

Chinese E-Government Information Resources and Services:

A Survey Report

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ABSTRACT: This article is a report on the findings of a survey regarding librarians' awareness of Chinese e-government information resources and services. Librarians from different types of libraries in the United States of America, People's Republic of China, Canada, etc., expressed the need for online Chinese government information. The survey revealed how librarians underestimated the extent of Chinese e-government development and how this might affect their collection development strategies and user services. This article includes several ranking lists based on the survey results, such as the most sought after Chinese government information by types, most difficult information to be found, etc. The limitation of this survey is discussed and following-up research is recommended.

I. Introduction

The development of e-government worldwide has increasingly promoted government transparency, resulted in a large number of regulations and procedures being mounted on government websites. These are useful sources of information for daily life, research, trade and business, tourism, and so forth. The Chinese government was famous for the way it guards information, but nowadays many national, provincial and municipal government offices regard the provision of information as a key function of government services. This fundamental change of the government's attitude towards information has a strong impact on library collections and services. As China continues to emerge as a key political and economic player in the world arena, the demand for information on China is growing.

Despite the fact that companies and universities in China are active in cooperating with the Chinese government on e-government development, there is a lack of original data, research, and discussion among librarians about Chinese e-government information and services. This is what motivated the authors to conduct a survey in order to gain a better understanding of the current awareness of librarians about this

movement and their knowledge and strategies of locating and accessing this new type of information resources.

II. Survey Design and Methodology

The authors conducted an independent study in 2006. In the survey, Chinese government information was defined as the information created from Chinese government activities, announced to the public through official channels, or published by the Chinese government authorized publishers.

The targeted survey participants were librarians with some experiences with online Chinese government information. This experience could include searching, locating, collecting, acquiring, accessing, or managing. An announcement of the survey was sent to IALL[1], GovDocs-L[2], INTL-DOC[3], CALA-L[4], and Eastlib[5] with the assumption that these listservs are most likely to have subscribers meeting the survey qualification.

The survey was web-based. The URL of the survey website was sent out via email to the selected listservs three times: March 1, March 20, and April 10, 2006. Responses were received from GovDocs-L, CALA-L and Eastlib while IALL responded that it has a policy not to distribute surveys. The authors also sent the survey announcement directly to some library colleagues in Canada, Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Europe that they had personal connection with. More information from different countries and places were collected.

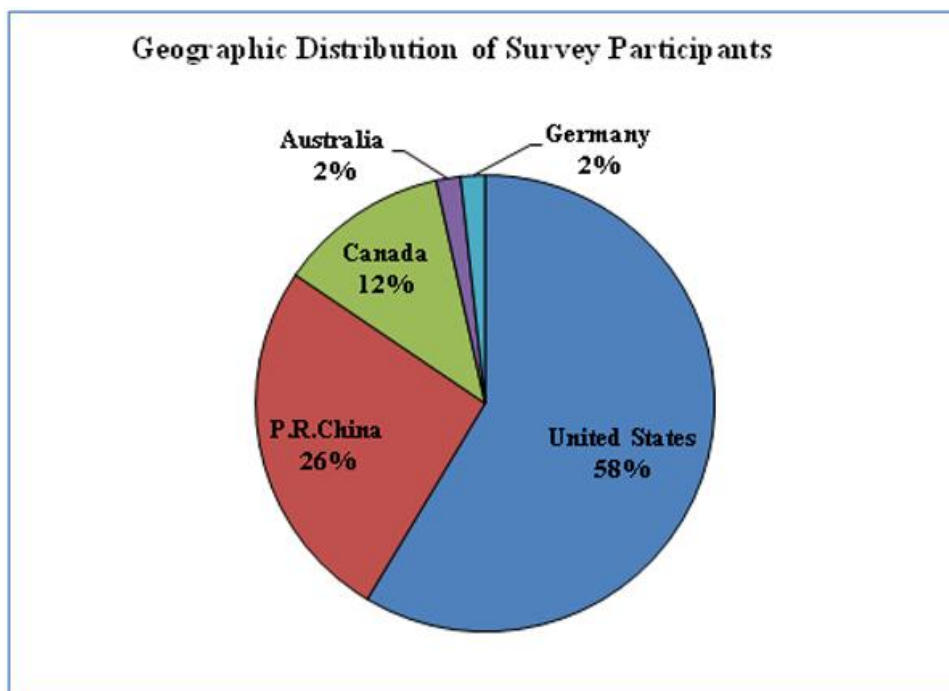
The survey participants were told upfront that participation was voluntary and that they had no obligation to complete the survey. There was no attempt to identify who completed this survey and it was kept completely confidential. Data collection was closed on April 31, 2006.

