Library Trends Takes on Chinese Technology Questions

A special issue of the journal Library Trends focuses on challenges facing local communities in China as they make use of information technology while coping with wrenching social and economic change.

Kate Williams, assistant professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign’s Graduate School of Library and Information Science, served as guest editor of the issue (Volume 62, Issue 1, Summer 2013). The issue features a dozen articles from scholars in mainland China, Hong Kong, and the U.S.

“The work presented in this issue of Library Trends reflects the rise of a new field known in the West as community informatics. Community informatics (CI) asks how local communities can and will fare in the digital age, that is to say, the postindustrial age associated with the information society,” Williams said.

To this point, CI researchers have mostly explored the English-speaking world, where the concept originated and the research infrastructure is stronger. This issue examines China, offering theory, method, and policy for China and beyond.

Two articles explore the relationship between Western community informatics and established work in China in community and rural informatization, which focusses on local government rather than on local culture and everyday life. Four articles examine how China’s great internal migration from rural to urban areas impacts and is impacted by mobile phones, home computers, Weibo (China’s Twitter), and ecommerce in the form of online train ticketing.

Four other articles look at shared spaces where people use technology: cybercafés, public libraries, private libraries, and academic libraries. Two more articles examine what happened when local educators and others in rural Gansu province partnered with Hong Kong and US professionals to carry out digital literacy projects in schools and villages.

Williams believes that western library professionals and scholars have plenty to learn from and with their Chinese colleagues and hopes the issue will stimulate more work. How can local communities survive and even thrive in the information age? How are people in their everyday lives making wise use of digital tools? And what is the role of the library?

Library Trends, which is published by the Johns Hopkins University Press, is a quarterly journal examining trends in professional librarianship and in the broader, associated information world. Each issue is devoted to a single aspect of professional activity or interest. Back issues are available online at https://www.ideals.illinois.edu/handle/2142/999 and through Project MUSE.

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