International Dateline -- Age of Knowledge Calls for More Qualified Librarians in Chinese Academic Libraries

Hu Ming Rong
The Library of Chongqing Normal University, humingrong@yahoo.com.cn

Follow this and additional works at: https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg

Recommended Citation
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.3195
FORCING FCC FREQUENCIES
by Sandy Beehler (Lewis & Clark College)

Since 1934 the FCC has had the final say on who has access to broadcast frequencies. Dewanye Hendricks contends that the FCC is standing in the way of inexpensive, high-performance broadband access for all Americans. He is challenging the FCC licensing monopoly by developing a wireless network on a Chippewa Indian reservation—technically sovereign territory not subject to U.S. regulations—in an effort to force the FCC to open up the whole spectrum to everyone. He contends that current technology provides the ability to share spectrum space more efficiently and without interference between users. Many agree that the time for reform has come.

See — “Broadband Cowboy” Wired 10.01 (January 2002).

THE JOHNNY APPLESEED MODEL IN EDUCATION
by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

Acting semi-locally, Charleston’s own Mary French wants every South Carolina third grader to have a dictionary. And for the third year running, she’s pulled it off.

With South Carolina’s 45% near illiteracy in fourth graders, it’s hard to see the impact. But for a devoted small-town philanthropist like Mary French, the proof is in the delirious enthusiasm of the kids. She has no doubts about her mission wrangling with dictionary publishers over price and soliciting donations in such drible-size amounts that most people willingly kick in. On Charleston’s elegant Tradd Street, Harriet McDougal and her blockbuster novelist husband Jim Rigney (pseud. Robert Jordan - Wheel of Time series) were so shocked by a request for only $500 that they gave her $5,000.

“We’re putting words in the hands of children,” she says.


International Dateline — Age of Knowledge
Calls for More Qualified Librarians in Chinese Academic Libraries

by Hu Ming Rong (Associate Dean of The Library of Chongqing Normal University, Chongqing, China) <humingrong@yahoo.com.cn>

Translated by Haiwang Yuan (Web Site & Virtual Library Coordinator, Western Kentucky University Libraries & Museum, 1 Big Red Way, Bowling Green, KY 42101; Phone: 270-745-5084; Fax: 270-745-6422) <haiwang.yuan@WKU.edu> www.wku.edu/Library www.wku.edu/Library/tip

The Need for Upgrading Chinese Librarians

The new millennium has ushered in the Age of Knowledge. Unlike its lingering predecessor, the Information Age, it requires that one not only knows how to access information, but also knows how to process and analyze information so that it becomes knowledge. In a knowledge-based society, one strives to be competitively marketable, trying to acquire the knowledge and capabilities that others do not have. For this reason, users are no longer satisfied with mere access to information resources. They want information services delivered to them when and where they want them in order to increase their knowledge base more efficiently and cost-effectively. All libraries, academic libraries in particular, bear the brunt of the oncoming tide of digitization under the network environment. The extremely urgent task is to keep up their efforts in automating, wiring and digitizing libraries, thereby bringing about fundamental change to them so that a great number of them will be modernized. Indeed, it is incumbent upon all Chinese librarians today to face the challenge and seize the opportunities it may offer in the process of modernizing their libraries.

It is true that funds and equipment are crucial to library modernization, but the human factor is equally, if not more, critical. It is a consensus among scholars of librarianship that the modernization of librarians is at the core of library modernization. A British librarian observes that even a world-class library will find it hard to provide its users with extensive and effective services without full use of its collections, efficient operation, and well-trained staff. The famous Chinese nuclear scientist Qian Xuesen also states, “Librarians in a modernized library ought to be information experts or engineers, builders of information systems, and consultants guiding users through the maze of information.” A vivid analogy depicts a librarian in the 21st century as a “navigator in the sea of information resources.” The point is that modernized libraries require qualified librarians.

How are the Chinese librarians doing today? According to statistics, academic libraries in China each have an average of 40 librarians and staff. If temporary and part-time personnel are included, the number will average 60. Only a few large libraries each have as many as 200 to 300 people. Chinese academic librarians and staff come from four different backgrounds: (1) college graduates from schools of library and information science, (2) college graduates of disciplines other than library and information science, (3) people with diplomas of continuing education in various disciplines, and (4) people without post-secondary education. An overwhelming majority of the Chinese academic library personnel belongs to the third and the fourth categories. In the past few years, some efforts have been made by academic libraries all over the country to upgrade their library staff. Unfortunately, the impact of these efforts on improving library efficiency and services has been limited, which worries scholars of librarianship. They point out bluntly that there is no time to delay in bringing up high quality librarians in China!

