

# A Proposal For A System That Provides Book Encounters For A Better Reading Experience

Yulana Watanabe<sup>1\*</sup> and Eiichi Yubune<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Faculty of Information Sciences and Arts, Toyo University, Tokyo, Japan

<sup>1</sup>s4B102000049@toyo.jp, <sup>2</sup>yubune@toyo.jp

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**Abstract:** *This study seeks to design innovative methods for encountering books and redefining the value of reading in a modern society where reading habits are declining. In an era dominated by digitalization and efficiency-driven consumption, the serendipity, physical engagement, and joy of discovery that reading once offered have become increasingly scarce. To address this issue, the study proposes a system that merges the advantages of physical books and e-books, introducing the concept of a “Reading Map” where readers can discover books by physically visiting specific locations. This mechanism leverages behaviors and emotions such as pilgrimage and collection-oriented interests, creating a unique reading experience that combines exploration and personal interaction with literature. When visiting designated spots, users gain access to related book information, fostering moments of surprise and inspiration driven by chance. Furthermore, collectable elements are incorporated to maintain long-term reading motivation, while features like visualized maps and collection histories stimulate the user’s intellectual curiosity. Drawing from prior examples such as library systems supporting serendipitous encounters, pilgrimage culture, and the psychology of collecting, this approach diversifies how reading is experienced in contemporary contexts, providing a richer, more immersive and meaningful interaction with books.*

**Keywords:** Reading Experience, e-books, Book Encounters, Pilgrimages

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## INTRODUCTION:

In recent years, the decline in reading has emerged as a significant social issue, prompting extensive discussion. With the rise of the internet and video streaming services, convenient options for obtaining information and entertainment have proliferated, leading to a decrease in reading time, particularly among younger generations. Moreover, in today's digital era, where information is consumed instantaneously, dedicating long periods to reading a single book is increasingly avoided. This trend persists even with the growing popularity of e-books, signifying a transformation in the nature of the reading experience. While e-books have enhanced the convenience of reading environments, they have also been criticized for diluting the depth of the reading experience. For example, Nakano (2009)[1] analyzed the causes of declining reading habits from a behavioral science perspective and proposed strategies to encourage reading. According to his research, reasons such as “not finding appealing books” and “lacking time to read” are frequently cited, with a pronounced decrease in reading among younger people. Educational efforts such as book talks, storytelling, and improving reading environments in schools have been identified as effective means of promoting reading and rekindling its significance and enjoyment. Sugaya (2016)[2] examined how different reading mediums influence reading behavior and comprehension strategies. Although e-books offer practical advantages, such as portability and quick search capabilities, their characteristics can also reshape the reading process. Despite their low adoption rates compared to paper books, optimizing reading methods for e-books could unlock new possibilities for engaging with texts. Additionally, their lower psychological barrier to note-taking suggests potential for use in educational contexts. While e-books cater to modern lifestyles by allowing users to carry vast libraries and quickly locate relevant books, they lack the depth provided by the serendipitous encounters and sensory engagement of physical books. The chance discovery of an inspiring book on a bookstore shelf, or the tactile pleasure of turning pages, is difficult to replicate digitally. Furthermore, e-book recommendation algorithms, often based on past interests or purchase history, tend to limit exposure to new genres and themes, reducing opportunities for unanticipated discoveries. This contrast mirrors a broader trend seen in other domains, such as the resurgence of analog records and cassette tapes, which embody a nostalgic attachment to physical objects in a digital age. Similarly, paper books, with their tangible and sensory qualities, serve as an antithesis to the digital subscription culture, offering a depth and richness that e-books struggle to match. To address the decline in reading, this study aims to integrate the strengths of both paper and e-books into a unified system that adapts to contemporary lifestyles. By combining the serendipity and sensory engagement of physical books with the convenience and searchability of e-books, it envisions a new form of reading that is not just about consuming information but about fostering discovery, inspiration, and personal growth. This research proposes a novel reading system that incorporates the value of serendipitous encounters associated with physical books

while leveraging the efficiency and accessibility of e-books, ultimately encouraging a renewed appreciation for the joys of reading.

