CHAPTER 20
Qiang Zhu, Director, Peking University Library

Introduction
Prof. Zhu Qiang, Director of Peking University Library, who was elected International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) Governing Board Member in June 2009, discusses the journey of his career from his humble beginnings after the Cultural Revolution in becoming a professional librarian in China. This chapter reveals Qiang Zhu's thoughts on the new developments of higher education as well as the library environment, academic libraries in mainland China are facing a lot of challenges. To meet the new needs and fulfill the missions, the Peking University Library is striving to improve and innovate its services to users, such as subject liaison services, reading promotion seminars, discovery tools, competitive information analysis, and mobile services. Qiang Zhu offers his personal views and insight into the growth of the profession of librarianship in China, and what the upcoming challenges are that academic libraries in China will face.

Could we begin this interview by first introducing yourself, for example, your training and background? What did you study at university? At what age you decided to choose a career in academic librarianship? Do you come from a family of librarians?

I earned my Bachelor of Arts degree from the Department of Library Science at Peking University. From August 1994 to July 1995, I served as a senior visiting scholar at the Center for East Asia and Pacific Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

During the Cultural Revolution (from 1966 to 1970), universities throughout China were all shut down, with the aim to facilitate the

* Co-authored with Tianji Jiang.
2 Center for East Asia and Pacific Studies, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign—Homepage. Available from http://www.eaps.illinois.edu/.
consolidation and development of the socialist system. Many young people were sent to the countryside for “re-education.” Actually, I was among the very first group of students who went to college in the late 1970s, when China began to reinstall its higher education system after the 10-year Cultural Revolution (1966–76).

Was librarianship ever your first choice of study at university? Did you have other career choices, options, or preferred professions in mind when you first entered university as a student?

Yes, Library Science was my first and only choice of academic major when I first entered university as a student.

What made you become interested in Library Science in the first place? Have you ever regretted that you did not choose to study more “practical” subjects like Science or Engineering? After the death of Chairman Mao, China decided to reopen its door after the 10-year Cultural Revolution and undertake a series of radical economic and social reforms since 1978, and a large number of Chinese students were dispatched to different advanced overseas countries under the national strategy of reinvigorating the country through science and technology. Would you not like to be one of those elite science and technology students to be selected by the Chinese Government to further your study in Europe or the United States?

To be honest, at that time I had never dreamed of going overseas for further studies. When I had reached the right age to enter university, my opportunity was denied—simply because during the 10-year Cultural Revolution, universities were all closed down, causing major disruptions to the quality of formal education throughout Mainland China at all levels. People simply did not have a chance to receive any proper education at all. In 1977, only a year after Chairman Mao Zedong died, university entrance examinations were reinstituted, and my wish to enroll in a university finally came, and I really wanted to give it a try. During the late 1970s, for university entrance examinations included subjects such as: “Chinese communist version” of History, Geography, Advanced Mathematics, and Philosophy of Marxism and Leninism, etc.

Based on the certain class distinction and social status (labeled by the Communist Party of China) associated with my birth and family background, there were certain limitations or restrictions in terms of the range of academic subjects that I could choose to study at university. Generally speaking, people who came from similar backgrounds like mine could only study subjects such as the Arts, History, or Literature. At the same time, I also thought it would be safer to choose Library Science, with the assumption that I would have a better chance to get accepted by a more
reputable university, like Peking University. Another reason was that I have always been a keen reader, and choosing librarianship as a career would ultimately mean having easy access to books. At that time, I really did not have any solid understanding of what Library Science would involve, neither as an academic subject, nor as a lifelong career.

As a young person during the Cultural Revolution, did you have easy access to books? If yes, what kind of books would you be reading as a young person during the period of Cultural Revolution?

I read all kinds of books, but mostly fiction and novels and usually great classical novels of Chinese literature, for example, *Dream of the Red Chamber* (紅樓夢), *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (三國演義), *Water Margin* (水滸傳). Martial arts novels by Jinyong (金庸), although famous throughout Chinese-speaking communities worldwide, had not yet been introduced to China during that time. The kind and number of books we had access to were extremely limited. Basically, I just read anything and everything that I could put my hands on.

During the time of the Cultural Revolution, where and how could you find or buy books to read? Did you have to go to the public libraries or buy books from the local bookstores?

The Xinhua Bookstore (新華書店) was the only countrywide bookstore chain available in China at that time. As a matter of fact, there was a lot of informal and random book sharing and exchanges between students and classmates. Furthermore, my mother was a very avid reader herself. She was a keen reader of both modern and classical Chinese literature. She would often borrow books from her workplace, and bring them home for us to share and read. I guess this was how I developed a keen interest in reading.

Could you describe your career path to becoming the General Director of Peking University Library?

I have been working for Peking University Library for many years. As soon as I had earned with my bachelor’s degree in Library and Information Science (LIS), I began working for the Library of the same University which I had graduated from. In 2005, I was promoted to the position of Deputy Director of the Library. Finally, in 2008, I became the General Director of the Peking University Library.

After graduating from university, I landed my very first job in the Secretariat of the National Committee on Academic Libraries in China in March 1982, with my office situated right inside the Peking University Library building. During that time, under the commission of the Ministry
of Education of China, Peking University Library took up many leadership roles in organizing a series of the cooperative and resources-sharing projects amongst libraries of higher institutions throughout China.

