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OVERVIEW

With the rapid development of the Chinese economy, academic libraries in China continue to evolve and reach colorful achievements. Meanwhile, the relationships between China and the United States in science and culture have made it necessary for libraries in each country to understand one another. This book integrates both informative and research papers which promote Sino-U.S. communication and collaboration in the field of academic libraries.

The term academic libraries includes university libraries, college libraries, and scientific research libraries. According to 2014 statistics, there are 2,529 regular universities and colleges in China, of which the most significant are called “Project 211” universities, denoting the 100 major Chinese universities in the 21st century, and “Project 985” universities, denoting the top Chinese universities. Including research libraries of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, it is estimated that there are 3,000 academic libraries in China, making Chinese academic libraries an important topic of study for their rapid development and significant innovations.

This book is intended for librarians, researchers, and information scientists, particularly those engaged in work in academic libraries, in both the United States and China. In this book, we focus on the representative projects and academic research in Chinese academic libraries since the 1990s, particularly looking at significant foundational infrastructure and support systems, including government oriented projects and exploratory studies, and covering systems, resources, services, education, and more.

RESPONSE TO A RAPIDLY CHANGING INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT

The field of Library and Information Science is rapidly evolving around the world, and technological innovations not only make better, more efficient, and more valuable service possible, but they also necessitate in-depth and thorough research into the benefits and pit-falls of going digital. In the Information Age, modern libraries in China, and indeed the rest of the world, are struggling to maintain current and thriving collections with limited and inconsistent funding support, while the need for increasingly diversified information resources is on the rise. This book argues that in order to remain relevant in this era of rapid development and big data, libraries must adapt to the needs of the user, providing ubiquitous resources and services to patrons outside of the library as well as inside its walls.

One way in which libraries in China are accomplishing this is through library consortia, such as the China Academic Library & Information System or the China Academic Digital Associative Library.
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These alliances allow libraries to share information resources with patrons of multiple libraries in order to curb the high cost of developing a full independent collection. In this way, library users can access more resources than any individual library could afford or house, while institutions continue to build upon cooperative relationships and collaborative projects.

Academic libraries in China are also addressing these challenges through the development of innovative user and outreach services. With the goal of comprehensive, user-based services at their core, services have been developed which allow libraries to provide year-round, 24/7 services to their users where they are and when they need it, anticipating user needs based on their demographic information and research stage. Going beyond mere collectors and distributors of information, libraries in China are striving to become centers for knowledge, culture, and information sharing.

Further, as the world becomes increasingly interconnected, Chinese libraries have also pursued more and deeper collaborative relationships with the international library community, particularly in the United States. Through regular library visits and exchanges, best practices and innovative ideas make their way across the globe to improve libraries and library leaders on both sides. Other collaborations have boosted library collections and cross-cultural relationships within the library field.

This survey of Chinese academic libraries is a necessary bridge between China and the West in an increasingly global community and an increasingly global field of Library and Information Science.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The book consists of 19 chapters, divided into 6 sections. Section 1, National Platforms, addresses three major government-oriented projects called CALIS, CADAL, and CASHL, all of which have widely benefited Chinese academic libraries. Section 2, User Services and Library Buildings, discusses trends in user services and library buildings in China. Section 3, Digital Libraries and Resources, covers digital collections, digital resources, big data, and support technologies. Section 4, Education and Research, provides a quantitative analysis of academic education and academic research. Section 5, Leadership and Assessment, presents independent studies on professional development and assessment in academic libraries. Section 6, International Communication and New Development, offers synthesized information about Sino-U.S. library relations and new developing models.

The first chapter discusses the China Academic Library & Information System (CALIS), a public service system belonging to Project 211 which serves as a nationwide academic library resource sharing consortium. CALIS aims to integrate academic library resources and services, and to develop digital libraries in higher education so as to consistently serve both institutions of higher education and basic education, and to promote global academic communication. To accomplish this goal, CALIS aims to use and develop advanced technological resources based on the resources of member libraries and institutions. This system is one of the largest and most successful networks of its kind, and could serve as a model for future library consortia.

