The Flow Path of Scholarly Information in Chinese Studies

Shuyong Jiang
Haihui Zhang

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The Flow Path of Scholarly Information—A Preliminary Survey Research

Shuyong Jiang & Haihui Zhang*

Abstract

Chinese studies in North America have experienced a significant and unprecedented growth during the last couple of decades. Modern technologies have stimulated new ways of scholarly communication between Chinese and American scholars. In order to investigate how scholarly communication has developed between Chinese and American scholars and how it has impacted the growth of the scholarship in the field and in order to understand how Chinese studies librarians can be more involved in the flow path of scholarly information exchange to support the research, it is necessary to map out the changes in scholarly communicative behaviors in terms of exchange channels; the intellectual awareness of scholarly output; and the ways scholars reference each other’s works. This study is our first attempt to trace the path and pattern of scholarly information flow. It is hoped that it will not only show the new development in scholarly communication between Chinese and American scholars, but also provide valuable measures for libraries in supporting teaching and research in the field of Chinese studies.

1. Introduction

In the development of Chinese studies, many changes have emerged due to the newly available and diverse sources and applied methods (Carlson, Gallagher, Lieberthal, and Manion, 2010). These changes can be characterized in two ways: First, interdisciplinary collaboration and stronger and more active networking among scholars; and second, emerging methodologies that focus both on quantitative and qualitative researches (Perry, 1999; Yan, Ding, Kong, 2012). The knowledge flow has become more interdisciplinary and more international (Yan, Ding and Kong, 2012). The approach of observing and monitoring the knowledge flow through a scholarly network has been adopted by many information scientists, and to construct a knowledge flow network has become an important tool to understand the complex of scholarly communication framework (Yan, Ding and Kong, 2012).

The booming of the electronic resources in Chinese studies, as well as the convenient online access to materials without limitation in locations and times have also had an impact on research behaviors and the flow of information. However, there is little analysis on the use of electronic resources in Chinese studies (Yang, 2010) and there is also a need to analyze and research how scholars value the electronic resources (Yang, 2010).

While this means that more overall research is required to provide a framework for studies of knowledge flow and scholarly communication, we also need case studies to

* Shuyong Jiang, PhD, is Associate Professor and Chinese Studies Librarian at the International and Area Studies Library, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Haihui Zhang is the Head of East Asian Library and Liaison librarian to East Asian Language, Literature and Asian Studies Center.

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provide practical analysis. This paper is a case study of information flow path among both American and Chinese scholars.

2. The context of the research

Chinese studies in North America has experienced significant and unprecedented growth during the last couple of decades. In her “Foreword” to the volume, A Scholarly Review of Chinese Studies in North America, Gail Hershatter considers Chinese studies to be “a large, sprawling, heterogeneous, and lively set of conversations,” which is “often in dialogue with other area specialists in the same discipline, or with evolutions in cultural theory and the social sciences more broadly.” These conversations are manifested in published research papers and monographs covering many aspects of Chinese politics, history, society, and culture. In the past three decades, scholarly works in Chinese studies have been booming. A quick search at the Bibliography of Asian Studies (BAS) website (http://bmc.lib.umich.edu/bas) shows that there are more than 11,000 items that are China or China-related studies indexed in BAS. Among them, more than 9,000 were published after 1990, and 5,715 research articles, book chapters and books were produced in the 2000’s alone. The expansion of scholarly writings not only materializes the outcomes of the scholarly activities, but also generates more scholarly exchanges in the discourse of Chinese studies.

The globalization of higher education in the U.S. demands that faculty members be engaged in broader and more frequent international scholarly collaborations. In Chinese studies, we have observed more internationally engaged research and scholarly exchange activities. China shows a great deal of interest in overseas Chinese studies programs. For example, several of its universities, in addition to the National Library, have become home to centers of Chinese studies in foreign countries. Scholarly exchanges happen in many forms: joint research projects and publications, translations of scholarly works, active visiting scholar programs, and diverse forms of collaborative research among scholars from both China and the rest of the world. Through these activities, scholars form strong academic ties with one another and build academic networks. They have established effective communication models to ensure continuing dialogue. Members of Chinese studies communities use the information channels of the scholarly communication system to share scholarly information and keep up with the research trends and new scholarly findings.