In 1987, I became the Deputy Head of the Secretariat of the National Committee on Academic Libraries in China. The Director of the Secretariat at that time would concurrently serve as the General Director of Peking University Library. In March 1989, I was transferred out of the Secretariat Office, and became the Assistant to the General Director of Peking University Library, and was concurrently serving as the Head of the Department of Automation [Peking University Library]. In 1996, I also took up the dual role and title of Deputy Director of China Academic Library and Information System (CALIS).³

From September 2002 to June 2005, I was temporarily transferred to the University Town of Shenzhen⁴ to serve as the Library Director, to actively take part in establishing the Library for the University Town of Shenzhen. In July 2005, I returned to Peking University Library, and continued to work as the Deputy Director. In January 2008, I was appointed the General Director of Peking University Library.

After universities in China were first reopened after the dark decade of the Cultural Revolution, how long did it take the Chinese education authorities, particularly the senior management of Peking University, to realize that a good, well-run, and well-staffed library system was an indispensable instrument for teaching, learning, research, as well as advancement of knowledge for any higher education institutions?

Although university exams had been abolished in 1966, they were restored for educating the worker-and-peasant-revolutionary cadre students with good political records in 1972 (during the peak of the Cultural Revolution). But, the re-institutionalization of university education was merely meant for paving an “easy way” for those cadre students to enter university. In 1973, a person named Zhang Tiesheng (張鐵生) became very famous during the Cultural Revolution, as he refused to take a national exam on physics and chemistry. Instead he handed in a blank paper, and wrote on the back that he was disgusted by bookworms, exco-riating the examination as a return to the capitalist model of education. He later became a national hero for his stand, and even won a seat in the

³ CALIS—Homepage. Available from http://project.calis.edu.cn/calisnew/.
Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress in 1975. All of a sudden, this “blank examination paper” became a “model piece” for other cadre students to follow. As you can see, in terms of these cadre students’ learning capability and academic performance, many of them might have reached the most elementary-school level. In other words, although these cadre students were also required to sit for university entrance exams, their standards and requirements were much easier, and were in no way comparable to the standards of the entrance exams set out before the Cultural Revolution.

1972 was the peak of the Cultural Revolution. What was the purpose of sending the worker-and-peasant-revolutionary cadres to university at that time?

Because in 1966, Chairman Mao wrote to Biao Lin (林彪) about education issues: “School systems are to be shortened, education to be revolutionized, and bourgeois intellectuals can no longer continue to rule our schools.” But, Chairman Mao only meant to allow universities of Science and Engineering to be run at that time. The reason that Mao put more emphasis on science and engineering university was because such subjects could not challenge his leadership according to his power and revolutionary theory, but only serve as his “political” tools. So, the education system was revolutionized to educate the intellectuals from peasants and workers. Hence, only the worker-and-peasant-revolutionary cadres were allowed to enter university during that time.

What did Chairman Mao try to achieve by sending these peasant-revolutionary cadres to university? What kind of knowledge or skills did Mao want these cadre students to acquire by sending them to university?

Because China was going through a series of education reforms as the result of the Cultural Revolution, primary school was reduced from 6 to 5 years, secondary school from 6 to 4 years. University education was shortened from 4 to 3 years.

Of course, putting these worker-peasant-soldier students through university was never meant for training them to become future leaders of society, but merely because a great number of them had only attended primary school or middle school at most before college. For those cadre students enrolled in colleges between 1970 and 1976, they were all accepted not for their academic achievements or qualifications, but rather for the “class background” of their parents. That was because despite China being at the peak of the Cultural Revolution, the country still very much needed all kinds of technicians to function. In other words, higher education was designed to train these cadre students to become engineering technicians,
primarily focusing on the learning of various real-world knowledge or very specialized technical skills. In most cases, higher education for these cadre students would last no longer than 3 years, sometimes as short as just 2 years. Not to mention the fact that these cadre students had to devote a great deal of time and energy on learning Marxism and Mao Zedong Thought, as well as taking part in various mass political movements.

So you could imagine how low the academic and literacy levels amongst the cadre students were, given they were already enrolled at the top universities in China. For those worker-peasant-soldier students who enrolled at Peking University during the peak of the Cultural Revolution (around 1972, 1973), some of them in fact stayed behind at Peking University, and even took up teaching positions in different disciplines upon graduation. By the time I enroll at Peking University, these former cadre students had suddenly turned into our university teachers. We knew immediately that the academic levels of these cadre-turned-professors were way below the minimum. So, a few years later, we waited for them to be transferred to other units, not serving as university professors anymore. But, some of them eventually got transferred to the University Library, or other laboratories, and became managers of different operation units on campus. But, for those who stayed and maintained their teaching positions, they needed to further their studies. Eventually, Peking University began to offer programs for these cadre-turned-professors to advance their studies—that is, providing a chance for them to re-learn and to upgrade their qualifications and their academic standards, with the aim of raising the overall education level for the current and future generations of students at Peking University.

Could you describe the state of library operations and conditions during the Cultural Revolution, when institutions of higher education were all geared towards providing these cadre students a basic education?

During the Cultural Revolution, the whole economy of China was in such a perilous state—everything was simply in total chaos. Libraries of higher education institutions were barely surviving with extremely limited funding and resources. Besides, the whole country was completely sealed off from the rest of the world during the Cultural Revolution. Purchasing library materials from foreign countries was just impossible.

Given the history and the diplomatic relations between the USSR and China, could academic libraries in China purchase books from the Soviet Union during the Cultural Revolution?

In the 1960s, China and the Soviet Union were the two largest communist states in the world. Unfortunately, the political and ideological
relations between China and the Soviet Union began to deteriorate since the early 1960s. The split and the deterioration of the relationship between China and the Soviet Union concerned the leadership of the communist world, as they had progressively diverged about Marxist ideology. By 1961, the Communist Party of China criticized the Soviet Union's variety of communism, as a product of “Revisionist Traitors.” During that time, China and the academic community were completely sealed off from the rest of the world. For this reason, we (the Library) had to rely on the old existing collections. Because of the extremely limited resources available, purchasing books from other overseas countries was not an option either.