(a) “Pilgrimages” and the Reading Experience

“Seichi Junrei,” or pilgrimage, has evolved in Japan into a cultural phenomenon centered around anime and literary works, beyond its religious meaning. This involves fans visiting real-life locations that served as settings in the works, deepening their affection for the stories and characters, and is categorized as “contents tourism” (Song et al., 2024)[3]. It began spontaneously in the late 1990s, expanded with the rise of social media in the 2000s, and by the 2010s, it was integrated into the “Cool Japan” policy as part of a national strategy. Famous examples include Kyoto, featured in *K-On!*, Takayama City in Gifu Prefecture from *Your Name*, Kobe in Haruki Murakami's *Norwegian Wood*, and the hot spring towns in Niigata depicted in Yasunari Kawabata's *Snow Country*.

These pilgrimages greatly benefit local economies; for instance, the economic impact of *Your Name* in Gifu Prefecture was estimated at 25.3 billion yen (Juroku Research Institute, 2016)[4]. The increase in tourists contributes to the revitalization of local businesses and the formation of regional brand identity. This study proposes positioning pilgrimage not just as a form of tourism but as an extension of the reading experience, enhancing fans' understanding and affection for the works while promoting regional economies and cultural exchange.

(b) Collection and the Reading Experience

“Collecting” is an important way to fulfill human intellectual desires and curiosity, serving as an act of self-expression, reassurance, and achievement. In this study, the term “collection preference” is used, following Nakayama (2008)[5], to describe the commonly used phrase “habit of collecting” in Japan, and the multifaceted characteristics of collecting behavior are examined. Karen Kingston (2013)[6] stated that people collect things “because it was necessary for growth,” pointing out that collecting is a fundamental human trait.

In recent years, the spread of e-books has drawn attention to digital forms of collecting in addition to paper books. E-books offer new collecting experiences by eliminating physical limitations, allowing for large collections, and providing features such as tagging, categorization, and search functions. This makes it easier to build systems of knowledge, making collecting behavior a means of satisfying intellectual desires. Additionally, the gamified aspect of “completion” in collecting enhances feelings of accomplishment and satisfaction, which is also significant.

This study explores reading experiences based on the preference for collecting to examine the potential for providing readers with enriched intellectual experiences. By leveraging the gamified aspects and sense of accomplishment inherent in collecting, this study proposes an approach to add new value to modern diverse reading practices.

(c) Previous Studies and Case Studies

Encounters with books, including prior studies and case examples, have been a topic of interest in both library and digital environments to explore the value of serendipity and create new experiences in book selection. Suzaki et al. (2020)[7] proposed two concepts, “seeking encounters” and “unexpected encounters,” to support accidental encounters with books in libraries. “Seeking encounters” refers to actively searching for books by browsing bookshelves, while “unexpected encounters” describe experiences where users come across books unexpectedly. The study developed a prototype system with three key areas: the search area, exploration area, and encounter area. This system aimed to provide users with new discoveries and intellectual adventures by integrating efficiency and serendipity. However, the study relied on qualitative analysis, highlighting the need for further investigations with detailed data.

In contrast, there are real-life examples like Shiwa Town Library's “Secret Book – Guided by the Obi” and Ferris University's “Reading Campaign Project” that emphasize book encounters. In Shiwa Town Library's project, users select books based only on information written on the obi (book belt) while the book's title and author are hidden. This approach maximizes the chance of unexpected encounters with unfamiliar genres and authors. On the other hand, Ferris University's “Lucky Bag” initiative allows users to borrow themed books in a mystery bag format. This activity promotes book discovery while encouraging shared reading experiences among students. Both examples highlight how creativity and chance can enrich the traditional methods of book selection.

Building on these insights, this study aims to create a new reading system that combines the charm of paper books with the convenience of e-books.

(d) Purpose

The purpose of this study is to redefine the reading experience into three stages: “before reading,” “during reading,” and “after reading,” with a focus on the “before reading” stage to propose new ways of encountering books. In particular, it aims to address the decline in reading habits and the changing nature of reading experiences due to the spread of e-books by not only combining the features of physical and digital books but also adding a unique location-based approach to redefine the value of reading. Physical books offer surprise and discovery through the serendipity and tactile experiences

found in bookstores or libraries, while e-books enable quick access to information through their efficiency and searchability. However, physical books face limitations in accessibility, and e-books lack the element of serendipity. This study aims to complement these characteristics and integrate “serendipity” with “efficiency” to add a new dimension to the reading experience. This study focuses particularly on the “before reading” stage of the reading experience and proposes a system where visiting specific locations or spots provides access to book information. This approach creates opportunities to encounter books related to the culture, history, or nature of the visited location, offering readers unexpected surprises and memorable experiences. Such a serendipity-focused way of encountering books has the potential to elevate reading from mere information consumption to a profound experience involving self-discovery and cultural exploration. This study proposes a system to enhance the overall value of reading through the “before reading” experience, aiming to rekindle the appeal of reading in modern society.

