Library Science Education for Foreign Students and Their Employment in the United States

EDITORIAL NOTE: The topic was the central theme for discussion at the Annual Meeting of Mid-West Chinese-American Librarians Association held on May 4, 1974. Professors Lester Asheim and Melvin Klatt were speakers and Mr. Robert P. Chen, Dr. Zubiadah Isa, Mr. Thein Swe and Dr. Anthony Yueh-shan Wei served as panelists. Professor Tze-chung Li of Rosary College Graduate School of Library Science presided and introduced the speakers and panel. The following are three papers presented at the meeting by Dr. Lester Asheim, Dr. Anthony Yueh-shan Wei and Mr. Thein Swe.

Library Science Education for Foreign Students

Lester Asheim*

I must confess to a certain amount of embarrassment in appearing before this group to talk about "Library Science Education for Foreign Students." After all, you know much better than I what the advantages and disadvantage are for a

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student from another country when he or she enters an American program of education. What I have to say can—at best—simply confirm your own judgments or—at worst—be inconsistent with your own experience. In either case, you will not learn much from my comments. It would have been far more fruitful, I think, if *I* were in the audience, and you would tell me what I need to know.

On the other hand, as an American educator, I might be able to tell you something about how we look at some of your familiar problems—if for no other reason than that it might indicate to you which of our ideas need correction.

From the standpoint of the American library schools, a key question always arises when we think of the relerance or value of our teaching program for a student from another country. That question is: does the student plan to return to his or her own country and to apply what he has learned here to his home situation—or does the student plan to remain in the United States and become a staff member in an American library? As you can readily understand, the kind of educational or training program that would be designed for the first purpose might be different in many respects from one designed to serve the second purpose. Even the prerequisites for admission might be different, and even if in general outline the two programs were the same, certainly the kind of emphasis that might be put upon certain aspects of the program would differ.

Nevertheless there are some factors that must be taken into account whether the student plans to return to his home country or remain here, and I shall touch very lightly upon those that seem most important to me. The first, of course, is the problem of language. In Dr. Cornovsky's study of the foreign student in American library schools, the most frequently mentioned handicap by the recent foreign graduates was insufficient fluency in English. Passing the TOEFL language test doesn't really take care of it: ability to pass an examination is a far cry from facility in understanding and absorbing lectures rapidly given, from confidence in presenting an oral report to a class, from comfortable participation in discussions with American student groups, and particularly from ease in preparing

reports.

You do not need to be told that the situation is not helped by the great variety of regional accents, local slang, and careless diction which characterize American speakers, lecturers and teachers. When one is very familiar with the language, these variations do not present too great a problem—although even Americans sometimes have trouble when they go from one region of the United States to another. But if one is not fluent in the language and its variations, it is as though there were a great number of smaller foreign languages within the major one—and they all present a barrier to communication and understanding.

Thus whether the student is going to become an American librarian or not, a good command of English is essential if he or she is to get much benefit from the experience in the library school. If an applicant lacks sufficient proficiency in the language to carry the load of reading, writing, and class participation that our courses demand, he is not yet ready to enter an American library school program—and I do not see any way out for the American library school except to reject the application. Such an action, harsh as it may seem, is really a kindness to the student whose time in the school would otherwise have been wasted, and whose ability to use what he had learned when he goes into a library position—here or abroad—would be so limited as to be harmful both to him and to library service.

Closely related to the language handicap is lack of familiarity with the American cultural background, difficulty in adapting to American customs, and following discussions related to American history, traditions, government and social conditions. Even though they have no difficulty in understanding the language itself, many students are lost trying to place lectures and readings in their cultural context, because of the heavy in American schools upon American society and educational background.

One of the most frequent troubles mentioned by those who responded to Dr. Carnovsky's questionnaire was that of adjusting to American teaching methods. They cited such practices

as the short periods between term examinations, the way we drop a topic when the semester is over and plunge into an entirely different one, the heavy reading assignments outside the prescribed textbook, the large amount of classroom time spent on student discussion rather than in professorial lectures, the use of True-False and other such objective tests—and many more such academic habits to which the American student is accustomed but which pose real problems of adjustment for graduates from other educational systems.

