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**Why Does
a Leisure Magazine Publishing House Need a Professional Librarian?
An Interview with Eddie Yeung,
Librarian at the
South China Media Limited**

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Introduction

Having its own in-house library is particularly important for any modern organization that has to handle a large amount of information flow on a daily basis. This in-house library is expected to function as an "information hub" for centralizing, acquiring, organizing, managing, disseminating and archiving information for its parent organization in any possible format. Meanwhile, have you ever thought about how information was being thrown through the library and handled by the library staff at a major TV station during the June 4th Incident that took place in Beijing in 1989? Leisure magazines are often considered inferior in comparison to the journalistic news and scholarly books. However, have you ever thought about why a leisure magazine publishing company would need to have a fully-qualified library professional to manage its collections and services? Many LIS professionals are unable to tell you what a typical day at work is like for a librarian working for a magazine publishing company. In the following interview, Eddie Yeung shares with the readers the joy, the challenges, as well as difficulties that he currently faces as the Library Manager of the South China Media Limited, a major leisure magazine publishing house founded in Hong Kong.

Patrick Lo (PL): Would you please talk something about yourself like academic background, working experience and job history, etc.?

Eddie Yeung (EY): I am originally from Hong Kong. I graduated from Fu Jen Catholic University (輔仁大學)¹ in Taiwan, where I obtained my first

¹ Fu Jen Catholic University (輔仁大學) – Homepage. Available at:
http://140.136.240.107/english_fju/

(Bachelor's) degree in Library Science (LS). I still remember that the cataloguing course (of the LS programme) was based on the Dewey Decimal Classification Scheme, and it required the students to have substantial programming skills like Pascal at that time.

After completing the four-year undergraduate programme at Fu Jen Catholic University, I worked in the libraries of several research institutes in Taiwan, namely the Research Institutes of Taiwan Academia Sinica (台灣中央研究院),² the Institute of History and Philology (歷史語言研究所)³ (formerly known as the Institute of History (歷史研究所) and the Institute of European and American Studies (歐美研究所)⁴ (formerly known as the Institute of Chinese and American Studies(中美研究所).

During my two years at the Taiwan Academia Sinica, I participated in several different projects and learnt to manage the budgets of library materials. It was at the Academia Sinica, where I developed a good professional network with famous scholars and many book agencies on an international scale - because as the Librarian, I was the key person at the Academia Sinica responsible for acquiring books for the professors. At the end of my second year at the Academia Sinica, I decided to pursue a Postgraduate Diploma in Library and Information Studies (LIS) at the University of Strathclyde⁵ in the UK.

PL: Where and how did you begin your career as a professional librarian in Hong Kong?

EY: After obtaining my Postgraduate Diploma in LIS from the University of Strathclyde in the UK, I began my professional career as a librarian at Hong Kong Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB),⁶ where I worked for nearly three years.

During my initial period at TVB, I was working in the Arts Department and was later transferred to the Library of News Department (about one year later), and was working the night shifts, i.e., from 15:00 until midnight—performing all the indexing and cataloguing tasks, including writing descriptions for news footage, and providing keywords for library materials in a large variety of

² Taiwan Academia Sinica (歐美研究所) – Homepage. Available at: <http://www.sinica.edu.tw/>

³ Institute of History and Philology (歷史語言研究所) – Homepage. Available at: <http://www2.ihp.sinica.edu.tw/en/>

⁴ Institute of European and American Studies (歐美研究所) – Homepage. Available at: <http://www.ea.sinica.edu.tw/index-en.php>

⁵ University of Strathclyde – Homepage. Available at: <http://www.strath.ac.uk>

⁶ Television Broadcasts Limited – Homepage. Available at: <http://www.tvb.com>

format, such as photos, VHS tapes and telegraph messages.

It seemed that I had already acquired all the necessary practical skills while I was pursuing my LIS degrees at university; hence, I could very much work independently without any supervision or guidance from my seniors at the TVB News Library. Having said that, I still had to observe closely all the policies and working procedures readily developed by the TVB News Library, e.g. following all the procedures and rules for cataloguing and classifying all sorts of news related materials including news footages. During that time, there were only four people working together as a team in the TVB News Library, i.e., the News Librarian, two cataloguing staff and a typist.

Since it was still the non-computer era, the typist (at the TVB News Library) was responsible for typing out all the descriptions for the card cataloguing records. At that time, the end-users (mostly the TVB News reporters) still relied on the card cataloguing records for locating the library materials. Before digitalization, lots of human errors could be found in those VHS tapes, e.g., images could appear one or two seconds deviant as recorded. Wrong retrieval of video-clips could sometimes lead to the wrong person being shown in the background picture, when the news footages were being aired.