What were the subject contents of books that were published in China before and during the Cultural Revolution?

The subject contents ranged from Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, etc. There were not any formal or ready-to-use textbooks for the university courses we took. All the teaching materials were in the form of simple mimeographed handouts prepared by the teachers themselves.

When university education was reinstituted in China back in 1978, were the Ministry of Education and the universities giving priority to rebuilding the Science and Technology programs, and putting less emphasis on arts and social sciences disciplines? Could you describe the conditions of higher education in the post-Cultural Revolution era during the late 1970s?

Institutes of higher education at that time were divided into two main categories, namely comprehensive universities and specialized universities. Peking University, Nanjing University, and Fudan University are comprehensive universities. On the other hand, Tsinghua University, Shanghai Jiaotong University, Nanjing Institute of Technology, Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics, Beijing University of Agriculture, etc.—they all belonged to the specialized university group.

5 Nanjing University—Homepage. Available from https://www.nju.edu.cn/EN/.
Once the higher education system was reinstituted in 1978, faculties and academic departments of different majors, specializations, and disciplines began to recruit students actively. Since the whole society of China was waiting desperately to be rebuilt from major ruins after the 10-year Cultural Revolution, we seriously needed people with professional knowledge and technical skills in all walks of life to restore the whole country back to its former state.

Being the leading university in China, what kind of leadership role did Peking University play in terms of helping or leading other universities and colleges in restoring the high education system in post-Cultural Revolution China?

The restoration period (of China’s higher education) was divided into several stages. For the very first 10 years after the Cultural Revolution, we called it the “Recovery Stage.” People like us in China were making every single effort with the sole aim of restoring the country’s higher education back to its former state.

When you talk about returning to standards in education back to the time before the Cultural Revolution, were you referring to the standards back in the 1950s?

I am referring to the time prior to 1965. During the 1960s, many young high school students were rusticated by the Young Communist League, and they were assigned to the countryside on a national level to cultivate the land, in order to follow Chairman Mao’s policy, “The intellectual youths must go to the country, and will be educated from living in rural poverty.” For this reason, many students were unable to enroll into university. Furthermore, because of the Cultural Revolution, many educators were forced to give up their professions for over 10 years, and were sent to the countryside to work as farmers. Because of this tragic social and political condition, many university teachers had simply forgotten almost everything they had previously studied or taught. In short, conditions for teaching and learning were simply rudimentary by today’s standards.

Having experienced such a major disruption in education, the quality and competency of teachers had seriously suffered to a degree that was without parallel throughout the history of China. For this reason, everyone throughout the education system, from teachers to students at all levels, felt a real sense of urgency—that is to rebuild the China’s entire university education system from ruins.

After the Cultural Revolution came to an end, and when university education in China was first reinstated, it was simply impossible to talk
about development or innovation of any kind at that time. No one would dare to mention it either. We simply called it the “recovery” stage. As for the students, having experienced 10 years of hardship imposed by the Cultural Revolution, they all realized that the opportunity to receive a university education in China did not come easy. Being the very first group of students to enter university after the Cultural Revolution, everyone was so desperate to make progress in their studies. As a result, Peking University became so overwhelmed and overcrowded, and many students simply could not get seated inside the Library. In order to find a way to enter the University Library, everyone had to queue up very early in the morning, and there were two occasions that the glass doors of the University Library were shattered, simply because too many students tried to jam themselves into the Library building.

Were you one of those students who tried to squeeze themselves into the Library building, which ultimately caused the shattering-glass-door incident?

Luckily, I did not have to jam myself into the Library building, because I was a Library Science major, and it was considered one of those modest “privileges” we got when we were studying to become a future librarian. The Peking University Library designated two classrooms inside the Library building for Department of Library Science for teaching and hands-on learning purposes. They were in fact former reading rooms turned into classrooms, inside which many professional literature and books related to Library Science were kept. There were also chairs, desks, and spaces for study inside these two LIS classrooms. So if we could not find any free seating in the regular user areas inside the University Library, we could always use these two dedicated LIS classrooms, as long as there were no other classes being held concurrently.

You said the students were trying their best to squeeze themselves into the University Library, desperately looking for books to read—what kind of books were they desperately looking for? Were they seeking books directly related to their majors or academic disciplines? Or they were reading any books regardless of genre or type?

Of course there were both. On one hand, some students read diligently about their academic majors. But there were also students who just read everything and anything, including books that are not related to their majors. They simply read anything interesting to them. As a result of this condition, some students went straight to graduate school (in the same discipline) right after earning their undergraduate degrees. While there were other students who developed interests in other subjects because of
such diligent and extensive reading in “other subjects,” and eventually decided to switch disciplines.

Peking University is the first modern national university established in China, and is consistently ranked as the top academic institution within the country. The University has always represented the highest standards of academic achievements and scholarship that is comparable to Harvard University in the United States and Oxford and Cambridge in the United Kingdom. When the Cultural Revolution finally came to an end, what kind of leadership role did Peking University play in the high education community, when the Chinese Government was trying to reinstitute its university education system?

Peking University had already been a model of highest standards of comprehensive university education in China, ever since the first day the University was established. Peking University has always been so! Tsinghua University, on the other hand, represents the highest standards of higher education in the field of Science and Engineering—devoted to training the next generation of engineers in large numbers.

During the early years, for those students who graduated from a top comprehensive university in China like Peking University, what kind of career paths would they usually take? Would these young talents be assigned by the Chinese Government to take up positions in different government organizations or units?