What Qualities Should Chinese Librarians Have in the Age of Knowledge?

First, let us take a look at top library administrators, namely, deans, directors, and other members of the administrative team. As policymakers and leaders, they play a decisive role in the day-to-day operation, in particular, and the modernization, in general, of Chinese academic libraries. There are a few outstanding top library administrators who do have a clear vision of their libraries’ future, an open mind for changes; and high levels of library, computer, and foreign language skills. They know what they are doing and are doing it well. Unfortunately, they amount to a very small percentage of the tens of thousands of academic library administrators in China. A large number of them are not equal to their responsibilities, owing to the following reasons:

Without sufficient knowledge of librarianship they often find their abilities fall short of their best intentions. The overwhelming major-

continued on page 83

82 Against the Grain / April 2002

<http://www.against-the-grain.com>
International Dateline
from page 82

ity of directors of Chinese academic libraries are appointed by their superiors, namely, their university or college administrators. A large number of them are conscientiously committed to self-training to become competent library administrators through learning by doing. Some of them, however, face difficulties in their transition from what they used to do to the management of their libraries. The difficulties may be attributed to heavy loads of research and teaching assignments, over-commitment to social and community service activities, or inability to deal with too many problems that pop up at the same time. For all their good intentions, they are unwittingly hurting their performance.

Where academic library directors' qualifications are concerned, the United States developed standards as early as 1979, making a master's degree in library science as the bottom line. In Taiwan, more than two years' field experience in a library must supplement a master's degree in library science. Many other countries and regions in the world enforce similar standards. Commenting on such criteria and standards, a library science scholar Ding Yuming says, "Modern management must be conducted by specialists in management and experts in given disciplines.... Without professional library directors there cannot be modernized libraries." Mr. Xie Zerong, Associate Research Librarian at the Library of the Chongqing Normal University, also believes, "Only when a director becomes a professional can he or she be in the right position, make the right decisions, and give the right directions, ensuring that his or her library is on the scientific track towards modernization. Whether an academic library can make a speedy adjustment to the monumental development of an information-based economy," he continues, "is decided by the sole factor that the library must have a competent and professional director." (Xie Zerong, 1998).

Of the Chinese academic library administrators, not very many are competent professionals in the field. They are neither experts of librarianship, nor masters of a wide range of knowledge who have extensive field experience as well as a broadened sphere of activities — traits that characterize what scholars of librarianship call "professionals of a complex type."

Zhang Dong and Xiao Hongyuan use a formula to describe the components of knowledge that professionals of a complex type should possess:

"An ideal professional of a complex type = a person with computer skills (operator + serviceman + programmer) + a multi-linguist (language A + language B + ..., language N) + a manager of document and other information resources (processor/classifier + deliverer + and other skills) + a professional (discipline A + discipline B + ..., discipline N)" (Zhang Dong, 1997).

Researcher Ye Shusheng's model of professional complexity is analogous to an X over a +:

The vertical bar of the + represents the knowledge of a given discipline while the horizontal bar stands for the knowledge of librarianship. The left arm of the X indicates the knowledge of the Chinese language, the right arm stands for writing skills; the left leg represents foreign language skills and the right leg stands for computer skills.

Though different in their analogy and too ideal in their expectations, both scholars are making the same practical point: that the modernization of libraries calls for professional library administrators with complex knowledge and skills. In practice, library directors that fall into either model may be hard to find. Yet, "comprehensive skills + creativity + devotion to librarianship" ought to be an attainable qualification for being an academic library administrator in China.

As a Chinese saying goes, "A flower cannot be a flower without the assistance of its leaves." Library administrators alone cannot accomplish the mission of modernizing their libraries. They need to work with teams of library professionals more or less of the same complex type. These team members include coordinators and librarians in the key divisions of a library, such as electronic resources, document delivery, collection development, reference and instruction, etc. A team of such core professional librarians, led by a competent administration of clear vision, is the guarantee of success in the endeavor to modernize China's academic libraries.

While paying attention to the growth of professional librarians with complex knowledge skills is imperative, training the rest of the library staff in order to enhance their overall quality is equally important. If a team of professional librarians with complex knowledge skills were the beams of a modern library, the supporting staff that amount to the overwhelming majority of Chinese academic library personnel would constitute the base. For historical reasons, these staff members either lack professional training or have had some training that is increasingly growing obsolete. Stuck in their library positions amidst rapid transition to modernization, all they can do is perform traditional library routines. Libraries cannot be modernized without bringing them up-to-date with the developments of information technology and keeping them abreast with the trend towards a knowledge-based society. Hong Tiebing, a librarian of the Library of Nanjing Audition College, points out, "Information service in the future is to meet all the needs of library patrons. The service will be an extension from its traditional role to one that involves tremendous amount of knowledge, hard work, and technology." Liu Xuehe shares the view: "Librarians of the 21st century are no longer librarians in the traditional sense, namely, managers of documents in their circulation process. Instead, they ought to be information experts. As such, they should be responsible for the development and utilization of information resources, and for the education of patrons in how to use them." The future of a Chinese academic library depends on the emergence of an entire team of high quality personnel, be they administrators, librarians, and supporting staff.