III. Survey Results

1. Geographic distribution of the survey participants

Altogether, 68 responses were received, of which 40 (58%) were received from United States, 18 (26%) from China (Beijing, Shanghai, Canton, Hong Kong, etc.), 8 (12%) from Canada, 1 (2%) from Australia, and 1 (2%) from Germany.

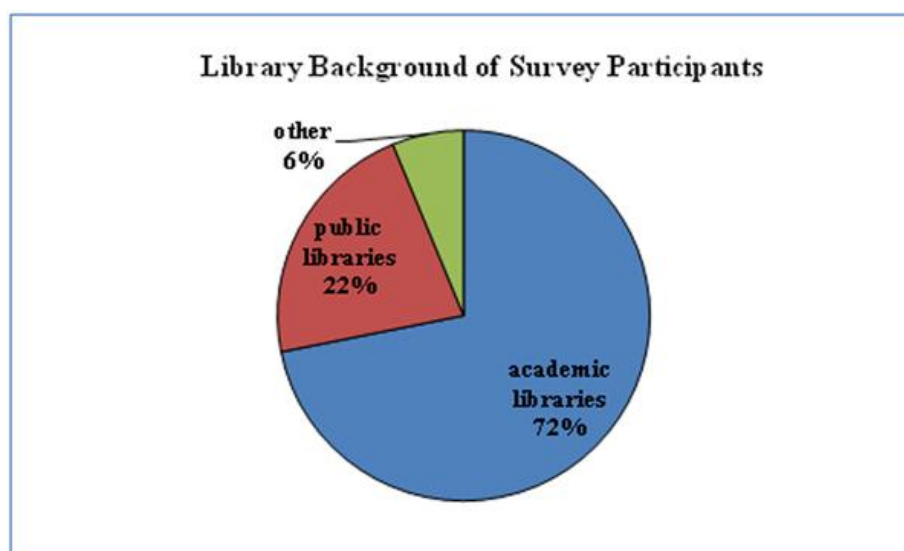
Fig. 1: Geographic Distribution of Survey Participants



2. Types of libraries of survey participants

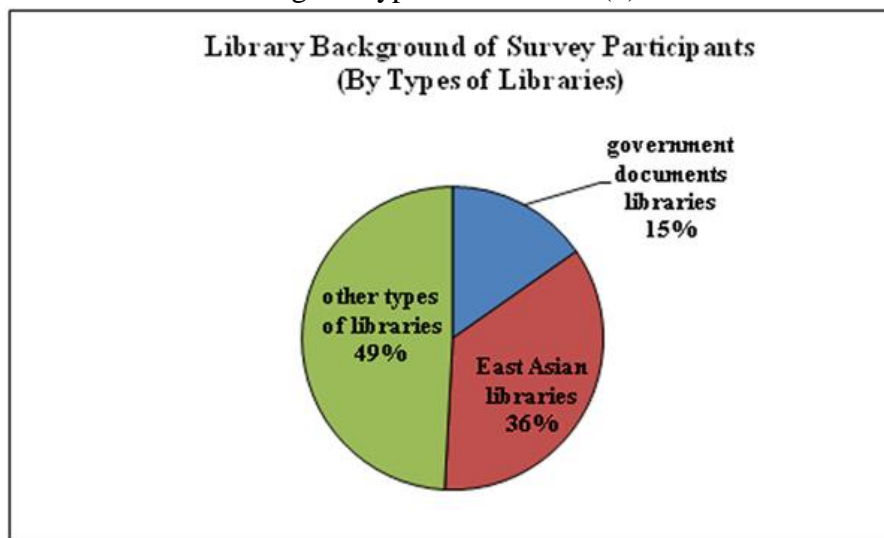
The majority of participants, 49 (72%), came from academic library. The second largest group of participants, 15 (22%), came from public libraries. And 4 (6%) did not specify their library types.

