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Back Talk -- Memories of Food and Thoughts about Library Service Quality

Anthony (Tony) W. Ferguson

University of Hong Kong, ferguson@hkucc.hku.hk

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Something To Think About? — Compact and Powerful!

Column Editor: **Mary E. (Tinker) Massey** (Serials Librarian, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Jack R. Hunt Library)
<Mary.Massey@erau.edu>

If you have been following our discussion this year, we are talking about the periodical weeding process in libraries. First and foremost, we are in need of keeping as many shelves or parts of shelves empty for expansion. Sometimes we make decisions about how many years of a journal to keep, thereby making the older issues unneeded in our collection. Sometimes we decide that specific titles are not needed any longer because their scope does not add to the information bank required for courses being taught today in our schools and universities, or our patronage interests have shifted in the public venue.

This issue's discussion revolves around the usage of microform as a substitute for print issues. The four by four boxes of microfilm or four by six inch fiche stored in cabinets, take up far less space than print issues on open shelves and they can be retained in the busier and more functional areas of the library. The 1930's saw the advent of the 35mm camera and possible use of both negative and positive film to record print in a much smaller format. Scientific and government reports were some of the first to be preserved on film and fiche. Now, we have scores of journals that are reproduced on microfilm and microfiche as a regular routine. It is still our best format for retention, lasting over one hundred years (digital has not proven its longevity yet — too young). Of course, those

companies have to buy the privilege of being able to film the journals and resell them, but there seems to be adequate cooperation in that area. One of the few problems of microform is that reading and printing equipment have to be available to the user. Over the past five to ten years, technology has improved the capabilities of these machines as well. We have readers, we have printers, we have combination reader/printers, and we are now seeing the capability of the reader/printer that can send the visual information to a computer or to your disks, etc. This makes the data so much more useful and effective for reports, papers, articles and other presentations.

We have been used to having newspapers on microfilm for years, but now even the most scientific and technical journals are being captured on film. Being a somewhat specialized library as well as academically oriented, we are conscious of the extensive use of our film and fiche as a substitute for older volumes of journal titles. This allows us to retain the latest five years of the print on our shelves (which is most heavily used for research), while offering another ten to fifteen years in a microform format that allows students to do more historical studies. We are a smaller sized library, but we pack a punch information wise.

Since we are adding to our microform hold-

ings every day, we strive to keep our facilities clean, neat and the boxes in good repair. We have recently purchased five sets of arches that allow a central passageway with pull out upright drawers on each side of the walkway. We also have some microfilm and microfiche cabinets that expand our collection. Some of the cabinets house specific titles or masses of technical reports. The arches house journals on microfilm. When I arrived last year, the microfilm still had rubber bands on the reels, so we removed them in a quick but thorough project. Rubber bands tend to eat their way through film over the years of chemical changes within the packaging. (Best not to take chances on this one point.) We have spent some time this summer going through all the boxes in those arches, making sure they are functional. When we find damaged boxes, we replace them with new ones. I personally like the acid free boxes that store flat and pop-up when you need them. These allow space for labels to be generated on the computer and applied to the appropriate boxes. This year has been a clean-up/fix-up time for all of our collections. The anticipation of gaining more microform holdings in our weeding process has excited us all. Many of our one to three year retentions will have microfilm backup for the older years. Perhaps, we can begin to move our reading/printing equipment to the new age of technology and allow students and faculty a chance to send them to disks and office/home computers. That is truly something to think and dream about! 🐼



I Hear the Train A Comin' from page 92

gence. It also becomes expected. When RSS is sufficiently omnipresent and straightforward that the **Asheboro North Carolina Zoo** begins syndicating its content, it is obvious that every scholarly publisher should be on the bandwagon. And many are. So, too, will we see publishers and other content providers adopt other **Web 2.0** services as these services cross the chasm. Community rating systems and blogs, mentioned above, seem like obvious candidates. So, too, do folksonomies, in which readers and site visitors help categorize the content which they are reading. Chatting/message

board technology is well established, providing a natural gateway to real-time discussions and debates among authors, editors, referees, and readers. When Web users are fully at ease with the protocol for sharing their photos on sites like **Flickr**, how big a leap will it be for the scholarly subcommunity to share their data and supplementary materials? When the **MySpace** model of community interaction is part of our cultural fabric, how great a jump are we from an academic **MySpace** at which professors and students network amongst themselves? The **Web 2.0** services that become ingrained in our everyday lives will be adapted and adopted by our scholarly communication solar system just as the printing press, and, indeed, the **Web 1.0**, were. 🐼

Back Talk from page 94

these small buns, you are linked to lists or chat rooms where people are talking about them, you get pictures of them. Yes, you also get advertising but we have all been trained during thousands of hours of TV as children to ignore ads (even in 1950's Idaho we had advertisements between our mix of Agriculture Department films and Crusader Rabbit episodes). How can we ensure that our libraries (the physical places and the virtual places where our expensive databases, e-journals, and eBooks are kept) are equally rewarding? But that is the hard question. Since I have already exceeded my 1,000 word count I think I will go into the kitchen, push our Filipina cook out of the way and cook some hash browns, over easy eggs, toast and hot chocolate to eat while watching the **CBS** evening news that appears on TV here each morning on our side of the earth. I will let you all think about how to give our users what they want quickly, efficiently, and with great enthusiasm. Bon appétit/ sihk faahn!

PS Unless this column gets yanked, I may return with food/service memories of Bergdorf's in Chicago, the Capital Deli in New York, and the Peking Garden in Seattle. 🐼

Rumors from page 76

To see some digital collections managed with **CONTENTdm** software, visit: <http://www.contentdm.com/customers/>.

