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ABSTRACT

A conference on the theme, "New Missions of Academic Libraries in the 21st Century," was held on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the founding of Peking University and the dedication of its new library building. The published conference proceedings included 144 papers. Plenary papers on the six sub-themes of the conference were presented and discussion sessions followed each plenary session. This paper summarizes the keynote address, and the plenary papers and the discussions which followed for each of the following themes: (1) "Mission and Purpose of Academic Libraries in the 21st Century"; (2) "Management and Organizational Structure of Digital Libraries"; (3) "Services and Resource Sharing in a Networked Environment"; (4) "Management of Electronic Information"; (5) "Libraries and Distance Learning"; and (6) "Professional Development and Continuing Education." (AEF)

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International Conference on New Missions of Academic Libraries in the 21st Century

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Peking University, October 25-28, 1998

CONFERENCE SUMMARY[1]

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A conference on the theme, New Missions of Academic Libraries in the 21st Century, was held in Beijing on October 25-28, 1998 on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the founding of Peking University and the dedication of its new library building. Nearly 200 academic librarians from 19 countries participated. The conference was organized by an international committee of 11 members which was chaired by Bessie Hahn, Brandeis University, and Hwa-Wei Lee, Ohio University. The published conference proceedings[2] include the 144 papers accepted for presentation at the conference. Plenary papers on the six sub-themes of the conference were presented and discussion sessions followed each plenary session. This paper summarizes the plenary papers and the stimulating and thoughtful discussions which followed.

All delegates agreed that the conference was an enriching experience. The papers, those presented and those published, were excellent. Through these papers and the discussions, all delegates learned much and shared many experiences. The delegates praised the conference organizers and acknowledged, particularly, Zhu Qiang, who edited the proceedings and managed the local arrangements.

Keynote addresses

Dai Longji (Peking University) in his keynote address introduced the audience to the planning for the new Peking University Library, not only in terms of the new building, but in relation to the goals for future collections and services. Three projects guided the building program: the modernization of the building, the implementation of the Sirsi system, and the provision for Peking University Library to be the hub and the base for resource-sharing for Chinese academic libraries. The new building,

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[1] An earlier version of this paper was presented at the closing session of the conference, October 28, 1998.

[2] International Conference on New Missions of Academic Libraries in the 21st Century, Oct. 25-28, 1998. Proceedings. [Beijing], Peking University Press, 1998. ISBN: 7-301-03859-3.

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the largest academic library in Asia, has over 50,000 square meters, 4500 seats for patrons, and an open-shelf arrangement. The building and the planning for it reflect the extraordinary change occurring in university libraries in China. The bibliographic systems are state of the art and several digital library projects are underway, one being a joint project with Princeton University to digitize ancient Chinese books.

Ching-chih Chen (Simmons College), appointed by President Bill Clinton to the Advisory Committee on High-Performance Computing and Communications, Information Technology, and the Next Generation Internet, described the work of the committee and the planning underway at the national level in the U.S. for the NGI (Next General Internet and Internet II. She identified several issues academic librarians must be concerned about: digital content, copyright issues, and intellectual property issues.

Theme 1. Mission and Purpose of Academic Libraries in the 21st Century

Thirty Four papers on this theme were accepted for publication. The authors of the papers contributed much to the discussion sessions.

The two plenary speakers, Min-min Chang (Hong Kong University of Science & Technology) and Fred Friend (University College London) agreed that the mission of the academic library is unchanged: it is to support the information needs of the university's faculty and students. Friend described the mission in its historical frame: immediate service and long-term preservation. Friend urged a reinterpretation of the mission in light of change in method and called for a international collaboration on a new mission now that technology has broken the barrier of distance, a barrier of great significance in the world of scholarship.

Both plenary speakers agreed that the methods of carrying out the mission have changed. While collections remain important in the digital environment as well as in the print environment, issues of collection evaluation and issues of access and ownership have become more important. In terms of information and access services, the academic library is being transformed from a store-house model to a model of provision.

Friend observed that technology is changing the way users do their work and librarians must begin to understand that. Assessments of how users are doing their work must be made and then acted upon. Lynch, in summarizing the conference, observed that the many references to the library's users were made rather casually. The question of how users seek information was not explored nor were differences in user behaviors addressed in terms of differences in academic discipline, information need, status, that is whether the user is a student or a faculty member. Knowing

more about university library users will be essential as librarians move forward in designing the changes in library method.