Chapter 2 looks at the China Academic Digital Associative Library (CADAL), a direct descendant of the China-America Digital Academic Library, which is funded by the Ministry of Education of China. In response to modern information sharing trends, the CADAL project aims to transform Chinese academic libraries from mere information-sharing institutions to partners of resource construction and sharing, acting as the world’s largest non-profit digital library with more than 2.5 million Chinese and English e-books. This uniquely Chinese resource has proven invaluable to academic libraries in China
who, like libraries across the globe, are struggling to stretch funding and keep pace with the influx of information resources.

In Chapter 3, authors describe and analyze the impact of the China Academic Social Sciences and Humanities Library (CASHL), a service composed of 17 academic libraries in mainland China which is primarily funded by government support. This service is the only collection which provides full subject coverage of the humanities and social sciences in China, making it an important topic of research domestically and internationally. While a number of authors have already published on this service, often lauding the program’s efficient document delivery services and effective marketing strategies, this chapter gives a detailed introduction to the origin, organizational structure, and primary services of CASHL, as well as the organization and implementation of collaborative innovation within the service, concluding with a description of some of the challenges which CASHL is facing.

The purpose of the fourth chapter is to discuss innovative user services in Chinese institutions of higher education which strive to meet the progressive trend toward globalization and openness. The authors argue that academic libraries must evolve at the rate of environmental change in order to remain relevant in the modern age of information. To satisfy increasingly diversified needs for information, academic libraries continuously extend user service functions and gradually evolve from mere collectors and distributors of information into centers of learning, teaching, knowledge, and culture. In discussing a variety of methods in which libraries are developing services to meet the information needs of modern users, the chapter offers readers not only several models and case studies for successful library innovations, but also a window into the services and trends found in Chinese academic libraries.

In discussing outreach services in Chinese special libraries, Chapter 5 provides readers with an overview of services which expand on traditional library services to reach patrons outside of the library in order to meet the complex needs of the modern researcher. These services are not only innovative, but they also take library services beyond the walls of the library to reach patrons where they are, effectively extending the services of the library to directly address patron needs and raise awareness about library resources and support.

Chapter 6 provides an overview of the development of the Scholarly Learning Commons (SLC) in academic libraries in China. Research revealed three stages of development: the preliminary integrated state, the double fusion state, and the highly integrated stage. The authors go on to explain the philosophy behind the construction of an SLC, methods and strategies for building an SLC, and the components and services of an SLC, before concluding with the argument that Chinese academic libraries are adopting a strong, user-centered service model, but that the developmental stages of SLC in China are inconsistent.

In the seventh chapter, the authors look specifically at library buildings and their development in light of 21st century population boom with new values and limited space for construction. Instead of building in cities, where adequate space is not available, universities and colleges nationwide are seeking land in suburban areas. This new boom in construction aims to meet the demands of a growing population, while taking advantage of economic growth and technological development to provide strong material foundation and technical support.

The eighth chapter discusses the construction and development of the Academic Digital Library of Chinese Ancient Collections (ADLCAC), a cooperative project and one of the largest databases of ancient Chinese materials across the globe. This chapter introduces its development, member libraries, resources, service mechanisms, characteristics, and future development. Like many digital libraries, this initiative breaks down boundaries, allowing users from around the world to access a thorough and in-depth collection of ancient Chinese materials.
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Chapter 9 is dedicated to the construction and development of university digital libraries in western China. Throughout the book, the deficiencies in quality and funding of libraries in the western region are touched on as a major challenge that the Chinese Library and Information Science community must address. This chapter investigates current samples of digital libraries in western libraries in China, looking at 100 universities in the region, to reveal problems and obstacles which arise during the construction process, offering future direction for digital libraries in this region in order to close the gap between libraries in the western and eastern regions.

Digital libraries are also discussed in Chapter 10, but the authors of this chapter focus on the development of special subject databases, looking particularly at the China Academic Library & Information System special subject databases as an example. These databases are not only important digital resources which strengthen discipline development, but they are also rich special data resources. This chapter ultimately covers the management mechanism, technical platform, standards, social benefits, and philosophy behind the CALIS Special Subject Collection, revealing important information about the development and maintenance of a digital special subject database.