Fig. 2: Types of Libraries (1)



25 (36%) were working at East Asia libraries, 10 (15%) at government libraries, and 33 (49%) from other types of libraries, such as Agriculture Library, Humanities Library, Social Science Library, Law Library, Medical Library, etc.

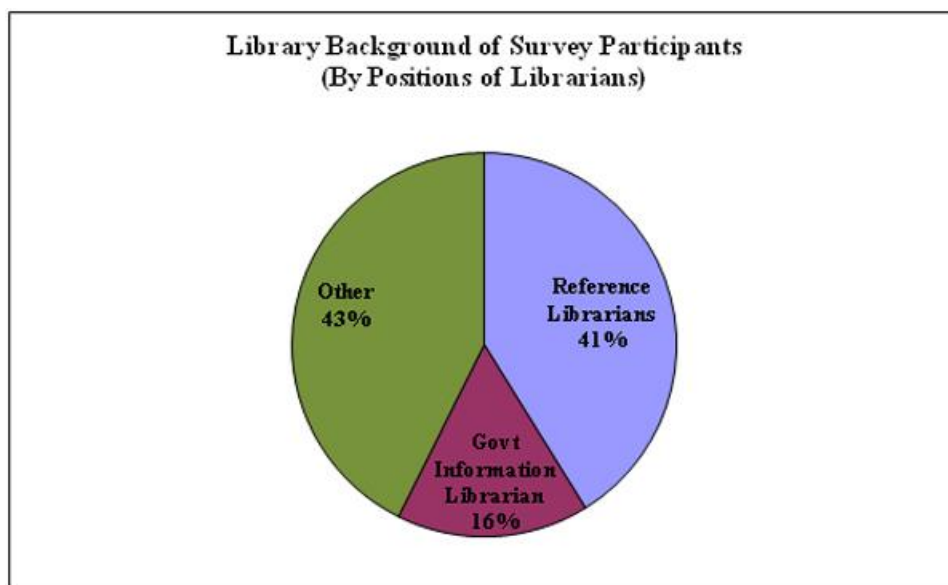
Fig. 3: Types of Libraries (2)



3. Positions of survey participants

28 (41%) were Reference Librarians, 11 (16%) Government Information Librarians, and 29 (43%) worked at other library positions such as Law Librarian, Cataloger, Chinese Studies Librarian, Bibliographer, Subject Librarian, and so forth.

