

Finding the Chinese-American Self in Scholarly Activities and Achievements

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ABSTRACT: As intellectual immigrants, many of the overseas Chinese librarians have a second advanced degree in a subject area and are active in research and scholarly publication. They are in a unique position to promote Chinese culture in a foreign cultural environment and to find their identities through their scholarly activities. The paper is an attempt to showcase some important research outcomes by overseas Chinese librarians. It illustrates how overseas Chinese librarians bring more perspectives in understanding different cultures of East and West. Their achievements in publishing and research have become part of their self-expression as Chinese-Americans.

Overseas Chinese librarians have made great accomplishments not only in their professional and intellectual pursuit but also in the field of research and scholarship. They have established the identity of the Chinese-American self with their intellectual achievements, adding values to the library profession as well as to the overseas Chinese community. The current study is to analyze the research publications and other scholarly activities of the overseas Chinese American librarians with a view to revealing their unique position in a foreign cultural environment, that is, how they have brought in more perspectives in understanding different cultures of the East and the West. As intellectual immigrants, many of them have a second advanced degree in a subject area and are active in research and scholarly activities. Their achievements in publishing and research have become part of their self-expression in finding their identity as Chinese-Americans.

I. Deep Roots in Chinese Traditional Scholarship and Book Culture

The tradition of bibliographical study or criticism started with China's first classified bibliography as early as around 6 BC and the earliest extant bibliography, "Bibliographical Treatises" in the *Records of Western Han Dynasty*, completed in AD 80. This tradition has continued through the ages. Bibliographical criticism, research, and compilation have been considered the fundamentals in the Chinese scholarship as embodied in the Chinese tenet of "scholarship starts with compiling bibliographies" or 治學先治目. Bibliographical study is a basic skill and a foundation of research methodology for Chinese scholars. Many overseas Chinese librarians have been trained and educated with the knowledge of the history of books, printing, and publishing. And they have implemented such knowledge and skills in bibliographical works.

This is especially true among early immigrant Chinese intellectuals. They helped to lay the groundwork for the Chinese collection development in North America and provided great

research and reference tools for Sinologists through their bibliographical works. Yuan Tung-li or Yuan Tongli (1895-1965) and Tsien Tsuen-Hsuin or Qian Cunxun (1910-) are two representative ones for their achievements in this area. They produced many influential bibliographies that are collected in hundreds of libraries around the world.

Dr. Yuan Tung-li, one of the first overseas Chinese librarians who were trained professionally in the United States, was devoted passionately to the bibliographical research and produced a great number of bibliographies and other reference works. His *China in Western Literature: a Continuation of Cordier's Bibliotheca Sinica* was considered monumental for its scale and scope (Shen, Zhou & Wei, 2004). The bibliography includes as many as 18,000 English and a few other western language books, documents and publications on China. Looking through the list of Dr. Yuan's publications, one is struck by the breadth of the topics he covered and the authenticity he possessed in dealing with the materials. He was truly one of those who possess a combination of the qualities of "linguistic proficiency, bibliographic capability, and subject specialization", as Dr. Tsien Tsuen-Hsuin observed (1975).

Dr. Tsien Tsuen-Hsuin himself is also such a pioneer. He is the curator emeritus of the East Asian Library and professor of the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago. He worked at University of Chicago for more than 50 years and was very consciously contributing to East Asian librarianship. In addition to his duties as a librarian and curator, he also taught in the East Asian Department and in the Library School on Chinese bibliography and Chinese historiography, two major courses for students in attaining the basic skills required for a Chinese studies librarian. Among more than 150 publications, he compiled several influential bibliographies and wrote on the history of books and printing. His works are well received by scholars around the world. *Written on Bamboo and Silk: The Beginning of Chinese Books and Inscription* and *Paper and Printing* are the most influential ones.

Compilation of bibliographies is fundamental to building reliable and strong collections for Chinese studies and a great means to introduce Chinese culture. The field of bibliography is one of the primary areas contributed to by overseas Chinese librarians. For generations, overseas Chinese librarians have devoted their times and efforts into bibliographical research. Many of them have in-depth knowledge in the history of books, printing, and classification systems. They possess a combination of the qualities as well as the willingness to make personal sacrifices for the benefit of others (Tsien, 1975).