It took us about 10 years (1978–88) to recover from the Cultural Revolution. After restoring ourselves back to the former settings, we began to think about gradual development. The unfortunate 10-year Cultural Revolution created a temporary but serious shortage of trained personnel to replace the older generation in China. For this reason, once we graduated from university, many of us were often given “obligatory” jobs—that meant being assigned to take up whatever job needed to be done or whatever positions needed to be filled. In other words, we could not really choose our own professions based on our personal interests or preferences. But the situation began to change gradually.

Shortly before our university graduation, we were asked to take part in a questionnaire survey—to solicit everyone’s opinions and career preferences. On the questionnaire, we were asked: “Would you prefer to stay in your hometown, or willing to seek employment in the capital city, Beijing?” “Would you like to serve as a government official, or still wish to stay in school to further your education?”

Personally, I very much hoped that I could return to my hometown in Jiangsu. The living conditions in Beijing at that time were not comparable to Jiangsu. Moreover, my mother was living alone in Jiangsu, and
she needed someone to look after her. So I was very much hoping that I could find a job in Jiangsu, and be close to my mother at the same time. However, the teacher in our department who was responsible for assigning jobs for the graduates said to me, “There are already three students from Jiangsu, and only one person is allowed to return to Jiangsu, one to Shanghai, and one to stay in Beijing.” So he suggested that I should stay in Beijing, and work for Peking University. He also told me that, after gaining some working experiences in Beijing, it would be relatively easy to get transferred to other parts of the country for work. On the other hand, if I had started my career outside of Beijing, it would be more difficult to be transferred back to the capital city afterwards. Since everything sounded very logical to me, I decided to stay. But I never expected that I could stay here for the next 40 years, all the way till my retirement.

Could you give us a brief account describing the different stages of Peking University Library’s developments during the last four decades, that is, from 1978 to the present?

After the Cultural Revolution was over, everything was desperately waiting to be rebuilt from ruins. Naturally, funding was very scarce. Only a few hundred thousand US dollars were allocated to the whole University every year. Later, we started to recruit graduate students. Since there were graduate programs and graduate students, there was a great need for the University Library to acquire books and other research materials from overseas, particularly English-language journals for supporting these graduate programs at Peking University. Unfortunately, the Library did not have any funding.

In order to tackle this problem, a group of senior professors from Peking University, including the most well-known scholar of ancient Indian languages and culture, Professor Xianlin Ji (季羡林), all joined forces and wrote a letter to Peking University’s senior management simply saying that there was no point recruiting graduate students, since there were no materials in the University Library for these students to do research with. This letter pleading for money was addressed to the Ministry of Education, and was then forwarded to the Ministry of Finance for discussions, with the hope of finding a solution. I think the letter eventually reached the top level of the central government. Finally, we got a message from Deng Xiaoping or some senior officials from the central government, indicating that the Ministry of Education had agreed to allocate a special fund of two million US dollars for rebuilding Peking University at all levels, that is, including funds for recruiting graduate
students. Since we are a large university, each discipline or individual
department was allocated with approximately one to two thousand US
dollars only. If you add up all these academic disciplines/departments at
Peking University together, the University Library alone was allocated
over USD$100,000 for developing the collections and buying new books
in year 1984 alone.

At the time when Peking University Library was undertaking major organiza-
tional restructuring and reforms, the management style and operational model of
which country or university in particular did you try to model your library system
or organizational structure after?

At that time, everyone thought that the United States was the most
advanced and developed country, so we all wanted to learn from the US
library community. The Library of Congress (United States) and the
Harvard—Yenching Library\textsuperscript{12} would send professional librarians or other
visitors to come to Peking University Library for professional exchanges
from time to time.

Having said that, there were relatively few professional exchanges and
scholarly visits going on between China and the United States at that
time. But there were a few Chinese-Americans who were working in dif-
f erent libraries in the United States at that time. They would sometimes
come to China as visiting scholars, while using the opportunity to visit
their families or relatives at the same time. It was through these Chinese-
American visiting scholars and academic exchange opportunities that we
managed to establish some kind of professional network with the library
communities in the United States, as well as allowing other local Chinese
librarians to learn about the latest developments in the field of librarian-
ship outside China.

When you were visiting the libraries in the United States for the very first
time, it was before the age of the electronic catalog and Internet, what did you hope
to learn from your North American library colleagues at that time? Was it mostly
about the philosophy behind modern library leadership and management?

We learned about everything and anything, for example, concepts
about modern library collection management (e.g., how to develop a pol-
icy for collection development), resources sharing, interlibrary loan ser-
ices, cooperative cataloging initiatives, union catalogs, and more—none
of these services were available in China at that time.

\textsuperscript{12} Harvard—Yenching Library—Homepage. Available from http://hcl.harvard.edu/librar-
ies/harvard-yenching/.
During the first 10 years after the Cultural Revolution was over, when academics and librarians were allowed to travel out of China for professional and academic exchanges, what kinds of key skills or technologies did the librarians from China really focus on learning from their North American counterparts?

Taking the Peking University Library as an example, during the 1980s we did try our very best to send library professionals to different advanced countries (mostly the United States or Canada) to further their education and training in different areas of LIS. We also managed to send some Peking University Library staff to library schools in the United States to further their education. We also had to take loans from the World Bank in order to secure the funding to put our colleagues through library schools in different overseas countries.

How did you manage to go to the United States as a visiting scholar from 1994 to 1995? Who provided the funding support during your visit to the University of Illinois at that time? Was that your very first time to leave China and to put your foot on foreign soil?

No, it was the second time. The very first time I left China was to attend an overseas academic conference held in Japan. I gave a presentation at this overseas conference.