These are a difficulty while the student is in school, but are not terribly serious for those who return to their home countries. But for the student who hopes to remain in the United States, these cultural shocks are going to continue in almost every aspect of library practice. One of the unique strengths of library work is the fact that it does reflect the society in which it operates, and is closely connected with that society. A librarian, however well qualified in library skills, cannot do an adequate job if he or she does not understand the interests of the library's users, or the atmosphere in which demands are made upon library services, or the values that libraries support in their particular communities. We are finding this to be true even for American students who try to provide library service to other Americans who happen to have had a different background and life style. The urgent need to recruit more librarians from minority groups in our society is a reflection of this experience.

In this connection, let me tell you an illustrative true story. In the branch of the San Francisco Public Library which is located in that city's Chinatown, there has always been an effort to hire Chinese librarians for the staff. This makes good sense, and undoubtedly the Chinese librarians have, for the most part, been able to serve their community better for the very reasons of language and knowledge of customs that I have been mentioning. The librarians, experts on the traditional Chinese culture, have worked to preserve it in the library and have purchased a great deal of the classical literature, carefully cataloging and classifying it, and building up an excellent special collection unrivalled by any of the other

branches. But this is not a library in China, it is a library serving the Chinese in the United States, and there have been many complaints in recent years that the library is too heavily weighted in the direction of Chinese classics and subject matter, too much devoted to preservation of the tradition, and too little reflective of current American materials and interests. The Chinese users of the library have become Americanized (I will not argue whether that is good or not) and they want a library that will reflect not only their past, but their presents—not so much as Chinese, but as hyphenated Chinese-Americans. If this can happen to a Chinese librarians serving a predominantly Chinese community in the United States, think how much more serious such a clash of cultural values could be in a predominantly occidental community.

Concerning the value of American library education for those who do wish to return to their home countries, I am sure you are better qualified to speak than I, but it does not seem unlikely that something of this same clash of cultures could occur - in reverse. In the Conference on Library Education and Training in developing Countries held in Hawaii in 1966, it was the conclusion shared by Asian and American librarians alike that where library schools exist in the home country, they are the best source of *basic* professional library education and training. Schools abroad (including those in the United States) can make their best contribution by offering advanced or specialized work to those who already have the professional qualification in their home country.

This recommendation arises, as much as anything, out of the fact that American library schools are so completely keyed to the needs of the United States and the American library that their real value for a foreign student lies not in training in specific technical skills of library practice but rather in identifying broad principles and theories of library service. There is no way, I think, for American schools to provide the kind of intensive training needed in the reference and bibliographic tools, the general publications, and the equipment specific to each of the countries around the world. Nor can the American schools manage the language skills needed, or the

understanding of conditions in other countries, to meet the requirements of beginning students of librarianship who plan to serve in an environment and a culture very different from our own.

In Dr. Carnovsky's study, some of the suggested changes requested by the student revealed the complexity of the problem. The foreign students wanted more emphasis upon materials from their own countries and in their own languages; more attention paid to UDC and Colon Classification; more course work that would be useful to *them*, but only peripherally useful to the majority of the students in an American school—including the students from other countries beside the one to which the individual respondent belonged. Obviously, with the best will in the world, an American school can not cover every possibility equally well, nor can it ignore its responsibility to the American student, and the American libraries into which most of its graduates will go. Thus the American bias is inevitable, and for that reason, American education for librarians who will work in other countries will always be somewhat limited in its day-to-day relevance.

I am not suggesting that additional and less provincial content would not be useful, even to the American student. Our programs would undoubtedly be better for a deeper international awareness, more attention to universal problems, and a sounder understanding of the whole library world rather than just our small corner of it. But given the limitations upon time, the immediate needs of our own libraries, and the limited knowledge most of us have of foreign libraries and foreign languages, we cannot promise to be able, very soon, to add this further dimension to our programs although some of us are trying. I do not think the American educational experience, even though biased, is completely wasted for the student from another country, but I do think that the foreign student is likely to get much more useful *basic* training in the environment in which he or she plans to work.

This suggests, of course, that students from other countries who do want to become librarians in American libraries would do well to come to an American library school. If you

have your eye on employment in an American library, you will be much better off if you are able to present a degree from a program accredited under ALA's *Standards for Accreditation.* While an American library is often quite willing to accept a foreign credential which is adjudged the "equivalent" of an ALA-accredited program, there are so many problems and difficulties in establishing equivalency that this is never an assured way of qualifying for placement in an American library.