This tradition continued to the present. There are several bibliographic series initiated by overseas Chinese librarians. Eugene Wu initiated the *Harvard-Yenching Library Bibliographical Series*, in which a few important bibliographies of Harvard-Yenching's collections were published, including *Annotated Catalogue of Naxi Pictographic Manuscripts in the Harvard-Yenching Library* (1997), and *Annotated Catalogue of Chinese Rare books in the Harvard-Yenching Library* (2011).

Later generations of overseas Chinese librarians have also been following this tradition and have produced some useful bibliographies in a wide range of subjects, from ancient publications to modern. Collectively, these types of publications have contributed to the scholarship from the following aspects:

- Their works helped to fill gaps in bibliographical works, especially the areas related to Chinese studies. As the area studies evolve, different topics merge at different times due to the cultural and political changes. Realizing the importance of certain topics at a given time, many librarians have worked to fill in gaps in those areas and compiled bibliographies to put together information and resources on these topics, providing a “fairly complete and organized picture of the extent and nature of this material” (Graves, 1961). For example, Dr. Yuan’s bibliography on Russo-Chinese relations, *Russian Works on China, 1918-1960 in American Libraries*, was published in 1961. This work provides a comprehensive account of Russian publications from Hoover Library, Harvard, Library of Congress, Yale, and many other libraries.
- Compilers of bibliographical works offer authentication to the materials in hand and provide reliable information of the research materials. The process of compiling bibliographies is not just to create lists of the titles, but rather a meticulous and careful research for accurate information on publications on certain topic, area or period. It is a time-consuming task, especially when these were done before the Internet age. This was the case when Dr. Yuan compiled his *A Guide to Doctoral Dissertations by Chinese Students in America, 1905-1960*, when Dr. Tsien Tsuen-Hsuei collaborated with Professor Soren Edgren on the *Chinese Rare Books in American Collections*, and when many others went through the process and worked in the field of bibliography.
- Through their bibliographic studies and research, overseas Chinese librarians also reveal unique collections on China and provide better understanding of the collections in US. Many bibliographies provide surveys on Chinese collections in North American university and research libraries. Dr. Tsien led several surveys of the East Asian collections, and these surveys served as useful references for East Asian collection development and East Asian librarianship. The recent such bibliographies include Wang Guohua’s *Guide to archives of missionaries to China Collected in Woodruff Library, Emory University, U.S.A.* on a special collection from Emory University Library, and Li Guoqing’s survey of Chinese ancient books in the Ohio State University Library.

II. Intellectual Acuity to Foreign Culture and Modern Library Practice

Many intellectuals came overseas to study and to receive education in the Western culture. In search for the values in their present homeland, they are eager to learn and share new things. The overseas Chinese librarians are coming from all walks of life and have different educational backgrounds. They have joined the library profession for various reasons, but they all have a similar goal, that is, to understand and learn the concepts and practice of modern libraries. They are introduced into the field of library and information science with great intellectual acuity and interest. One of the areas that have drawn the greatest interest from overseas Chinese librarians in earlier years is the classification and cataloging, an essential function in a library to provide access to its collections. In the technology era of the 21st century, the technology and information management have become another hot area for overseas Chinese, along with other aspects of library services and information or knowledge management.

As to the scholarly achievements by overseas Chinese librarians in mainstream publications, Dr. Lois Mai Chan is clearly an outstanding example. Probably no one else has achieved what Dr. Chan has achieved in the area of cataloging and classification. She has numerous publications on

Library of Congress subject headings and classification, many of which resulted from her extensive research on existing systems and meticulous examination of how information is organized and accessed. Her research efforts resulted in a series of more than twenty publications, including *Library of Congress Subject headings: Principles and Applications* and *Immroth's Guide to the Library of Congress Classification*. Almost every library student knows Dr. Chan's textbooks on the topic and has read them. She is one of the most frequently cited authors in the scholarship of library science and information. Her other popular works include *A Guide to the Library of Congress Classification, Cataloging and Classification: An Introduction*, and *Dewey Decimal Classification: A Practical Guide*. These publications have demonstrated Dr. Chan's research strength and concentration. They are not just regular handbooks for cataloging and classification but serious studies on knowledge organization, management, and access.