Actually, I was supposed to go to England instead. At that time, the British Council was providing funding for scholars from Mainland China to go to the United Kingdom to further their studies in different library schools. My application was already approved and accepted in 1988. Unfortunately, my application experienced a serious delay, as the British Post Office workers were going on strike, and I missed the admission deadline. Then the British Council suggested that I would defer the enrollment until 1 year later. So I decided to wait one more year. Then, in 1989, the student-led Tiananmen Square protests broke out coincidentally in June that year. So after all the efforts made and even with my application approved and accepted, I could not go to England to further my studies.

Finally, in 1994 my opportunity arrived, as I went to the University of Illinois as a visiting scholar. It was a joint academic exchange set up between Peking University and the University of Illinois that I took part in. Every year, the University of Illinois would accept a few visiting scholars from Peking University, and I was one of those visiting scholars who got accepted. In order to be selected, I had to submit an application, and

\[^{13}\text{University of Illinois—Homepage. Available from http://illinois.edu/}.
}
also had to pass the English language test. Finally, my application was approved and accepted.

When you finally got the chance to travel to the United States to take part in this academic exchange program for the very first time, what exactly was going through your mind then? Had you already worked out some clear objectives, with the hope that everything you learned from the United States could one day be contributed back to Peking University?

Everyone who came back from the United States kept praising how “advanced” this country was. Many of them went to the United States at their own expense, and some decided to stay there after earning their university degrees, and did not return to China. I was never that ambitious, and did not go to the United States with any big aims or long-term goals. I was only thinking how we library professionals in China could better develop our own university libraries based on the skills and knowledge acquired from our North American colleagues. Honestly, I never had any big dreams or ambitious plans at that time, in terms of how I could one day contribute back to the LIS community.

Out of everything you learned from your North American colleagues, what did you find to be most impressive and useful? Many people would say it is the American democratic system that allows genuine freedom of speech, more choices, and the majority get to decide what is best for their communities and workplaces, which in turn have enabled the country to become so advanced in so many areas.

I went to the United States as a visiting scholar in 1994. The mid-1990s was also the same time when the Internet had just begun to have revolutionary impacts on our daily life and modern-day culture, for example, email, instant messaging, online discussion forums, blogs, social networking, online shopping sites, etc. Internet and its practical applications, for example, ftp, Netscape, Webpages, etc., were all just introduced to the wider public, and everything was still at an infancy stage at that time. For this reason, most of my time and energy were devoted to attending lectures and seminars, with the aim of understanding the latest developments in LIS, and most importantly to master the basic functions of these new online applications. At the same time, I took four other LIS-related courses at the University of Illinois. One of these courses was about Library Management and Administration. Another important LIS-related course I took was on Library Resources Development and Sharing. I have to admit, both courses made a deep impression on me because of the course contents and the way these lectures were delivered and the
pedagogy—they were drastically different from the learning experiences I had in China.

In what ways were they different from each other?

Taking Library Management as an example, the professor would first talk about the history and development of Management Science. Taking Taylor’s standard operating procedure as a starting point, he would then move on to discussing the more humanistic approach in management. During his lectures, he would be constantly using slide projections and even clips and scenes from movies to illustrate his points. For example, he once showed us a scene from Charlie Chaplin’s silent movie *Modern Times* (1936), in which a factory worker was employed on an assembly line, in order for students to develop a better understanding of the development of management theory in the context of a modern, industrialized society. I thought that was very effective in terms of making an impact on students’ learning—something that I had never experienced before when I was in China.

In your opinion, what are the major differences between the traditional style of Chinese management and the more modern approach of operational management (in the context of academic library) brought in from North America?

The concepts of Library Management in China were actually modeled after the same approach that was developed in the West. For this reason, organizational structures amongst libraries in China are found to be very similar to their North American counterparts. For example, the whole library structure is made up of the following divisions: Circulation Services, Reference Services, Technical Services, etc. The only major difference was that libraries in North America continued to develop, while libraries in China were seriously held back because of a series of political and social upheavals. For this obvious reason, libraries in China could not measure up or catch up with our North American counterparts. That is why people like me carry the heavy responsibility of bringing the latest developments from the outside world to develop the LIS profession and practices in China.

As you said, the development of librarianship as a profession was very much held back because of the political and social upheavals that occurred in the past few decades. All these have resulted in obvious disparities between China and other Western countries. In terms of the professional library profession and practices, where exactly could such disparities be found?

I think it was mostly those conceptual things (such as professionalism and service attitudes), rather than the operational side of the library
business, such as the Western approach of library management and the philosophy behind it. It is much more difficult to change one’s or a group of people’s attitude or way of thinking. For example, we were all working with very limited resources in the past, so you had to know someone working inside the library in order to borrow books. If you did not know anyone from the library, you might not be able to borrow anything at all. Situations like this would simply be unimaginable amongst libraries in North America.

As the Library Director, I had to find ways to change this culture and service mentality. In other words, I had to teach and promote the concept of equality of access, the concept of fairness, the concept of library users’ rights, intellectual property rights, copyright, etc. The concepts of “user-centered services,” and “giving priority to service instead of economic self-interest” have been seriously lacking amongst our library professionals, owing to the nonstop sociopolitical upheavals that took place in China in the past decades. Hence, we have to try hard to reinstall these concepts back to the services attitudes amongst our library professionals.

Let’s say in 50 years, what kind of roles would you like the Peking University Library to play in the academic library community on a global level?