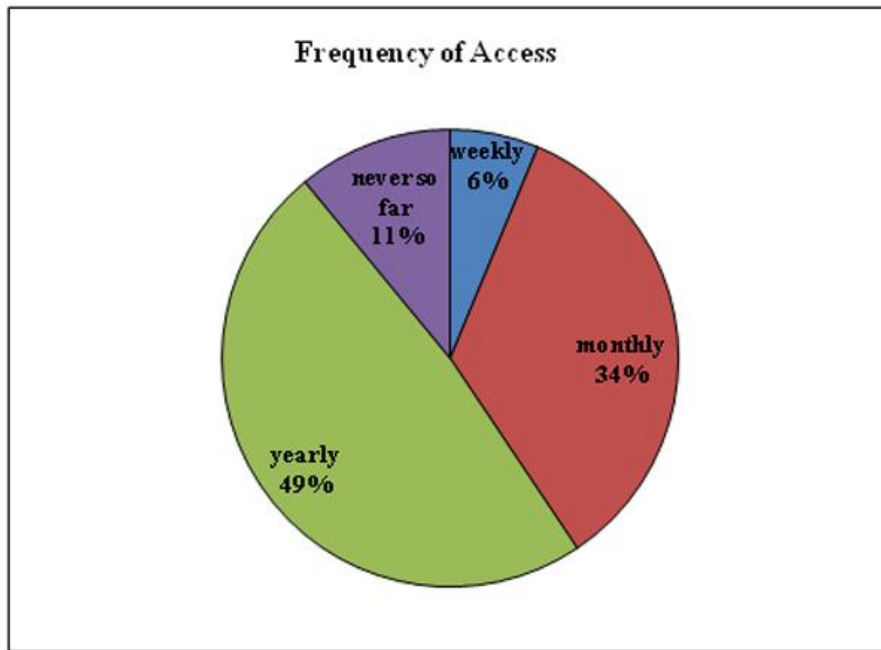
Fig. 4: Types of Positions



4. Frequencies of accessing Chinese government information in libraries

56 libraries accessed the Chinese government information resources on a monthly (34%) or yearly (49%) basis. 4 (6%) libraries accessed them weekly. And 8 (11%) libraries had not accessed the Chinese government information resources at all.

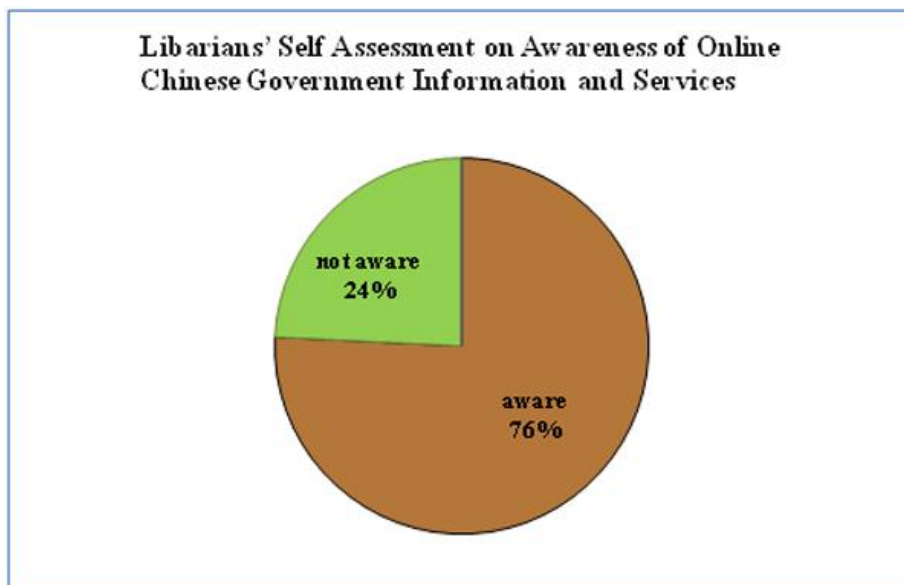
Fig. 5: Frequencies of Accessing Chinese Government Information Resources



5. Librarians' awareness of online Chinese government information and services

52 (76%) stated that they were aware that the Chinese government is developing online government information resources and services. About 16 (24%) said they were not at all aware of it. And 2 (3%) did not answer this question. This indicates that many librarians have some awareness of online Chinese government information development.