And when you come to an American school, you must expect to take the same program, and meet the same requirements, that American students do. I think this is extremely important; the standards and the requirements should be the same for all students—for the students' sake as well as for the profession. If it is known that standards are lowered, or programs diluted for foreign students—and when I travelled abroad I found that it was indeed well known which are the "easy" schools in the United States—the degree they get will soon be meaningless; a handicap rather than a help. This applies to students who return to their home countries as well as to those who remain in the United States. However, when I say that the standards must be equal to those required of all other students, I am not saying that the content of the program cannot be different. Obviously, it would be useful for a foreign student to pursue certain special projects which give him a chance to try adapting the principles he is learning here to the needs of his own country, and to learn certain kinds of information essential to practice at home which may not be essential to practice in the United States (I think of the preservation of materials in a tropical climate, for example, for some but not all students). But if you do go back with an American qualification, then it should be as good as it can be.

I have been speaking, primarily, of what the American library school can do for the foreign student. But let me remind you that American educators are well aware that the presence in the student body of students from other countries serves to enrich and broaden the educational experience for our American students too. The foreign student in the American

library school really does represent an *exchange*—a two-way transaction with benefits going both ways.

Education and Role of Academic Librarians

Anthony Yueh-shan Wei*

In recent years there is a strong and growing support to the idea that the university library is an integral part of the learning process, and the academic librarians are equal colleagues of the teaching faculty. Consequently the preparation and role of academic librarians should cope with the new trend and development in American higher education.

I. The Change in American College Education:

Although it is not easy to change a traditional institution, something is going on in American higher learning. Institutions as gardens of virtue, Colleges as a paradise of four golden years, the B. A. as I. D. card to the middle class society, [1] and professors as proprietors of controlled knowledge are all ideas currently being discussed and criticized by both committed faculty and students. Fortunately the result of today's dissatisfaction of American colleges, is that the true meaning of education is being scrutinized and studied. Specifically, two particular features are gaining ground in education.

A. Interdisciplinary program and thematic major:

Both faculty and students realize that education is not limited nor principally intended to develop a particular skill for

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a certain position in the society, but it has as its objective the personal fulfillment, the developing of all aspects of one's potential which contribute to individualization and personality. A too detailed compartmentalization of knowledge is not at all a realistic and definitely not the best way to educate the whole person. Thus interdisciplinary programs are being widely introduced in colleges across the country.

In addition to the interdiscipinary program that is mostly limited to the organization of particular courses, the thematic major was recently introduced creating a different type of college. In this program, students should work constantly with a responsible and conscientious faculty adviser to plan the general program and particular courses to develop his personal talents.

B. Independent Study:

In addition to more flexible programs, teaching methods are drastically changing in American higher education. Professors are now less convinced that they are the only symbols of knowledge, and that the exact transmission of what mankind achieved in the past is not a sure way of securing progress in the future. These changes together with a more trustful confidence in the person of the student, the teaching method of independent study is developing and widely gaining more acceptance in the modern colleges.

II. How Does This Change Affect College Libraries:

In order to make "independent study", "thematic major", etc. meaningful and not just an euphemism for a hidden irresponsibility on the part of both faculty and students, the library must be studied, evaluated and used. To reach this point, I fail to see how a few lectures on library orientation during the freshman year could be sufficient. More serious and demanding courses on general references and resources in the different subject fields should be offered. An advanced course on research methodology is indispensible for graduate students before they undertake their endeavor.

III. How Does the Newly Developed Teaching Method Affect the Librarians:

With the introduction of the recently developed teaching method into American colleges, professors begin to feel rather sharply their limitation and confess their deficiencies. Professor Leuba say: "only too true that we professors have not done as well as we might have done as educators. We lecture, write and enjoy the sound and sight of our own words too much. Equally harmful is our too-narrow specialization within our general subject area. We may be unaware of the best books and other educational media available outside of a small segment of that area..... The professors' failures may be the librarians' opportunity. Perhaps librarians can develop that balance between over-specialization and over-generalization which would be most appropriate for the effective guidance of undergraduates. In one small respect, librarians have already begun to grasp this opportunity. They have turned the tables on the professors and use the latter as expert consultants to write brief reviews for their book-review journal *Choice.* (Ye Gods, are we professors to become mere librarians' helpers?) [2]