I think after so many decades of steady development, from management concepts to the level of facilities and service quality, we should be close enough to be comparable to our international counterparts. Right now, the main gap lies in the discrepancy between our service attitudes, and the belief or motivation in “going the extra mile.” In other words, the level of professionalism amongst our library professionals, their creativity, and their ability to innovate are still lagging behind. Relatively speaking, there is still a gap in our level of professionalism and service attitude, and not in the hardware or facilities.

I suppose it is after all our social environment and cultural climate that ultimately determine how we Chinese people think and work. China has a very long history and civilization—of course, there are the good aspects of the Chinese culture and traditions, but there is also this negative side. These negative aspects could influence or affect the level of professionalism, that is, the attitudes amongst us library professionals as LIS service providers. Let me use this as an example, many of our North American colleagues are choosing librarianship as a career, because they have a passion for library work. So, one could easily feel their enthusiasm when they are at work. For example, they are far more proactive, and would strive to identify new and innovative ways to meet or even surpass their
end-users’ needs. On the other hand, many of the library professionals in China chose a career in librarianship not because of their passion or enthusiasm, but merely because of a relatively safer and more stable working environment. In other words, their choices of profession were very much shaped or compelled by external circumstance, for example, library work being less competitive. As it is not a career that they chose out of passion or a sense of purpose (or both), many of them are not aiming to make any big or small contributions to the library community, or to the end-users. In that sense, the level of professionalism and the working attitudes amongst the library professions in China seem far more passive by comparison.

China is one of the fastest-growing major economies in the world. There are many business opportunities for making money outside the education sector, especially for large Chinese cities like Shanghai and Beijing. So what are the ultimate intrinsic or extrinsic factors that influence people to choose a career in librarianship under China’s current economic and employment climate?

Many people still think that LIS-related work is relatively more steady, relaxing, and less competitive, in comparison to the business world. Plus, the working environment is very good: always working inside air-conditioned buildings, and there are also long summer and winter vacations. Most people working outside the education sector do not have summer and winter vacations like us. Peking University also has affiliated kindergartens and elementary schools that are close by, where parents working for Peking University could send their children to. In addition to their convenient locations, the quality of education provided by these affiliated kindergartens and elementary schools is also very high.

Although the salary of being a librarian at Peking University might not be very high in comparison to other profit-making organizations, because of these extrinsic factors, library work at a top-ranking university like Peking University is still comparatively attractive. Particularly to married women who do not have big career ambitions, many of them think the nature of library work is relatively steady, that is stable working hours, stable income, thereby allowing them to spend more time and energy to take care of their families, especially when they have young children.

As the General Director of the Peking University Library, what do you do to change the library organizational culture, in order to create a positive and supportive working environment for your library staff?

When it comes to recruiting new library staff, we always try to look for young people possessing relatively more outstanding qualities to fill
the positions—outstanding in a sense that they are more proactive at work, and not afraid of taking extra steps. After they have been recruited, we have to give them the right kind of training—that is to allow them to develop a better sense of the true nature and “real meaning” of library work, and the current information climate, as well as the end-users’ needs and demands. In other words, we have to help them develop more positive and desirable attitudes and values towards library work, so that they are well prepared for the long career in librarianship ahead of them.

In fact, under my direction, our Library has recently adopted this job rotation exercise, that is every 2 years our library professionals are required to rotate between different workstations or departments within the Library at an interval of 2 years in between. The objectives of this job rotation exercise are to provide a systematic method of enlarging the professional demands, as well as adding a variety of skills, knowledge, and competencies required as a library professional takes on more duties. In practice, we have implemented this two-way selection system—that is every 2 years, an existing library professional may suggest three different preferred areas of LIS work. Then the head of department would come to discuss with you to see whether the position you are applying for is actually suitable for you at all. There have been incidents that applications during the job rotation exercise were declined, because the position was found to be unsuitable for the applicant. The main benefits of this job rotation exercise could be summarized as follows:

- It has the potential to motivate library professionals in their job performance, and could reduce boredom at work;
- Moreover, it could enhance individual library staff’s versatility, flexibility, at the same time, allowing them to gain more knowledge about the overall library operations;
- Ultimately, it gives a higher incentive for our library colleagues to perform better at work, while allowing them to be better prepared to be promoted to senior or managerial positions in the library in the long run.

*Could you describe the staffing structure of Peking University Library?*

Similar to the North American system, Peking University Library staff is made up of a strong team of professional librarians and para-professionals. Professional librarians are expected to be master-degree holders in LIS or in other related subject fields. We librarians at Peking University also carry the same faculty title, and faculty status, as our academic counterparts within the University community.
Peking University Library at its present state versus 40 years ago—could you give us a brief account of the major changes and organizational restructuring that your Library has undertaken in the past few decades? What kinds of new departments, services, or operation units have been established, in order to catch up with the evolving research and teaching trends of the faculty and researchers at Peking University?

Peking University Library has recently undergone major strategic changes and organizational restructuring. For example, former departments carrying the following traditional library functions: Acquisitions, Cataloging, Circulation, Serials, Special Collections, and other operation and reader services subunits, such as Multimedia, do not exist in Peking University Library anymore. We also had a unit called the Computer Science Research Department, but it was converted to the Library Automation Unit, and then later rebranded to the Systems Department. In 2015, we decided to go through some major restructuring, that is, we managed to merge different departments and operation units together, from the previous 13, downsizing to only seven. One of the main operation units is the Resources Development Center, that is to perform all functions or tasks related to cataloging, end-processing, subscription of electronic resources, metadata, paper-, digital-based, and multimedia materials, and other functions that are associated with open access and dissemination—they are all built-in under this Resources Development Center. At the same time, we have been trying to enhance our effectiveness and efficiency by streamlining and centralizing our Library’s operations. In other words, our operations are not defined by the language or format of materials; instead they are defined by the different academic disciplines being taught at Peking University in order to allow us to provide better services and learning supports, and to cater for the needs of different academic departments that we are serving.

