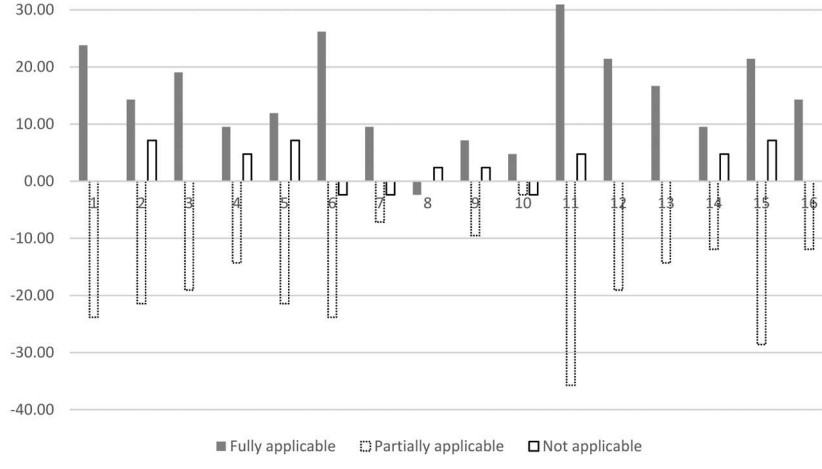

Figure 2. Change in response to assessment of relevance of guidelines to the development of school and library in the next 5 years following phase 2, stage 2. "Not sure" responses are not included. Color version available as an online enhancement.

Table 8. Ranking of Recommendations Based on All Four Assessments of Applicability

	Stage 1		Stage 2			
Recommendation	Current	Can Guide Development	Current	Can Guide Development	Mean	SD
3	4	3	3	3	3.25	.50
1	3	1	8	1	3.25	3.30
9	1	5	7	7	5.00	2.83
11	2	4	6	9	5.25	2.99
13	12	7	1	2	5.50	5.07
7	7	10	2	4	5.75	3.50
10	5	11	5	5	6.50	3.00
16	8	13	5	6	8.00	3.56
14	6	8	9	11	8.50	2.08
8	9	6	11	12	9.50	2.65
2	10	2	13	14	9.75	5.44
4	11	9	10	14	11.00	2.16
6	14	16	14	8	13.00	3.46
12	16	15	12	10	13.25	2.75
15	13	12	15	15	13.75	1.50
5	15	14	16	16	15.25	.96

Participants in phase 2 were also unfamiliar with the documents, but in stage 1 of the study, their comments suggested that they accepted that the principles and values stated in the documents must be relevant to school libraries. However, in stage 2, when the participants were better informed (following the workshop), they had more understanding of the documents mentioned in recommendation 1, and many felt that the principles and values espoused were not appropriate to a Chinese context.

Similar concerns were expressed about recommendation 2, particularly after the workshop. The researchers' interpretation of the IFLA guidelines that define school libraries and their role (IFLA 2015, secs. 1.3, 1.4) caused several participants to reevaluate recommendation 2. Many who had previously considered it applicable or partially applicable now considered it not applicable. One chief librarian noted in feedback that "China's exam-oriented education determines that the expectations and requirements of national, regional, and local education management departments for all schools are mainly in special subjects classroom teaching and learning. Therefore, the learning spaces of school libraries, various learning centers, and all capabilities of students mentioned in the guidelines are inconsistent with the expectations and requirements of education management departments."[2]

2. 中国重视考试的教育决定了国家、地区和地方各级教育管理部门对学校的期望和要求主要是关于特定科目的课堂教学。因此，指南中提到的学校图书馆的学习空间、不同的学习中心以及所提及的学生应具备的能力，都与教育管理部门的期望和要求不一致。

Legislation (Recommendations 5 and 6)

Recommendations relating to school library legislation were seen as among the least relevant (table 8). Currently, China has no laws relating to school libraries at a national level. At a city level, only one of the three cities covered by this study (Guangzhou) has passed legislation relating to libraries, and this applies only to public libraries.

