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Libraries in Oregon, USA

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As a result of the staff exchange agreement signed by Oregon State Library (OSL) and Fujian Provincial Library, we came to Salem, Oregon, USA, in October 1998, for a six-week visit. During our stay we visited all of the major departments of OSL and 16 other public, special and academic libraries in Oregon. Wherever we went, we were warmly received by our American colleagues. During our visit we listened, observed, and participated in some of their activities. Their efficient management, advanced equipment, and dedication to librarianship impressed us deeply.

Library System and Management

The types of libraries in Oregon are basically the same as those we have in Fujian. The State Library, however, is classified not as a public library; rather, it is more like a government agency. It acts on behalf of the government in the promotion and planning of library development in Oregon and the assignment of state and federal grants. These functions are generally undertaken by the Bureau of Culture in Fujian and other provinces in China. A Chinese provincial library generally provides only operational assistance to city or county public libraries.

There is a Board of Directors in every state library and public library in the U.S.A. that supervises the management of a library. Some boards even have the power to make decisions on the development of the library, evaluate the performance of the director, and decide on the appointment or removal of the director. For example, the Board of Oregon State Library is composed of seven people. All except the State Librarian come from different institutions. Any citizen in the state may apply to become a member of the Board. It is a voluntary organization and plays an important role in the management of a library. The Library Board embodies democratic management and is an inspiration for us.

We were interested to find that the governance of public libraries in Oregon varies from area to area. There are

consolidated county libraries administered by counties or a special library district, as well as libraries administered by cities, by school districts, or by non-profit corporations under contract. Different districts adopt different modes of governance depending on what suits their situation best. As the financial and personnel resources also vary significantly among different areas in Fujian, we think we may make use of this pattern of governance in the development of our local libraries.

Quality Services to Users

Libraries in Oregon have done a great job in satisfying people's need for education and information, which is the goal and objective of a library. All of the library workers we met showed great love to their jobs, and we saw how enthusiastically and patiently they handled users' requests. They actively apply new and advanced equipment, so as to make information searches and book borrowing easier and friendlier to users. For example, the Online Public Access Computer (OPAC), 24-hour automatic renewal telephone system, telephone claiming system, and automatic lending machines are widely used. Due to the library workers' excellent service and the American people's love for books, the rate of turnover for the public libraries in Oregon was nearly 400 percent in 1997.

One of the characteristics of the reference service in American libraries is that they put their reference desks in the front or the center of reading rooms. Reference librarians at the desk were always ready to give help to patrons and answer their questions. Compared with American colleagues, reference librarians in China mostly work in their own offices and pay more attention to bibliographic work and the needs of organizations and enterprises rather than those of individuals. Answering questions on the phone is another major reference service for public libraries in Oregon. At the Multnomah County Public Library, there is a team that specializes in telephone reference service. They answer more than 1,000 questions every day. Telephone reference service provides people a very handy means of obtaining answers to their reference questions. As of the end of 1999, the total capacity of the telephone switchboard in China reached 155 million; that is, there were about 12 lines for every 100 persons, or one line for every 8.3 persons. The fixed number of total telephone sets was 130 million, or about one telephone for every 10 persons. Because of this increased telephone access, we have every reason to strengthen telephone reference service for our patrons in China.

During our visit in Oregon, we were touched to see that libraries there paid special attention to the needs of the handicapped. To enable handicapped to have equal to books and information, libraries have made unremitting efforts and achieved great results. The Talking Book & Braille Services (TBABS), a service for the blind in OSL, is particularly worth mentioning. It has a collection of over 200,000 items of recorded books and Braille materials. They provide tape players, recording books, and cata-

logs of new books to the blind. All of the services are free. Everyday about 1,300 items are checked out.

The development of interlibrary loan and resource sharing is a success story in Oregon libraries. As early as 1960, OSL began compiling the Oregon Union List of Serials. Interlibrary loan was already very active at that time. With the development of computer and telecommunication technology in the 1980s, interlibrary cooperation reached a new level. There were 14 automated resource sharing systems in Oregon by 1998. Library staff and users can easily get the location and status of a particular book on a terminal. Users themselves can even request a book from another library with some library systems. Every resource-sharing system has its own mail system for the interlibrary loan. It usually only takes two to three days for an item to be delivered to the requesting library. Public libraries loaned 450,000 items and borrowed 480,000 items in 1997.

Automation and Electronic Resources

By visiting 17 different libraries, small and large, public and academic, we found that the computer had become a common tool for all libraries in their daily operations. What's more, they have also made a remarkable achievement in the development of networks. Based on local area networks, dozens of wide area networks were established, like CCRLS, DYNA, PORTALS, and ORBIS, which connect libraries in the same region or system and greatly promote resource-sharing among them. Access to these networks is available for both library staff and the public via dial-in telephone or Internet. Users can easily locate items they want on OPAC. Traditional card catalogs are no longer produced, and some libraries discarded the card catalogs after they finished retrospective work. In some libraries, catalog cases were kept just for decoration.

Electronic resources have become an important part of the collections of Oregon libraries. In addition to online bibliographic databases, every library is trying to provide more electronic information for their users. They purchase databases on CD-ROM or subscribe to online information services, such as DIALOG, OCLC, CARL/UNCOVER, SEARCHBANK, and CAS. These electronic resources include bibliographic information, abstracts and, in some cases, full text. As it is usually not affordable for a single library to subscribe to an online information service, many libraries in Oregon join together in the subscription and bargain with the information company for a lower price. We think the method is also suitable for Chinese libraries.

There are many other things that we found interesting and inspiring, such as the team management in the State Library, story time and puppet shows in children's libraries, activities of the societies and friends of library, the Internet librarian conference, and so on. In a word, the visit was a valuable experience for us. We personally saw how libraries operate in the U.S.A., and we learned a lot from our American colleagues. During our stay,

librarians at OSL and the other libraries we visited gave us a lot of directions. We are grateful for their help and hope that the exchanges between libraries in Oregon and Fujian will continue to be even more fruitful. ☺

You Know Libraries

by Paula Germond
Periodicals Assistant

Shoen Library, Marylhurst College

Kneedeep in the darkwood silence
dry-muffle magic carpet words
pixelated cyber-tunnels of light
to everywhere
worn bricks Oregon-washed
by wet maple leaves
Guarding what is too sacred to be censored
day folds close, leans toward sunset
imagination closes out the books
Before key and lock can meet
the stolid doors blast in,
sandalwood rushes your nose,
a pair of desperate shadows spilling
desert from their shoes,
dark eyes terrored to the closing sundog,
begging with their hands and
two broken words-sanctuary.
In the sudden—one clear grace
against the window stain-
last echoes of the call to prayer ...
You find them space
You find yourself on point
at the sacred converge
6000 miles NW of Mecca
Its all a degree of sun and side-slant
of light through bookdust
in spite of rain
Above the closet oasis,
your 200's do not speak
The wolf of failed prayers makes
a fire-escape exit, tail down low
Salvation pools in the closet with The Faithful,
pours out from under the door.
Evening's thin thread blesses you
with Something you had not known before

Editors' Note: *An earlier draft of this poem was inadvertently published in the Winter 2001 issue of the OLA Quarterly. This is the completed version.*