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Chinese and American Forum on Legal Information and Law Libraries: Highlights from Hangzhou

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CHINESE AND AMERICAN FORUM ON LEGAL
INFORMATION AND LAW LIBRARIES

HIGHLIGHTS FROM HANGZHOU

Reporting from the fifth
biennial conference.

BY NING HAN,
EVELYN MA, & WEI LUO

The Fifth Biennial Conference of the Chinese and American Forum on Legal Information and Law Libraries (CAFLI) was held in Hangzhou, China, June 1-2, 2017. More than 60 law school deans, law librarians, and law professors from more than 50 law schools in China attended the conference. Overseas attendees included more than 25 law librarians and library directors from Germany, Canada, and the United States, as well as the presidents of the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) and International Association of Law Libraries (IALL).

The Background

CAFLI was founded to promote accessibility of legal information and to foster the education of legal information professionals in the United States and China. It was officially incorporated in February



Conference attendees during one of the sessions.

2010 in Philadelphia, with past conferences held in Beijing (2009), Philadelphia (2011), Shanghai (2013), and Honolulu (2015).

The theme of the Hangzhou Conference was “Reimagining Law Libraries: Collaboration, Sharing and Win-Win.” Law librarians from both countries benefited from programs and discussions that focused on the following eight topics:

- Integrating Legal Research Courses into Law School Curriculum
- Innovative Roles of Law Libraries in their Parent Organizations or Communities
- Collaboration and Coordination Between Law Libraries and their University Libraries
- The Role of Law Library Organizations and Alliances
- Enhancing a Library’s Value Through Faculty Services Programs: Current Models and New Trends

- Partnerships with Vendors on Reporting and Using E-Resources Statistics
- From Old to New: Designing the 21st-Century Law Library
- Big Data, Law Libraries, and Public Library Legal Service—How Big Data Enhances the Provision of In-Depth Library Services, Information Retrieval, and Decision-Making

Important Topics in Law Libraries

The keynote speaker was Yanping Lin, vice-president of East China University of Political Science and Law (ECUPL), Joan Howland, associate dean at the University of Minnesota School of Law, and Jun Zhao, associate dean of Zhejiang University Guanghua Law School. During his keynote, Lin stressed the importance of the socialization of law school libraries and advocated that law school libraries should be more open to the general public and should improve access to

legal information. ECUPL started the Center of Chinese and Foreign Legal Literature as the first law library in the nation to provide better international law resources to the public. The initiative was embraced by the local court system. Howland shared insights on how law libraries can stay relevant to their deans, faculty, and students during the economic downturn. Relevancy is the drive for innovation. She emphasized that law libraries need to know their audience, personalize their services, and be more proactive.

In a separate talk, Howland discussed the changing role of law librarians—from content collectors to content creators, from passive listeners to active teachers, from facilitators for law libraries to facilitators for law schools, and even as ambassadors to help build relationships with alumni, students, and the legal community. Referencing the “Belt and Road Initiative,” Zhao analogized law libraries as product suppliers. He raised the question, “What can law libraries do to supply better ‘products?’” Zhou

suggests that law libraries should be the heart of their institutions, and friends of their faculty and students. The law library is both a “dream and knowledge factory” as well as a platform for communication. He advocated that law libraries should make good use of advanced technologies, such as big data, cloud computing, and artificial intelligence to enhance services and fulfill the legal information needs called for by the implementation of the “Belt and Road Initiative.” (For more information on the “Belt and Road Initiative” visit bit.ly/JA18Belt.)

Global Education

Programs offered throughout the two-day conference were inspiring for legal educators and law librarians from both countries. In spite of their drastically different legal systems, there

are notable similarities in the practices employed and services provided by law librarians from both nations. Legal research, instruction, faculty services, usage tracking, outreach, and open access were recurrent themes referenced by law librarians from both countries during their presentations.

Law librarians in the United States are seasoned teachers, not only in teaching basic and advanced legal research, but also in teaching specialized practice-oriented courses. Filippa Anzalone and Sherry Xin Chen from Boston College, and Faye Jones from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign shared unique courses they taught at their respective schools and stressed the fact that law librarians, through teaching, are contributing to law schools by enriching the variety and utility of the course

offerings, thereby generating revenue for their schools. Jones teaches a legal technology course where she incorporates technology and legal ethics in research training. Additionally, her library sponsors students to attend the American Bar Association (ABA) TECHSHOW every year so that students can learn the latest technologies that facilitate virtual legal practice.