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Modern technology has also brought dramatic changes to the scholarly communication system and added new ways of information retrieval and dissemination. The digitalization of scholarly publications has made millions of materials accessible online to researchers worldwide. There is no exception in Chinese studies. Historical documents and contemporary scholarly findings are available in electronic form. By 2013, the volumes of e-books in 41 institutions in the Council on East Asian Libraries (CEAL) totaled 4,961,284. A retrospective look of the development of Chinese electronic collections in the CEAL shows impressive growth. The member libraries and collections of CEAL have increased their expenditures for e-resources from $428,000 in 2003 to $3,039,000 (3.04 Million) in 2013. The Chinese databases and collections in CEAL make up the largest portion of the total Chinese collections as compared with Japanese and Korean materials.

Electronic databases have become more mature over time, supported by better search functions and retrieval tools. More historical full-text databases have become available, and the databases for journal articles expand each year. All of these provide better access to scholarly resources in both Chinese and English in a timely fashion with no geographical and time limits, although cross-geographical accessibility only applies to the users of subscribed databases from respective institutions. Along with electronic content, secondary research guides are also developing. New media types including social media, in recent years, have come to play a role in resource services. The expectation for efficient and comprehensive access is higher than ever.

In this evolving and changing scholarly communication system, the concept of Open Access to the results of scholarly endeavors is fundamentally important. Open Access as a new model of scholarly publishing is gaining ground in Chinese studies as well. In 2013, the Chinese Academy of Social Science (CASS) launched its “National Social Science Databases” (NSSD, http://www.nssd.org/), offering open access to its 457 social science journals with more than 1.5 million articles in total. The environment for Open Access in North America is even more encouraging. Government and institutional policies on Open Access stipulate that government-supported research results be openly available to the public; and institutional

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3 Data and the table are from Vickie Fu Doll, “CEAL Statistics 2013 with Multi-year Summary and Comparison” http://hdl.handle.net/1808/13415.
repositories and other self-archiving publishing have changed the paradigm of scholarly publishing. Although there are no Open Access journals or databases devoted to Chinese studies in North America, scholars and librarians alike are committed to making the results of research in Chinese studies openly available. In 2013, the Association of Asian Studies (AAS) published its first ever open access work: A Scholarly Review of Chinese Studies in North America. All the contributing scholars agreed without any hesitation to make it an open access publication. In the same year, CEAL’s annual conference included in its agenda a theme on Open Access: “Open Access and Discovery in the Academic Universe: Next Steps for East Asian Studies Research and Library Development.” This discussion was continued at the 2014 CEAL conference with the topic of “Scholarly Networking, Inter-disciplinary Research, and e-Scholarship: Implications for East Asian Libraries.”

Herbert Van de Sompel and his colleagues have proposed a new element in the scholarly communication system. In their article, “Rethinking Scholarly Communication, Building the System that Scholars Deserve,” they emphasize that open access to scholarly publications is “only one dimension of how the scholarly communication process can be transformed.”4 They restate what Geneva Henry observed in 2003: “opportunities abound in the world of 21st century publishing and the discussion on transforming scholarly communication must move beyond the debate of subscription-based vs. open access publication.”5 New models of scholarly communication are affecting scholars’ behavior in seeking scholarly information, shifting the patterns and path of information flow and access. As Chinese studies librarians, we ought to understand the impact of digital technology and scholars’ changing information seeking behavior, as well as the flow path of the scholarly information, so that we can play an active role in the life cycle of future scholarship. This was our motivation when we decided to do this survey. This study is our first attempt to trace the path and pattern of scholarly information flow. It is hoped that it will not only show new development in scholarly communication between Chinese and American scholars, but also provide valuable measures for libraries in supporting teaching and research in the field of Chinese studies.

3. The survey

In order to investigate how scholarly communication has been developed between Chinese and American scholars and how it has made an impact on the growth of the scholarship in the field, and to understand how Chinese studies librarians can be more involved in the process of scholarly information exchange to support research, teaching and learning, we find it necessary to map out the changes in scholarly information-seeking behavior in terms of exchange channels, intellectual awareness of scholarly output, and the ways scholars reference each other’s works.

a. Purpose

The survey has two purposes: firstly to investigate how American and Chinese scholars stay aware of new scholarly publications published on either side, and secondly to find out how they access newly published research results by scholars both in China and in America.

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5 Ibid.
This awareness of scholarly publications is one of the five functions that “must be fulfilled by every system of scholarly communication.” Sompel defined “awareness” to be actual published articles and supported secondary finding aids. How and where scholars can find new scholarly outcomes in a timely fashion fulfills one of the important functions of scholarly communication. Through the survey, we want to identify the channels and paths where scholars from both China and America use to remain aware of emerging scholarly information. It is evident that knowing how and where scholars get timely information can help us to improve our service.

