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Workshop for Chinese Studies Librarians

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WORKSHOP FOR CHINESE STUDIES LIBRARIANS  
San Diego California, March 7, 2000

More than a decade has elapsed since the last training workshop for East Asian studies librarians was offered on the campus of the University of Washington in Seattle. In this past decade, new technologies have drastically changed the library world. Chinese studies librarianship has gone through even more enormous changes, catching up with the growing interest in China. Chinese studies have expanded from traditional humanities subjects to all areas of academic inquiry, particularly the area of economic studies. Significant developments of computer network technology have revolutionized the way information was stored and disseminated, and digital collections have begun to replace printed collections of the most traditional type. Such major classic works as the Chinese Twenty-five Dynastic Histories and the Siku Quanshu have been digitized. Electronic bibliographical tools and current periodical indexes in the Chinese language are also becoming readily available both on CD-ROM and through online subscription. In addition, publications in the Chinese language have increased rapidly especially in China. An annual publication of more than a hundred thousand titles of monographs has made China the world's largest publisher of information. Prices for Chinese books have also skyrocketed.

Faced with the changing information landscape for Chinese studies, it has become more difficult for librarians to keep pace with developments in the field and to evaluate what is available on the market in order to make the best collection-development decisions about both print and electronic information. Fundraising is becoming an important part of a librarian's job. Needs specific to Chinese language computing have made it even more difficult for Chinese studies librarians. While our profession is changing rapidly, the demand for information services is also increasing. These developments require significant retraining and reorientation on the part of Chinese studies librarians. The need for an organized training program for Chinese studies librarians has become urgent. In response to this situation, the CEAL Committee on Chinese Materials, with the University of California at San Diego Library as cosponsor, organized the first workshop for Chinese studies librarians in more than ten years. It was held on the campus of the University of California at San Diego immediately prior to the AAS/CEAL conference on March 7, 2000.

The workshop was designed to assist Chinese studies librarians or East Asian librarians who have responsibilities in Chinese studies in renewing their knowledge and skills to reflect the changes and new developments in the field and to help junior librarians grow professionally. The workshop focused on three areas: electronic resources and new technology applications, information services for the studies of China economy and business, and fundraising.

Forty-nine librarians including four instructors from the United States and Canada participated. Invited instructors were Diane Perushek, Associate University Librarian for Collection Management of Northwestern University; Richard Wang, Chinese Studies Librarian of the University of California at San Diego; Martin Heijdra, Chinese Bibliographer & Head of Public Services of the Gest Oriental Library of Princeton University, and Karl Lo, Head of the International Relations and Pacific Studies Library of the University of California at San Diego. Before the instruction sessions began, Dr. Yuan Zhou, Chair of the Committee on Chinese
Materials, delivered an opening speech, and Phyllis Mirsky, Deputy University Librarian of the University of California at San Diego gave warm welcoming remarks.

Diane Perushek presented a one-hour lecture entitled "Successfully Seeking Outside Funds: Basic Elements of Grantsmanship," in which she discussed strategies and techniques for initiating fundraising projects and campaigns. She listed the major granting agencies and offered explanations on guidelines for grant-proposal writing and insights on criteria of proposal evaluation. In his two-hour session, "China Economy and Business: A Resource Guide," Richard Wang discussed publishing trends in the changing economy of China and introduced the major reference tools, useful Internet sites, and other electronic resources in the field. Martin Heijdra's presentation, "Renda fuyin paokan ziliao on CD-ROMs: an Overview and Searching Tips," focused on how to search the CD-ROM database for newspaper and magazine articles reprinted by the People's University Press in China. In this session, Dr. Heijdra walked the class step by step through the major techniques of searching this database and also evaluated the database from a user's perspective. In the last session of the workshop, Karl Lo provided participants a hands-on experience in the searching of the networked Suku Quanshu electronic edition currently on beta test at UCSD library. He also taught many other techniques of Chinese computing and database searching. At the end of the workshop, a survey was conducted among the participants regarding the design, organization, and topics of the workshop. Forty-one survey forms were returned.

The results of the survey indicate that of the forty-one surveyed participants, twenty of them work primarily with Chinese language materials in their jobs. Twenty-five work with both Chinese and Western language materials, six work with Chinese and Japanese language materials, and one with primarily Japanese and Korean language materials. Most participants are specialized in collection development, reference, and cataloging. Twelve of the participants have administrative responsibilities, and nine have responsibilities related to library automation. Most of the participants are veteran or mid-career librarians. The results of the survey show that twenty-two people have been in the field for longer than ten years, eight for eight to ten years, and six for five to seven years. Only five people have been in the field for less than two years.

Twenty-one surveyed participants graded the overall quality of the workshop as excellent, sixteen as good, and five as satisfactory. Eighteen of the forty-one thought the format of the workshop was excellent, sixteen thought it good, and seven thought it satisfactory. Eighteen of the surveyed participants regarded what they learned from the workshop as very useful, nineteen as useful, and four as somewhat useful. Eleven participants felt the handouts to be very useful, twenty-one as useful, and six as somewhat useful. Forty people thought the opportunities to ask questions were adequate while one did not think there were enough opportunities.

The two aspects of the workshop participants felt to be most useful were the instructions on electronic sources and searching and the instructions on fundraising and grant writing. In addition, many people expressed appreciation for instruction on the practical issues of various other aspects of Chinese librarianship.

1 Some of the survey questions allow more than one answer. Not all surveyed participants answered all the questions.
Areas in which participants would like to see improvement include more hands-on instruction, more handouts, better quality of slides and power point demonstrations, expanded scope of the workshop to cover such topics as cooperative projects, and handouts distributed in advance in order to improve classroom participation. Some people also suggested more time for socialization. Most of the participants strongly recommended that the workshop be offered regularly to help Chinese studies librarians keep up with changes in the field.

To summarize, the results of the survey demonstrate that the Chinese studies librarians workshop was a great success. The focus of the curriculum was right on target to address the needs of the participants. In order to help Chinese studies librarians adapt to the rapid changes of the information landscape of Chinese studies librarianship, the workshop should be offered on a regular basis. The demographic information provided by the participants in the survey shows that when technology revolutionizes our profession, it is impossible to wait for library schools to provide adequate training. As the major organization of East Asian librarians, CEAL must take the lead in providing organized training to professionals who are already in the field.

(Prepared by Zhijia Shen on behalf of the Committee on Chinese Materials)