Another excellent example is Dr. Hwa-wei Lee. With different approaches from Dr. Chan's focused research agenda but the same outstanding nature and influence, Dr. Lee's research and publications cover a wide range of subjects from library automation to knowledge management, all of which are from his rich experience in library services and management. His writings on each of those topics are as excellent as his service and leadership. His early publications are mainly focused on library automation and computer applications in library and information services. Such works include *Computer Applications in Library and Information Services: The Current AIT Experiments and Future Plans* (1969), *Regional Cooperation in Scientific and Technical Information Service* (1971), *The Information Technology: New Tools and New Possibilities for Information Storage Retrieval and Dissemination* (1973), and *The Application of Information Technology to Close the Information Gap* (1974). These were all timing studies of computer technology in library services and information and knowledge management. Besides the practical side of library technology, he also reflected philosophically on knowledge management and analyzed the trends. His view and reflections are well presented in such works as *Trend in Automation in American Academic Libraries: Ohio University's Experience* and *Knowledge Management: Theory and Practice*. The library technology and knowledge management are not the only topics that he is interested and has experience with. He is also a great fundraiser and library manager. He shared his wisdom in his publications. His *Fundraising for the 1990s: The Challenge Ahead: A Practical Guide for Library Fundraising, from Novice to Expert* is a handbook for anyone who wants to test the waters and be successful. In addition to these writings, his works on library management and strategies and planning are equally useful and stimulating.

Regarding modern concepts of libraries and librarianship, one tends to turn to American libraries as a model both from practical and theoretical perspectives. There are many Chinese students enrolled in American universities for library and information science education. There are also many publications to introduce the Western and modern concepts of libraries. For example, it is widely accepted that the Library of Congress and other Western classification systems are as scientific and modern as compared to the traditional Chinese classification. It is not a surprise that many research and publications are done in this area.

A quick look through the tables of contents of the *Chinese Librarianship: an International Electronic Journal* reveal other topics in which overseas Chinese librarians have increased

interest such as library web technology, data storage and retrieval, and, most recently, the scholarly communication, open access, and informatics.

III. Professional Attentiveness to Issues in Chinese Librarianship and Bridging Cultures

With the experiences in and understanding of both Chinese and American cultures, overseas Chinese librarians are in a unique position to attend to issues related to China and problems caused by the Anglo-centric environment. More importantly, they have the advantage in bridging cultures through their research and publications.

In the past 10 years or so, more Chinese students have enrolled in library schools in America, and more librarians of Chinese heritage have entered in the library profession. As a result, the number of research papers on China and related issues has risen dramatically since 2000 in the library literature. The author has conducted a query in the Library and Information Subject Abstract (LISA) database with the term “China” or “Chinese” in the subject and title fields for peer-reviewed English journals from 1900-2010 and retrieved a total of 1,291 articles. The breakdown shows that over the first 100 years (i.e., 1900-1999), there are only 529 articles; in the last decade of the 20th century (i.e., 1990-1999), the total number is 390, with an average of 39 articles per year; while in the most recent decade (i.e., 2000-2010), the number jumped to 762 in total, averaging 76 articles per year. Furthermore, of the 4,648 peer-reviewed articles indexed in LISA in 2011, 106 are related to China, account for 2.28% of the total.

A similar search in LISA was conducted for articles published in 2011 that are related to selected countries (i.e., India, UK, USA, and France). The results show that articles related to China are more than those related to other countries, indicating a greater interest in China-related topics. Many of these articles are authored or co-authored by overseas Chinese.