How many librarians are currently aware of these opportunities? How many of them are willing and prepared to accept the challenge of this new situation? Are librarians ready to participate in and improve upon this currently imperfect process of guiding, motivating students into serious study; of providing opportunities for students to react to the educational materials to which they are exposed; and of examining and evaluating student performance? In one word, are librarians prepared to assume the role of educators? Librarians for many years have been and still are struggling for faculty status and rank, but have they done anything to justify this demand by improving the educational quality of librarianship? Have they made appropriate effort to develop their personal scholarship or are they satisfied to enjoy the ivory tower of technical services behind the scene? Support of the educational process of the institution and possessing a graduate degree does not *ipso*

facto qualify a person to be admitted to faculty status and rank; other personnel in the institution may have these two prerogatives and nevertheless are not considered as faculty members (e. g. health personnel, security officer and in some instances the staff of the counseling center). With the introduction of new programs, faculty status and rank are available to librarians. It is up to them to prove that thay are qualified and willing to accept the challenge and responsibility as well as the benefits. Most college librarians do not seem to be at a level necessary to accept this challenge, and there are even those who are not willing to do anything about it. The complaint from educators that librarians are not prepared to actively and directy participate in the educational process is not an isolated voice in the desert. [3] Therefore, the educational quality of librarianship must be improved. "If librarians are to instruct effectively, they must know something about theories of learning, educational philosophy and psychology, principles of curriculum construction, teaching method and procedures, and the social forces which affect education. They must see themselves, and must be seen by faculty and students alike, not as clerks, not as information specialists, not as purveyors of information, but as educators." [4] Among many other things to improve the present situation of college librarianship, I would like to mention two briefly.

A. Subject competence:

The ALA Standard for College Libraries prepared by ACRL under the chairmanship of Felix Hirsch fifteen years ago indicated that academic librarians "should be expected to do graduate work in such areas as would contribute to their effectiveness in their respective positions. In some instances such a program of study might well lead to a second or third Master's degree rather than to Ph. D. degree." [5] Ralph Ellsworth, responding in 1963 to the question of what is the one major problem, which still faces the library profession says, "It is clear to me that we should be staffing our university libraries with librarians who have Ph. D.'s in a subject field, plus a library education that places heavy emphasis on biblio-

graphy and analysis of the literature of scholarship." [6]

Josey and Blake supporting the same idea, say: "The academic librarian needs a subject master's or doctoral degree for many reasons. He should be one of a corps of specialists in the library, spread over all the academic disciplines, who knows his subject and is familiar with what the library has and how to find it. He should be selecting the important new and retrospective materials in the subject he knows. He should be intimately familiar, because he has done research himself, with the research process. He should be able to guide, to teach the students in his institution how to find the materials of scholarship." [7]

In spite of these and other recommendations, most of the college librarians today do not meet these ACRL standards. Moreover in many instances academic librarians are not interested in acquiring a second Masters degree and feel it is not necessary.

The Council on Library Resources, aware of the present qualitative situation of academic librarians, has recently allocated $103,000 to support fellowships at the University of Chicago for Ph.D.'s in other disciplines to earn Master degree in library science. The idea is to bring highly qualified specialists into librarianship. [8] This action of the Council on Library Resources caused strong reaction from K. Tracy and Don Lanier, two concerned librarians, striving for excellence in this profession. They view it as "a slap in the face of all librarians" and contend that librarianship will not benefit from this program and will not be able to take advantage of the Ph.D.'s subject expertise for reference and acquisitions, because they will be immediately placed in high management positions. [9] I sympathize with these two excellent librarians and wish their number will increase and soon. I have to say however, that maybe this slap is a well deserved one for many librarians. I agree with them that librarianship probably will not benefit from this program, not because this highly qualified blood will be placed in high administrative positions, but because they simply will not be hired. The staff of the university library I am associated with, consistently turned down applicants with

M. L. S. and Ph. D. degrees in subject fields as area specialists, because their presence would have been threatening and would have made the rest of the library staff feel uncomfortable.

This attitude is a disservice to a growing number of librarians committed to high quality scholarship, and to the library profession itself in perpetuating the state of mediocrity. I only hope the number of this type of University Library is limited.