## **DISCUSSION OF BOOK ENCOUNTERS:**

### **(a) Definition of the Reading Experience in This Study**

In this study, the “reading experience” is redefined not as the act of reading books alone, but as a comprehensive process that includes encounters with books, the act of reading, the lingering impressions and reflections after finishing, sharing with others, as well as sensory pleasures like collecting books and turning pages. Iwasaki (2021)[8] describes interactions with books and the reading experience as “seeing, gazing, smelling, decorating, knowing, thinking, creating, borrowing, feeling, savoring, touching, flipping through, listening, admiring, entrusting, pondering, connecting, buying, and encountering.” He further notes that the situations for encountering books have expanded beyond bookstores and libraries to include cafes, events, and more, illustrating the diverse experiential values associated with books that go beyond just “reading.” This study concurs with this perspective. In the modern era, the forms of books have diversified, and with the spread of e-books and audiobooks, the nature of the reading experience is also evolving. In this context, the reading experience increasingly depends on individual values and experiences, leading to differing impressions of the same book. This study conceptualizes the reading experience across three temporal stages: “pre-reading,” “during reading,” and “post-reading.” The “pre-reading” experience includes, for example, the “encounter” with a book. Encounters with books occur in various scenarios, such as spotting a book in a bookstore or library, seeing a work trending on social media, or receiving a recommendation from a friend. The process of selecting a book often involves recognizing one’s own interests and reasons for choosing it, leaving a lasting impression as an experience. The “during reading” experience refers to the process of immersion in a story or content while turning the pages. This can involve empathizing with characters or events, or reflecting on one’s own past experiences, leading to emotional or cognitive changes. Particular words or descriptions may resonate deeply, leading to the discovery of new values, which is one of the key attractions of reading. The emotional highs and moments of contemplation during reading go beyond simple knowledge acquisition to include self-reflection and growth. The “post-reading” experience includes the lingering feeling of being immersed, known as the “afterglow,” and activities such as sharing with others. Reflecting on the content after finishing a book, considering its impact, recalling memorable words or episodes, and sharing impressions with others often lead to new discoveries. This sharing and dialogue deepen one’s understanding through the opinions of others, expanding the world of the book. This study considers the reading experience as a process across these three stages, offering value that transcends reading as mere information acquisition to foster self-growth and empathy with others. In particular, the “pre-reading” stage, where the encounter with a book occurs, is a critical element that influences the overall reading experience. The circumstances under which a book is encountered and chosen shape the anticipation and readiness for the reading experience, deepening the subsequent engagement. Therefore, this paper focuses on the “pre-reading stage: encounters with books,” exploring the future of reading experiences in a digital society while proposing new approaches centered on this aspect.

### **(b) The Significance of Encounters with Books in the Reading Experience**

Encounters with books are the starting point of the reading experience as conceptualized in this study and represent a creative moment that goes beyond mere book selection, offering readers new perspectives, inspiration, and growth. The way this encounter process occurs significantly influences the depth and breadth of the subsequent reading experience and the impact the book has on the reader’s mind. The significance of encountering books lies in stimulating one’s sensitivity and values through exposure to unknown knowledge or stories, thereby deepening self-understanding. It is not merely the moment of “picking up a book” but an act of opening the door to new discoveries that enrich one’s life. Encounters with books involve both serendipity and intentionality. Serendipity adds surprise and joy to the act of selecting books. For instance, a book that unexpectedly catches one’s eye at a bookstore or library might open the door to entirely new genres or ways of thinking. The encounter with that book often becomes more deeply etched in one’s memory when tied to the emotions and circumstances of that moment. This serendipity gives rise to discoveries that transform the