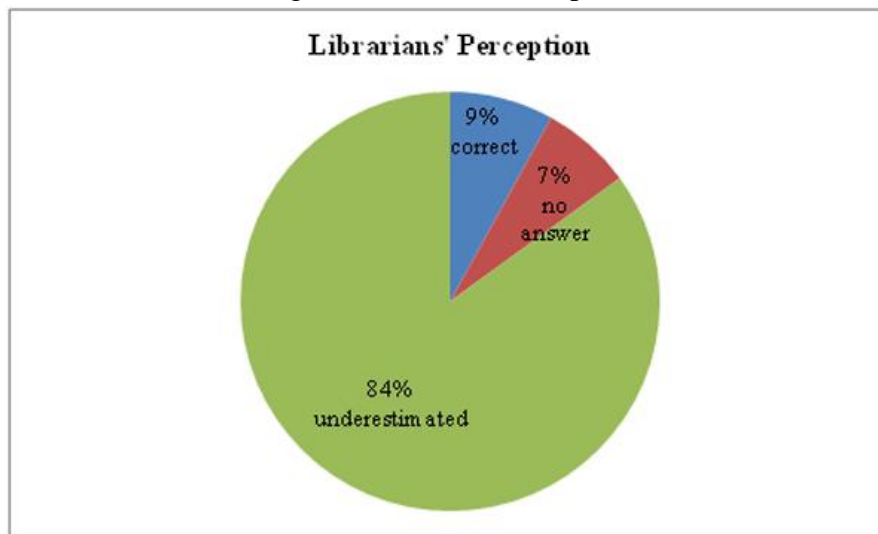
Fig. 6: Librarians' Awareness



6. Librarians' perception of the scope of the existing Chinese government websites

Survey participants were given five choices (0-100, 101-1000, 1001-10000, 10001-100000, and >100000). 5 (7%) didn't give an answer. Only 6 (9%) librarians have chosen the right answer (i.e., 10001-100000). According to China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), there were already 16,780 websites registered with gov.cn in January 2005, and by the end of that year, the number had increased to 23,752.

Fig. 7: Librarians' Perception



57 (84%) underestimated the number of existing Chinese government websites. Among them, 19 (28%) thought that the range of official Chinese websites with the domain name suffix of gov.cn was 1-100 in 2005. It shows that although many librarians are aware of the development of Chinese e-government information resources, its speed is far beyond their imagination. 7. *Awareness of the availability of online government services*

The survey selected three existing basic government services (visa/passport application/renewal services, driver's license application, and tax payment) available on the Chinese government websites. 28 (41%) respondents selected only visa/passport application/renewal services. Three (4%) selected only driver's license application. Two (3%) selected only online tax payment. Four (6%) selected two of the three listed services. Among all the respondents, only two (3%) were aware that all the three services were already available on some Chinese government websites. Among the six participants (9%) who selected "other," five (7%) said none of the three services were available online at the time. One (1%) stated being "only familiar with services to foreigners." 22 (32%) did not give any answer. The survey results show that the librarians lack the necessary knowledge about the recent trends regarding government services available on Chinese government websites.

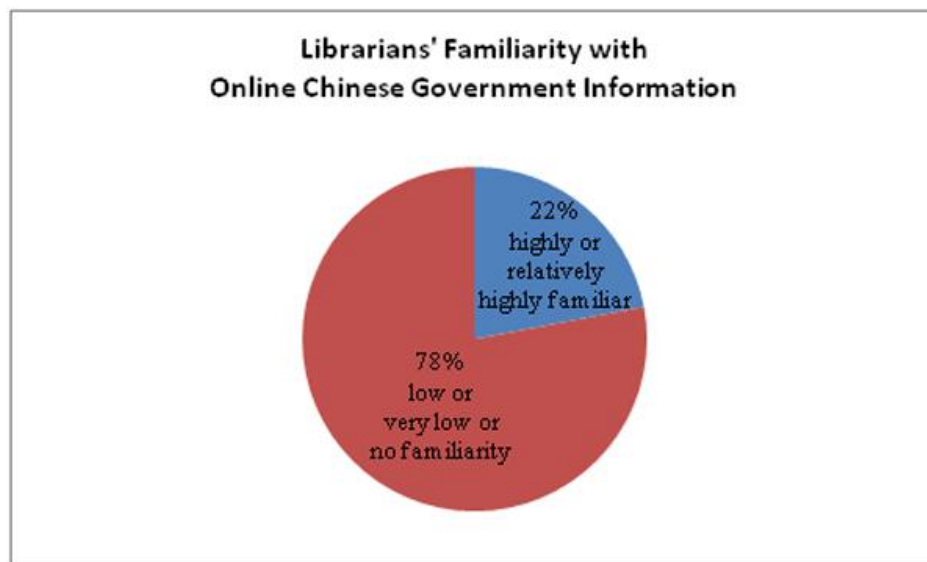
8. Librarians' pioneer work on collecting online Chinese government documents