In my opinion, having high working efficiency and being able to work under constant pressure were the most important criteria for working as a librarian for a TV news station. Furthermore, having an extremely sharp eye, and passionate interest in both current news and public affairs would no doubt enable one to become a good and competent news librarian.

PL: Could you share some of your more memorable moments during your time working for the TVB News Library?

EY: It was always extremely busy working in the News Department of TVB—a library that never sleeps might be a more fitting way to describe our working conditions. The most memorable moment during my time at the TVB News Library would have to be the period of June Fourth Incident, which took place in Beijing, China in 1989. During the actual Incident, I had to work 72 hours straight with no sleep. In addition to writing the descriptions for all the news footage in the fastest possible way, I also had to handle all sorts of information related to the Tiananmen Square massacre flying into the TVB News Library from all possible directions.

The most unforgettable and priceless piece of information that I ever handled during the period of the June Fourth Incident was the original soundtrack of Chai Ling 柴玲, one of the student leaders of the Tiananmen Square protests. The soundtrack was about 20 minutes long, and it recorded many details

depicting the actual situation happening in the Tiananmen Square during the massacre. You could literally hear the gunshots, and people screaming in the background. Upon receiving the “Chai Ling soundtrack,” I had to work at lightning speed, that is, searching and identifying the suitable video-clips and other information that could be found in the News Library to match with the “Chai Ling soundtrack”—editing the video-clips and preparing the descriptions accordingly—so that the video-clips could be used as the background during the actual broadcast of this “Chai Ling soundtrack.”

I really enjoyed my job at the TVB News Library, as I could derive a high level of satisfaction from what I did as a special library manager. I felt very proud to have taken part in reporting the Tiananmen Square incident, and I still do: supporting the information needs of every single member of the TVB News Team under such a crisis situation, especially when I was assigned with such an important task of handling the original “Chai Ling soundtrack” during the Incident. However, I resigned from TVB soon after the Tiananmen Square incident was over, because I felt so burnt out every day after work. More importantly, I felt that given such major contributions I made in reporting the Tiananmen Square incident, I did not receive the recognition that I totally deserved. Witnessing all the frontline reporters at TVB being awarded with medals for successfully reporting the story, while I as a key member of the TVB News Team was awarded with nothing, exception for an invitation to attend the departmental celebration dinner was definitely not a pleasant feeling, so I decided to leave TVB for good.

PL: Could you share with us your other professional experiences as a special library manager during the time after leaving TVB, and before joining the South China Media Limited (南華傳媒)?

EY: After leaving TVB, I worked for another seven private companies before taking up my current position as the Librarian at the South China Media Limited (SCML). During my career as a special library manager, I have also worked for a number of magazines, newspapers, as well as financial companies in Hong Kong, including the Asian Sources (commercial magazines company), *Tin Tin Daily News* (天天日報) (a Hong Kong newspaper that ceased publication in September 2009), and Schroders Investment Management (Hong Kong),⁸ a British commercial bank.

I learnt a lot from working for the Schroders Investment Management Limited, where I was in charge of a major project, transforming their traditional library

⁷ South China Media Limited (南華傳媒) – Homepage. Available at: <http://www.scmedia.com.hk>

⁸ Schroder Investment Management (Hong Kong) – Homepage. Available at: <http://www.schroders.com.hk/hkmain/en/index.html>

into a digital one. Having worked there for about seven years, I was glad that my hard work and contributions were recognised by Schrodgers' senior management, and I was eventually promoted to executive grade. After my promotion, I had the chance to work closely with many financial analysts and system vendors so as to implement a new automated library system. From 1998-2000, Schrodgers sent me twice to their head office in England to take a two-month intensive training workshop. Through the training workshops, I acquired very crucial working knowledge, as well as developed many practical skills for retrieving and compiling financial and business data that would be useful to the end-users at many levels. I have to admit such working skills were absolutely indispensable for supporting the daily operations of a sizable financial company like Schrodgers. In fact, such business research skills [acquired at Schrodgers] have proven to be most beneficial to my professional career for many years to come. Since then, I believed that being flexible and informative are the key factors for being a successful LIS professional for a corporate organization like Schrodgers. I left because during the financial crisis, Schrodgers laid off many staff members, including me, as a result of company acquisition.

PL: How long have you been working as the Librarian for the SCML? In addition, could you describe your typical day at work at the SCML?

EY: I have been working for the SCML since 2011. My main duties and responsibilities here include gathering, organizing, preserving, manipulating, managing and delivering information to SCML employees at all levels. This Library or Information Centre existed for many years before I joined the SCML. The SCML Librarian position had been left vacant for a long time. For this reason, when I first arrived at the SCML Library, there was a huge cataloguing backlog that had been accumulated over the past four years. As soon as I took up the position as the Librarian at the SCML, the most urgent and immediate task that I had to deal with was to clear the cataloguing backlog in the Library. In order to achieve this, six additional temporary library assistants were hired to clear the massive cataloguing backlog.

