

LIS EDUCATION IN MACAU: BIG CHALLENGES FOR A SMALL TERRITORY

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Abstract. This paper chronicles the history of LIS education in Macau and profiles the current situation. It then goes on to highlight the problems arising from the present situation and to analyze the reasons for the absence of a formal LIS school in Macau. Three options to move forward with the aim of providing a formal and quality LIS education in Macau are proposed. The advantages and disadvantages of these three options are examined and one option considered the most practicable is suggested for adoption.

Introduction

Library and information professionals would definitely fall into the category of “knowledge worker”, a term first coined by Peter Drucker (1959) in his book *Landmarks of Tomorrow* when referring to people in the information technology fields, such as programmers, systems analysts, academic professionals, and researchers. In the knowledge economy that we are in now, the role played by knowledge workers is becoming increasingly important and also vastly different from that in the previous era. Lucy Tedd (2003) summarized what some previous writers wrote about the changing roles of library/information/knowledge professionals and concluded that “library and information professionals all over the world are being affected by a range of ICT developments and so find their roles changing”. In a paper presented in The ACRL Twelfth National Conference, Corey Seeman and others (2005) regarded the changing and greater roles of the academic librarians in the changing information environment as “facilitator of change”.

In view of the changing role of the LIS professionals, it becomes imperative for the LIS schools, where these people receive their education, to take a long and hard look at their curriculum, the way of teaching, the quality and specialty of its faculty members and a host of other relevant matters. Indeed, it poses a great challenge to the LIS schools everywhere in the world. For a small territory like Macau, where there is no formal LIS school in existence, the challenge for having the LIS personnel of the right caliber to manage the LIS institutions is even greater. This paper will focus on –

- How Macau has coped in a situation where there is no formal LIS school;
- The problems encountered and how Macau has dealt with them; and
- The way forward for Macau.

Background of Macau

Macau, a Chinese territory with Special Administrative Region status, is located on the Southeast coast of China to the western bank of the Pearl River Delta. Bordering on Guangdong Province, it locates 60km from Hong Kong and 145km from the city of Guangzhou. With an area of 27.5 sq. km, Macau has an estimated population of 469,800 as in March 2005. About 95% are ethnic Chinese, from different provinces, e.g., Guangdong and Fujian. The remaining 5% includes Portuguese, Europeans and other regions. Chinese and Portuguese are the official languages, Cantonese being most widely spoken. The official languages are used in government departments in all official documents and communications. English is generally used in trade, tourism and commerce.

According to the *Directory of Macau Libraries* (澳門圖書館名錄) (2003), there are altogether 242 libraries in Macau and it is estimated that there are over 400 people working in these libraries. It can be seen, therefore, that most of the libraries in Macau are fairly small in size, employing on average 2-3 staff members. Probably because of the fact that there does not exist a critical mass of students in Macau, formal LIS education is conspicuous in its absence in Macau.

LIS Education in Macau – Past and Present

For a long time until the early 1990s, there had been no LIS education program of any form in existence in Macau. People in Macau had to go outside of the territory to receive LIS education. In the

1960s, students started going to Taiwan Normal University to enroll in the LIS bachelor's degree program. Some of them came back to Macau after their studies, bringing back with them the library practice in Taiwan, such as the use of the Classification Scheme for Chinese Libraries (中國圖書分類法). In the 1980s, several Macanese went to Portugal to take up courses in Documentation. When they came back to Macau later, they were employed by the government libraries. Starting in 1990s, Macau students began to go to China Mainland for their LIS courses, and these were graduate studies at Master and Doctoral levels rather than undergraduate studies.

So far as the local LIS programs go, they started in early 1990s, when a Bachelor's degree course in Documentation was inaugurated in 1991 under the Faculty of Portuguese beginning with second year students in the University of East Asia (predecessor of the University of Macau). The curriculum consisted of –

- For second year
 - ✓ Introduction to Library Science (3 hours),
 - ✓ Community and Information (2 hours),
- For third year
 - ✓ Bibliography and Sources of Information I (3 hours),
 - ✓ Bibliography and Sources of Information II (3 hours),
 - ✓ Cataloging (4 hours),
 - ✓ Classification and Indexing I (3 hours),
 - ✓ Classification and Indexing II (3 hours),
- For fourth year
 - ✓ Library Management I (3 hours),
 - ✓ Library Management II (3 hours),
 - ✓ Automation I (3 hours),
 - ✓ Automation II (4 hours),
 - ✓ Classification and Indexing III (3 hours),
 - ✓ Library Techniques (4 hours),
 - ✓ Book Preservation (3 hours),
 - ✓ Introduction to Archival Studies (3 hours).

