Comments

Ernst Wolff

Professor Kaser’s homage to librarians as humanists has touched our heartstrings. It makes us proud to see ourselves as upholders of the humanist tradition in the process of dehumanization that has set in in many areas of our society, following the recent acceleration of the industrial revolution. The “Asian” librarian—a profession of which I count myself member—is particularly aware of the humanistic aspects of the library profession, since we handle the literary heritage of cultures that have a much longer humanist tradition than Europe, and a very emphatic humanist message. Listening to Professor Kaser’s historical remarks, the parallels in the development in European and Chinese culture comes to mind. Chinese humanism goes back to Confucius and Mencius (think of his great emphasis on jen [humaneness]), as, similarly, we can imagine Christ and the early Church rekindling the torch of humanitarianism in a period of social dehumanization. But as Christianity later, in the Middle Ages, declined into dogmatic enslavement, so did Confucianism into the doctrinaire neo-Confucianism. However, as Europe experienced its Renaissance and period of Enlightenment, so did the Chinese when the May Fourth Movement blossomed forth into a true cultural revolution, reasserting the basic humanist values, including freedom of thought and of communication, the areas that librarians are most concerned about.

We, who live in a free society, are of course so much better off as regards these basic freedoms than persons living under authoritarian regimes, but with the growing mechanization

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of our lives we face different dangers and different humanist concerns. For instance, much of our thinking is influenced—we may even say "dominated"—by radio and television, that is, by a stream of ready-made, one-sided opinions, without opportunity to argue or even question. Here the libraries and librarians stand ready to open doors to all aspects of the issue or controversy, and in this respect too, perform a truly humanist service.

We are truly grateful for Professor Kaser's lucid reminders.

Kuang-liang Hsu *

In the field of librarianship, two patterns of change are most noticeable. There are: (1) the changing formats of information, and (2) the changing roles of librarians.

The changing formats of information may be illustrated with the following examples: information on pre-printing format, such as tablets and scrolls; information on printed format, such as books and pamphlets; information on audiovisual format, such as films and filmstrips; information on micrographic format, such as microfilms and microfiches; information on machine readable format, such as magnetic tapes and paper tapes; and information on holographic format, such as holograms.

On the other hand, librarians played different roles in different situations: librarians served as curators; librarians served as historians; librarians served as managers; librarians served as media specialists; librarians served as technologists; and librarians served as information scientists.

As a result, many faces of library practice are also changing: the changing relationship between librarians and users; the changing techniques on information storage and retrieval; the

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changing library organizational structure and the changing methodology of library management.

During these changes, modern technology has been applied in the library with the aim to maximize library services to meet the changing needs of users and to free librarians from daily routines so that they can devote more personal attentions to their patrons. Dehumanization, sometimes a side effect of the technology is a result of malapplication of the technology rather than a result of the technology itself.

In the midst of changes, the highest goal of librarianship, I personally believe, remains unchanged. That goal is to provide the best service to library users. In seeking this goal, librarians are humanists in their philosophical perspectives as they contribute to the quality of human life.

Gertrude Soonja Lee Koh*

The focal point of librarianship is ‘man’. Since library services centers around the interest in and concern for man, librarianship by nature is humanistic and therefore should be humanistic in its approach to provide information to meet users’ needs. This duty of linking certain information contained in the book (book in the generic sense which embraces all types of library materials) with specific needs expressed by individual users identifies the librarian’s role as a mediator between the people who need specific information and the media which contain appropriate information expressed by authors. The librarian’s role is to bridge the gap between two groups of people: those who want certain information and those who express their ideas. Library service should be people-oriented.

The backbone for library service is the catalog which serves as a collective communication memory of recorded human knowledge and which serves as a benchmark for reference services of various types. The value of catalog information about author,

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title, bibliography, subject headings, classification numbers, etc. is intangible and cannot be measured in dollars and cents. A poorly constructed catalog is like a needle with thread tied in the middle.

The activity of organizing 'the word' is the 'hallmark of librarianship,' as stated by Dr. Kaser. This remark coming from Dr. Kaser, who had been an administrator of academic libraries for many years, is welcomed wholehartedly and is meaningful because not many administrators, who are often so far removed from cataloging, would have given so much credit to cataloging activities and other activities behind the scene, particularly in this age of computer technology. Often we wish the computer could eliminate cataloging all together. At the same time we all know that the computer alone cannot create a catalog with adequate subject approaches, which is the sole key to a vast collection of books and information. Applying the computer as a tool in order to transfer information lessens cataloging burdens, mostly routine, and encourages us to be more creative in re-structuring library manpower for efficient library operation while placing cataloging in a different perspective.

In the future, cataloging will not be an exclusive activity for catalogers alone, but rather an activity which will require involvement of all librarians. In order to help users locate needed information, librarians at the desks of reference, circulation, acquisitions, and children's as well as adult services, should be as familiar with catalog information as catalogers themselves, whose input will be the main source of information in the catalog. Whether cataloging is a territory for all librarians or not, what may frequently be forgotten in the process of cataloging is the purpose of cataloging, i.e. to serve users. Catalogers create catalog information, not for themselves, but for others, users in particular.

Taking a closer look at today's growing number of Asian-American librarians, we wonder whether we put any incalculably valuable information in the catalog which will serve a specific group of users, such as Asian-Americans. Besides the
normal cataloging duties, cataloging responsibility requires new insight and ideas in a community which is also made up of those potential users who are immigrants or which include the non-natives of the English language. Imaginative approaches make our catalog usable to this segment of the community should be investigated that the library may be a part of their daily life. We need to recognize new needs and objectives of these users who may have to tackle language barriers, who need to be assimilated into a new culture, and who should broaden social orbits to extend beyond family and at the same time strengthen their identity. If we submit that the catalog is the key to library services, we as humanists and queralists should investigate various ways of making the catalog effective and usable in bridging the specific needs of users and ideas as well as other information expressed by people and contained in the book.