The second purpose, derived from the first one, is again to get a better sense of what our library collections mean to our faculty and scholars. For the past 100 years, East Asian libraries in North America have been collecting materials for Chinese studies. When scholars want to obtain a copy of a certain publication, be it a book or an article, where or whom do they go to for help? What can we do to assist them in locating scholarly publications in Chinese studies?

Those are the fundamental questions that we would like to answer through our survey. We designed our questionnaire so that our survey would get us more concrete information.

b. The Questionnaires

The questionnaires were sent to both Chinese and American scholars with some variations. The questionnaires were designed to collect data from both sides and in both English and Chinese for publications published in either China or America. There are a total of five questions, Q1 and Q3 are about flow path of monographs or other book-form publications and research articles respectively. The other two questions, namely, Q2 and Q4 are about information channels, which means from where or whom scholars get publications. Question no. 5 is open-ended, designed to seek input from scholars on the means of information exchange. American participants received two more questions related to Chinese journal databases.

We designed two questions to solicit information about research journal articles and monographs (Q1 & Q3, Q1 for monographs and Q3 for journal articles respectively). We identified major channels for information as follows:

- book reviews/bibliographies/indexes
- Citations of research papers
- Colleagues or friends in Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong
- Colleagues or friends in the U.S.
- East Asian Library at your institute
- Publishers’ websites or catalogs

Participants were asked to rank those options from 1-6, with 1 as the most frequent path. The combined score for each option will rank them from 1-6 to indicate the most frequent path. We also use the “Other” option to ensure the inclusiveness of the data.

Q2 inquires about the ways scholars obtain publishing information in order to get a copy of the publication. We hope to be able to figure out the impact of online tools on scholarly information exchange. Again a few ranking options are listed for the participants:

- Check the availability in East Asian Library at your institute
- Purchase a personal copy from a vendor in the U.S.

6 Ibid.
While Q2 is focused on regular means for getting a publication, Q4 looks at network and academic connections. We ask the participants to respond and rank their usual sources for obtaining a copy when they need it:

- Book vendors
- Friends in Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong
- Librarians
- Your colleagues

Of the two additional questions given to American participants, Q6 is to see how scholars value electronic databases and if they are satisfied with what they get. Although it is not a question to evaluate the merit of these databases and cost effectiveness, it will allow us to get a general sense of the value of subscribing to the database. Q7 is to find out what functions these databases perform for scholars and their research. We want to know how scholars use these databases and what they expect to get from them: Do they use them for timely information, full-text accessibility, or something else.

A final word about the survey: We want to know, in a digital age where a mounting flood of scholarly information is available, what are the ideal ways scholars believe would help them remain aware of new scholarly claims and findings. For that sort of purchase, we have included an open-ended question to collect the subjects’ ideas and suggestions. We believe this will help us find more ways to improve our service so that we can better assist them in their research.

c. The Responses

The survey was conducted in February 2014, when we sent an email that included a link to the survey’s web site. We got 26 responses from American scholars and 20 from Chinese scholars.

From responses to Q1, we observe that the Chinese and American scholars give very similar rankings. Both groups rank “citation” as the #1 choice and “bibliography or Index” as the #2 choice in obtaining scholarly information. If there are some differences, it mainly lies in the library’s role. American scholars list library as the last means among all the choices, while Chinese scholars rank it as #3. American scholars tend to go to their colleagues and friends for publishing information rather than to consult publishers’ websites or library catalogs.

From the responses to question 3 that asks about the most frequent path for obtaining scholarly information, we detect significant differences between the American and Chinese scholars:

- American scholars list “citation” as the most frequent path and rank library databases as the least place for consultation.
- Chinese scholars rank any personal connection either with colleagues or friends in the U.S. or in China as the least-used means (#4 and #5 choices respectively), while American scholars rank them as high as #2 and #3 choices.
- Chinese scholars rank database search as the most frequent means in finding scholarly information.
In responding to question 2, the American scholars list ILL as the mostly used means to obtain a copy of book or an article, while Chinese scholars choose to go to their own library collection first. Consequently, they list ILL as their next choice. Both groups list purchasing a copy online as second to the last choice, indicating some hesitation in online purchasing. When asked in question 4 whom they will contact when they need to purchase a copy, American and Chinese scholars show the same confidence in their friends and colleagues of the other country. One thing worth noting here is that none of the groups list “librarians” as their top choice. Instead they list them as the last but one.