Another factor contributing to the lack of relevance of recommendations 5 and 6 is the lack of managerial influence that librarians in Chinese schools have. At present, school librarians are not permitted to develop policies independently. The formulation of school policies, including those that relate to the library, is the responsibility of a school's administrative department. As things stand, there is no way for legislation to provide support for the establishment, development, and continuous improvement of libraries.

In both phases 1 and 2, principals and chief librarians believed that the establishment and development of school libraries should be guaranteed by law and that librarians should play more of a part in formulating school policies. Many also agreed that although the "ethical responsibilities" referred to in recommendation 6 are currently not a primary focus of school libraries (which were felt to have more fundamental concerns), in future, such a focus can be expected.

Roles of Library Staff (Recommendations 7–10 and 13)

Some secondary school libraries in China are run by staff with library qualifications, which may qualify them as "professional librarians" (recommendations 7–9); however, at present, there is no training program in China's library education system specifically designed for school librarians. All chief librarians participating acknowledged the need to clearly define the role of professional school librarian (recommendation 8) and expressed the hope that, in future, relevant agencies within China will be able to provide targeted vocational training.

Lack of professional status was seen by some participants as a reason why school librarians were not usually given a role in establishing school policy: "Only if the professional level of library professionals is in line with the professional level of education and teaching management, can we assume a leading role."[3] And "currently the school librarian does not possess the competence to be a leader."[4]

Again, the responses of librarians were influenced by whether they were in elementary or secondary schools. Recommendation 10, which advises that school librarians "should endeavour to develop collections of physical and digital resources consistent with the school's curriculum and with the national, ethnic, and cultural identities of members of the school commu-

3. 只有图书馆专业人员的专业水平与教育教学管理专业水平一致，才能担当领导角色。
4. 目前，馆员自身素质不够，无法担当领导角色。

nity," was seen as irrelevant by the elementary school librarians who participated in phase 1. None of their libraries had collections of digital resources, and a lack of funding and management support meant that they had no plans to acquire any.

Although the secondary schools represented in the study are developing both physical and digital collections, these have been accumulated with a focus on school curricula and without any consideration of the national, ethnic, and cultural identities of members of the school community. Because library collection policies are determined largely by the school management, librarians and teachers have little say in their development.

The description of the core instructional activities of a school librarian suggested in recommendation 13 received a mixed response during phase 1. The recommendation was more favorably received by secondary school librarians than elementary school librarians and by librarians from the two developed cities (Guangzhou and Zhuhai) than by those from Yunfu. Participating elementary school libraries had conducted some book-reading promotions, whereas the secondary school libraries represented had provided media and information literacy instruction in addition to basic literacy training.

None of the libraries that participated in the study offered inquiry-based teaching, technology integration, or professional development of teachers, and some of the recommendations were felt to be outside the current role of school library staff. Several activities listed in recommendation 13 for example were seen as the responsibility of other staff or other school bodies: "It is kind of overstepping if the school library carries out these activities. But we can assist in ways such as providing books for study."[5] And "our school has a library and an information center. These educational activities . . . should be carried out by the information center not the library."[6]

The data presented in table 8 suggest that many concerns expressed by librarians were addressed by the workshop. However, all librarians taking part in the workshop were from Guangzhou; it is possible that librarians from less developed parts of China might have continued to question the relevance of recommendation 13.

Services and Programs (Recommendations 4, 11, 14, and 15)

Public libraries at the county level or above are assessed and graded by the Ministry of Culture every 4 years (Public Culture Department of Ministry of Culture of China 2017). In contrast, assessments for school libraries are not compulsory and do not generate specific feedback or suggestions. They tend to be informal and irregular and to focus mainly on library usage,

5. 由图书馆开展这些活动是越位，但可协助，提供相关书籍以供学习。
6. 学校另设有信息中心，取代了图书馆这一职能。

finances, collections, and staff. Although most respondents agreed that there should be regular, comprehensive assessments, two chief librarians thought that these would be "difficult and unpractical"[7] to conduct.