William Simpson in his paper, "What Kind of Future" wrote that except for science, technology, and medicine, the demand in the Trinity College Library, Dublin, for non-print is small. Few other papers reported any differences or attempts at determining differences.

Min-min Chang said that as technology changes, so the traditional values of librarianship become more important; she identified these values as being cooperation, team work, and resource-sharing.

Following the plenary speakers, the participants were divided into three groups in order to discuss the issues relating to academic library mission. All groups agreed with the speakers that the mission is unchanged, with some recognition given to the difference in type of academic library. There was emphasis on the need to be relevant to the library's own community, that is to those people who form the library's primary clientele, the university's faculty and students. Some acknowledged that users other than primary clientele would be important in some academic institutions, and that the decision about others will depend upon the local determination.

The discussion groups generally supported the need to preserve the record. Except for the papers by Sarah Thomas (Cornell) and Peter Fox (Cambridge), however, there was less emphasis on the preservation of the record.

There was agreement that the methods used to accomplish the mission are changing and will continue to change. The new technologies provide new opportunities for improving service and access to content and for improving the sharing of resources. User expectations about library performance are increasing and the new ways of providing access to instruction will challenge libraries to participate actively in the design and delivery of course content.

While it was agreed that methods are changing, there were some points of caution:

* Staff training and development must become a higher priority;

* Libraries must continue to improve performance in regard to the traditional operations so that energy and resources are freed to invest in the required infrastructure necessary to support the digital agenda;

* It was acknowledged that the technology has brought about a changing environment and that libraries and librarians must be responsive to that;

* It was observed that the world of information is still very print-based;

* There continues to be a significant growth in print materials which users will seek;

* The growth in print publishing leads to difficulties because the budgets of academic libraries do not grow accordingly; instead, budgets and the purchasing power of libraries to acquire materials have been declining. It was noted that 8% of the materials budget at one university is designated for digital materials; and 11% is the goal of another;

* As new academic libraries are constructed, print and digital materials must be accommodated. As yet, there are no guidelines to give architects on this change in library collections brought about by the digital technologies;

* It was emphasized that in the new digital technologies, cultural differences might not be respected, that cultural distinctions would be overwhelmed by the on-rushing digital age. Yet it also was observed that the decentralized nature of the world wide web actually is supported of cultural differences -- thus enriching us all.

* There was discussion about the future of education and the need to look at the future of the educational system. There was a general assumption that librarians will assume a greater role in teaching;

In all of the discussions it was emphasized that the change is driven by technology and that it is fast-paced. While libraries are responding well, there are some major problems confronting library directors:

* Staff. Every discussion group called for staff development and training and there were comments about the desirable education and training of staff;

* Facilities. The new mission, driven by technology, is forcing change in facilities, but, as yet, there are no guidelines;

* Relations with faculty. This was identified as a problem of some significance in some locations.

One group offered advice on how the academic library must evolve to be successful in the new information environment:

* Be client centered and be more sensitive to the client perspective;

* Be assertive as the library competes on campus to maintain its central role as the primary academic information agency;

* Be an active participant in the development of the new packages of instruction that are integrating the traditional classroom content with library resources;

* Be adventurous in seeking opportunities for cooperation -- locally, regionally, globally.

Theme 2. Management and Organizational Structure of Digital Libraries

Twenty-one papers were accepted for publication on this theme. The two plenary speakers, Zhang Xiaolin (Sichuan Union University) and Jerry D. Campbell (University of Southern California) offered provocative observations on organizational change.

Zhang Xiaolin redefined the concept of the university librarian. He described the old role as that of manager of physical information resources and organization; he defined the new role as one of information market researcher, user educator, information policy researcher. He identified the new roles as calling for new operational practices, placing greater emphasis on service quality and effectiveness, less emphasis on efficiency; greater emphasis on service creation and improvement and value-added. He said that the new roles require an open organizational structure which would incorporate a permanent library department together with temporary task oriented project teams from library and non-library departments.

Zhang commented that the processing of materials currently takes much of the library's investment; he urged change in that. The change in staff jobs, which will be required in the digital environment, will come about more easily in some places than in others. An understanding of personnel rules and regulations is important as is an understanding of organizational culture.