However, this course attracted only Macanese students who wished to go to Portugal to work after their studies. This course was held for only a few years and had to discontinue in 1997 because it did not really serve the needs of Macau libraries and many of the lecturers left Macau for one reason or another.

1998 saw the introduction of the second local LIS training program. This was the joint venture of three organizations -- Macau Library and Information Management Association (澳門圖書館暨資訊管理協會), Macau Amateur [After-work] Continuing Study Center (澳門業餘進修中心), and the Information Management Department of the Peking University. This is a degree course lasting for 3 years with a total of 78 credit hours. According to its brochure for 2006 class, its curriculum consists of –

- For first year
 - ✓ University English I (4 hours) and University English II (4 hours)
 - ✓ Introduction to Library Science (4 hours)
 - ✓ Fundamentals of Computing (6 hours)
 - ✓ Chinese Culture (4 hours)
 - ✓ Retrieval of Chinese Reference Resources (4 hours)
- For second year
 - ✓ Cataloging of Chinese Materials (4 hours)
 - ✓ Collection Building (4 hours)
 - ✓ Classification (4 hours)
 - ✓ Bibliography (4 hours)
 - ✓ Retrieval of Western Reference Resources (4 hours)
 - ✓ Reference Services (4 hours)
- For third year
 - ✓ Fundamentals of Computing Network (6 hours)
 - ✓ Library and Community Reading (4 hours)
 - ✓ Library Automation (6 hours)
 - ✓ Reference Resources on Macau (4 hours)
 - ✓ Publishing and Information Industry (4 hours)

✓ Graduation Paper (4 hours)

The mode of study is basically part-time and the teaching is carried out in the evenings and weekends. Peking University sends its faculty members to come to Macau to do the teaching. Compared with the course held from 1991 to 1997 at the University of East Asia, this course is more comprehensive in scope and covers the Macau resources. In addition, the teaching medium is in Chinese. Therefore, this course is quite welcome by students in Macau who plan to make the library work their career.

Some overseas universities have extended their courses to Macau in the form of distance education. School of Information Studies at Charles Sturt University in Australia has been doing this and has trained about a dozen Macau students in its Master program. Most of the students are already employed in the libraries; taking advantage of the flexible teaching mode, they completed the course while they are holding a day-time job. Department of Information Studies, University of Wales (Aberystwyth) also has some Macau students in its distance learning program.

Apart from the above-mentioned LIS courses, Macau has had some short in-service training courses. The earliest such short course could be traced back to 1949 when a public library in Macau sent one of its staff to Guangzhou to enroll in a course on book classification. But, it was only until 1990s when more such short courses were organized by the Macau government for its personnel working in the government libraries. These government courses were taught in Portuguese. More in-service courses in Chinese began in 1995 when the Macau Association of Library and Information Management was established. The source of students is the staff working in various libraries in Macau and the emphasis of the courses is on practical operation of libraries.

One such important short course was jointly organized by the Macau Association of Library and Information Management, and the University of Macau's Center for Continuing Education and Special Programs, which has been in existence since 1999. The name of the course is called "General Certificate Course of the Library Professional Techniques", and as of 2005-2006 consists of 6 papers:

- Chinese Book Classification Scheme (20 hours)
- Anglo-American Cataloging Code and MARC (40 hours)
- Library of Congress Classification Scheme (40 hours)
- Dewey Decimal Classification Scheme (20 hours)
- Subject Headings (20 hours)
- Database Production (20 hours).

Students can take any number of these papers and those who have completed a particular paper will be awarded a certificate, whereas those who have completed all 6 courses and passed the examination will be given a General Certificate.