Some libraries were able to supplement resources with support from external bodies such as charities, allowing them to update their physical and digital resources, and generally there was a desire to offer relevant services and programs, as indicated by the ranking of recommendation 11 (table 8). However, there was clear frustration in many cases about limitations imposed by lack of resources: "The school library can only guarantee the feasibility of reading. It cannot fully support the needs of all students and teachers. We will try to provide. But the needs change too fast."[8] And "the school library has no facilities or equipment . . . [although] teachers can find teaching resources online because they all have computers."[9]

Again, lack of school librarians' professional status was an issue; in addition, the concept of "evidence-based practice" was new to participants. Given the limited role of school librarians in policy making, the collection of evidence to be used with a view to guiding services and programs would represent a considerable challenge. This, perhaps, accounts for the low ranking of recommendation 15 (table 8).

Integrating Libraries (Recommendations 3, 12, and 16)

There was wide support for the idea of a development plan (recommendation 3; see table 8), but lack of resources made the participating librarians skeptical about the feasibility of any plan. Successful integration of school libraries into the educational life of the school was seen as highly dependent on the presence of a supportive principal, to the extent that all chief librarians taking part in phase 2 believed that the inclusion of such support should be added as another condition to recommendation 3. For example, one chief librarian noted in feedback that "in China, it is the principal who is responsible for the school. Therefore, the features necessary for the success of a school library should include a principal who supports the development of a school library, or the three features necessary for the success of a school library should be taken as a target of principal's performance, which can guarantee the success of a school library."[10]

Associations with public and academic libraries were uncommon (recommendation 12). Even the university-affiliated schools in Guangzhou and Zhuhai (table 2) had few connections with the library of their affiliate university. However, Guangzhou's main city library provides a range of library services known as the "Guangzhou model" (Ke 2016). Services include smart, self-service libraries (which make use of RFID [radio frequency identification] and recommender systems) and mobile libraries. These supplement the resources of existing school libraries and provide facilities to schools without libraries.

7. 困难和不切实际
8. 只能保证阅读的可行性，很难完全满足师生的需求，会尽量提供，但需求变化太快，更新跟不上。
9. 学校图书馆没有设施或设备. . . . . 老师自己有电脑，上网就能找得到教学资源。
10. 学校是校长负责制，应加上一位支持图书馆发展的校长或者把以上三点加入到校长绩效考核，才能保障。

The elementary school librarians who contributed to phase 1 were particularly skeptical about the kind of planned and systematic communication envisaged by recommendation 16. One (from Guangzhou) commented that "the library has no special funds; its expenses are covered by other school funds. The library finances will not be changed because of better performance. Therefore, this kind of communication is completely unnecessary."[11]

Secondary school librarians were less skeptical. Responses to the questionnaire in phase 2, stage 1, suggested doubt about the relevance of recommendation 16, but much of the doubt appears to have been resolved by information provided in the workshop (table 8).

Discussion

Overall Applicability of the Guidelines

Despite some skepticism, the tables and figures suggest that all 16 recommendations were considered to be at least partially applicable by most participants in phase 2, all of whom were representing secondary schools.

Because responses to each recommendation were anonymous, it is not possible to look for patterns associated with particular schools. Nevertheless, it is clear that although assessments were generally favorable, there was a lot of variation. Figures 1 and 2 suggest that the workshop had considerable impact on the way in which participants assessed the recommendations, but the impact was not consistent. One apparent impact was an increase in certainty. Responses such as "partially applicable" or "not sure" could be interpreted as indicating doubt. Prior to the workshop, six recommendations were seen as being fully applicable to the current situation by more than 50% of respondents; in all cases, only a minority felt that the recommendations were applicable as guides to development over the next 5 years (table 6). After the workshop, most respondents felt that most recommendations were applicable both currently and as a guide to future development (table 7).

Some assessments of the recommendations appeared little changed following the workshop. Recommendation 3 (about school library legislation) was seen as fully or partially applicable both currently and in the future by most respondents before and after the workshop. Similarly, the negative assessment of recommendation 5 (for a formally trained school librarian) remained unaffected by the workshop (table 8). In some cases, though, the training appeared to significantly change the minds of respondents (Zhang et al. 2016). This was most notably the case with recommendation 13 (regarding monitoring and evaluation), which was far more favorably regarded after the workshop (table 8).