reading experience into something more moving and memorable. When the encounter with a book is strongly connected to a specific place, time, or emotion, that book can transcend its role as a mere medium of information and become a symbolic presence in one's life. Conversely, intentionality also plays a crucial role in encounters with books. When selecting books with a specific theme or purpose in mind, readers can find suitable books aligned with their interests or issues, gaining knowledge and insights in the process. Encounters based on intentionality are particularly effective for academic learning or acquiring specialized knowledge, providing an efficient and practical reading experience. While serendipity brings unexpected discoveries and inspiration, intentionality helps deepen knowledge toward specific goals, serving as complementary elements in the reading experience. The greatest significance of encounters with books lies in how they enable readers to discover themselves and find opportunities for personal growth. Books are not merely collections of information; they engage in dialogue with readers and pose new questions. Facing these questions allows readers to delve deeper into themselves, gaining a better understanding of unknown worlds and perspectives. Encounters with books transcend the act of "reading" and encourage active thought and action on the part of the reader. As a result, reading becomes an emotionally charged personal experience with the power to shape one's self and life. In today's reading environment, both paper books and e-books offer unique ways of encountering books. Paper books emphasize the joy of serendipitous discoveries, providing memorable reading experiences through sensory engagement, while e-books excel at efficient searches and convenient access, facilitating goal-oriented knowledge acquisition. However, these two approaches do not fully intersect. If the surprise of serendipity and the convenience of efficiency could coexist, the reading experience would become even richer. This study proposes a system that integrates the serendipity of paper books with the convenience and searchability of e-books to provide a better reading experience. By complementing the limitations of traditional reading experiences, this system aims to creatively design new encounters with knowledge and stories. By providing an environment where readers can actively encounter books and grow through these experiences, the study seeks to enhance the value of reading.

#### **(c) Encountering books in different media**

The way we encounter books differs significantly depending on whether the medium is physical books or e-books, and this variation greatly influences the overall reading experience. In the case of physical books, the element of chance in physical spaces like bookstores and libraries plays an important role. For example, special displays in bookstores or eye-catching book covers can lead to unexpected encounters with new books. This "serendipity," or unexpected discovery, adds surprise and delight to the reading experience, giving it a unique value. Moreover, physical books have a rarity that can only be experienced in the moment, and their tactile qualities create a sense of immersion that tends to leave a lasting memory. The thickness of a book and the feeling of turning its pages encourage unrestricted exploration of genres and themes, providing opportunities to encounter new perspectives and unknown topics. On the other hand, e-books rely on search functions and recommendation systems to facilitate book discovery. Search functions allow users to quickly locate specific books, while recommendation systems suggest relevant books based on purchase history or interests. These efficient and personalized systems are useful when one wants to deeply explore a particular topic or quickly find books that match a specific purpose. However, e-books lack serendipity, and the influence of filter bubbles can reduce opportunities to encounter new genres or unfamiliar topics. Additionally, algorithms may be influenced by promotional interests or popularity rankings, potentially preventing users from finding books that truly suit them. The ways of encountering books in physical and digital formats each have their own strengths and weaknesses, and their features complement each other. This study aims to propose a new system that leverages the characteristics of both formats, integrating serendipity, tactile experiences, efficiency, and personalization to diversify book discovery and expand the appeal of reading.

#### **(d) New Way of Encountering Books Proposed in This Study**

The new way of encountering books proposed in this study aims to go beyond readers actively searching for books or relying on algorithm-based recommendations, by enabling encounters with books through places and actions. This approach is inspired by cultural phenomena such as pilgrimage and content tourism, and is characterized by the idea that "visiting a place" can become the starting point for a new reading experience. Traditional methods of discovering physical books based on chance and digital recommendations focused on efficiency each have their own advantages, but they also present challenges such as physical limitations and fewer opportunities to explore new fields. According to the model of "seeking encounters" and "unexpected encounters" proposed by Suzuki et al. (2019), the randomness of bookstores or libraries can create profound reading experiences, but they are limited by physical constraints. In contrast, e-books allow for quick and accurate book discoveries but tend to be confined to existing interests. To overcome these challenges, this study proposes a system that leverages the context of visited places or local characteristics to provide new points of connection with books. For example, the system might suggest books about the history or architecture of a temple during a visit or provide opportunities to learn about books related to the nature and culture of a specific region on-site. Such

encounters with books combine randomness with the unique storytelling of a location, making the reading experience memorable and special. This method also has the potential to spark interest in new topics and broaden the intellectual curiosity of readers. Moreover, connecting places with books offers a new dimension to reading, transforming it from mere information consumption into a process of self-discovery and cultural exploration. The approach of this study suggests a future for reading that creates unique experiences based on readers' actions and memories, offering a depth to the reading experience that has not been achieved before.

