Back Talk -- Censorship and Google

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A consortial-level project team (or teams) could ameliorate this. With a number of libraries in need of project work, a team of this nature could be kept busy full-time, rotating its services among members. No individual library would bear the cost of retaining such a staff full-time, but all would be able to draw upon its capacity as needed. A similar approach could be used to amortize curation, preservation, and digitization expertise and capacity across the entire shared collection.

Many libraries and consortia, of course, have already recognized and seized these opportunities:

- The University of California’s Shared Cataloging Program and California Digital Library have distributed high-level skills across the entire UC system. Its Next Generation Technical Services initiative seeks to bring those operations to the UC network level.
- Shared offsite storage facilities like Harvard/MIT’s, Colorado PASCAL and a host of others have reduced costs and collection redundancies.
- In Florida, both FCLA and CCLA provide centralized automation support for most of the academic libraries in the state.
- Programs such as Orbis Cascade’s Distributed Print Repository have enabled libraries to extend their space while providing a secure archiving solution for valuable content.
- The CIC’s Hathi Trust has pioneered secure digital archiving for millions of book titles.
- The CONSORT libraries in Ohio have drastically reduced the overlap in tangible Government Documents in their respective collections.
- The Colorado Alliance has implemented a large-scale digitization program for microforms.
- Colby, Bates, and Bowdoin Colleges have initiated a fully shared approval plan, in which weekly shipments alternate among all three campuses.
- Columbia and Cornell have begun to formally explore closer collaboration between their technical services operations, in a pilot program known as 2CUL.

This list merely scratches the surface. There are hundreds of similar endeavors that demonstrate the actual and potential benefits of ground-based collaboration within a region. (We’ll reserve the drawbacks for another, much more entertaining article.) But there is much more to be done, and well-managed consortia are the organizations best positioned to do it. No matter how fully the library in the cloud is realized, efficient exchange of material, equipment and staff will continue to require these libraries on the ground. And yea, verily, sharing shall sweep the regions...except for the region of my stuff.
S
omeone asked me the other day about my thoughts concerning Google’s announce-
ment a few weeks ago that it would stop censoring news in China, even if it meant
being closed down by the Government. This decision was supposedly based upon Google’s
“discovery that a China-originated attack let malicious hackers steal Google intellectual
property and partially break into the Gmail accounts of Chinese human rights activists.”
I think it is important to note that Google was not protesting censorship, which Google itself
had been practicing, and seemingly continues to practice as of this writing, in order to obtain
Government support/escape the Government’s ire. Rather Google was complaining that the
Government had supported/allowed the hacking of its computers to enable it to gather
information which could then be used to do really bad things to those who oppose/criticize
the Party, and to take part in an act of industrial espionage.

My thoughts about all of this are fairly simple: I don’t doubt that China could be
guilty on both counts: wanting to get evidence to enable them to track down their opponents
and wanting to collect information about the inner workings of Google in order to control
it further and to perhaps feed this information to Google’s Chinese competitors. The Party/
Government has consistently sought to weed out the opposition with the same fervor that
nourishes members of the opposition who can readily point to the stupidity of these policies;
it shields corrupt officials which in turn then gives the wrongful impression that everyone
in Government is corrupt; and because in the current day of WEB and IT telecommunication
technology, attempts to completely silence the free speech of the opposition is hopeless.

Actually my first thoughts about all of this are along the line of “if you think this is bad,
compared to how things were only 35-40 years ago in China, this is nothing.” In 1979 when
I was a member of perhaps the first group of Asian Studies librarians to visit Chinese
libraries following the Cultural Revolution and Gang of Four periods, one of my most
striking memories of that trip was a visit to a public library where evidence of the censorship
that had been practiced was still in place. Still sticking to book stacks were what
was left after paper ribbons/stripes had been pasted in a crisscross pattern to
identify these materials as “poisonous weeds” and to protect them from
further acts of violence.

Because the libraries and librarians themselves of that period took
on the role of the willful gardeners, they may have also been protected from personal vio-

lence to some degree since the Red Guards would know that they were doing their jobs
well. But of course looking backwards at how bad things were does not justify the cur-
rent, but much more sterile and bloodless acts of hacking into the Google computers. I do
twice wonder about the roles now played in the hacking of the Google computers by the 15-year-old Red Guards of that last year of the
Cultural Revolution who are now in their 50’s, or the posts filled by the now 40-year-old anti-
western enthusiasts of the Gang of Four period, which followed the Cultural Revolution. Are
the current acts of repression directed by those former young people, or is it just the opposite,
that they would run far and quickly away from such assignments?

I do think China did learn a lot from its Cultural Revolution experience when in the
name of ideology confusion reigned and irrational acts of self-destruction were common.
Without regard to the economic consequences of stopping the economy in its tracks, or to
preventing the railroads from hauling materials from production sites to where them might be
consumed or further manufactured, or to beating or killing a significant portion of a whole
generation of intellectuals, or to attempting to destroy the willful gardeners, they may
be systematically managed and weeded when they fail to conform.

One day in 1979, while sitting on a stone bench in the Lu Shan mountains and enjoying
the scenery, I started up a conversation with an old gentleman who was walking near where
I was. I asked if he could tell me anything about the lovely stone villas which dotted
this mountain top resort. Since I knew that
Chairman Mao had been to Lu Shan, indeed
was deposed at a meeting held there because of
the tensions of that period took
the people in the valleys were slowly cooking
by a succession of elites in China because of its
or erased, e.g., religions of all persuasions
So all competing ideologies are to be controlled
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and to destroy China’s old culture and to rid itself
of vestiges of western decadence, China’s
younger generation of intellectuals, or to attempting
the weaknesses of Government policies that
must be hid from the truth; in the long run, the
lack of openness will repel the best and bright-
est from working and contributing to China’s
development; it encourages people to lie to the
government rather than tell the truth; it simply
nourishes members of the opposition who can
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generation of intellectuals, or to attempting to destroy China’s old culture and to rid itself
of any vestiges of western decadence, China’s
youngsters followed the dictates of their ideol-
yogy and caused chaos to take control of China
and to destroy the economic gains which had
been accomplished through the efforts and sacrifices of their parents. This lesson, the
evils of uncontrolled ideology or competing
ways of life, has been learned, and the current
Government will not allow it to happen again. So all competing ideologies are to be controlled
or erased, e.g., religions of all persuasions
including Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, the
Fa Lun Gong, and all competing ethnic groups
including Uighurs, Tibetans , Mongols, etc.,
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