Problems in the Present LIS Education in Macau

At present, there is no formal LIS school in Macau. In an attempt to train the staff working in the libraries or people who are interested in library work, a variety of training channels are, as outlined in the above, in place. However, this situation brings about the following problems:

1. In terms of the number of students taken in and the graduates produced, the existing courses are not adequate in meeting the manpower needs of the libraries. Among the 400 or so personnel working in libraries in Macau, it is estimated that only about 150 have received some kind of library training.
2. Some courses are run and taught by library schools outside of Macau. In the case of distance learning courses, e.g., Charles Sturt University, the curriculum is planned without any consideration being given to the special needs of libraries in Macau. As a result, what students learn may not entirely apply to the actual working situation in Macau.
3. Some of these courses are short in duration and meant for in-service training. Furthermore, they are not organized by any academic institution, or leading to an academic degree award. Consequently, these courses do not enjoy academic respectability.
4. Some local courses sometimes would have difficulty in recruiting enough lecturers of the right caliber. Senior serving librarians are usually reluctant to be lecturers, because (a) these courses are run in the evenings and weekends, thus posing some inconveniences, and (b) it is sometimes difficult for them to get approval for being part-time lecturers from the organizations that they work in.

Why There is no Formal Library School in Macau

The reasons for Macau not having a formal library school affiliated with an academic institution are as follows:

1. Macau is a small place where not too many libraries are in existence. Further, most of the libraries in Macau are fairly small in size and contain a small collection only. To make a library school viable academically and financially, a critical mass of students needs to be available.
2. Related to the above reason is that the market for professionally-trained librarians in Macau is limited as well as stagnant. To start with, the number of librarians required by the existing libraries is fairly small. And then, the staff turn-over in the libraries in Macau is not significant.
3. The third reason is related to the lack of appropriate textbooks. Most of the textbooks in LIS are written in English. However, the great majority of Macau students have been educated in Chinese and, to a less extent, Portuguese. Standard of English among Macau students, therefore, is not high, thus making it difficult for them to go through the learning materials in English. There are some textbooks written in Chinese, but these are not entirely applicable to the situation in Macau.
4. There is no sufficient number of lecturers who are academically competent and comfortable with teaching in Chinese.
5. As there is no library that holds a fairly comprehensive collection of LIS learning materials, students would have difficulty getting hold of textbooks. In some other developing territories, the Central Library, an academic library or the Library Association would have such resources for use by LIS students.
6. There is neither a great diversity of different types of libraries nor a top-ranking library in Macau that can be shown to LIS students as models. Also because of this, it is hard for students to find good libraries to do practical work.

The Way Forward

Despite the small size of Macau and the tiny number of libraries in Macau, it is felt that some kind of formal LIS school should be established. For one thing, a properly-managed school can enhance the quality of library staff, rendering better library services. For another, Macau Government is very keen in upgrading the level of the educational and cultural life in the territory. For example, Macau was in 2005 listed by UNESCO as a World Cultural Heritage site; the Government has recently announced that it will provide 15 years of free education by 2009. All these point to the need of training more and better quality professional librarians.

Considering the current situation regarding LIS education in Macau, there are three options that can be considered:

- ***To establish a formal LIS school, either at undergraduate or graduate level, in an academic institution***

The main advantage of doing this is that the program will undergo rigorous academic accreditation and review process to ensure good academic quality. It follows, therefore, that the qualification obtained will be recognized and the students will be able to find a library employment more easily. However, the difficulty of going down this route is that it will take a fairly long time to have a proper academic program established. Other problems will be the lack of good students (who may not wish to enroll in the program chiefly due to the limited job market), lack of lecturers and textbooks.

- ***To import to Macau more distance learning program from overseas***

While this is quicker, compared with the first option, it has the disadvantage of not catering to the specific needs of Macau libraries. In addition, these training programs from overseas would require students to have a reasonable level of English because the textbooks used will be in English. This poses a problem for many students in Macau.

- ***To have an academic institution in Macau to partner with an overseas library school***

The merits of this option are (a) it will undergo the rigorous academic review process, thus gaining academic respectability for the qualification obtained, (b) the curriculum will be formulated in such a way that it will cater to the special needs of the Macau situation, (c) it is comparatively quicker to have this program up and running. On the other hand, the stumbling-blocks of doing

this are - finding an appropriate overseas library school that is willing to be a partner of this co-operative venture and finding a suitable Faculty/School in an academic institution to house the program.

Conclusion

For some reasons peculiar to Macau, there is at present no formal library school affiliated with any of the academic institutions in Macau. Some short term in-service training courses as well as a few distance learning programs are available. In order to have a regular supply of library personnel of good quality, there are three options. After careful consideration, taking into account several factors, it is felt that the best option is to have an academic institution in Macau to partner an overseas library school offering a LIS program in Macau. The preparation work involved will be arduous and the process complicated. But, with the belief that this is the best option to produce a constant team of capable LIS professionals for libraries in Macau, it is hoped that all the problems will eventually be overcome.

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