Of all the participants, only 2 librarians (3%) stated that they had been collecting Chinese e-government information via websites and documents for more than 10 years. Another 3 librarians (4%) did that for 6-10 years. 26 librarians (38%) had not collected online Chinese government information resources at all while 9 (13%) had less than one year's experience and 23 (34%) had 1-5 years' experience. 5 (7%) did not give an answer.

9. Librarians' familiarity with online Chinese government information

53 participants (78%) believed that their familiarity with online Chinese government information resources was "relatively low", "low", or "nonexistent". Only 15 (22%) thought they were "highly" or "relatively highly" familiar with online Chinese government information resources.

Fig. 8: Librarians' Familiarity with online Chinese government information resources



IV. Survey Limitations

The survey and report have some limitations. First of all, since the survey was conducted in 2006, it does not take into account the most recent changes in the field. It may be necessary to conduct the survey again in order to see if there is any increase in librarians' awareness about online Chinese government information resources and services since 2006. However, since there is a lack of original data for that time period, this survey report can still provide valuable historical information for future study and comparison.

Second, when conducting the research in 2006, the authors were unable to reach a large number of librarians in mainland China. A new survey in future could see improvements in this area. It would be interesting to learn if there is any increase in

libraries' involvement in Chinese e-government development since 2006. If yes, what kind of involvement with what success? And what were the major challenges? If there is no increased involvement, why not, and what can be done in future to improve this?

Third, in the appendices of this article, the authors compiled the data collected through the survey and created several ranking lists. They were intended to give librarians a general idea about the patrons' needs as well as the resources and strategies often used by librarians. Since it has been a few years after the lists were created, there may be new search and access tools available.

V. Conclusion

The survey shows that a library's need for Chinese government information may vary from weekly to yearly. Obviously, the public has yet to use libraries as a primary place to access Chinese government information. It may be due to the scarcity of such information in libraries. It may also be because there is a lack of public services in libraries related to Chinese government documents.

Most librarians who had working experience with Chinese government information stated that they were aware of the Chinese e-government development. However, they obviously underestimated the speed of Chinese e-government development. It was not a surprise that this mistaken perception led directly to their ignorance of new types of online resources. This also led to shortfalls in collections and services.

Chinese e-government has developed rapidly and has a good infrastructure in place. Its importance is increasing rapidly. People need all kinds of assistance and education in understanding, searching, accessing, and using this new type of online information resources and services. However, the survey findings show that many librarians do not have enough knowledge about this tremendous online information resource. The authors hope that this report will draw the attention of more librarians, especially mainland and overseas' Chinese librarians, to Chinese e-government documents and services. To meet users' needs in a digital age, librarians should increase their awareness of and knowledge about the Chinese government online documents, developing library services accordingly, and exploring ways to work with government and other related organizations in order to play a greater role in the further development of Chinese e-government.