B. Knowledge of Languages:

With present day communication, scholarship can hardly be limited to a particular country or language. Librarians should possess a working knowledge of at least two languages. By working knowledge, I do not mean the ability to decipher a title-page, because in order to be familiar with educational resources, a deeper knowledge of widely known languages is necessary.

IV. Conclusion:

The new teaching program in American colleges unveiled a timely opportunity for librarians. Their service is needed and without any controversy will be acknowledged, provided they do develop scholarly competency. Otherwise more and more teaching faculty will take library courses and obtain library degrees in order to support their own teaching program.

A real knowledge of a subject combined with languages will make the academic librarian not only colleague of the teaching faculty, but, perhaps more important, will enable him to serve significantly the students of his institution.

References

1. Cf Sanford, N. "Higher Education as a Social Problem." *In*: N. Sanford, *The American College: A Psychological and Social Interpretation of the Higher Learning*. N. Y. Wiley, 1962, p. 13.

2. Leuba, C. "The Roles of Librarians and Professors." *Drexel Library Quarterly*, 4:114-5, 1965.
3. Clarence Leuba refers: "To most of my colleagues in psychology, for instance, a librarian would seem unqualified to guide a student seeking to orient himself in a specific aspect of psychology, such as motivation, or even in a general way in psychology as a whole." *Op. cit.* p. 114.
4. Knapp, P. *Independent Study and the Academic Library, An Approach to Independent Study* (New Dimension in Higher Education, No. 13). U. S. Office of Education, 1965.
5. Standard for College Libraries. *College and Research Libraries*, July 1959, p. 276.
6. Ellsworth, Ralph. "Librarians Need to Know More," *Library Journal*, January 1, 1963, p. 40.
7. Josey, E. J. and Blake, F. M. "Educating the Academic Librarians." *Library Journal*, 95:126, 1970.
8. *Library Journal*, 99:96, 1974.
9. Tracy, Kenneth and Lanier, Don. "Ph. D.'s and Librarians." *Library Journal*, 99:1077, 1974.

Comments: Thein Swe*

Having been asked to comment on some of the problems and nuances surrounding employment opportunities for American trained librarians from foreign countries, I feel that I must first begin by posing the question as to what type of library employment is being sought at. Surely, the inherent pre-conditions for first qualifying for consideration for employment differ drastically between the types of libraries themselves. For example, Federal libraries would normally require citizenship as would some State and some public libraries, although of course there are exceptions. The exceptions seem to be built around language expertise, or around certain areas of expertise which an American citizen would

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not normally bring to the job. Therefore, it seems that unless there is a unique talent usually built upon some foreign element of the librarian from abroad, the chances of securing a library position which, by and large, does not require special expertise may be very minimal at best, and, at worst, may not exist altogether. This leads us, it seems, to the fundamental issue of our own career aspirations as well as to the degree to which we conceive of the importance of our potential contribu tion to the library in which we wish to work.

More often than not, American trained librarians from foreign countries face a fair amount of what I will term 'categorization' in that our country, culture, and language of origin is usually the starting point for many libraries in assessing our potential contribution to their needs. If, therefore, we wish to be engaged in library duties requiring no more particular expertise or background than what library schools in this country prepare their students for, we often face the prospect of being 'Asianized' or, at least, being pigeon-holed in some fashion. When faced with this sort of situation we must, I feel, be extremely articulate in presenting our assets and potential outside the context of our ethnic experiences and background. For some of us who have had library experience, but for whom the very *raison de'tre* of such an experience has been our 'Asian' attributes, particularly in the area of language and culture, we must, of necessity, draw as many parallels as we can between the 'Asianized' job and the more 'general' one we happen to be seeking. Specifically, I personally do not see why a cataloger who has hitherto been cataloging books for an Asian collection (albeit those materials in the vernacular) cannot possess the necessary and fundamental knowledge to transfer ability and tsak to the more 'general' area of cataloging Western language materials.

In concluding these very brief remarks, I wish to reemphasis then that it is usually a question of our visa status and of the 'special attributes' which prospective employers over-concentrate upon in their evaluation and which in many cases handicap the achievement of our goals and aspirations. Needless to say, we must make certain that our qualifications,

whether they be in the area of English language expertise or in general areas of librarianship, stand the test of comparison and competition. In this regard, I urge that we be librarians first and, Asian librarians second, without, of course, attributing any particular order of importance to those two conditions which, to me are more one and the same than different. Thank you.