This study focused mostly on the views of librarians and principals from secondary schools in Guangzhou. The evidence gathered in phase 1 suggests that, had there been sufficient resources to repeat the study in different cities and with more representation from primary

11. 图书馆没有专项经费，现在的经费都是从学校其他经费挪用的，并不会根据绩效而改变，因此没有必要沟通。

schools, more concerns might have been raised about the relevance of the recommendations. However, some key concerns are summarized next.

Political Circumstances

There is clearly value in establishing professional consensus concerning the role of libraries and the services they offer. Such consensus helps to promote more effective advocacy (e.g., Ahlstedt et al. 2015), and the IFLA's standards have a valuable role to play. However, where recommendations contain elements that are politically sensitive, there is a risk of misunderstandings that could cause prejudice against some or all of the recommendations, creating barriers to their implementation. All respondents mentioned that some recommendations were at odds with national policy. References to freedom of knowledge, freedom of information, and "resisting efforts to censor materials, no matter the source" (IFLA 2015, 34) are indicative of the fact that library communities in different parts of the world develop differing understandings of the profession and what it entails. Where possible, the authors believe that there should be international consensus regarding libraries and the services they provide and that IFLA standards should play a role in establishing that consensus. Agreement on standards appropriate to varying national and political circumstances would help to establish professional guidelines internationally, enabling library communities in different local contexts around the world to aspire to those standards. However, if the IFLA standards are to achieve this, they would need to be revised to take more account of political sensitivities.

Professional Status

Participants in this research questioned the validity of some recommendations on the grounds that school librarians in China lack the status needed to implement them and therefore cannot make independent decisions regarding the design and development of libraries. Many recommendations are predicated on the understanding that school librarians have a significant role in shaping school policies. Following the training session, the participating librarians all took the view that the success of a school library in China depends mostly on a supportive principal. It is, of course, well recognized that school principals are key players in the establishment of and successful running of a school library (Oberg 2009). In China, however, given that it is rare for school librarians to contribute to managerial decisions and that there are no systematic evaluations of school libraries, the support of a principal is likely to be even more crucial than in other countries.

Promoting IFLA

No respondents were aware of the guidelines before the investigation, probably because the Chinese version of the guidelines had yet to be published. However, the respondents were also unaware of the "IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto" (IFLA 1999). When introduced to

the guidelines, many participating librarians found them to be a source of new ideas that could shape their work in coming years. Despite many reservations about the guidelines' relevance to China, much was acknowledged to be of value. The lack of awareness of the guidelines, coupled with positive responses to much of their contents, points to a need for more efforts to promote them within China. The promotion and publicity of IFLA standards could be more extensive and could cover professional fields as well as related organizations. A focus on different local contexts would help to highlight their relevance.

Conclusion

Over the two phases of this study, representatives of school libraries in Guangdong Province were presented with the IFLA's school library guidelines and asked to respond. In almost all cases, the participants had not seen the recommendations before taking part in the study.

Phase 1 highlighted the concerns that school librarians had about the guidelines. The workshop that followed phase 2, stage 1, was designed to address these concerns. The workshop gave an indication of a "first impression" response to the recommendations (phase 2, stage 1) and then an "informed impression" (phase 2, stage 2). The first impression is likely to be typical of school librarians who have only a translation of the 16 recommendations rather than the complete IFLA guidelines or of people who do not have time to read the guidelines in depth.

Following 3 hours of training, there was a notable increase in the number of respondents who assessed the recommendations as relevant to the current situation and applicable as guidelines for the next 5 years. However, the training not only informed the participating school librarians of the areas in which the recommendations were appropriate but also highlighted areas where they were not.

Most of the 16 recommendations arising from the IFLA's guidelines were seen as applicable, at least in part, but were thought to be poorly suited to the Chinese situation in several areas. However, many participants' concerns about the relevance of the recommendations were allayed by the training provided during the workshop.

