

Shanghai phone booths get new literary lease of life

Imagine you're waiting for a bus, or walking home from work, or just wasting some time between appointments, and you really fancy something to read.

No problem if you're in Shanghai, just look out for a red phone booth.

263 public telephone booths in Shanghai Xuhui district are to be turned into mini-libraries, according to the city government.

Before the popularity of smart phones, public telephone booths were the handiest way to make a call when away from home or the office, but the meteoric rise of mobile devices has largely made them redundant. Also, most phone booths still need IC top-up cards which are increasingly hard to find in Shanghai.

It had been thought mobile technology would spell the end of books too, with more and more people choosing to read on smart devices. However the appetite for printed books seems undiminished, with a recent revival of traditional bookshops in China.

So using phone booths as mini-libraries seems like the perfect solution, not just to use the increasingly unloved booths, but also to satisfy the demands of readers and to encourage book reading in the area.

There will be six different types of booth, including "Library Booths" offering 60 books for people to read or borrow; "Celebrity Exhibition Halls" with old photos and information about celebrities who once lived in Xuhui district; and "Electronic Booths" allowing users to listen to audio and even record their own voices.

The booths will still keep their familiar red color, and will still contain phones to allow the public to make free emergency calls.

For visually impaired, Braille no longer king

While happy about the move to present maps and bus schedules in Braille at bus stops, advocates for the visually impaired are calling for more facilities to meet the needs of residents with sight loss.



A signboard in Braille at a bus stop in Beijing's Xicheng district in July. [Photo by Wang Fei/China Daily]

The authorities placed 16 Braille signboards and 95 route maps in four areas across Beijing's Xicheng district in 2015 as part of an effort to improve accessibility.

But people with visual disabilities, or who are engaged in related industries, said that they had heard little about it. And they suggested that Braille may not be the best way to help visually impaired passengers.

An employee at Xicheng's housing commission, who was not named, told Beijing News that the four areas were chosen because research had shown those places had heavy demand for Braille, and that experts had been consulted to ensure the Braille translations were accurate.

Yan Xiaoqiang, who works at a school for the visually impaired in Beijing's Haidian district, said that even with the signboards and maps in Braille, the passengers using them still had problems figuring out the bus they wanted to take.

Instead of Braille signboards and maps, Yan said, it would be more practical for bus stops to be equipped with audio speakers that announce where the next bus is heading.

"After all, hearing is the major source of information for us," said Wang Hua, a massage therapist in his 30s who is currently seeking a job in Beijing.

Li Qingzhong, chairman of the China Blind Persons' Association, said that easier and more practical things can be done to help visually impaired

passengers, such as using signboards with larger characters, increasing the contrast of the characters and the background and lowering the height of signboards, noting that around 90 percent of the roughly 18 million visually impaired people in China can see to some degree.

Others interviewed suggested that rapidly changing technology is undercutting Braille, which was the only way for the group to access information in the past.

Li said that while many visually impaired people can read Braille today, knowing the language is no longer as important as it was two decades ago.

Wang, the massage therapist, said Braille is losing its appeal for the younger generation in the digital age.

“I’ve been learning Braille for some time but still cannot use it proficiently. It is rather complicated. I think the younger generation of visually impaired people is more reliant on voice-assisted apps, because they are super convenient,” Wang said.

In 2012, the central government implemented a regulation to guarantee construction of barrier-free public facilities.

“It’s good to see that laws and regulations are in place to ensure the rights of the disabled, but there’s still a long way to go before the policies translate into tangible, practical benefits for the group,” Li said.

Media leaders stress new technology role

Technological achievements in China, such as big data, cloud computing and artificial intelligence, have laid a solid foundation for the transformation of Chinese media as the industry seeks better development amid a changing environment, media professionals and industry leaders said at a forum on Saturday.

Rapid advances in internet technology have brought significant changes to Chinese people’s lifestyles in recent years. An increasing number of people read the news online, pushing traditional media to transform itself by integrating with new media.

“Media integration requires support from new technologies,” said Tuo Zhen, deputy head of the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee.

“To achieve integrated development, (media) need to be technology-sensitive.

We need to have an interest in, take a receptive attitude toward and gain application capabilities in new technologies,” he said at the Media Integration and Development Forum 2017 held in Shenzhen on Saturday.

The annual event, launched in 2015, is co-organized by People’s Daily, the Party’s official newspaper, and the Shenzhen government.

In a speech delivered at the forum, Yang Zhenwu, publisher of People’s Daily, said that technological innovations have provided “wide space” for media to grow.

“Several years of exploration fully demonstrates that under new conditions, media still have wide space for development in the area of content with continuous innovation,” Yang said.

It also shows that traditional mainstream media fully have the condition and capability to make good use of the internet to increase their communication capability and influence, he said.

Zhou Shuchun, publisher and editor-in-chief of China Daily, also said at the forum that media organizations need to make technology a priority and attach more importance to mobile and video production in order to better survive and develop in the changing times.

The rapidly rising popularity of video underscores the key role of technology and innovation in media transformation and upgrading, he said.