At the same time, our Library has established two new units, namely, the Learning Support Unit and Research Support Unit. The names of these two operation units are self-explanatory—that is all the support services and functions related to learning and teaching will be under the jurisdiction of this Learning Support Unit. Meanwhile, the Research Support Unit is set up with the mission to provide assistance and intelligence to researchers, faculty, and students at Peking University to validate and review the research results, as well as analyzing the competitiveness of different academic disciplines. The Research Support Unit is also responsible for identifying, recommending, and creating resources for supporting
their research and academic endeavors. Furthermore, we have recently established a new Information Center—carrying the responsibility of teaching the application of Information Communication Technology (ICT). Any issues and functions related to information and technology management, and digitalization are now all centralized and managed by this Information Center. Last, but not least, we have two more departments under our Library, namely the Special Resources Unit, and the Rare Book Collections Department.

The missions of Peking University Library are as follows:

- Embracing diversity;
- Being the guardian—that is ensuring the torch of our culture and civilization are passed down to future generations;
- Being an innovative service provider;
- Contributing to maintaining harmonious developments.

The digital library is the window or gateway of knowledge and information, meeting the needs of our end-users in a varying of formats, for example, answering reference enquiries, circulation of books, information and research consultation via the subject librarian system, interlibrary loans, online document delivery, user tutorials, online information literacy instruction, research data management, and many other services.

Peking University Library was not established until 1912. The funding situations were so bleak during the first half as well as the second half of the 20th century. Could you tell us how the Peking University Library became a repository of rare book collections of such immeasurable cultural and historical values?

Interestingly, Peking University Library was founded even earlier than the National Library of China. In other words, in the early days before the National Library of China was actually established, Peking University Library was already performing some of the core roles and functions of the National Library—that is being the national repository. In 1952, Peking University was merged with Yenching University. For this reason, the collections of Yenching University Library and Peking University Library were merged together and became one single library collection. That is the reason why one could find materials belonging to the former Yenching University Library collection inside the current Peking University Library.

Could you give us a brief account of the history and development of the Peking University Library?

\textsuperscript{14} National Library of China—Homepage. Available from \url{http://www.nlc.cn/newen/}.
Peking University Library was one of the earliest “modern” libraries ever established in China. Peking University Library was formerly known as the Imperial University of Peking Library (京師大學堂藏書樓), and the library building itself was constructed in 1898. According to historians and experts, items of high historical value could be found amongst the Peking University Library collection, for example, a stitch-bound book [雕版朱印的線裝古籍《大學堂書目》] printed in Qing Dynasty during the 25th year of Emperor Guangxu (1899).

In 1912, the Imperial University of Peking changed its name to Peking University. Peking University Library took up its current name in 1930. Before and after the May Fourth Movement (1919), Peking University Library was also one of the main centers or gathering points for a series of anti-imperialist, cultural, and political movements. Dazhao Li (李大釗), Mao Zedong (毛澤東), and many other revolutionary leaders have worked here (as librarians) at Peking University Library. During the period of the Republic of China (1912–49), many influential and world-renowned famous scholars, such as Shizhao Zhang (章士釗), Tongli Yuan (袁同禮), and Da Xiang (向達) all spent time working here at Peking University Library. Former Presidents of Peking University Library including Yuanpei Cai (蔡元培), Menglin Jiang (蔣夢麟), and Shi Hu (胡適), have all made immeasurable contributions to the development of Peking University Library on many different levels. In 1952, Peking University Library merged together with the original Yenching University Library. In 2000, Peking University also merged with Beijing Medical Sciences University. These are the reasons why and how Peking University managed to acquire and develop such large and comprehensive collections of both modern as well as premodern martials of high historical, cultural, and academic value.

*Could you tell us about the highlights of the Peking University Library collection?*

As of 2015, the Peking University Library collection consists of 11 million items, out of which eight million of them are printed materials, and over 500 electronic databases. Our digital resources collection has already exceeded 3 million titles. Our Rare Books collection has 15 million titles of Chinese-language rare books (including stitch-bound books and stone rubbings), out of which 200,000 of them are of high cultural and historical value, dating all the way back to between the 5th and the 18th centuries.
Could you tell us how Peking University Library became the hosting institution for CALIS, the nationwide academic library resources-sharing consortium that is modeled after OCLC?

In 1995, the Ministry of Education of China initiated this major project, called Project 211, aiming at raising the research standards of top universities and cultivating strategies for socioeconomic development. This name came from an abbreviation of the slogan “Facing the 21st Century,” for the 21st century to manage 100 universities successfully, where 100 was an approximate number of participating universities. During the first phase of Project 211 (from 1996 to 2000), approximately USD$2.2 billion was distributed to different key national universities and colleges throughout China. Today, China has about 116 institutions of higher education (about 6%) designated as Project 211 institutions for having met certain scientific, technical, and human resources standards, and offer advanced degree programs. Despite large amounts of funding being allocated by the central government for developing these key universities at different levels, resources and manpower tended to scatter throughout the participating institutions without any good reason. As a result, it was agreed that a strategy for centralizing information and resources-sharing networks should be developed, in order to allow more effective utilization of funding, manpower, and resources. The two nationwide information and resources networks developed under this strategy are namely CALIS and CERNET (China Education and Research Network). Eventually, Tsinghua University Library became the hosting institution for CERNET, while Peking University took up the responsibility for managing CALIS.

Could you give us a brief account of the latest developments of CALIS?