Jerry Campbell also discussed new models of organizational structure. His published paper described the current structure in his university library. He provided key characteristics of a new organizational model which include cost effectiveness, requiring difficult decisions about priorities, a research and development capability, and defining a new information professional. Campbell offered some characteristics of the digital library, urging that the old model of library not be the model used for the digital library. The digital library:

* faces many unknowns and unresolved problems;

* must be organizationally flexible;

* will offer ubiquitous access;

* will be fully technology based;

* will be open and customizable and will offer distinctive functions;

* will radically alter job descriptions;

* will focus on original materials, providing much new content;

* will exploit commercial value bringing new competition;

* will be managed by users, not librarians, that is, it will be subject specific.

Both speakers, Zhang and Campbell, commented that organizational change, that is change in organizational structure, emerges when the work of the organization changes. They also acknowledged that libraries do not start organizationally from scratch, so there will be difficulties in making structural changes because people are involved.

Each of the speakers gave the delegates much to contemplate. Neither provided a recommended model of structure but defined characteristics which must be in place before a new structure will emerge.

Staffing issues dominated most of the group discussions. There were no easy answers in relation to retraining staff, motivating staff, down-sizing or reducing staff, and staff credentials. There was concern about how to maintain a stable work force in libraries under stressful situations, with old roles and new expectations. It was pointed out that staff cannot lead change, that library directors must set the new directions. Some observed that the lack of change agents is common. How to bring middle managers into the new changing environments was recognized as a major issue. It was acknowledged that library directors must be the first to pay attention to staff development.

Team management, currently a trend in the United States, was discussed by the speakers and was a topic in several of the published papers. One discussion group identified teams as being good for small problems, and particularly good for redesigning procedures; this group did not see teams as being effective for large problems that demand creativity and vision.

There were questions about how to measure library performance and library quality. These are difficult issues, for it has been difficult to find consistent and objective measures. The questions of performance measurement and standards for library performance were not explored in any depth.

There was discussion of the business model, the defining of users as "customers" or "clients", and some concern with the adoption of the business model. The observation was that the goals of higher education are education and service, not profit-making. The business model, however, dominates much of the thinking of governments and the thinking in some parts of education, so libraries are likely to follow the model until something else emerges.

There was much discussion about the establishment of consortia for the purpose of creating digital libraries and an exploration of how these arrangements influence local structural arrangements. Also the merging of library and academic computing functions under a single administration was considered.

One discussion group attempted to describe how a newly created digital library would look:

* Allow seamless searching across all data sources;
* Have a reduced need for new buildings;
* Employ artificial intelligence;
* Be user friendly;
* Be built around agreed upon standards;
* Would distribute archival responsibilities;
* Would have fast communication links;
* Would automatically translate search terms.

Theme 3. Services and Resource Sharing in a Networked Environment

Forty papers were accepted for presentation on this topic, providing extraordinarily rich case study material. The papers describe how libraries are continuing to serve students and faculty, using new technologies to bring materials to the users. New forms of cooperation were reported with the models of CERNET (China Education and Research Network) and CALIS (China Academic Library and Information System) being presented and discussed in detail. The developments in Ohio and Illinois also were featured.

The paper by Zhu Qiang (Peking University) on the development of CALIS offered a fine description of the new cooperative developments among libraries in China. The paper by Rush Miller (University of Pittsburgh) described a pilot venture to provide articles from Chinese periodicals held only in China to users in the U.S. through the use of digital technology. Miller urged the conference and its leadership to develop programs of international lending.

The group discussions emphasized the importance of CALIS to the development of academic library services in China. Some similarities to developments in Europe were acknowledged. There was some discussion of the utility of a union catalog approach given language, classification, and other differences among libraries. It was generally agreed that at this point in the development of libraries in China such an approach was useful and CALIS important.

Discussions on resource sharing and document delivery possibilities continued and the issues relating to cooperative acquisitions were explored. It was observed that cooperative acquisitions programs are very difficult to implement and that competition among institutions impedes such efforts. The point was made that even among competing institutions, cooperation in the area of licensing of data bases through consortia was possible.

