On the Development of the Institute of Chinese Studies Library at Heidelberg University

Thomas H. Hahn
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AT HEIDELBERG UNIVERSITY

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It is a great pleasure as well as a great honor for me to be able to contribute to the Committee on East Asian Libraries’s (CEAL) 100th issue of its Bulletin. I have always taken the Bulletin seriously, have applauded the statistics enclosed, marvelled at the job and career offers cited, and looked forward to its stimulating bibliographical descriptions of new titles relevant to the field. The only wish I have about the Bulletin is that it may appear more frequently.

My initial thought about what to contribute to this commemorative issue included such matters as International Interlibrary Loan (IILL), resource sharing, shared cataloging projects and, in general, defining proper fields of cooperation between the European Association of Sinological Librarians (EASL) and the Committee on East Asian Libraries. Since these matters were already voiced and discussed during EASL’s visit to Washington and other Chinese, Japanese, and Korean (CJK) libraries in April 1992, I (as chairman of EASL) decided not to repeat them again. However, it goes without saying that these issues should not be dropped or neglected and it is my sincere hope that in the not too distant future, European and American colleagues will be in a better position to share experiences and to discuss automation links and other matters concerning the flow of information between the two worlds.

Instead, recent events at my own institute have convinced me that the time might be ripe to "go public" with what might be dubbed in euphemistic terms as "the Heidelberg Great Leap Forward".

The state of China-related research libraries in Germany

In order to understand the meaning of this euphemism, let us have a look at the library environment in Chinese studies in Germany. In a recently published survey of institutions with a research interest in Asia called "Institutionen der Asien-Forschung und -information in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland – Forschungsinstitute, Bibliotheken, Dokumentationsstellen und Archive," the author lists over 110 research institutions, 60 libraries as well as 31 documentary centers and archives potentially collecting and holding CJK materials.

Extracting the university institutes for Chinese studies, we end up with the figure 25. Adding other institutions outside a university environment that really specialize in China-related academic research (whether treating history, economics, or modern politics is irrelevant in this context), we may have 35 units that do matter in the (German) world of China-related academic research. However, of these 35 institutes I would say 30 lag far
behind in their collection policies. There are a number of reasons for this lamentable deficit, the most obvious of which are (a) no money — most libraries command an annual budget of US$20,000 or below, (b) no staff — again, university administrations in general do not emphasize CJK studies and are reluctant to grant funds to create administrative posts solely for the libraries.

The result of this situation is a most discouraging picture: of the thirty-five institutions mentioned above, I can only pin down about ten persons that I know personally or by hearsay representing these respective libraries. All other libraries are managed by ever changing staff — mainly students working on their Ph.D., after completion of which they move on into the teaching world. Furthermore, since these libraries are not or only insufficiently automated (there is yet no on-line access to any of these institutes available either to the general public or to the specialist), we do not know what the other libraries actually have in terms of monographs, periodicals, rare books, and new media materials. The only thing I can say about the Chinese library at, say, the University of Freiburg is that they might have a copy of the Zhongwen dacidian. I am in a much better position in relation to the big state libraries at Munich and Berlin but, since their published catalogs date back to 1987 or even 1984, there is (at least at present) no way to be up-to-date with the collections of these large institutions.

The Institute of Chinese Studies at Heidelberg University

For more than two decades the library of the Institute of Chinese Studies at Heidelberg University was amongst those with a low budget (about US$10,000 per year) and virtually no staff. For a collection of less than 30,000 volumes there was no full-time librarian until my position was created in 1990. The annual growth rate until 1987 did not reach 1,000 Chinese titles per year. The Institute was established in the early sixties and is thus among the younger of its kind in Germany. This all changed when Prof. Rudolf G. Wagner, formerly a researcher at Berlin and Harvard, took over the post as director of the Institute in 1987. In the course of negotiations with the university administration, it surfaced that the country of Baden-Württemberg was willing to contribute substantially to build up a center of Chinese studies at Heidelberg. The timing was perfect; nobody could foresee that the unity of East and West Germany was close at hand, that it would cost a fortune to "level" the different standards of living in east and west, and that, as a consequence, Germany would be stricken with a nice economic recession never anticipated before. Thus, close to half a million Deutsche Mark were granted to tackle the task of building a major research library, to be spent over the years 1987 to 1992. Within these five years the library holdings leaped from 30,000 to about 80,000 bound volumes. At the same time plans for automating the library were introduced. The classification system was redesigned to comply with the Library of Congress (LC) classification and the number of staff working in and for the library was elevated from a mere two part-time staff to thirteen part-time workers and one full-time position. In regard to collection development, the following aims were formulated:
1. acquiring as many quotable editions of all major classical and modern texts as possible, including the dynastic histories, the thirteen classics, and recent standard collections like the *Minguo congshu*, for example, and paying particular attention to the commentaries of these texts,

2. consolidating our periodical holdings, especially in the field of modern literature and drama, but also intellectual history, religion, and film,

3. building up a substantial collection of Chinese films, starting from the early up to modern times (altogether about 450 titles by now),

4. and collecting titles on social and economic history, as well as on Chinese Buddhism (*Taishō Tripitaka, Dunhuang baozang*), history of the Chinese Communist Party, and late Qing and early Republican era newspaper and periodical press appearances (for a research project on the public sphere in China).

