

# Academic libraries in China

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*The report of a visit to the PRC in 1988.*

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**D**uring May and June of 1988, I visited 5 Chinese cities: Sheng Zhen, Shanghai, Beijing, Taiyuan, and Qingdao. The main purpose of my visit was to share my American library experience with my Chinese colleagues. I spent most of the time with the university librarians of these cities and lived in the campus housing for foreign professors and visitors. I will first share with you my experience of living on a Chinese campus and, later, some of my impressions of Chinese academic libraries.

## **Life on a Chinese campus**

In China a university is like a society of its own. Everyone, employees as well as students, lives on campus in apartments provided by the university. The university also provides transportation, health care, and child care, as well as elementary schools.

Most people, young and old, participate in various kinds of physical exercises which are held every morning on campus before 8:00 a.m. Besides taiji and gongfu, there are also jogging, disco, acrobatics, etc. At the same time, daily news is broadcast throughout the campus by a loud speaker from a radio station. It seems that the university has the responsibility to bring its members up-to-date on current events. During week days, one or two afternoons are set aside for political discussions.

Working hours are from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., six days a week. There are no coffee breaks. But the lunch hour is long, from 12:00 to 2:30 p.m. Every-

body goes home for lunch and rests; no service is provided at this time. Libraries are closed, banks are closed, even telephone operators are not on duty at this time. Taking care of personal business during office hours is common as well as is working after 5 p.m. There is a two-month summer vacation. The university arranges tours and trips for its employees at a minimum charge.

The monthly income of university employees is low, ranging from 50 to 170 yuan (\$13.50-\$45.30), and is basically spent on food and clothing. Everyone is paid according to twenty-six established grades. Librarians are paid the same as doctors in the same grade. Since China opened its doors to the world in the mid-seventies, individuals have been encouraged to bring in extra revenue for their working group, such as selling a newly developed technical product. Personal profit-making is allowed now. On a university campus language professors often tutor or do translations to bring in extra income. Not everybody lives on a set income anymore. Also, inflation has come to China.

## **Library settings**

I was impressed with the high-rise new buildings I saw everywhere in China. Almost every university I visited had a new library building, some already constructed; others still under construction. I was told that in recent years library service has become one of China's high priorities. The goal to achieve modernization and the new library building pro-

gram represent only part of the government's programs in support of library service.

Inside a typical Chinese library, card catalogs, information service, and circulation desks are seldom located in the major traffic area, i.e., on the first floor, as in American libraries. Stacks are closed. There are multiple subject (or departmental) reading rooms and multiple circulation desks on each floor with very little reference service available. Only faculty and graduate students are allowed to use the rooms that hold the materials of their subject specialty.

Recently, some advanced universities have begun to serve users with some open-shelves and a centralized reference service area.

### Personnel

Library directors in large Chinese universities are mostly political leaders and hold the highest academic rank. Deputy directors are the ones responsible for the administration of the library. The term "librarian" is used liberally for people working in a library. In large university libraries 30–50% of the personnel are librarians (many with degrees in fields other than library science). They are principally trained through apprenticeship. Some also attend library meetings and workshops. They are paid the same as professional librarians or higher if they have more years of service. Students are not employed in academic libraries.

Only 2% of all librarians have the professional degree. Before 1977 there were two library schools in China, one at Wuhan University, the other at Beijing University. Today there are forty graduate library science programs in China.

Library school students enroll in a three-year program after finishing their bachelor's degree. Many of them have a second degree in computer science. After completing their library degree, they are assigned to library schools for teaching. Some library school faculty members received additional training in the U.S.

There are also shorter library science programs at the undergraduate level. Graduates from these programs become the working force of Chinese libraries. In recent years, 10,000 library employees have received some library training. Librarians will slowly increase from the current 25–30% to 60%. This is the standard set up by *The Regulations of College and University Libraries*, which was issued in 1981.

### Information service

Chinese librarians are beginning to work on establishing a reference service and a more systematic collection development. Today some modern universities have a centralized information service

area. Reference questions are addressed and answered on written forms. Since most librarians were formerly subject specialists, information librarians seem to assume the dual duty of librarian and teacher. While providing information, they also recommend reading materials for a special subject field.

Lately, an online information retrieval course has been added to many university curricula. For instance, there is a fifty-hour reference course offered to graduate students at the Medical Institute in Qingdao. Students spend six hours learning to use Biological Abstracts and eight hours on how to use Chemical Abstracts. After this training, students can do their research with more confidence. Chinese librarians also serve as translators and interpreters of foreign library materials.

There are over 5,000 information centers in the nation. The Taiyuan Information Center, a local station, gives online service to the entire Shanxi province. It is online through the Beijing Information Center, the national station, with American and European databases such as DIALOG, BRS, ESA-IRS (Europe Space Agency for Information Retrieval Service), STN (Science and Technology Network in West Germany), and WPI (World Patent Index). The Chinese Information Center covers 80% of the world's machine-readable documents, primarily in the social and natural sciences. Even though the per-article charge is high (\$40–\$50), this local information center has handled 700 to 800 searches since its inception on December 12, 1987.

Many universities and information centers are undertaking the task to establish various specialized databases. In 1986 the Taiyuan Information Center established a national patent (commercial product) database. Twenty-seven provinces, individual cities, and special districts in the country participate in this project. The database contains over 13,000 scientific and technical patents. Each entry includes the name of the inventor, and the name, address, and telephone number of the organization. Also included are the award, the method used, and the social benefits of the product. Supposedly this database is cost effective and user-friendly.