Theme 4. Management of Electronic Information

Twenty one papers were accepted for publication on this topic. In the plenary session Yang Zongying (Shanghai Jiao Tong University) described the projects underway at his university. Carole Moore (Toronto) addressed the issues of standards in relation to digital materials, commenting particularly on encoding (unicode), metadata, and naming. Moore referred to Mark Needleman's paper on standards as a fine presentation of the issues and asked what role can libraries play regarding standards. (Rush Miller, in his description of the China/Pittsburgh project also referred to standards as did several other authors.) Moore also addressed the issued raised by others, that is, where will digital libraries be stored and preserved.

Much of the discussion emphasized issues of funding for electronic information. Anticipating the continuing change in technology, the question of the cost of migrating the data when technology changes was important as was the responsibility for carrying out the migration, for archiving and preserving the digitized information.

There was agreement in principle that standards should be the aim, but concern that technology moves faster than standards and thus waiting for perfect standards might take too long. The developments in Digital Object Identifiers was mentioned in relation to the identification of pieces of information. Participants acknowledged that there must be leadership at the national levels on these matters while there also would be a role and certain responsibilities for universities.

Many small digital projects are underway. Most of these projects are concentrating on theses, rare books, maps, and newspapers. The first steps to digitalization usually move information from microfilm to compact disks to the web. As funds are small and as copyright issues offer obstacles, the larger

academic libraries are dominating the current work in digitalization.

The discussions on electronic information raised issues relating to the tendency to commercialize library holdings as a means of financing digital library initiatives. Some caution was expressed over proposals to dispose of existing holdings of university library print collections, for the library users were not ready to use only electronic resources.

Theme 5. Libraries and Distance Learning

Nine papers were accepted for publication on this topic. Dong Xiaoying (Peking University) described the internet development in China and its importance to the movement to the knowledge-based economy. She offered data on users of the internet in China: 1.17 million users, 79.2% of these are male 21-35 years of age. Dr. Dong also charted the growing number of complaints about the lack of Chinese information on the interent: 1997 - 7.3% complaints; 1998 - 45.5%. She summarized her study of 1500 users - 62% of these had some or good knowledge of using computers - and their main channels of information. The Library was the principal source, although important age differences emerged here; those under 20 years of age used the internet as their main channel for information. Overall the internet ranked second.

Rebecca Martin (University of Vermont) described how higher education is changing as it moves to a distance education environment in many locations.

The discussion centered on how libraries are responding. It was agreed that libraries are not yet offering the same level of service to distance education courses they are to courses on site, but that technology is making service easier. The objective was that if the service is not yet equal, at least it must be comparable. The new developments in reference interviewing in an on-line environment was mentioned, the Internet Public Library was offered as an example (http://www.ipl.org) of an on-line question form. It also offers e-mail question guidelines (iplref@ipl.org). There was recognition that the library's workload is increasing with e-mail questions from distance education students and participants described how they were responding. It was agreed that as distance learning becomes more common, libraries will explore various means of providing services to the students.

Theme 6. Professional Development and Continuing Education

Seventeen papers were included in the conference proceedings on this topic. Meng Yang (Beijing Industrial University) described a proposal for centralized delivery of continuing education for university libraries. She provides a good history and a framework for continuing education in China. Peter Drury (University of

Auckland) urged a program of in-service education for university librarians. The program, an on-going one, would begin with a detailed training plan for each new employee. Drury pointed out that in-service training would differ depending upon whether the new employee was a junior employee or a senior one. Drury believed that in-service training programs are critical in the new technological environment and recommended that all libraries, large and small, implement them.

The various discussion groups attempted to identify skills needed by today's librarians. Among those mentioned were library science, computer technologies, subject expertise, interpersonal skills and analytical skills. Among the good discussions of training needs and knowledge, skills, and abilities needed by Chinese librarians, it was noted that Chinese librarians needed to improve in English language skills, data base skills, and indexing skills. The indexing skills were identified because there are few Chinese indexes in English.

Many of the discussions on other themes also considered the skills needed by librarians in the emerging digital environment. There was general agreement that training of librarians at every level in the library was necessary.

Final Comment

The conference was a splendid celebration of the founding of Peking University and the construction of its new university library. The papers and discussions were informative and provided knowledge that was state of the art. There were many subthemes, subtle distinctions, contradictions, and some disagreements which could not be captured in this summary. Every participant had a topic he or she wished to explore more fully with colleagues here.

The conference concluded on an optimistic note. Everyone is enthusiastic and excited about the future of academic libraries as we move into the 21st century.

BPL
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