Well, we're out of space for this issue. Hope to see you all at the **Charleston Conference** in November! Register online at www.katina.info/conference. See you then! 🐼

Back Talk — Memories of Food and Thoughts about Library Service Quality

Column Editor: **Anthony (Tony) W. Ferguson** (Library Director, University of Hong Kong; Phone: 852 2859 2200; Fax: 852 2858 9420) <ferguson@hkucc.hku.hk>

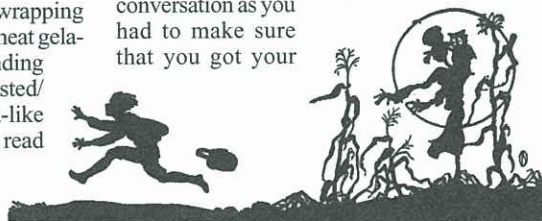
I like to eat, and thoughts of memorable meals stay with me. That's nice, you say, but what has this to do with libraries or information. That is the problem with this column. I seem to want to tell a few stories but making them relate to our profession, our common interest in the information business is my challenge. So, just in case it isn't clear by the end of my allotted 1,000 words what this short piece is about — it is about the importance of excellent customer service, the importance of collection excellence.

First for food. I am not a food snob. In fact, while I can appreciate the beauty of the food in some Nuevo cuisine restaurants where you can remember how the food looked when presented on a large plate or white or Italian glass, how the sauces were draped across the plate like paint on canvas, such food is not my cup of tea.

If I am not an epicurean, what kind of food does appeal to me and anyway, where are these food memories? Let's begin with Shanghainese *xiaolongbao* or little steamer buns. When I was a young missionary in Taiwan I didn't have much money and so my choice of foods with which to satiate my love of eating was somewhat limited. For a while I lived in a fairly small city called Chaiyi. Of course even in Taiwan a small city can have half million or so fellow citizens. *Xiaolongbao* are made by wrapping small amounts of fatty chopped meat, meat gelatin, and who knows what else depending upon the cook in a simple tightly twisted/sealed round piece of very thin pasta-like substance of flour and water (you can read more in **Answers.com**). The buns are cooked in small bamboo round baskets with lids that are piled high

one on top of another over an especially made caldron with boiling water that allows the steam to move upward through the chimney-like tower of bamboo steamers.

The secret of this kind of food is that the steam penetrates the pasta pouch making a soup of the fatty meat and gelatin that cannot escape until you bite it. My fellow missionary and I would go to a small eatery located by a canal whose walls only went up waist or chest high leaving lots of space for a breeze to penetrate, to move some of the steam with the aroma of the food being cooked out of the restaurant. This was an architectural win-win design that provided relief from the heat and advertising in the same step. On most days we could only afford two steamers of six small buns. I think each steamer cost about 50 American cents each, a princely sum then. You would dip the bun in a little dish of soy sauce mixed with thread-like shredded ginger with your chop sticks of one hand — but with your Chinese spoon held in ready just below the bun to catch the soup that would escape once you bit into the bun with the fingers of your other hand (biting the bun not your fingers). This was a heavenly experience not to be forgotten. The simultaneous tastes of meat soup, meat, tangy soy sauce, and ginger was enormously satisfying. There was little conversation as you had to make sure that you got your



fair share of this everyday delicacy.

So, what has this to do with libraries and information? Last week I was in Taiwan talking about my library's hitting the million eBook level and the hosts from **EBSCO** took me for a stroll down memory lane to a classic *xiaolongbao* restaurant in the capital city. While the buns we ate were not as good as those of my memories 40 years previous, some beautifully made with crab meat and golden crab roe, they were none the less terrific and hundreds of Taipei's local and tourist residents seemed to agree. The sidewalk in front of the three or four story restaurant was teaming with expectant diners who would queue up to get a photocopied list of choices and an order form. Once filled out you are given a number which is later announced over a speaker for all to hear so you know it is time to be taken to your table to feast upon your choices. But as we sat on small four legged stools on the sidewalk sheltered from heat and rain by the part of the building waiting for our number to be called, **Paul Poon** who directs an academic library in Macau — a small former Portuguese colony located just opposite Hong Kong on our stretch of the South China coast — and I reflected on why this restaurant was so popular and what could we as librarians learn from their example?

We could of course offer good food at a good price but our universities would soon get rid of the books and computers in order to create more space for the restaurant. In a recent focus group meeting to gather ideas for the construction of a learning commons on our campus, a group of students all concurred it should be like a huge **Starbucks**: comfortable chairs arranged in a chummy atmosphere; tables for snacks, drinks, and laptops; wireless access and power; and a central location where you can hang out with friends to see and be seen, and good food/drinks with an educational discount. I think what **Paul** and I concluded, although serious talk soon changed to serious eating, was this restaurant gave the people what they wanted quickly, efficiently, and with great enthusiasm. Now at last we have arrived at the topic of this **Backtalk**: Quality Service. Yet, like the American slogan "where's the beef," excellent service without content is noise.

Sometimes I get the feeling that our current passion for measuring service quality forgets that people also want content. Of course we all know that many/most (?) of our patrons come for the atmosphere, to study, to look at and be seen by other people, to find their friends, to be findable, etc. But our only justifiable excuse for continued existence is to provide the beef, the buns, and the content that is needed/craved. That is why the Web is valued so much. You type words like *xiaolongbao* in a small **Google** or **Yahoo!** box and you get information about

continued on page 93

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