### 3) Overview of the “Reading Map”:

This system proposes a new reading experience by providing book information tied to specific locations or spots, leveraging serendipity and physicality. The system visualizes spots in cities and tourist destinations on a digital map, allowing users to visit these locations and access local information while referring to the map. Unlike e-book search or recommendation functions, this system enables users to encounter books through physical visits, offering the added enjoyment of “collecting” on the map. By combining the digital convenience of e-books with the serendipitous discoveries inherent to paper books, this system creates a novel reading experience distinct from conventional approaches.

#### (a) System Design

The proposed “Reading Map” system is designed to help users discover book information at each spot they visit, with a visual and intuitive interface. The map displays the locations of spots, while features such as QR codes and NFC tags enable access to information and visually track the user’s collection progress, providing a sense of achievement in real-time. The map app shows spots like cities and tourist destinations as icons, as illustrated on the left in Figure 1.

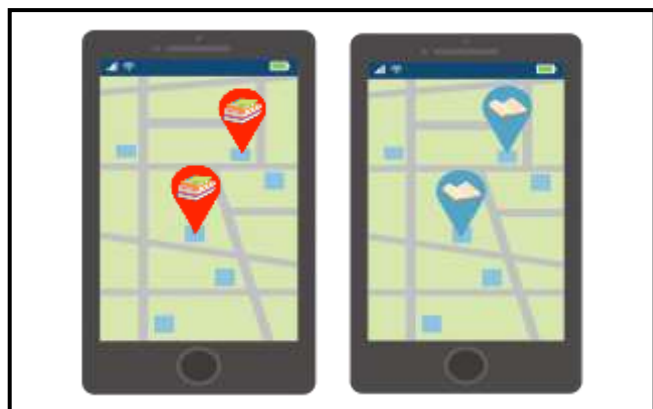


Figure 1(a) Spot icon display (left: unvisited, right: visited)

Icons are color-coded and designed according to the location type, making it easy to visually distinguish between historical temples, libraries, stations, cafes, and more. Users can tap icons on the map to view details and related information about each spot, making it easier to pique their interest in visiting. Moreover, as shown on the right in Figure 1, visited spots are marked as “collected,” allowing users to see their visit history and collection status at a glance and track their progress visually. When visiting a spot, users can scan a QR code or tap an NFC tag installed at the location with their smartphone to unlock book information related to that place. The QR codes and NFC tags offer intuitive and straightforward usability, enabling smooth access to the information. Another key feature is the incorporation of collectability into the design. When users obtain book information at a spot, the icon changes to “collected.” This collection record is clearly displayed on the map, allowing users to easily identify visited and unvisited spots, fostering new plans such as “visiting all spots” or “completing spots in a specific area.” In this way, the “Reading Map” system offers a new reading experience by combining the visual representation of a map, QR codes or NFC tags at each spot, and the collectability design, integrating serendipitous discoveries with intentional collecting.

#### (b) Reading Experience Offered by This System

The “Reading Map” system provides a new reading experience by allowing users to access book information through “spots” they visit in their daily lives or while traveling. At each spot, users can access book information via QR codes or NFC (Near Field Communication: a technology where a device with a contactless IC chip communicates with a terminal equipped with reader/writer functions at a distance of about 10 cm). Books related to the history, culture, or geography of the location are introduced, allowing users to enjoy “serendipitous encounters” in their everyday surroundings or at destinations they visit. The system’s most distinctive feature is that book encounters are facilitated by “location-based serendipity.” For instance, scanning a QR code at a historic temple during a trip might reveal books on the temple’s history, architectural style, or novels set in that location, displayed randomly on the user’s smartphone. As shown in Figure 2, when multiple books are available, one book is randomly displayed first. Selecting “Check Details” displays information

about the book. Pressing “View All” shows all books related to that spot. In the list, users can sort books by “Sales Rankings,” “Categories,” or “Publication Dates.” This setup offers “serendipitous encounters” based on location while allowing for “personalized book selection” afterward. The detailed flow of this process is shown in Figure 3, which visually organizes the steps between system functions and the corresponding user actions. This enhances the travel experience, offering fresh encounters with books that include local information. Even in daily life, visiting familiar locations like train stations, cafes, or convenience stores can introduce users to books related to the area or popular titles, adding “new discoveries and knowledge” to their routine.



