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A SURVEY OF FOUR LIBRARIES IN KUNMING: LIBRARY AUTOMATION AND MODERNIZATION IN A FAR REMOVED PROVINCE IN CHINA

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Kunming, the capital of Yunnan Province, China incorporates industrial, commercial, and residential areas. It boasts not only rich and varied minority national cultures, but also a varied array of developing and surprisingly modern libraries.

In 1998, Jianli and I had the opportunity to visit some of Kunming City's most treasured libraries, together.

In 2000, we updated our findings, which follow.

Over the last fifteen years, in a major effort at modernization and with an increasing investment by the Chinese government, China established more than twenty national information systems. The libraries we visited were member of some of those national information systems. These national information systems have been charged with setting up the basic foundations of an information industry. They belong to, respectively, the Education System, the Cultural Ministry, the Science and Technology Committee System, and the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

Everything is relative, so they say. One must judge, then, how far library automation has progressed in China by understanding how far it has moved forward in the last five years.

We wanted to see first hand how modernization of libraries in China had progressed to date. We felt strongly that viewing four Chinese libraries in a province far removed from the more sophisticated population centers of Beijing and Shanghai, would be a

good test as to how far China has progressed in its automation and modernization efforts.

The survey was initiated by two Librarians, one a Director of an academic library in Kunming, and the other an American Reference Librarian visiting Yunnan for the first time.

The Education System library that we chose to survey was Yunnan University library. Yunnan University, established in 1923, has a beautiful campus, along with a new 196,000 square foot library, the Yifu Building, named after its benefactor, Mr. Yifu Shao. Of the 1,160,000 volumes held, about 162,000 are deemed rare or ancient, and of the traditional thread binding of Chinese books. 4,217 volumes are listed in the Catalog of Chinese Rare Editions collection. Additionally, there are also hundreds of rare Japanese and Korean block printed editions.

The Library, which serves almost 10,000 students and faculty, is divided into ten departments, including an information department for Science and Technology, computing and media departments, and comprehensive services.

Naturally, we were most interested in the state of the Library's technology, and were able to question Yang Yong, the Library's Deputy Director, on the subject. Yong explained to us that modern equipment is available in the form of microfiche duplicators, viewing equipment, and digital cameras. A computer management system, developed beginning in 1987, is connected to the campus network (YNUNET) for use by the Cataloging, Circulation, and Acquisitions Departments. Also, computers connect the Yifu Library with CERNET, the China Education and Research Network. Currently, an electronic library and electronic reading room are being constructed on the network. Additionally, the Library hosts a world wide web home page at <<http://www.lib.yni.edu.cn>>.

Our expectations were that the Yifu Library would be one of the most automated libraries in Yunnan. Thus, we were curious to survey the state of technology in the Kunming Public Library, which is operated under the auspices of the Cultural Ministry System, and serves a population of 3.5 million in urban Kunming City.

Kunming Public Library was constructed in 1988 and houses 3,320,000 volumes. The pride of the Kunming Public Library is its Juvenile Department, which is built outside the main building on a garden. This design integrates literature and nature for the children of Kunming. We discovered that the Children's Reading Rooms are particularly popular. They are small, and arranged side by side, allowing the child to choose a book and a room in which to go and read.

Concerning automation management in Kunming Public Library, just before our visit in July, 1998, hardware and software had been installed. Network equipment, printers and other installations were also provided at the same time. The software used is called ILAS (Integrated Library Automation System). The copyright is reserved by the Shenzhen Library in Guangdong Province, which points out that China is not only buying technology from other countries, but also is intent on developing its own. Since, 1998, cataloging has been done by computer. Public access to records is still done with a card catalog, though. More study of the automation of Readers' Services is being done at the present time, and if the ILAS system is officially applied, Kunming's citizens will get high speed, quality, and efficient service.

Next, we visited the Information Institute of the Yunnan Academy of Agricultural Sciences. The Information Institute is not as advanced in automation as the Yifu Library and the Kunming Public Library, but as its bright, young Librarian, Mr. Lianzhen Chen told us, preparations are currently being made. The Institute is located in the northern suburbs of Kunming, and belongs to the National Science and Technology Committee system.

A major task of the Institute is the publishing of two journals, the *Journal of Yunnan Agricultural Sciences* (Yunnan has a vastly rich agricultural region) and the *Journal of the Honeybee*.

The Library is one of the five departments in the Institute, along with the Information Department, Administration, and the two journal's editorial departments. Its collection, about 130,000 volumes, emphasizes Agriculture, Biology, and Chemistry.

Since 1988, the Library staff has been building databases, including a Chinese periodical contents database, an English periodical contents database, a restricted publication database, and an archive of science and technology database. A CAB CD-ROM and three Chinese databases have also been constructed.

The Information Department of the Institute edits the "Bulletin of Agricultural Science and Technology," which mainly reports recent developments in agricultural research in the Academy or in Yunnan. They also investigate many general problems about agriculture.

The plan is for the Information Department to become a part of the YAAS network, and the Library will build its collection database using its own resources and those of the Information Department.

Choosing a Chinese Academy of Science library to visit was easy since Jianli, one of the co-authors of this article, is the Director of the Library at the Kunming Institute

of Zoology (KIZ). She has long been interested in automation, in a strong service ethic, and modern service methods.

The Kunming Institute of Zoology library is noted for its distinctive collection features, as it must cover zoology, entomology, biochemistry, reproduction, neuroscience and the related conservation of resources.

It is noteworthy that the Institute has exchange relationships with 75 other institutes or colleges abroad, and 51 institutes in China.

In 1989, librarians at the Institute began to study automation management. Today, they are network based, and are able to make full use of the Internet, email, and their computerized catalog.

Scientists at the KIZ contribute to journals worldwide, and the librarians must assist them by doing everything from copying articles, to collecting email addresses to journal presses, to providing a molecular biology database by email, as well as providing CD-ROMs and specialized databases. Among those specialized databases is a Chinese science periodical database, a Union Catalogue Database of Serials in Chinese and Western Languages, a Chinese Science Citation Database, and a book database.

After surveying these four libraries, from four different systems in an area of China that is much closer to Vietnam than it is to Beijing, our conclusions are as follows:

(1) Great progress has been made since 1988 in all types of libraries in Kunming, China, no matter what subject matter the collection covers. As with much of the rest of the world, libraries in Yunnan province are attempting to introduce the benefits of electronic technology to their patrons.

(2) Librarians are learning new modes of work, which are necessary to deal with this new and emerging technology. Many librarians in China are studying automation with special attention given to its implications for library management. Automation and modernization has happened, relatively speaking, very fast in China, and with little historical preparation. As we witnessed in Kunming, library automation and modernization is working amazingly well.

(3) Training of librarians is of primary importance in Chinese libraries. The hope is, here, that librarians will move from their traditional role to network navigators.

http://southernlibrarianship.icaap.org/content/v02n01/li_j01.html