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

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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. **Dewayne 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-time 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 dribble-sizes 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.

See — **June Kronholz**, “The Dictionary Lady Is Spreading the Word To South Carolina Kids,” *Wall Street Journal*, p.A1, March 4, 2002.

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>

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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 statis-

tics, 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 policy-makers 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-

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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 trainees' 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

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time: participants take paid leave to attend classes in appropriate schools or colleges and become certified with diplomas or degrees; (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 overall 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 specific 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 professional 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 modernization of Chinese academic libraries.

can be adopted: (1) formal education with full release

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

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WEBWORTHY

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Websites selected for broad appeal, depth of information, and ease of access. Webworthy has reviewed over 230 Websites to date! Sites are organized by broad subject area and are visited just prior to publication. Please let the editor know of any sites that are not accessible. Comments and suggestions welcome to **Pamela M. Rose**, Health Sciences Library, University at Buffalo, 3435 Main St., Buffalo, NY 14214-3002; 716-829-2408 <pmrose@acsu.buffalo.edu>. Unless otherwise noted in square brackets following the description, Internet addresses were published in *Science*, NetWatch column edited by **Mitch Leslie**. — PR

Archaeology

The **Polynesians of Taumako** in the Solomon Islands are reviving their ancestral voyaging tradition by teaching their youth the almost forgotten skills of building and sailing voyaging canoes. The process is documented on video on **The Archaeology Chan-**

nel, maintained by the non-profit **Archaeological Legacy Institute (ALI)**. With goals of increasing public awareness and support for projects often poorly documented and inaccessible, and providing indigenous peoples a voice in research that affects them directly, **ALI** offers over 31 video clips of archaeological efforts from **The Parthenon** to **The Popham Colony** which existed briefly from 1607-1608 in Maine. Work is supported by membership, and the site also offers Web links, teacher resources, opportunities to get individual field projects documented on video for a reduced rate, archaeological field school cosponsored by the **University of Oregon**, and the latest news from the field. — <http://www.archaeologychannel.org/>.

Endangered Species

The baiji, aka **Yangtze River** dolphin, is the rarist of the 31 listed on the "World's Rarest Mammals" section of **Animal Info - Information on Rare, Threatened and Endangered Mam-**

mals, a site maintained by Maryland water-quality specialist **Paul Massicot**.

Presented in a simple, straightforward, sans graphics format, users can browse alphabetically by common and scientific name, by species group, or by country. Each informational listing offers a Profile, Tidbits, Status and Trends (IUCN Categories, Population Estimates, Countries Where Currently Found, History of Distribution, Threats/Reasons for Decline), Data on Biology and Ecology (Weight, Habitat, Age to Maturity, Gestation Period, Birth Season, Birth Rate, Early Development, Maximum Age, Diet, Behavior, Social Organization, Minimum Viable Population, Genetics), and References. All information is beautifully hyperlinked wherever possible to other sources of information, and the Animal Organizations, Links, and Publications section

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