Qing Hua University, together with 340 other scientific and technical universities, has developed a database called CUJA (Chinese Universities Journal Abstracts) which collects, abstracts, and indexes scientific and technical periodical publications held by the universities.

### Collection development

In China the book budget is 5% of a university's general budget. The book budget of a medium-sized academic library is around 45,000 yuan (\$12,162). The duplicate rate is high in Chinese

library collections. It is usually 4 to 5 copies per title. The large libraries hold a higher percentage of foreign publications—30–60%. Small college libraries hold some foreign publications—not over 20%. Most of the foreign publications are periodicals and reference materials. They are selected from publishers' lists provided by the Chinese Import and Export Book Company, which is the only company that distributes foreign books in China. Individual libraries seek donations from their foreign visitors. Materials in science and technology are preferred, but Chinese libraries will accept almost anything.

### Bibliographic control

Card catalogs are divided. They are first divided by languages, basically Chinese, English, and Russian. Within each language there are three separate public catalogs, i.e., name catalog, title catalog, and a classified catalog. The union catalog that shows all of the materials available on campus is kept in the catalog department. Filing of Chinese characters is a major task. Added entries are limited to personal names. Subject headings are not used at all; therefore, assigning a proper classification to a book becomes a librarian's major concern, because the classification is the only subject access to the item. Libraries have various kinds of classification systems. Consequently, users must consult more than one classified catalog in order to find related materials in various locations.

There are two major classification systems—the Chinese Library Classification System and the Chinese Academic Library System. The first one is published in a single volume and uses an alphanumeric code. This classification scheme is suitable for a general collection. The latter is designed for a specialized collection, especially for scientific libraries.

On its union catalog cards, the National Library

in Beijing supplies both these classifications. Before 1965, it used the Library of Congress classification. The National Library will eventually supply only the Chinese Library Classification in its automated union catalog, because 80% of the Chinese libraries are using this system. Right now, the National Library in Beijing is working on its Chinese name authority and on subject heading authority in order to prepare for a national Chinese bibliographic database. ISBD and AACR2 will be used in cataloging all materials. The MARC formats and national romanization tables will be used for data entry. Access points will include Chinese classification numbers, ISBN, and LC subject headings. It is estimated that this automation effort will begin in 1990. In the meantime the National Library has used WLN software for its Western-language materials.

Since its establishment in 1979, the China Library Society has sponsored classes on cataloging of Chinese materials. An estimated 1,500 catalogers have been trained since September 1984.

Today, every academic library has a special department which works on preparing for library automation. The staff of these units are actively developing their own automated systems. The present Chinese library situation has two major difficulties. One is the different classification systems which fragment library collections. The reclassification of so many library collections will be a major undertaking. The other difficulty is that Chinese characters are very difficult to store and retrieve online. At the moment there is not a unique method for Chinese character data entry. Hopefully, in the near future—when all these obstacles will have been resolved and when the telephone communications system will have improved—individual libraries will be able to contribute their unique records to the national bibliographic database and will be able to build a Chinese union catalog online. ■ ■

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## Letter

To the Editor:

I am writing to inform you and all ACRL members about the "Clean Up TIAA-CREF" campaign. TIAA-CREF is the nation's largest pension fund and one that many college and university faculty are vested in through their institutions. This campaign is an effort to have TIAA-CREF provide an alternative stock investment fund that is free of investments in firms either doing business in South Africa or involved in the production of nuclear weapons. Some institutions of higher education have already permitted employee investment into socially responsible investment funds like Pax World Fund or

Calvert Social Investment Fund. These funds have rates of investment equal to or better than CREF and other stock portfolios.

Many of us are unwittingly funding activities we would never dream of supporting if we were aware of them. If nothing else, the Clean Up TIAA-CREF campaign should serve to awaken our individual responsibility to socially conscious investments regardless of what pension funds our monies are vested in. For more information, contact: Clean Up TIAA-CREF, Peace Studies Institute, Manchester College, North Manchester, IN 46962; (219) 982-2141, x346 or x343.—*Terry Link, Reference Librarian, Michigan State University Library.* ■ ■

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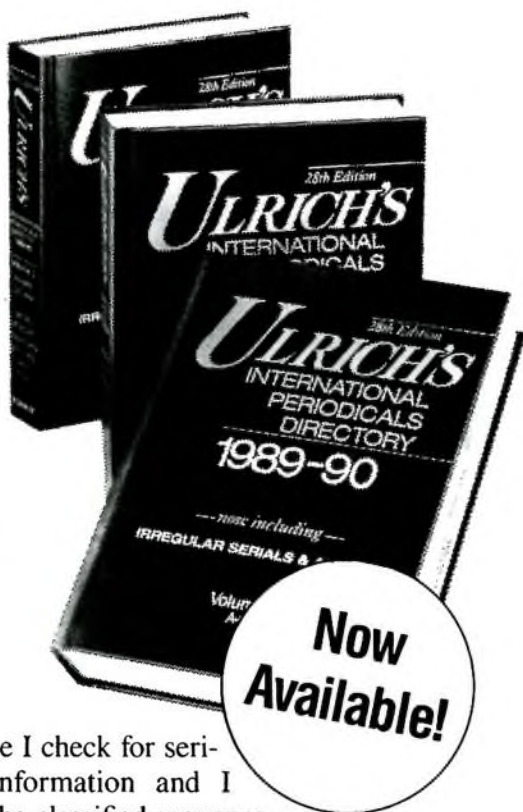


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