

4-1-2014

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Recommended Citation

Chen, Li (2014) "Building a Library for a Non-Profit Organization: A Success Story," *Georgia Library Quarterly*: Vol. 51 : Iss. 2 , Article 10.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/glq/vol51/iss2/10>

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Building a Library for a Non-Profit Organization: A Success Story

Cover Page Footnote

I would like to express my sincere thanks to Dr. Mary Chain and Mrs. Michael Wood for their valuable advice and comments on an earlier version of this paper.

Building a Library for a Non-Profit Organization: A Success Story

By Li Chen

The Atlanta Contemporary Chinese Academy (ACCA) is a non-profit organization and teaches Chinese language and culture to children through weekend (Saturday, Sunday) classes. Since its founding in 1992, it has become the largest Chinese language program in the Atlanta area, operating through several campuses. There are over 1,000 children enrolled in the ACCA program. The library is located at 7094

Peachtree Industrial Boulevard in Norcross, Georgia. It currently holds a collection of over 1,000 (Chinese language) books about China, its language, and culture. This is the story of how a non-profit, educational organization with zero funding approached the intriguing challenge of building a library.

There were many unique problems in founding this library. There was no money for library professionals, and no money for library software or hardware. Since ACCA only operates on weekends, its library, unlike other libraries, had to serve a readership that was only able to access it on weekends. Since the ACCA campuses are scattered throughout the Atlanta area, a visit to the library involved a special trip for many parents and, in some cases, made it inaccessible.

The idea of building a library began with a gift to ACCA of over 1,000 Chinese language books.

After acquiring the ACCA Main Campus property in 2010, the school became a property owner, a rare position for a weekend school. In



Before

December of that same year, the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China presented the Atlanta Contemporary Chinese Academy with a gift of more than 1,000 volumes. More than half of these books are for children and the

remainder are for adult readers. The content includes Chinese literature, history, cooking, culture, hobbies, medicine, philosophy, geography, archaeology, and adventure stories.

After the boxes of books arrived at the ACCA Main Campus, they were locked in a dark room, just waiting to meet their readers. The Academy had neither funds nor expertise to build a library.

In August 2011, Dr. Mary W. Chian, a former member of the Board of Directors of ACCA and an instructor, volunteered to meet the challenges to build a library. Her proposal received unanimous (and enthusiastic) board approval. Dr. Chian enlisted another ACCA instructor, Ms. Li Chen to help. Ms. Chen is the Assistant Director of The Southern Polytechnic State



After

University Library. She also enlisted the aid of Mr. Andy Douglas, an information technology

professional and ACCA parent, who could help in programming and constructing a database.

The three volunteers contributed enthusiasm and expertise. Ms. Chen developed the book category system and library policy while working with Mr. Douglas to build system software specific to the data management of the ACCA Library. Dr. Chian, Ms. Chen, and Mr. Douglas created a library procedure that allowed the library to operate on weekends. Dr. Chian set up a system, using coordinators at each campus, to help the parents to borrow books.

A special gift of \$1,000 each, from former ACCA Board Chairman Mr. Zhiqiang Liu and Dr. Mary Chian, allowed the library to begin construction.

Bookshelves

The library was very fortunate to obtain the bookshelves for little cost. In September 2011, the book retail giant Borders closed. They liquidated their assets and Dr. Chian was able to purchase, through the local Borders, very nice shelves to equip the entire library for less than \$500. ACCA parent volunteers moved the shelves from the store to the Main Campus.



Volunteers

The library startup depended entirely on volunteer work. In addition to Dr. Chian, Ms. Chen, and Mr. Douglas, the ACCA parent volunteer workers moved not just shelves, but books and data. Augmented by students from Southern Polytechnic State University, these

people entered book data, catalogued and labeled books, and shelved them. Each of these people gave up family and personal time, sacrificing their holidays, evenings, and weekends.

Book Classification

Ms. Chen completed the book classification. Since over 99 percent of the books were already ordered with the Chinese system of book classification, she chose to continue to use this system, thus saving time, reducing the workload, and shortening the learning curve for the volunteers. The table below shows the Chinese Book Classification:

Chinese Book Classification

- A Marxism, Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory
- B Philosophy and Religion
- C Social Sciences
- D Political and Legal
- E Military Science
- F Economics
- G Culture, Science, Education, and Sports
- H Languages and Linguistics
- I Literature
- J Art
- K History and Geography
- N Natural Science
- O Mathematical, Physics and Chemistry
- P Astronomy and Geoscience
- Q Biological Sciences
- R Medicine and Health
- S Agricultural Sciences
- T Industrial Technology
- U Transport
- V Aviation and Aerospace
- X Environmental Science
- Z General Works

Software Construction

Mr. Andy Douglas, an ACCA parent who is an information technology professional, helped to develop the library management system

software using Microsoft Access. This system includes the book catalog, circulation, patron modules, and booklist reports. The booklist reports are posted on the ACCA website at <http://www.acca-web.org/index.php/library> for patrons to view what books are available.

Special Considerations

The ACCA weekend operations and the different locations of the campuses made it difficult not only for readers to borrow books and return them, but also for the library to assess fees for overdue materials. Dr. Chian suggested that each campus select a coordinator (or establish a group of people who would serve as coordinators).

The library coordinators serve as the extended arms of the librarian at the Main Campus. The librarian provides training to the coordinators and supervises the operations of the library. These coordinators may be parents of ACCA students, ACCA faculty, or ACCA students who can drive. They serve as a physical liaison between the library and its campuses.

The library coordinator(s) for each campus are responsible for enrolling and registering new readers, collecting and returning books from the library, and collecting fines and late fees.

By adjusting the book cycle from a month to four weeks, a book request can be given to a



coordinator, who retrieves the book from the ACCA Library. The reader has two weeks to enjoy the book(s) and can either renew the book(s) or return it through the coordinator. Late fees are charged on a weekly basis.

Conclusion

The Atlanta Contemporary Chinese Academy now has a central library. The library did not cost any school funding. It has been built through the efforts of many loving and caring volunteers who shared a dream. They established not only a library but also a community of Chinese readers.

Li Chen is Assistant Director, Johnson Library, at Southern Polytechnic State University