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Notes

[1] IALL, "members-only" listserv of the International Association of Law Libraries to communicate news about the annual courses and other educational programs, the International Journal of Legal Information, and information about other IALL activities. See: <http://www.iall.org>

[2] GovDocs-L, listserv-based discussion forum about government information and the Federal Depository Library program. See: <http://govdoc-l.org>

[3] INTL-DOC, listserv-based discussion group designed to facilitate the exchange of information concerning the publication and information dissemination policies of IGOs (International Governmental Organizations). See: <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/rts/godort/taskforces/internationaldocuments/intldoc.cfm>

[4] CALA-L, now called calalist, listserv of the Chinese American Librarians Association. See: <http://www.cala-web.org/aggregator/sources/1?page=4>

[5] Eastlib, closed listserv for CEAL (Council on East Asian Libraries) members and others interested in East Asian Librarianship. See: <http://www.eastasianlib.org/Eastlibinstructions.htm>

Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire

This survey is designed to find out the awareness of Chinese e-government development among librarians in the United States, Canada and Hong Kong. It is also designed to collect information for preparing a practical guide to online Chinese government (E-government) information resources (People's Republic of China), including Chinese government publications, products and services available on Chinese government websites or compiled by non-government online resources, free or fee-based. One objective of conducting this survey is to help librarians effectively develop an online Chinese government information collection. Another objective is to help inexperienced users search, locate, access, collect and use online Chinese government information resources. Please fill out this survey if you are librarian with any experience in searching, locating, collecting, acquiring, accessing, managing, and/or using online Chinese government information. Please answer as many questions as you can. Please return the survey even if you cannot answer all the questions--partial responses will be helpful. It will take about 15-20 minutes to complete the survey. Thank you for your cooperation.

Collection Development of Online Chinese Government (E-Government) Information

1. I work in

The United States Canada Hong Kong other (please specify): _____

2. I work in

an Academic Library a Public Library other (please specify): _____

3. I work in

Government Documents Library East Asia Library other (please describe):

4. My present library position is

reference librarian government documents librarian other (please specify): _____

5. How often do you receive questions requesting Chinese government information?

- one to several times a day
 one to several times a week
 one to several times a month
 one to several times a year
 Other: _____

6. I am aware that the Chinese government is developing online government (E-Government) information and services?

Yes No

7. Do you know how many Chinese websites are registered under .gov.cn in 2005, which indicate clearly that they are Chinese government websites? Guess how many:

0 1-100 101-1,000 1001-10,000 10,001-100,000 > 100,000

8. I have been collecting Chinese E-government information sites for

- > 10 years 6-10 years 1-5 years <1 year 0 years

9. I think my familiarity with Chinese online government information resources is

- High relatively high relatively low low Non-existent

10. Our patrons mostly look for the following types of Chinese government information

- laws, rules and regulations
 annual reports
 statistics
 maps
 directories of government agencies
 catalogs of government publications
 guides to government publications
 indexes of government publications
 abstracts of government publications

other (please specify):

11. Of the following information, check all that you think is/are most difficult to find:

- laws, rules and regulations
 annual reports
 statistics
 maps
 directories of government agencies
 catalogs of government publications
 guides to government publications
 indexes of government publications
 abstracts of government publications

Other:

12. Our patrons are mainly interested in the following areas of Chinese government information

- agriculture
 alternative medicine
 economics/trade/business
 education
 energy
 engineering
 environmental protection
 geography and geology

- health science
 - mining/power
 - patent
 - political science
 - science and technology
 - social issues
 - tourism
 - transportation
 - copy right /intellectual property
- other (please specify):

13. Of the following information, check all that you think is/are most difficult to find:

- agriculture
 - alternative medicine
 - economics/trade/business
 - education
 - energy
 - engineering
 - environmental protection
 - geography and geology
 - health science
 - mining/power
 - patent
 - political science
 - science and technology
 - social issues
 - tourism
 - transportation
 - copy right /intellectual property
- Other:

14. I am aware that the following basic government services are already available on Chinese government websites: (Please check all that apply)

- driver's license application
 - online tax payment
 - visa/passport application/renewal services
- Other:

15. I find (or locate) online Chinese government information resources by

- Consulting Chinese colleagues
- Consulting non-Chinese colleagues
- Reading newspapers
- Listening to the radio
- Reading related journal articles
- Surfing the Internet
- Watching TV
- Contact with vendors/publishers
- Visiting Chinese government websites

Other (please specify):

16. I think the following resources are essential to search online Chinese government information at different levels (national, provincial, city/county level) and in different types (statistics, laws, maps, reports, etc.):

- China Data Center (<http://chinadatacenter.org/>)
- Google
- Individual Chinese government ministries' website
- Individual provincial government websites
- Individual city government websites
- People's Daily (<http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/>)
- www.china.org.cn
- www.gov.cn
- www.stats.gov.cn
- Xinhua News (www.xinhuanet.com/english)
- Yahoo Directory > Government by countries > China

Other:

17. What essential Chinese E-government information resources do you or would you collect to meet library users needs?

- statistics
- primary documents (e.g. important speeches)

Other:

18. What basic steps do you recommend to search, locate, acquire, access, use and manage Chinese E-government information resources?

19. What are the major barriers for you and your patrons to search, locate, acquire, access, use and manage Chinese E-government information resources?

- I do not know Chinese and some Chinese government websites have no English version.
- I know Chinese but I do not have software to read Chinese characters.
- I do not know Chinese and do not know how to type in Chinese characters to search.
- I know Chinese but I do not have software to type in Chinese characters to search.
- I know little about Chinese e-government information resources.

Other:

20. What Chinese government information you and your patrons think is important and should be available to the public, but cannot be found online?

21. How would you like the CHINESE GOVERNMENT to improve the delivery of government information and services online?

22. Please share any comments or suggestions on this SURVEY.

You have finished the survey. Thank you very much for your time and support!

Appendix B: Ranking lists generated based on the survey results

1. Mostly sought Chinese government information by types
 1. Statistics
 2. laws, rules, regulations
 3. annual reports
 4. maps
 5. directories of government agencies
 6. guides to government publications
 7. abstracts of government publications
 8. catalogs of government publications, indexes of government publications, other
2. Mostly sought Chinese government information by subject areas

1. economic/trade/business
 2. social issues
 3. education
 4. political science
 5. copyright/intellectual property
 6. tourism
 7. health science
 8. science and technology, patent
 9. agriculture, alternative medicine
 10. energy, geography and geology, transportation
 11. mining/power
 12. engineer
 13. other
3. Most difficult Chinese government information to be found by types
 1. Statistics
 2. abstracts
 3. catalogs
 4. guides
 5. indexes
 6. laws, rules, and regulations, as well as annual reports
 7. other
4. Most difficult Chinese government information to be found by subject areas
 1. social issues
 2. copyright/intellectual property
 3. economics/trade/business, political science, alternative medicine
 4. environmental protection
 5. mining/power
 6. patent
 7. energy, engineer, science and technology, agriculture, other
 8. transportation
 9. tourism
5. Most essential Chinese e-government information resources to collect
 1. statistics
 2. primary documents
 3. other
6. Mostly used ways for searching, accessing and collecting Chinese e-government information resources
 1. surf the Internet
 2. visit Chinese government portals and individual Chinese government agencies' websites
 3. read related journal articles
 4. read newspapers
 5. watch TV, contact with vendors/publishers
 6. consult Chinese colleagues

7. listen to the radio
 8. consult non-Chinese colleagues
 9. other
7. Mostly used resources for searching, accessing and collecting Chinese online government information and services
1. Google
 2. Individual national level Chinese government ministries' websites
 3. Official Chinese government portals such as www.gov.cn
 4. Database such as China Data Center, China InfoBank
 5. Individual lower level 'C provincial, city level - Chinese government websites; Xinhua News
 6. Yahoo Directory > Government by countries > China
 7. other

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