



6-1-2007

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Wang, Li; Wang, Chengzhi; Jiang, Shuyong; and Yang, Jidong (2007) "AAS Panel on Chinese Studies Resources," *Journal of East Asian Libraries*: Vol. 2007 : No. 142 , Article 9.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jeal/vol2007/iss142/9>

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AAS PANEL ON CHINESE STUDIES RESOURCES

In the 2007 AAS annual meeting in Boston in March several East Asian library colleagues formulated a panel on access to Chinese studies resources in the information age. The main purpose of this panel was to provide researchers with information on new resources, trends, and search strategies especially for Chinese studies. It was also intended to promote scholarly communication between East Asian subject librarians and researchers. Thanks to the support and participation of many library colleagues, the panel was very successful. The information, including all abstracts of the papers, on the panel is as follows.

AAS 2007 Panel 185 - Access to Chinese Studies Resources in the Information Age: Trends, Challenges, and Strategies

Saturday, March 24, 2007, 5:00 pm 7:00 pm, Vermont - 5th Floor, Boston Marriott Copley Place

Chair: Tai-loi Ma, Princeton University (replacing Diane Perushek of the University of Hawai'i, who was unable to attend the meeting)

Discussant: Hilde De Weerd, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Organizer: Li Wang, Brown University

Paper Presenters:

Li Wang, Brown University

Chengzhi Wang, Columbia University

Shuyong Jiang, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Jidong Yang, University of Pennsylvania

Abstracts:

The Panel:

In this dynamically changing information era, newly published scholarly resources for Chinese studies have been increasing dramatically. At the same time, there have been challenging issues on how to update, evaluate, and access emerging information sources in timely and effective ways. New directions in research and scholarly communication in recent years also require a better understanding. This panel will address important trends and issues in the altering landscape of Chinese studies resources. Presented by four subject specialists from major American research university libraries, the papers attempt to provide insights, strategies, and guides for accessing new print and electronic resources from various perspectives.

Li Wang's paper offers an overview of building and accessing new scholarly resources for Chinese studies by investigating current publishing trends, transformations of resources, and new research needs in the changing academic world. Chengzhi Wang reviews the role of state-managed publishing resources in China by examining new policies, operations, and investment strategies, focusing on three National Leading Groups for publishing projects. Shuyong Jiang's paper introduces the development of open access for digital resource sharing and explores issues affecting its development in China. Jidong Yang's paper focuses on the impact of electronic resources in sinological research by analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of selected popular full-text databases for pre-modern Chinese history. The panel thus explores new ways to access and share Chinese studies resources in support of contemporary scholarship in the global academic arena.

An Overview of Trends in Developing and Accessing Chinese Scholarly Resources

Li Wang, Brown University

The past decade has witnessed tremendous transformations in the landscape of Chinese scholarly resources, both print and electronic. At the same time, remarkable changes have been occurring in terms of research interests, scholarly communication, and library collections and services, especially related to Chinese

studies in North America. The increasing availability of Chinese materials in the marketplace has raised questions about how to select, acquire, evaluate, and access information resources to meet the research needs of the academic community. In response to the challenges and opportunities in the dynamically changing information milieu, it is necessary to reflect on and address strategic directions and ways of developing and accessing new Chinese scholarly resources.

Based on an investigation of recent trends in Chinese studies, this paper is intended to provide researchers and librarians with insights and strategies for building and accessing scholarly resources. It first profiles scholarly publishing and the array of formats in the changing landscape of Chinese scholarly resources. It also analyzes the new research needs of Chinese studies scholars, observed in their information seeking and academic endeavors. Particularly, it emphasizes the key role of the library subject specialist in scholarly communication in developing and providing access to Chinese studies resources. Finally, the paper highlights the importance of creating a favorable information-knowledge-cultural environment for accessing Chinese studies resources in the changing academic world.

Updating State-managed Publishing in China: Ancient Texts, Qing History and Current Gazetteers

Chengzhi Wang, Columbia University

As China has turned wealthier and stronger, the Chinese government has increased its interest and investment in large-scale book projects. Among the areas that the state has exhibited special interest in and committed significant resources to are the analysis and editing of ancient texts, the writing of an official account of Qing history, and the compilation of gazetteers and yearbooks. Substantial political, human and financial resources have been invested, and a great number of publications have been printed in recent years. High-profile directorates at the national level, representing the top authorities of China, exercise effective management in scholarship and publishing in these three areas. These directorates include the National Leading Group for the Planning of Collating and Publishing of Ancient Classics (Quanguo guji zhengli chuban guihua lingdao xiaozu), the National Leading Group for Compiling Qing History (Guojia Qingshi zuanxiu lingdao xiaozu), and the National Leading Group for Gazetteers/Yearbooks (Quanguo difang zhi zhidao xiaozu). Overall, the state's active involvement and endorsement contributes greatly to scholarly research and publishing industry.