Future Action

Workshops similar to the one described in this article may prove valuable in helping to promote the IFLA School Library Guidelines and in encouraging their adoption within a Chinese context. Similar exercises in other countries could also provide valuable information for the IFLA because, clearly, the development and refinement of the IFLA School Library Guidelines would benefit from further analysis of local sensitivities, particularly in non-Western countries. It would be a useful exercise to carry out similar assessments of the guidelines and other IFLA standards in a variety of international contexts. This would help the IFLA to determine the robustness of its standards across cultures and to review its procedures for developing and promoting proposed international standards.

Appendix

Recommendations in the Guidelines (IFLA 2015, 10–11)

Recommendation 1

The mission and purposes of the school library should be stated clearly in terms that are consistent with the principles of the *IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto* and the values expressed in the *United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child*, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People*, and in the Core Values of IFLA. [Introduction, 1.7]

Recommendation 2

The mission and purposes of the school library should be defined in terms that are consistent with the expectations of national, regional, and local educational authorities, also the outcomes of the school's curricula. [Introduction, 1.1–1.8]

Recommendation 3

A plan should be in place for the development of the three features necessary for the success of a school library: a qualified school librarian; a collection that supports the curriculum of the school; and an explicit plan for ongoing growth and development of the school library. [1.1–1.8]

Recommendation 4

Monitoring and evaluating school library services and programs, as well as the work of the school library staff, should be conducted on a regular basis to ensure that the school library is meeting the changing needs of the school community. [1.9, 6.1–6.4]

Recommendation 5

School library legislation should be in place, at an appropriate governmental level or levels, to ensure that legal responsibilities are clearly defined for the establishment, support, and continuous improvement of school libraries accessible to all students. [2.1–2.2, 2.4–2.7]

Recommendation 6

School library legislation should be in place, at an appropriate governmental level or levels, to ensure that ethical responsibilities of all members of the school community are clearly defined, including such rights as equity of access, freedom of information and privacy, copyright and intellectual property, and children's right to know. [2.3, 3.6–3.8]

Recommendation 7

School library services and programs should be under the direction of a professional school librarian with formal education in school librarianship and classroom teaching. [3.1–3.4]

Recommendation 8

The roles of a professional school librarian should be clearly defined to include instruction (i.e., literacy and reading promotion, inquiry-centred and resource-based), library management, school-wide leadership and collaboration, community engagement, and promotion of library services. [3.5, 3.5.4]

Recommendation 9

All school library staff—professional, paraprofessional, and volunteer—should clearly understand their roles and responsibilities to work in accordance with library policies, including those related to equity of access, right to privacy, and right to know for all library users. [3.1, 3.2, 3.6, 3.7]

Recommendation 10

All school library staff should endeavour to develop collections of physical and digital resources consistent with the school's curriculum and with the national, ethnic, and cultural identities of members of the school community; they also should endeavour to increase access to resources through practices such as cataloguing, curation, and resource sharing. [4.2.3, 4.3, 4.3.1–4.3.4]

Recommendation 11

The facilities, equipment, collections, and services of the school library should support the teaching and learning needs of the students and the teachers; these facilities, equipment, collections, and services should evolve as teaching and learning needs change. [4.1–4.3]

Recommendation 12

The connections among school libraries and with public libraries and academic libraries should be developed to strengthen access to resources and services and to foster their shared responsibilities for the lifelong learning of all community members. [4.2, 5.4]

Recommendation 13

The core instructional activities of a school librarian should be focused on: literacy and reading promotion; media and information literacy instruction; inquiry-based teaching; technology integration; and professional development of teachers. [5.2–5.7]

Recommendation 14

The services and programs provided through the school library should be developed collaboratively by a professional school librarian working in concert with the principal, with curriculum leaders, with teaching colleagues, with members of other library groups, and with mem-

bers of cultural, linguistic, indigenous, and other unique populations to contribute to the achievement of the academic, cultural, and social goals of the school. [3.5, 3.5.4, 5.1–5.8]

Recommendation 15

Evidence-based practice should guide the services and programs of a school library and provide the data needed for improvement of professional practice and for ensuring that the services and programs of a school library make a positive contribution to teaching and learning in the school. [5.1, 5.2]

Recommendation 16

The use and support of the services and programs of a school library should be enhanced by planned and systematic communication with school library users—current and potential—and with the library's stakeholders and decision-makers. [6.4, 6.5]

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