The responses to the additional questions for American scholars (Q6 and Q7) are not very surprising. Twenty out of the twenty-six respondents think that the databases such as CAJ and Wanfang, are very useful (44%) or useful (36%). They use these databases to access full-text research papers and retrieve research information in a timely fashion. These databases are also a good place for exploring more research outcomes. One thing that is quite alarming: Five of the respondents (20%) indicate that they have never used these databases. This is quite a high ratio.

When it comes to responding to an open-ended question, it seems that Chinese scholars are less demanding than American colleagues. In reply to Q5, where the subjects are asked to suggest what they think are the ideal ways to communicate scholarly information, Chinese scholars seem to pay more heed to regular visit to primary resources whereas American scholars focus on two basic issues: (1) better communication and supportive secondary research aids like newsletters with brief summaries, blogs and other media to inform new publications, RSS digest or feeds associated with a specific subject area; and (2) better services from a librarian as a liaison to faculty and students, such as competent reference services, access to information on a regular basis, and better assistance in obtaining electronic Chinese books and related publications. Some Chinese scholars indicate that they have realized the importance of networking in which they tend to be inactive, and put forward suggestions to enhance this type of activities.

4. Analysis and Discussion
   a. Findings

   From the data collected in this survey, we have found a few interesting facts. In general, American scholars seem more inclined to their academic network while Chinese scholars tend to rely on their library for scholarly information or access to publications. Compared with the Chinese scholars, the American subjects rank colleagues and friends high in several of the questions. Compared with scholars from Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, they are more inclined to do the following: treating scholars’ circles as very important for the awareness of new academic accomplishments, valuing their academic network over library’s collection in obtaining information about research papers. They go to their network instead of librarians when they want a copy of a publication. In similar situations, Chinese scholars tend to rely on their library’s collections and services or means that do not require personal contact.

   The surveyed American scholars think that the libraries in their institutions are not necessarily a primary access point for discovering new academic accomplishments from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. They think of libraries only as a place to check out and access academic books and articles. Neither do they consider librarians to be part of the academic circles. They usually don’t go to librarians or libraries first when they need to obtain
information or a publication, even though East Asian libraries in the North America have been acquiring newly published scholarly works much earlier than their appearance in citations.

Citations and book reviews of academic works are primary sources for both American and Chinese scholars to discover new information. This is especially true for American scholars. They rank “citation” as the first choice, and “reviews/bibliographies/indexes” second in obtaining publishing information. Why? We know that it takes time for published works to appear in citations or to be cited or indexed. So does this suggest that scholarly value is more important than how fast one can get information? Furthermore, does this also suggest that there are no other reliable sources for scholars to consult? How can we improve this?

b. Possible Improvements

Over the past years, East Asian libraries in North America have acquired a large number of databases of primary documents, archives, yearbooks, statistics, scholarly monographs, and periodicals. These electronic resources, along with the significant print collections accumulated over more than a hundred years, provide valuable resources. The online tools have also greatly improved the accessibility of library resources. Chinese studies librarians are doing their best to assist scholars in their teaching and research. In the findings of this survey, Chinese studies librarians may find some useful suggestions for improving their services to scholars of Chinese studies, thus enhancing the role they can play in scholarly communication system.

First of all, the survey suggests that we should provide more effective means of communication to make scholarly information known to the public on a regular basis. As we recall the feedback from the American scholars, many of them indicate their desire to have better means of communication, such as RSS digest, newsletters, and blogs. We can clearly tell that scholars are expecting us to use modern communication tools to keep them current with the scholarly information and to create subject and research guides to help them in distributing, discovering and retrieving scholarly information. If we build good services to satisfy their needs, they will use it. Interlibrary Loan Service (ILL) is a good example.

Another improvement we can make is to build stronger connections with scholars and network with them. It is indicated in the survey responses that American scholars value and rely on their academic networks as an important means for staying aware of current scholarly findings. Librarians should be more actively involved in scholarly activities so as to build strong relations with scholars. In so doing, we can have a better understanding of their needs, and, at the same time, can create more opportunities to promote scholarly information. There are many ways to help us to do so. For example, collaborating with scholars in research, translating scholarly works, and organizing and participating in subject related conferences. The constant changes in scholarly communication require us to take the initiative and be innovative in playing a liaison role in teaching, learning and research.

It is also worth mentioning here that one of the new opportunities in supporting scholarly communication is to be involved in Open Access publishing of Chinese studies scholarship. Today digital technology has been making progress with each passing day, and libraries are going through a paradigm shift from a collection and reference provider to also being a publisher. Amidst the changes, we certainly can be more involved in other functions of the scholarly communication system. That is, we can take initiative to contribute, certify,
and conduct dialogues with scholarship. This is where we have a lot to explore and expand our potential.

c. Further studies

The survey may have yielded some data that indicate the changes and patterns of scholarly information flow, but we need more to draw more significant conclusions. We hope to find ways to generate more participation in our surveys similar to this one but at different levels. It will be interesting to do a comparative study of the data collected in surveys at different levels or in different subject areas.