“And various innovations pushed by Chinese IT companies, such as big data, cloud computing and artificial intelligence, have offered a solid technological support for such transformation,” Zhou said.

According to the latest statistics released by China Internet Network Information Center, the number of Chinese netizens stood at more than 750 million as of June, accounting for 20 percent of the world’s total.

Savior of strays runs animal farm

As soon as Hu Xiuping steps out of the taxi, a bag of dog food under her arm, hundreds of hungry mouths bark a chorus of greeting for the woman who saved their lives.



Hu Xiuping with her dogs at her farm. [Photo by Zhu Lixin/China Daily]

Over the past 18 years, 62-year-old Hu has rescued numerous lost, abandoned and injured dogs—even some that were on the verge of being butchered for meat.

She now lives with 560 of them on a grape farm in Hefei, Anhui province, but could not afford their upkeep, which stands at about 40,000 yuan (\$5,990) a month, without a little help.

“Thanks to donations from across the country, I am able to keep them here, though sometimes there are still food shortages,” she said.

Though Hu seldom speaks of her own upbringing, the retired hospital accountant remembers the back story of almost every animal in her care.

Born into an impoverished rural family, Hu had a tough childhood. Her mother died when she was 6, to be replaced by a stepmother “who treated me badly”, she said. She would often sleep in the kitchen of her home with the family dog.

Even after moving to the big city, Hu still pined for canine companionship, and would provide food to the homeless dogs she saw around her neighborhood.

Her first rescue came in 1999, when she brought home a dog that had been badly injured after being hit by a car. “After that, I started bringing back more dogs—and also some cats—to my apartment, to protect them from danger,” she said.

Running an ad hoc animal shelter in her apartment building didn’t go down too well with the neighbors, however, and she was the subject of numerous complaints. So, after amassing 32 dogs and a handful of cats, Hu eventually moved to the countryside in 2006.

“You can’t say my neighbors had stony hearts, they had tolerated me and my animals for seven years,” she said.

In 2009, a group of animal welfare advocates rented a grape farm in Dawei township of the city’s Baohe district and offered it to Hu as a place to keep

her dogs.

The township has hundreds of such farms and is a well known for grape growing.

“They thought we could grow grapes and keep dogs there at the same time, but we later found we couldn’t keep the business running with so many dogs,” Hu said.

Every time she spots a homeless dog, Hu brings it back to her farm, which has become something of a haven for castoff canines. Even the local police, who find it difficult to humanely deal with strays, have been known to approach Hu for help.

“The farm is firmly fenced-in and considered the best place for them. Dogs keep coming in, but we will not let them go out,” Hu said.

“People want to kill them and eat them, I don’t understand,” she said, pointing at two golden retrievers with tear in her eyes.

“At least I can be happy knowing there are caring and understanding people out there, who volunteer to join me in helping these lovely animals.”

[Smuggling suspect returned to China](#)

One of China’s most-wanted fugitives, suspected of smuggling ordinary goods valued at 438 million yuan (\$65.7 million), was captured and returned from Indonesia to face trial, according to the General Administration of Customs on Sunday.



Ji Wenhong is detained on suspicion of smuggling luxuries at Xiamen Gaoqi International Airport in Fujian province on Wednesday. Ji was returned to China after Interpol captured him in Indonesia. [Photo/Xinhua]

Ji Wenhong, founder and former chief executive officer of online luxury retailer Shenzhen Zouxu Network and Technology – branded as Xiu.com was arrested in the island province of Bali in early August and returned to China on Thursday after spending 15 months on the run in Indonesia.

An online statement on Sunday by Xiu confirmed that the third-party cross-border operation platform had been involved in smuggling, and that some individuals in the company were under investigation.

“We believe the judicial departments will make a fair judgment,” the statement said; meanwhile, “all the company’s business is normal”.

“We have always had legal operations. We feel that giving back to society is our responsibility, and we will adhere to that purpose in the future,” the statement said.

According to Gongbei customs in Guangdong, under Ji’s leadership Xiu transported luxury clothing purchased in Europe and the United States to Hong Kong.

The goods were then sent to an employee of a logistics company, identified only as Wu, who hired travelers to carry the merchandise through customs inspections. The smuggled goods were then transported to a Xiu company warehouse.

Xiu also offered false price information to an online retailer in Shenzhen and a logistics company in Guangdong, then smuggled the goods into China via

express by declaring a low price and fabricating other information, customs officials said.

According to the authorities, imported goods were made to look like ordinary personal belongings, lowering the declared price below China's 800 yuan threshold, to reduce fees.

The administration said goods worth as much as 321 million yuan were handled by Xiu.com. Ji was also involved in other smuggling, it said.

When the operation was exposed, Ji fled the country on May 17 last year, a few days after being charged with smuggling ordinary goods.

In October, Interpol issued a red notice for Ji, and Indonesian police captured him on Bali island on Aug 4. Chinese anti-smuggling police escorted him to Xiamen airport on Aug 16.

Interpol issued red notices for the 100 most-wanted Chinese officials in April 2015. So far, more than 40 have returned from more than 16 countries and regions – including the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand – to stand trial.