At the SCML Library, we use a software programme developed in-house called Media Station to manage our collections. The Media Station is used for converting hard copies of library materials into computer files, and these computer files are then catalogued into the automated library system. Our automated library system functions like an online library catalogue. For example, our SCML colleagues usually search for their desired information via the metadata included in our automated library system. After locating their desired materials, they then come to our Library and collect the physical printed copies from us.

PL: Which magazine or newspapers are currently being published by the SCML?

EY: SCML is a magazine publishing company founded locally in Hong Kong. Unlike the other South China Morning Post (SCMP) Group,⁹ we publish mainly leisure and lifestyle magazines. Some of our more popular magazine titles include *CarPlus* (車王雜誌),¹⁰ *CAPITAL* (資本雜誌),¹¹ *CAPITAL Entrepreneur*,¹² *JESSICA* (旭萊),¹³ *JESSICACODE* (旭萊),¹⁴ *HIM*,¹⁵ *JMEN*,¹⁶ and *Kids Weekly* (兒童快報).¹⁷

PL: Why do you think a medium-scale publishing house for leisure magazines in Hong Kong also needs to have its own in-house library and a professional librarian to manage its services and collections?

EY: The Library at the SCML functions as an “Information Hub” within the company itself. It is important for any company (regardless of whether it is a profit or non-profit-making company) with more than twenty staff members, including a mass media business like us, to have their own library for centralizing, acquiring, organizing, managing, disseminating, as well as archiving, information in any possible formats—with the aims of serving the information needs and supporting the operations of the SCML at all levels.

Based on my professional experience, I would also suggest that in addition to having its own in-house library and a professional librarian to manage its daily operations, any publishing house should have at least one copy of all published issues (regardless of whether it is a newspaper or magazine) archived in its own in-house library for future reference, because you never know when you will need to use the information or photos from any particular issue again in the future. Digitization is not applicable to all kinds of library materials, especially when you are talking about leisure magazines that we currently publish in large quantities. In our case, I keep at least one copy of any issue and any title published by the SCML, and then store it in a CD, DVD or Blu-ray disc format. Unfortunately, in the face of our current budget shortfall, it is very unlikely that we could purchase a new server for converting all our

⁹ South China Morning Post (SCMP) Group – Homepage. Available at: <http://www.scmpgroup.com>

¹⁰ *CarPlus* (車王雜誌) – Homepage. Available at: http://www.carplushk.com/index_carplus.htm

¹¹ *CAPITAL* (資本雜誌) – Homepage. Available at: http://www.capital-hk.com/index_capital.htm

¹² *CAPITAL Entrepreneur* – Homepage. Available at:

http://www.capitalentrepreneur.com/index_capitalentrepreneur.htm

¹³ *JESSICA* (旭萊) – Homepage. Available at: <http://www.jessicahk.com>

¹⁴ *JESSICACODE* (旭萊) – Homepage. Available at: www.jessicacode.com/

¹⁵ *HIM* – Homepage. Available at: http://www.him.com.hk/index_him.htm

¹⁶ *JMEN* – Homepage. Available at: <http://www.jmen.com.hk>

¹⁷ *Kids Weekly* (兒童快報) – Homepage. Available at: http://www.sckid.com/kids_weekly/index.htm

back issues into the online format.

PL: Could you describe your typical day at work? Your previous professional experience as the TV News Librarian and also librarian at other major newspaper companies in Hong Kong—do such experiences still come in handy sometimes?

EY: Every day, other than the routine library duties, I divide my tasks into two major groups, current awareness and business research.

First thing in the morning, I make use of the online Wisers¹⁸ news clippings service to collect news articles about the most current activities surrounding the mass media industry in Hong Kong. After collecting these news articles, I then systematically distribute them to the relevant editors and senior management (within SCML) for their attention. In the afternoon, I normally perform research—reading a variety of fashion magazines or/and browsing through all the photographs found in the entertainment sections of all local newspapers.

Yes, I do find that my past working experiences gained from the news or the journalistic sector to be most useful to my current work as the Librarian at the SCML, especially when it comes to doing research on the current affairs that are taking place locally in Hong Kong. Over the years, I have developed a very sharp eye for current affairs, or anything unique going on in our society that would spark an interesting story or grab the readers' immediate attention. In addition, I have equipped myself with very useful knowledge about the major listed companies and other important information concerning the main board members of these listed companies in Hong Kong.