Chapter 11 looks at research data management models, challenges, and practice. In the big data landscape, research data is the currency of science. With the rise of the open science movement and data sharing policies, research data management is an emerging practice among domain-specific science and library and information science practice. This chapter explores the much shorter history of research data management in China, and the extensive challenges that they face, looking at the development of research data management in China across multiple disciplines. The goal of this chapter is to provide some strategies to close the gap between China and other countries and identify the best practices for Chinese academic libraries in the area of research data management.

In Chapter 12, authors describe technological innovations in academic libraries in China, introducing the system platforms used to actualize new services, explaining the progress made in constructing digital libraries, addressing library space management, and providing an example of the application of mobile technologies. In analyzing the wide range of application of technological services, the authors reveal that libraries have been advancing and continue to pursue innovative development to meet user demands in the new information environment.

Chapter 13 focuses on library and information science education and graduate programs that are found in academic libraries. The chapter discusses the two kinds of instruction which happen in Chinese academic libraries; namely, information literacy instruction, and graduate program education for LIS students. The chapter introduces the first library to offer graduate education in library and information science independently, Shanghai Jiaotong University, and explains how more academic libraries began to follow this example in 2003, offering LIS education more widely. The chapter investigates and analyzes web portals in terms of education patterns, fields of study, entrance examination subjects, and curriculum.

The authors of Chapter 14 discuss the research initiatives and projects in academic libraries in China. The chapter begins by emphasizing the importance of academic libraries as research institutions, noting that research conducted by academic librarians can improve the professional abilities of librarians, drive service innovation, and promote continuous development of librarianship. In order to encourage research within the library setting, some libraries have even begun to offer incentives. This article studies the scientific input and output of academic libraries to provide an overview of research initiatives and projects conducted by academic libraries in China.
Chapter 15 provides a bibliometric analysis of research and services in Chinese academic libraries by analyzing the years of publication, authors and their institutions, journal titles, and keywords of research papers relevant to academic libraries published in 18 core journals of library and information science in order to identify the distribution of research subjects and development trends in the age of big data.

The focus of Chapter 16 is leadership development and career planning in an increasingly complex and dynamic social environment. The authors introduce the trends of development in higher education and academic libraries, explaining the necessity of strong leadership development programs and opportunities in responding to the changing environment. The authors argue that by focusing on reforming management philosophy and structure, human resources, teamwork, and capability enhancement, academic libraries have the potential to become a new breed of library that is patron-oriented, innovative, flexible, and far-sighted.

Chapter 17 looks at the assessment and evaluation of academic libraries in China. It is argued that assessment and evaluation guide library development, promoting innovation and improving quality of service. The purpose of this chapter is to present a systematic and comprehensive review of assessment efforts in China. Some examples of assessment discussed include the integration of undergraduate teaching level evaluation and the promulgation of the System of Indicators of Academic Library Evaluation, but it is suggested in this chapter that assessment must be more specific and guided in order to be truly valuable.

The authors of chapter 18 present key examples and case studies of China-U.S. library relations. Despite a lack of solid documentation and research, the library relations between China and the United States have been strong for decades, and have been particularly active since the turn of the century. Many collaborative efforts have taken the form of international conferences which specifically feature speakers from both China and the United States to discuss collaborations between the countries. Another form of collaborative relationship focuses on leadership development and exchange, as modeled by the Chinese Librarians Scholarly Exchange Program at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The chapter concludes by identifying major strengths and challenges of international relationships and proposes topics for further study.

The final chapter, Chapter 19, discusses resource sharing and mutually beneficial cooperation by looking at the new united model in public and college libraries. Many academic libraries are opting to combine physical space with public libraries in order to optimize library resources, space, and usage. The example provided in the chapter is Beilun Library, which combines the resources and space of the public library and the local university library.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Most of the authors come from Chinese and American academic libraries, and some are library directors or associate directors, and they are familiar with Chinese academic libraries with rich empirical practices. All editors participate in active Sino-U.S. communication, and aim to promote strong and consistent Sino-U.S. library relations.

We made every effort to create a resource of the highest possible level. However, many challenges prevented us from meeting our high expectations. Despite the limitations of the finished product, we hope that this book can provide a synthesis of information on Chinese academic libraries to promote international collaboration and understanding in the library world.
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Lian J. Ruan
Illinois Fire Service Institute Library at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA

Fred Y. Ye
Nanjing University, China

Qiang Zhu
Peking University Library, China