The results of the survey also suggest some directions for further studies. We have noticed that for both American and Chinese scholars, the citation is a very important source for obtaining and remaining aware of scholarly information. Citation analysis has become one of the important measures of academic achievement and to indicate a scholar’s academic merit and value. Studies based on citation analysis will lead to our better understanding of the status of Chinese studies scholarship.

As one of the major method of bibliometric study of scholarly communication, citation analysis has been applied in many quantities studies. We have seen citation studies in Chinese science, medical, library science, and other scientific fields, but not so many China-related studies in social science and humanities. We need to fill the gap and take advantage of this type of studies. By doing citation analysis, not only can we librarians understand the scholarly trends in a particular field, but we can also use it as a tool to inform faculty and researchers of most current scholarly information through newsletters, blogs, and other social media. Citation analysis can serve as a benchmark in collection development as well.

In our research plan, we are considering doing some bibliometric studies including citation analysis. We intend to look at what is cited from academic works created by scholars in China and America and do a comparative study of the scholars’ works published in different time periods through citation analysis. We want to investigate how scholarly communication has developed between Chinese and American scholars; and how it has impacted the growth of scholarship in Chinese studies. We have very mature scholarly publication databases available, such as China Academic Journal (CAJ), Science Citation Index, and other useful tools we can draw data from. Through these types of studies, we may trace the changes in scholarly communication behavior in terms of exchanging channels, intellectual awareness, and ways that scholars reference each other’s works. If we do it right, we can also find ways to improve our services, upgrade our roles, and contribute to the conversation in Chinese studies.

The current survey is very preliminary in nature. Therefore it probably cannot be taken as an indicator for general changes and patterns of scholarly communication in Chinese studies. However, the survey does reveal some interesting data that reflect some characteristics of flow path of scholarly information and patterns of scholars’ behavior in seeking scholarly information. They also reveal the need for further studies. We hope this research will stimulate more similar or different studies, and progressively, we will draw a better picture of scholar communication in Chinese studies.

**Selected bibliography:**


Appendix
Questionnaire

Survey On Flow Path of Scholarly Information In Chinese Studies

Q1
In obtain information of scholarly publications published in mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, which following path is the most frequently used? Please rank the flowing paths and use 1 as the most frequent path:

- Book reviews/bibliographies/indexes
- East Asian Library at your Institute
- Citations of research papers
- Colleagues or friends in mainland, Taiwan and Hong Kong
- Colleagues or friends in the U.S.
- Publishers' websites or catalogs
- other

Please choose several ways to obtain academic publication information, and rank them by the most frequent order.

- Reviews, bibliographies, index
- Library of your school
- Citations of research papers
- Colleagues or friends in mainland, Taiwan and Hong Kong
- Colleagues or friends in the U.S.
- Other
Q2
If you want to obtain a copy of academic monograph published in mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, what is the usual path to get one? Please rank the following:

- Check the availability in East Asian Library at your institute
- Purchase a personal copy from a vendor in the U.S.
- Purchase a personal copy online
- Purchase a personal copy when you visit mainland, Taiwan and Hong Kong
- Recommend your librarian to purchase a copy for the library

Q3
Please rank the following paths through which you get information of research papers published in mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong

- Citations of research papers
Q4
When you purchase a copy of published academic monograph from mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, who is your primary contactor?

- Book vendors
- Friends in mainland, Taiwan and Hong Kong
- Librarians
- Your colleagues

Q5
Please tell us the ideal ways to remain aware of new scholarly claims and findings

- Newsletter of publications in my field;
- RSS Digest / RSS feeds, each associated with a specific subject keyword, would be great;
- Online newsletters with very brief summaries;
- A highly qualified reference librarian to assist faculty and students;
- Librarians make the information available on a regular basis;

Additional question for American scholars:

Q6: How do you value databases of Chinese academic journals (such as CAJ, Wanfang, etc.) in meeting your research needs?

- Very useful
- Useful
- Never use

Q7: Please number the following functions of databases of Chinese academic journals that are crucial to your research

- Access full-text research paper easily
- Explore more research work
- Receive research information timely
- Other

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<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Responses</th>
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<td>Access full-text research papers easily</td>
<td>Responses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Receive research information timely</td>
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Answered: 22  Skipped: 4