China	106	2.28%
India	72	1.55%
UK	69	1.48%
USA	51	1.10%
France	36	0.77%

The overseas Chinese are most interested in Chinese or East Asian librarianship. They pay a great deal of interests to the issues from developing collections to providing services to Sinologists and other user communities who use these materials. They also care very much about the library development in China. In the process of developing the Chinese collections overseas, they have diligently contributed to the scholarship and library literature on Chinese librarianship and East Asian Librarianship from very beginning and made major contributions. In 1965, Dr. Tsien organized a conference on East Asian librarianship. He also wrote some very influential articles on East Asian librarianship, including “East Asian Collections in America [with Discussion]” (Tsien & Beal, 1965), “Current Status of East Asian Collections in American Libraries” (Tsien, 1977), and “Trends in Collection Building for East Asian Studies in American Libraries” (Tsien, 1979). These papers discuss issues such as East Asian librarians’ qualifications and collection development. Many of these questions are still being asked in modern days.

In 2008, the first freestanding building hosting an academic East Asian collection on an American university campus opened its door. A comprehensive volume of collective essays accompanied this milestone event on East Asian collections in North America, *Collecting Asia: East Asian Libraries in North America, 1868-2008*, is an “extraordinarily important volume provides us with a unique look at the events and people that shaped the major collections of East Asian materials in North America” (Selby, 2010).

There are also several journals devoted to Chinese and East Asian librarianship. The peer reviewed online journal, *Chinese Librarianship Journal*, initiated by Shixing Wen, is an open access journal, which provides not only a forum for the scholarly exchange among the Chinese librarian community and beyond but also encourages open access and makes great contributions to the diversity in scholarly communications.

Chinese-American librarians are more aware of the cultural elements in librarianship and diversity issues. Their researches often focus on issues that are unique to Chinese studies and librarianship but may be neglected by the mainstream scholarship. For example, Shuyong Jiang’s “Into the Source and History of Chinese Culture, Knowledge Cataloging in Ancient China” (Shuyong, 2007) presents, as one of the reviewers put it, a view of cultural connections of a classification scheme that is simply not gone into in most classification publications. As the Library of Congress classification system is mainly a “typical American system” and the LC Classification is “oriented primarily toward the requirements of the Congress and secondarily to those of other government departments and agencies, scholars, and all other users” (Chan & Immroth, 1980, p. 19), it presents challenges in classifying Chinese materials. Research has been done on these issues associated with Chinese materials. Shuyong Jiang’s article on the problems of the Library of Congress Classification system in treating the Chinese Classics is one such research that points out the shortcomings of a Western-centered system and brings attention to the unfavorable environment of such a system towards non-Western cultural materials. The significance of this kind of research does not just lie on addressing the specific problems and offering insightful solutions but more importantly on bringing wider views and perspectives into the corps of library literature and helping increasing the cultural diversity in both librarianship and scholarship.

Overseas Chinese possess unique attributes and qualities. They have advantages in language skills and good understanding of both cultures and library practices. They can publish in both languages. Not only can they identify issues and bring cultural awareness overseas, they can also introduce best library practices to China and work collaboratively with their fellow librarians in China in research projects. In 2007, a group of Chinese American Librarians Association (CALA) members worked together on a book entitled *Academic Libraries in the United States for the 21st Century: Theories and Practices* (Jin, Li & Li, 2007), which introduces the theories and best practices from American academic libraries. From 2009-2010, several Chinese-American librarians published a series of articles on libraries and information science, discussing several topics that are of interest to Chinese librarians. These publications helped the librarians in China to learn about the trends and characteristics of American libraries and library services. For example, Lisa Zhao wrote a series of articles on the laws and policies of American libraries. One of her articles on privacy and users’ rights was well received when presented at an annual

conference of the Library Society of China (LSC), giving inspirations to some Chinese librarian leaders regarding developing laws for the public libraries in China.

IV. Conclusion

Overseas Chinese librarians possess unique qualifications from their cultural and educational background. They play very important and indispensable roles in promoting Chinese culture and in enriching scholarly productions. For generations, overseas Chinese librarians, like any other groups of overseas Chinese, have struggled but made progresses in finding their own identities — the Chinese, the American, and the Chinese American. They have become an integral part of the library profession in the United States, adding ethnic diversity, and making unique contributions by bring in their unique voices through their successful careers, active professional organization, and teaching and research. Despite the significant achievements and successful stories by the Chinese-American librarians, there are still issues to deal with in terms of ethnic equality and values.

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Note:

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