This paper reviews the publishing policies and operations of the three directorates and introduces their main publishing initiatives and products. It also examines the impact, both expected and unexpected, of state management and investment on the development of source materials and library collections. In particular, it analyzes the directorates' acquiescence to relatively high pricing for most publications, their hesitation to embrace digitization for wider access, and the problems that have been created for librarians and scholars. The paper also attempts to provide some useful advice for librarians and scholars to collect and access such state-managed publications coming out in increasing quantity.

Open Mind, Open Access: The New Development of Resource Sharing in China

Shuyong Jiang, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Open access is a modern notion of resource sharing in the technology era. It began as a bold reaction of the academic community to the rapidly increased cost of scholarly publishing, and it is now an important concept in digitization and digital libraries. It has changed the way scholarly information is disseminated. While the development of electronic resources and digitization in China in recent years provides rich opportunities for scholarly information exchange, open access both as a concept and as a practice is yet to be accepted. Open access repositories are very limited in number. Open access as a concept was not on the agenda for digital resource development until 2005, and the first open access library and information repository by the National Library of China was launched in July 2006. Prior to this, there were very few open access resources available. Most of them were experimental in nature and inoperable with mainstream Internet tools. Not only do these open access resources not carry the same academic value as other scholarly publications, but also they lack support from both information providers and consumers.

To ascertain the current status of open access resources in China, this paper will examine some of the primary open access resources in China, such as Qiji Wenku (“Miracle Library”). It will raise issues related to open access in China such as scholarly resource sharing, cooperation among information providers, creators and consumers, the implication of online copyright in a digital environment, and the promotion of the idea of resource and technology sharing in the global information transition.

Approaching Pre-modern China through the Computer: the Benefits and Risks of Using Electronic Resources in Sinological Research

Jidong Yang, University of Pennsylvania

Whether we like it or not, the large-scale digitization of pre-modern Chinese literature is rapidly reshaping sinological studies. The vast majority of pre-Song written works have now been digitized at least once, and in the foreseeable future most primary sources for post-Tang history and culture will become available electronically. While providing unprecedented convenience in information retrieval and revolutionizing research methods, commercially developed electronic resources have a number of limitations in comparison with print reference materials and research aids compiled by experts. When produced inappropriately by developers or abused by users, databases of traditional Chinese texts may cause significant damage to the discipline of Sinology, such as the perpetuation of faulty punctuations and apocryphal texts, a weakened interest in reading and studying original texts, the declining ability to understand the classical Chinese language, and an over-simplified comprehension of pre-modern Chinese concepts and terms.

The main purpose of this paper is to examine, both theoretically and empirically, the impact of electronic resources on the information seeking and research behaviors of today’s sinologists. It will also analyze both the advantages and disadvantages of some of the most popular electronic resources (especially full-text databases) in the field, and compare them with traditional print indexes. Finally, the paper attempts to provide concrete advice on how to choose the best possible versions of digitized pre-modern Chinese texts and how to search them effectively, while avoiding common “pitfalls” in the using of electronic resources.

Discussant comments

In her comments on the panel in general Hilde De Weerdts urged panelists to consider how we can understand their findings related to the opportunities and challenges presented by new publishing trends in the Chinese-speaking world in the broader context of critical scholarship on the information society.

She also asked how revolutionary the changes and the challenges librarians and researchers have been facing in the last few decades have been and how revolutionary are the strategies they have been developing to deal constructively with change, when these are placed in the context of the development of the information sciences in the twentieth century. In discussing individual papers, De Weerdts underscored the importance of viewing the characteristics of PRC publishing highlighted in the papers within a comparative framework. Following up on the panelists’ call for librarians to develop strategies to face such challenges as the variable scholarly quality of electronic resources or the exponential growth in book publishing, De Weerdts urged librarians to pursue in more concrete detail the questions of what kinds of collaboration and what tools for collaboration best serve the challenges subject librarians face.