In the course of this undertaking, various obstacles had to be overcome. At a time not too far back, the library had four different classification systems side by side (an older, self-made classification, LC, Harvard-Yenching, and *numerus currens* ("running numbers")). We are now down to three and hope to have a coherent LC classification extending to all titles by 1995. There was (and still is) no comprehensive catalog for all of our holdings. Instead, the Institute sports thirteen different catalogs, and the users of some collectanea (*congshu*) must refer to the specific *congshu* catalogs or, in some cases, must themselves venture into the abode of the collection in case a *congshu* does not have its own bibliographic tool. Also, one of our main suppliers of Chinese books, the China International Book Trading Company (CIBTC) only after about two and a half years realized that we are potential customers and started to deliver books in 1991 ordered way back in 1988 or 1989 (services improved dramatically during that last nine months and leave nothing to be desired these days).

On the bright side, Heidelberg is the fastest growing collection of all German sinological libraries, except the Prussian State Library at Berlin. It is among the first CJK libraries in Europe to automate its holdings (with library software called Allegro-C, developed at the Technical University of Braunschweig), now allowing on-line access to more than 16,000 bibliographic records in five different databases (to be integrated in the near future). A Novell network comprising five workstations, installed in 1991, is presently being upgraded with Novell Netware v.4.0 for twenty-five users. At the same time an Internet/Ethernet communications link is installed that will allow other institutions and individuals to do remote access on-line searches, including downloading and shared cataloging. The PC format for bibliographical entries developed at the Institute (it is based on the definitions given by the regional network of southwestern Germany, with added entry fields for vernacular CJK script) has been adopted by a number of similar Sinological institutes inside and outside Germany. Automation will soon go full swing and incorporate acquisition and
lending books. And since there is not enough room in which to swing a cat at the library anymore, the entire institute will move to new premises three times as large in April and May 1994.

Closing remarks

The abbreviated description given of German Chinese libraries in general and the Library of the Institute of Chinese Studies at Heidelberg in particular may not make exciting reading, were it not for the conclusion that success stories are rare but nevertheless possible, even under adverse conditions. However, two recent events proved that Heidelberg is on the right track and that the future (should anybody at the library survive the new challenges ahead of us) will be radiant and glorious.

For one, in January 1993 Prof. Wagner was awarded the Leibniz Prize of the German Science Foundation. This prestigious award is accompanied by a considerable sum of money in the range of one million dollars, to be used on research and bibliographical materials (including travel to conferences) and to be spent over the next five years. Presumably about two thirds of this money will go into supplementing the library's holdings. The university administration, proud of employing a scholar of such stature, promised to supply another one million dollars for the Institute. Most of this money will again be used for the library.

Second, in May 1993 the Institute received a letter from the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation of Taiwan, the Republic of China, stating that the institute had been chosen to receive a complete set of the automated twenty-four dynastic histories (developed by the Computer Center of Academia Sinica in Nan-kang, Taipei) and that it would be the only such gift to a European library.

Being thus furnished with funds, research materials and hard- and software, I believe that the Chinese collection at Heidelberg University will grow in status and significance in its German environment, and, indeed, in its European context. It is now up to the academic community to avail itself of the possibilities accompanying the rapid collection development described. For all persons involved in actually administrating this onslaught of materials (mainly myself, I am afraid) survival strategies have been devised and we have high hopes that the Central Planning Bureau of the next Five-Year Plan will make the right decisions to implement these strategies.

Bibliographical Notes

1. The title quoted on p. 96 and referring to institutions involved in research on Asia was compiled by Marion Gebhardt and appeared in Hamburg 1991 as v. 2 of the Asia and South Pacific Documentation Service, Series B by the German Overseas Institute, Overseas Documentation, Asia and South Pacific Section (ISBN 3-922852-40-8, ISSN 0938-2690).

2. During the last few years, I have had the opportunity to publish extensively and in rather
great detail on the work at the Institute library, especially in the German periodical *Chinesisch und Computer* (ISSN 0934-6090), edited by Urs Widmer at the Technical University in Bremen, 5 (1990), 6 (1991), and 7 (1992).