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SOME PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON MY BRIEF EXPERIENCE
AT THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

Chi Wang

In 1964 the late Dr. K’ai-ming Ch’iu, who retired from his position as Librarian of the Harvard-Yenching Library, was invited to be Librarian of the newly established Chinese University of Hong Kong Library. He served at its first Librarian until he retired and returned to the United States in 1969. Meantime, the Vice Chancellor of the Chinese University, Dr. Choh-ming Li, approached me and offered me the position at the Chinese University Library to help build a new Central Library and to assist in building new college libraries at the University’s three constituent colleges: Chung Chi College, New Asia College, and United College. Each of the three college libraries had its own acquisitions program and cataloging system and Dr. Li wanted me to help coordinate and centralize these programs and systems. This was a difficult task and, after considering the matter for some time, I decided not to accept.

However, in 1970 Dr. Li came to the United States to receive an honorary degree from the University of Pittsburgh. He called me and asked me to attend the ceremony. I went and had a lengthy discussion with him after the reception. It was also during that occasion that I met Ambrose King, then a Ph.D. candidate in Sociology, who later became one of the prominent scholars and finally president of the New Asia College of the Chinese University. After our meeting at Pittsburgh, I met again with Dr. Li in New York City for one day where he told me about his hopes and plans. At that time I was enjoying my work at the Library of Congress. But I considered Dr. Li’s offer both a great honor and a most challenging assignment for a librarian. Also because of his sincere persuasion, I could not refuse to accept his offer. It was agreed that this should be a two-year offer, and that I would return to the Library of Congress (LC) after the Central Library building was completed. On this basis I took a two-year leave of absence from LC and went to Hong Kong on my new assignment in December 1970 with my wife and our two and a half year old son.

When I arrived in Hong Kong, many of the University Library people came to meet me at the airport. For the first two weeks we stayed in a hotel on the Kowloon side, then later moved to an apartment for visiting scholars at the University. After my arrival in Hong Kong, I immediately made an appointment to meet with Dr. Choh-ming Li. He introduced me to the Library’s administrative staff members. I also met the Presidents of the three colleges: Chi-tung Yung of Chung Chi College, Yi-pao Mei of New Asia College, and T. C. Cheng of United College. The three were most helpful and very supportive of me.

The previous Librarian, Dr. K’ai-ming Ch’iu, was a most accomplished librarian, whereas I had only worked at the Library of Congress for fifteen years doing mostly reference and
research work. Also, the University Library already had more than seventy staff members, so I felt this was a difficult job I was getting into; but I felt greatly honored to be given this challenging opportunity for professional service in Hong Kong. This was indeed a golden opportunity for me as a professional librarian.

A New Central Library

I quickly got acquainted with the Library's staff members and department heads. Many of the senior members were much older than I and near retirement age. I thought that I would need to recruit some new employees if I stayed. I also met many of the University faculty members. Most of them were educated in the United States and in Great Britain. The Chairman of the University Library Systems Committee was Dr. Choh-ming Li himself and he gave me a free hand to develop the new library. He was my boss and my friend. Dr. Li was always very busy at the University's new campus at Shatin in the New Territories. He was a dynamic person, and was very farsighted in making plans for the University. He retired from the University in 1978 and passed away in 1991, but it was he who built the foundation of the Chinese University of Hong Kong from scratch. I am certain that everyone affiliated with the University will remember him and his contributions to the University.

During my stay in Hong Kong, I had the opportunity to be introduced to various community supporters, including local industrialists, philanthropists, and foundation donors. One of these was Dr. P. Y. Tang, Council Member on the University Council. He was a graduate of MIT and chairman of the Far East Textile Company, one of the largest industrial companies in Hong Kong. He donated millions to help build the University Library. He told me that he thought my coming to the Chinese University Library would be good for the students in Hong Kong and for the young people and urged me to make Hong Kong my home. I also met other leaders in education and industry, and I was very grateful to meet such generous people.

With regard to the plans for the new library building, I had regular contacts with Paul Y. Y. Lam, the Buildings Officer of the University, and with Mr. Szeto Wei, a well-known architect in Hong Kong who designed the building. After the groundbreaking ceremony for the building, I tried to visit the building site on a daily basis.

Standardizing Cataloging and Centralizing Acquisitions

At the University Library several of the staff members were especially helpful: Ms. Flossy Lee, Sub-librarian (equivalent to Associate Librarian), who has a degree from George Peabody University; and Mr. Fred Chang, Assistant Librarian, who currently is the Library's Deputy-Librarian. At that time the Library's Chinese books were cataloged by the Ch'iu K'ai-ming system used at the Harvard-Yenching Library, while the western-language books were cataloged by the Dewey Decimal system. I had this central cataloging system changed to the LC classification system. I also arranged to have the Asia Foundation invite Mr.
Joseph E. P. Wang, top Chinese cataloger at LC, to work for one summer in 1971 in the Hong Kong workshop of the University Library to train cataloging personnel in the LC classification system. The workshop was a very successful project; besides staff members from the Chinese University, cataloging staff from the University of Hong Kong also participated.