While U.S. law librarians are looking for new ways to stay relevant within their own law schools and beyond, Chinese law librarians are still in the process of shaping and redefining their roles and responsibilities. Successful completion of their dissertations is a requirement for graduation for law students in China. Professor Guohua Yang from Tsinghua University School of Law called on law librarians to take an active role



Welcome Remarks, from left to right: Xinli Zhu (Dean of Zhejiang University Guanghua University School of Law); Yanping Lin (Vice-President of East China University of Political Science and Law); Weidong Luo (Vice President of Zhejiang University); Ronald E. Wheeler Jr. (former President of AALL and Director of Boston University Fineman & Pappas Law Libraries); and James Duggan (CAFL Executive Board Co-Chair and Director of Tulane University Law Library).

in providing research assistance to students in the completion of their dissertations, as research is a heavy component of the writing process. He welcomed making it mandatory for students to consult with librarians in selecting topics and formulating research strategies. Similarly, law librarians in the U.S. help their law review teams. In some law schools, such as the University of Minnesota and Boston College, consultation with librarians is a requirement for law review students at the beginning of their courses.

Funding and Outreach

Law libraries from both countries are facing issues related to safeguarding their autonomy while maintaining a collaborative relationship with their main campus libraries. Harvard Law and Cornell Law are two unique law libraries in the U.S. in that they operate less independently, as many of their technical services functions are integrated with their main campus libraries. In comparison, a decent number of law libraries in China are still relying on their main campus library for partial funding support.

Chinese law libraries have done great work utilizing social media for student outreach. Xiamen University School of Law offers a full line of library services, including chat reference, catalog browsing, holds placement, viewing and downloads of electronic content, study room reservation, and more to their students through its WeChat public account. The library also pushes out librarian-generated content recommending new titles, discussing emerging cases and hot topics, promoting faculty publications, and research focus through its WeChat account to grab student's attention. When it comes to collecting faculty scholarship, several Chinese law librarians mentioned that they collect not only traditional scholarly publications, but also in-time and influential comments and tweets that faculty post onto their individual social media accounts. This is a novel service that no U.S. law library seems to be currently providing.

Another observation of Chinese law libraries' practices is that their collection development, electronic resource subscription, renewal, and cancellation decisions are heavily data-driven. Most Chinese law libraries tend to have better staffed information technology departments to help with data gathering, including usage data and data analysis to gauge user behavior. The panelist from Southwest University Political Science and Law explained how usage statistics tracked using AJAX technology can be more accurate, less biased, and easier for parallel comparison in contrast to vendor-supplied usage data.

Library Design and Open Access

In terms of library space design, Chinese attendees were impressed with professor James Heller's presentation of the beautiful library facility and technology integration at William & Mary School of Law Library, let alone the ping-pong room, pool room, and chess table their students and faculty can enjoy when a break is needed. Sessions on library design brought fresh ideas to Chinese attendees on how to make their future law library a more desirable space for their users.

There were also illuminating discussions on efforts of promoting open access to legal materials to the general public at the National Library of China, state law libraries, Prosecutorial Literature Center of the National Prosecutor College, and through vendor-led initiatives such as Research4Life by Brill Publishing.

Cultural Activities/Future Conference

Overall, the conference was a huge success. Attendees were also given the opportunity to walk along the scenic trail of West Lake and tour the campus of the host institution, Zhejiang University Guanghua Law School. The upcoming CAFLL biennial Conference will be held in Washington, DC, in July 2019, in conjunction with the AALL Annual Meeting. That year will also mark the tenth anniversary of CAFLL since its formation.

CAFLL strives to continue serving as a mutually beneficial forum to promote the exchange of ideas, practices, and scholarship among US-Sino law librarians. It welcomes all interested parties, old and new friends, to join the 2019 conference in Washington, DC. Please visit CAFLL for more information on the conference at bit.ly/JF18CAFLL. ■

READ

Ning Han's article "Legal Research Instruction and Law Librarianship in China: An Updated View of Current Practices and a Comparison with the U.S. Legal Education System," in the winter 2017 issue of *Law Library Journal* at bit.ly/LLJ109Han.

Evelyn Ma's article "From the Ground Up: Building a Chinese Vernacular Legal Collection to Support Research at Yale and Beyond," in the June 2009 issue of *AALL Spectrum* at bit.ly/J09Ground.



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