Figure 2(a) Display format after reading the QR code (Left: initial display, Right: display after selecting “See Others”)

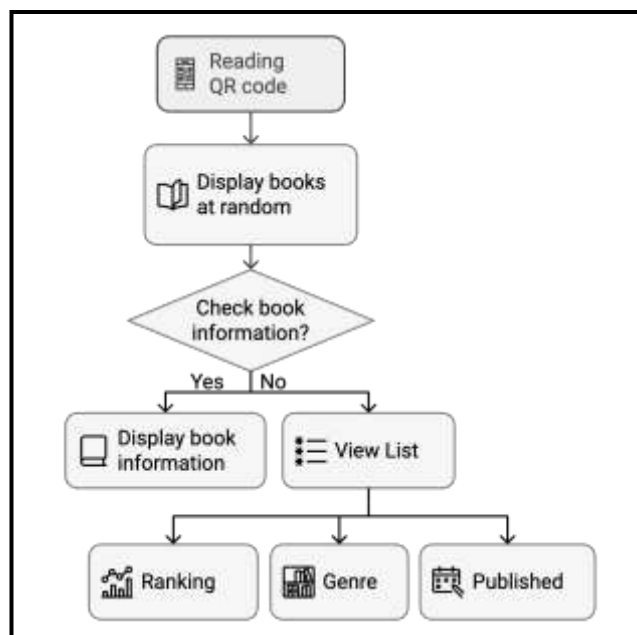


Figure 3(a) “Reading Map” system flow

After users have explored several spots, the system plans to recommend books based on their visit history and areas of interest. By suggesting books in genres or themes that users might not typically choose, based on their visit history and selections, the system enables encounters that are hard to achieve through “self-driven book selection.” This emphasis on serendipity, unattainable through simple online searches, defines the unique reading experience offered by this system. By incorporating the element of “collection” on the map, the system also adds the enjoyment of visiting locations. As shown in Figure 1, when users visit a spot, the icon on the map changes to “collected,” offering the satisfaction and enjoyment of completing the map. This visual feedback makes the act of collecting spots feel like a game, motivating users to explore further. By focusing on “encounters with books” and “collectability” in reading, this system provides novel book encounters that are unattainable through e-books or online searches. By walking through a city and stopping by various locations, users can expand their knowledge and interests through serendipitous encounters, ultimately deepening the enjoyment and value of reading.

#### 4) CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK:

This study aims to address the decline in reading habits by promoting new ways of encountering books and redefining the value of the reading experience. Chapter 1 organizes the characteristics of modern “pilgrimage culture” and “collecting tendencies” and discusses their potential intersection with the reading experience. It also examines recent studies and examples related to the reading experience, clarifying the differences and challenges compared to existing approaches. Chapter 2 redefines reading culture into three stages: “before reading,” “during reading,” and “after reading,” emphasizing the critical role of “encountering books” in the “before reading” stage for the overall reading experience. Based on these discussions, Chapter 3 proposes the “Reading Map” system and explains its novelty and features in detail. The Reading Map is expected to provide users with the joy of reading by enabling them to access book information through visiting specific locations, incorporating elements of chance and physical experiences. Additionally, by integrating a collecting feature, it aims to enhance user motivation and encourage sustained reading activities. Through this system, users can discover new books, visualize their interests, and reflect on their personal growth and value formation. This system combines the serendipity of physical books with the efficiency of digital books, creating a new type of reading experience that leverages the strengths of both. With this system, reading has the potential to be redefined not just as a means of gathering information, but as an adventure of inspiration, discovery, and learning. In particular, the feature of visiting physical locations restores a sense of bodily engagement that cannot be replicated in the modern digital environment. Future challenges include evaluating the actual impact of this system through practical use. Ongoing experiments with the prototype system involve collecting user feedback and behavioral data to assess how the types of locations and book selection methods influence reading behavior. Furthermore, it is necessary to explore the adaptability of the system to users of different age groups and interests, aiming to develop a system that appeals to a wide range of readers.

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