In my opinion, such professional knowledge and practical working skills are absolutely vital for my current role as the library manager of a major magazine publishing house in Hong Kong. For example, it is definitely a big advantage to know where and how to approach third parties like Agence France-Presse (AFP), European Pressphoto Agency and Reuters to purchase the photographs that we need for our magazines. Knowing whom to approach, knowing what to ask and knowing how to get them would no doubt save a lot of manpower and effort by preventing aimless looking around. After all, time is money, especially when you are talking about the mass media industry. All reporters want to be the first to crack the news. For this reason, no one can afford to waste any time. Moreover, having eye-catching photographs of high quality is particularly important for magazines that deal with fashion, trends,

¹⁸ Wisers Information Limited - Homepage. Available at: <http://www.wisers.com/>

lifestyles, and entertainment, as photographs usually make up 50% or more of a magazine's entire contents.

PL: How many staff are there in total currently working at the SCML Library?

EY: Two and a half, including me (the Head Librarian), plus one trainee and one part-time library staff.

PL: TVB News Library versus SCML Library—what are the major differences in terms of serving as a library and information professional for these two different profit-making organizations, since they both aim at providing the most up-to-date information to the general public about issues that are relevant to their daily lives?

EY: High working efficiency and being able to respond quickly to new and unexpected changes are definitely crucial. Compared with the news sector, a magazine publishing company can operate at a relatively slower pace, as we deal much more with fashion, entertainment and show business. But generally speaking, the expectations of our readers are more or less the same, i.e., they want it fast, trendy and accurate, at the same time entertaining.

PL: Any other important issues that need to be considered when you are handling the requests from your audience? Could you state some examples?

EY: Copyright is the most important issue. In addition to serving the information needs of the SCML staff at all levels, another major responsibility of mine is to deal with copyright clearance, that is, ensuring that all the photographs to be printed in our magazine issues have already obtained copyright clearance or permission. On one occasion, a SCML magazine editor was looking for a photograph of Diana Princess of Wales. We spent a lot of time and effort contacting many local and different international agencies looking for the right photograph. Many international photo agencies could not deliver the photograph (fitting all the criteria) in view of our deadline for publishing this particular issue. At the end, the photo had to be purchased from Image China (a photograph agency), because the editor wanted a photograph showing the young Princess [Diana] wearing a tiara, and he would not compromise on anything else. In this situation, the price for purchasing this photo was a secondary consideration.

PL: Were there situations in the past that you had to rely on your professional experiences and judgments to resolve any crisis situations?

EY: Sure! On one occasion, it happened that the SCML senior management desperately needed to get their hands on the latest issue of one of our own magazine titles for their early morning board meeting held at the head office. In fact, the latest issues had just been delivered to the local convenience stores, and copies were still waiting to be shelved. The copy needed for the senior board meeting was still pending delivery to the SCML headquarter. In order to tackle this situation, the SCML Library staff had to dispatch our own staff to run as fast as he could to the nearby convenience store, purchase the latest issue, and bring it back to head office in the quickest possible way.

The improper use of photographs of the famous Chinese actress Li Bingbing 李冰冰 was another example of how a librarian helped the magazine escape a violation of copyright law. Our subsidiary company in Shanghai publishes its own local version of the magazine, 《完全生活手册》. As usual, they copied everything including the copyright protected photographs provided by our Hong Kong Office, assuming that all the contents sent to them had already obtained copyright clearance. Ms. Li Bingbing had this particular catwalk-model-look photo, with the city of Rome (Italy) in the background. This photograph was allowed only to be solely used by the **MC Magazine** for advertising an internationally famous designer label in a fashion magazine. The colleagues in Hong Kong overlooked this and treated Ms. Li Bingbing as a nameless fashion model, and distributed this series of photos to the colleagues in Shanghai for use in their local magazine 《完全生活手册》. It was lucky that we discovered this error just in time before the magazines were distributed for sale to the public. Otherwise, not only the reputation of SCML would have been damaged, the company could also risk a penalty of HKD\$500,000 for copyright infringement.

PL: As the Library Manager of a major publishing house for leisure magazines in Hong Kong, what kind of challenges and difficulties are you currently facing? Are your difficulties related to budgets or the implementation of a new automated system? Or they are related to the shortage of library staff?

EY: Everything you have mentioned so far are difficulties and challenges that we special library managers are always facing. At this time, budget is the most pressing problem. As you know, our Library is going through a transition period, converting all our hard-copy materials into digital format. In order to achieve that, we need to build another stand-alone server for storing an increasing number of copies of different magazine titles in digital format. For the past 3 years, I have requested a budget of HKD \$400,000 from the SCML

senior management for purchasing a new server. Unfortunately, my budget request still has not been approved by the senior management. To ease the storage problem, our interim solution is to convert all the photographs and contents of readily-published magazines into DVD or Blu-ray discs, as they have much larger storage capacity. We then catalogue and index these DVDs and Blu-ray discs individually, in order to enable better retrieval—something similar to what other physical audio-video libraries are doing.



Eddie Yeung,
Librarian at the
South China Media Limited