Changes were also instituted in a centralized acquisitions system in the Library. There was very little central coordination in the acquisitions of library materials; each of the three constituent colleges purchased its own publications and processed its own materials. The University Library had little control over the book budget and the type of materials acquired by each college library. Following a series of meetings with each college president and librarian and with many heated discussions, we agreed to introduce a new centralized purchasing system. The "turf problems" between the Central Library and the three college libraries were temporarily resolved. The centralized acquisitions system would reduce duplication drastically. It was agreed that the Chung Chi College Library would concentrate on science, philosophy, and religion; the United College Library on business and the social sciences, etc.; and the New Asia College Library would acquire more books on humanities. After one year the system seemed to be shaping up and, although there was some disagreement about the system, there was mostly cooperation.

In the fall of 1972 the new Central Library building was completed and it became a landmark on the campus. Equipment, shelves, desks, and furnishings for the library were purchased and installed. In this work, Mrs. E. J. Fehl, University Bursar, who was very strict and systematic, was most helpful. The new Central Library building is one of the most modern libraries in East Asia. The University Library is primarily a research library for the use of faculty, staff, and graduate students of the University without duplicating the functions of the three constituent college libraries. These three libraries, together with the University Library, form one coordinated university library system. In the winter of 1972 the University Library moved from its temporary quarters in the Benjamin Franklin Center into the new facilities. Because of personal and family reasons, I was unable to stay in Hong Kong on a permanent basis, so I reluctantly returned to the United States.

Reestablishing Library Ties with the People's Republic of China

However, before I returned to the United States, an unanticipated development occurred. The Xinhua News Agency in Hong Kong told me that Beijing would welcome me to visit China in the spring of 1972. Remember that President Nixon made his historic visit to China in February 1972. I was not prepared for this invitation, and I immediately contacted the Library of Congress; the Librarian of Congress gave me permission to pursue this matter. After some discussion with the Xinhua people in Hong Kong, details for my visit were worked out. I was in China for two weeks from June 1st to June 18th, and was sent there through the authorization of LC Librarian Dr. L. Quincy Mumford and with the approval of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.
While in China I received a warm welcome from the Revolutionary Committee of the National Library of Peking, and I negotiated an informal exchange agreement with them. I was the first American librarian to visit the People's Republic of China (PRC) in twenty-three years. This was a most pleasant surprise and it is an unforgettable experience for me — one that will last for my whole lifetime. From 1973 the Library of Congress received many more publications from the PRC as a result of the visit. The reestablishment of an exchange program between the Library of Congress and the Peking Library was an important development for LC's acquisitions programs. I wrote a travel report which was published in the *Library of Congress Information Bulletin* 31, no. 39 (September 29, 1972); it has been translated into Japanese and German in library bulletins published in Japan and Germany.

**Growth of the Chinese University Library**

Upon returning to the United States, I continued to serve as Head of the Chinese and Korean Section at the Library of Congress and, concurrently, as Adjunct Professor of Chinese History at Georgetown University. Unexpectedly in 1984, Dr. Ma Lin, Vice Chancellor of the Chinese University, gave me a second opportunity to be the University Librarian of the Chinese University. The Librarian, Dr. L. B. Kan, who succeeded me in December 1972, resigned from her position and returned to the University of Hong Kong in 1984. The Chinese University was thus urgently in need of a qualified librarian to continue the library expansion. I could not resist the offer and accepted it with pleasure. Accordingly, I took another leave of absence from the Library of Congress from late 1984 to early 1986.

Dr. L. B. Kan, University Librarian from 1972 to 1984, had built up the University Library's collection from 400,000 volumes in 1972 to 800,000 volumes in 1984. In twelve years, the University Library staff also grew from 100 to 160 staff members. The higher level administrators of the Library, such as Dr. S. T. Chang, Professor of Biology (and Chairman of the University's Library Committee), Mrs. Sylvia Shen, Deputy Librarian, and Mr. Fred Chang, Senior Sub-librarian, etc., were all very helpful to me.

During my tenure as University Librarian, we were able to implement a new automated circulation system. We also added a Medical Library for the new Medical School of the Chinese University. In December 1985, on behalf of the University Library and with the support of Dr. Ma Lin, I sponsored an "International Conference on Collection Development of Chinese Publications" in the University Conference Hall. This conference was the first of its kind ever held in Hong Kong. More than 100 participants from Hong Kong, the United States, Singapore, Taiwan, and the People's Republic of China attended this three-day conference. In 1986 I returned to the United States with regret, even though Dr. Ma Lin urged me to stay. This time I really intended to stay on at the University but, because of some personnel policies at the University which could not be worked out the way I had proposed they should be, I had no choice but to return to the United States.
Thoughts of my three years' tenure as the University Librarian of the Chinese University of Hong Kong bring back fond memories, and I must say that these years in Hong Kong were the most important period of my lifetime. I owe a great deal to the late Dr. Choh-ming Li and to Dr. Ma Lin for their trust, support, and generosity in helping me as a friend and as a boss. Since 1986 I have had little communication with the University even though I offered my services to it on several occasions. Most of the senior faculty members and university officials during the period when I was in Hong Kong have retired or left the University. No matter what kind of changes will occur at the Chinese University, I shall consider myself a member of the University's family and I am proud of my contribution, however limited, to the University.

This year (1993) is the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of the Chinese University. I am certain that the University has a great future in the twenty-first century, no matter who will be the leading administrators of the University. It has many accomplished alumni and I am sure they will continue to contribute much to education in Hong Kong.