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From the President

Tai-loi Ma

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Those in the profession long enough may recall two notable successes when librarians joined force to deal with publishers and vendors. In the early eighties the Taiwan Commercial Press announced that it was going to reprint the complete set of *Siku quanshu*, making it available to the general public for the first time. This should have been good news to scholars and librarians, yet many librarians were genuinely unhappy with the publisher. The reason was that Taiwan Commercial Press had already published the more valuable titles in thirteen series. Librarians felt that they were forced to pay a premium price for duplicates. Formal protests were launched. The publisher agreed to give a deep discount to those who had purchased the previous series. And beyond anybody's expectation, this expensive title became a best seller. All copies were sold out within a relatively short time, and the publisher made a respectable profit.

The other confrontation happened when a few years ago the major vendors in China formed a committee to set a fixed export price. For many years librarians in North America paid double the domestic price while vendors offered different discounts. The committee wanted to raise the export price and also forbade individual pricing. In response CEAL's Subcommittee on Chinese Materials used the internet to inform librarians at large and to solicit their opinions. A meeting was held at Chicago and a formal letter of protest was drafted. Eventually vendors were again allowed to set their own prices individually. CEAL was vindicated when in 1998 the Chinese Government outlawed various industry organizations to set a uniform export price.

When the occasion arises, librarians can again unite together. We should protest or boycott when publishers set exorbitant prices or create instant rare editions. I have always been saddened to hear that a publisher promised to destroy the printing form after a set number of copies (as low as 20) were produced. Apparently the goal of some publishers is not to facilitate the dissemination of knowledge.

We should also negotiate and educate. Again using the *Siku quanshu* as an example, we may explain to publishers why we should be able to purchase individual titles from the various overlapping voluminous and very expensive series, and some of us need only the full-text version CD and not the image version. It is irresponsible for publishers to produce and to force people to acquire products they do not really want.

Tai-loi Ma
President, CEAL