How to Enhance the Quality of Librarians in Chinese Academic Libraries

Training is the key to the enhancement of the quality of Chinese librarians at all levels.

Firstly, training can be diversified. Zhan Dexian, a professor from the College of Library and Information Science at Wuhan University, came up with a workable approach: learning different skills under different circumstances. According to trainee's needs, training can fall into three categories: "Deficiency-satisfying," "Updating," and "Pioneering" (Zhan Dexian, 1998).

"Deficiency-satisfying" is to learn what has not been learned. As different people have different packages of what they have learned in school and now are assigned to different positions and units in the library, their needs may vary drastically. This is particularly true of the supporting staff, and therefore this type of training is more suitable to their needs.

"Updating" is applied to long-term enhancement of librarians with complex skills. To keep up with the exponential advancement of information technology and to meet patrons' increasing demand for information, they must learn to become adept navigators in the sea of information: by constantly "refilling" and upgrading their reservoir of knowledge.

"Pioneering" is to train library administrators to be creative as they apply modern information technology to the management of their library. The conception of Topper InfoPortal, the first library "portal of choice" by the administration of Western Kentucky University Libraries & Museum in the United States, is exemplary of such application. Creativity and innovation do not grow in a vacuum. They are cultured by knowledge. Library administrators and librarians with key responsibilities must be trained in a broader range of library skills so that they can apply them innovatively to the enhancement of their library services.

Secondly, training can be done in different modes. The following continued on page 84
International Dateline
from page 83

time: participants take paid leave to attend classes in appropriate
schools or colleges and become certified with diplomas or de-
grees; (2) formal education with half release time: participants
are fully paid but work part-time to receive formal training from
programs of adult education; formal testing after self-teaching
and distance learning; (3) seminars, classes, panels, lectures, etc.;
and (4) “apprenticeship,” where the trained train the untrained.
The forms of training may vary, but they all aim at enhancing the over-
all quality of librarians with a view to promoting and supporting
the efforts to modernize Chinese academic libraries.

Thirdly, training must be institutionalized. In regard to the spe-
cific conditions of a particular library, a standardized continuing
education program must be established, aiming at life-long learning.
Training should be conducted step by step in a well-planned manner and
must accommodate diversified needs under different circumstances.

Lastly, training itself must be innovative and flexible. While
training the majority of the supporting staff can be on a learning-
by-doing basis, it can also be integrated into the training of pro-
fessional librarians for complex skills. In the process, supporting
staff can learn complex skills themselves and librarians with the
skills can in turn become their trainers, tutoring them in classes,
seminars, panels, and research activities.

In addition to training librarians and staff on their jobs, keeping
more college graduates of library and/or information science
from leaving libraries for more lucrative careers is another way to
improve the quality of Chinese academic library personnel. In
addition, the tens of thousands of expatriate library professionals
are yet another pool of potential contributors to the moderniza-
tion of Chinese academic libraries.

Summary

In conclusion, building up a sizable contingent of first class
library professionals with rationalized skill levels equal to the most
formidable challenges will provide the ultimate guarantee that Chi-

nese academic libraries will keep abreast with the rest of the world
embracing the Age of Knowledge. Of course, things cannot be
done overnight, particularly considering the fact that China is ex-
periencing the unique historical stages of industrialization, informa-
tion age and knowledge society all at the same time. It pres-
ents difficulties as well as opportunities. Inaction and delay will
naturally cause Chinese librarians to miss out on the opportuni-
ties, while swift and yet well-planned actions will maximize their
chances. Act with no delay!

References

2000.
Shi Xinsheng, “Facing the Four Modernizations of Libraries in the 21st
Huang Zongzhong, “On the Reform of Academic Libraries Again,” Jour-
Zhan Dexiong, “On Continuing Education of Managers of Information
Resources in China,” Knowledge of Library and Information, vol. 2,
1998.
Xie Zerong, “Research Abstracts on Top Professional Administrators of
for Professionals with Complex Skills,” Journal of the National Library,
Jin Biao and Zhuo Ziping, “Retrospect and Prospect at the Turn of the