At present, CALIS has become the largest academic cooperative initiative library for resources sharing, supporting thousands of libraries in making information more accessible and more useful to people throughout China. We already have over 1000 member libraries under CALIS. Via CALIS, they are doing online cooperative cataloging, interlibrary loans, document delivery, as well as sharing of theses and dissertations online. We are also developing a series of online service platforms, aiming to serve a larger number of small and medium-sized libraries throughout China. In short, CALIS is the product of our joint efforts and fruitful collaborations of our member libraries.

---

Peking University Library has always been playing a leadership role, serving as a role model for all academic libraries throughout China to follow. Being the Library Director of such a key academic institution, do you sometimes find the responsibility and knowledge required to be overbearing? There is this old saying, “great responsibility entails a large amount of anxiety”—do you agree with it?

Because of various historical reasons, ever since the very first day Peking University was established, the University has always been taking a leadership role in scholarship and education in China. Because of the status of our parent institution, the University Library has also taken up a similar leading position—serving as a role model for other academic libraries throughout China to follow, before as well as after the Cultural Revolution.

Being the leader of the academic library community in China means that we (Peking University Library) have to come up with many new and unique ways to motivate the other CALIS members to become your “followers.” In order to convince them to follow your vision, your followers need to see the benefits by following the goals and visions laid out for them—that is for them to share the benefits of the results of our joint ventures and trustful collaborations, and being willing to take up the responsibilities of being a CALIS member.

Could you describe your roles and areas of responsibility for serving as the General Director of Peking University Library?

Being the General Director of Peking University Library, I have to be responsible and accountable for everything that is going on inside the Library, that is including strategic planning, project implementation, physical expansion and renovation of the library building, daily operations of library services, staff recruitment, professional training for library staff, staff promotion, as well as retirement management, etc.

Could you describe your typical day at work?

My typical workday is spent on writing emails, answering phone calls, signing and approving documents, holding and attending meetings, listening to work reports or listening to colleagues to understand certain work situations, allocating manpower and resources, receiving visitors, etc.

Could you share with us your philosophy for managing libraries, in particular academic libraries?

My management philosophy is as follows:
1. “Human effort is the decisive factor,”
2. “Only the most qualified person will/should be given the job/position,” and,
As the General Director of Peking University Library, which parts of your work do you find most rewarding, and which do you find most frustrating?

Being able to meet or sometimes surpass the needs and demands of our end-users, our library colleagues or senior management of the university—I always find this very rewarding. Not being able to accomplish the tasks despite the long time and efforts invested—that tends to frustrate me.

Regarding the Western approach to library leadership versus the concepts of traditional leadership in the Chinese Confucian context, what are the major differences between both management systems?

I would say each leadership style and management approach has its own unique characteristics and merits. I would describe it this way: traditional Chinese leadership implies “power concentrated with leaders,” while Western-style leadership generally refers to “power dispersed amongst leaders.” Under the Western democratic system, leaders are usually elected by the group or the communities they serve. Leaders are usually selected because of their own competence or because of their intrinsic leadership characteristics. Secondly, because leaders are selected based on election, so they need to actively try to gain others’ supports for their policy positions. On the other hand, leaders (including library directors) in China are appointed (not elected) by the Ministry of Education. If you are unable to convince your followers to follow you (as a leader) by appealing to their reason, for example, if your followers are not able to see any short-term benefits (such as granting them more resources), it would be very difficult to rally their support, resulting in them being not willing to follow your leadership to accomplish the missions or goals set out by you as the leader.

For example, you need to give individual libraries or operation units more opportunities to take part in different professional exchanges and development projects, that is including allocating more funding supports or other resources—so that they could all see that their own libraries or library staff could also benefit directly from following your direction in the short-term and in an immediate sense. In other words, you need to have negotiation and bargaining skills that are similar to those of a corporate CEO/politician.

As for the qualities, competencies, and personal traits of an academic librarian China in Mainland China, how are they different from their Western counterparts?
In North America and Western Europe, leaders or directors are selected based on criteria (usually professional skills and experiences) set by the nominating committee. On the contrary, leaders in China are not selected via election, but appointed by higher authorities.

What kind of characteristics and qualities are necessary for a successful library director?

Different library directors have different leadership and management styles, as well as personality traits. In my opinion, most successful library directors possess the following qualities:

1. Long-term vision and good understanding of the current, as well as future trends of library services;
2. Commitment and strong sense of responsibility;
3. Being transparent, honest and fair;
4. Being honest truthful and trustworthy.

What kind of challenges do you think the academic library professionals worldwide would be facing in the next 5—10 years?

Library services in digital format will continue to evolve as a result of technological developments. Because of the drastic growths in volume and content and new forms of library services, new styles of operational or strategic management will be needed to respond to all these new and fast-moving changes, as well as increasing demands from end-users. In the next 5—10 years, digital contents will become the core of library collections, and libraries and librarians might depend more than ever on digital technologies to enable the spread of information and contents across large and previously underserved populations.

If a young person is aspired to choose librarianship as a life-long career, what kind of advice would you give to him or her?

Out of all the retirees who have previously worked at Peking University Library, one third of them have lived healthily and happily beyond age 80. In fact, I know that the oldest retiree (from Peking University Library) actually lived to around 103. For this reason, I said this publicly at our last staff meeting, “I know for a fact that being a librarianship is a very satisfying and rewarding career, because it would help us lead longer and healthier lives...”—this is what I would say to encourage people who are interested in becoming future librarians.
Peking University Library.

Peking University Library at sunset.
Peking University Library.

A young student using the Peking University Library collection.
Qiang Zhu, Director of the Peking University Library.

Peking University Library's reading area.
Peking University Library’s main hall.