

Treasuring our Traditions and our People: Riding the Wave and Making a Difference Over the Next 25 Years (*)

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ABSTRACT

The current so-called e-revolution presents professional academic librarians with an ocean of content which contains many undercurrents and disruptive technologies, possibly undermining all we are trying to do and to be. Two questions are asked in this paper: First, will there be academic libraries in 25 years time for our younger colleagues to inherit? In other words, are senior academic library managers reacting rightly and proactively making the correct strategic decisions now to ensure the rightful and proper place for librarians in a university for decades to come? Second, assuming there will indeed be university libraries and 'librarians' to people them in the year 2032, what professional and personal attributes will future librarians need, not only to ride the inundation, but also to prosper as leaders in their institutions to the year 2057 and beyond?

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INTRODUCTION

In the information and communications technology (ICT) revolution – let us agree to the term ‘e-revolution’ – we are faced with an ocean of text and data which continues to inundate university libraries. It is posited here that the e-revolution, and all its elements such as eBooks, full-text journals, the domination of Google and so on, are forcing librarians to ask the most basic questions about what it is we are now trying to do, and where our profession is heading. Librarians, particularly librarians in universities, have always worried about their status as quasi-academics and are continually striving for the respect of research and teaching colleagues in the academic community. They are also continually assimilating new formats in reading material and media into their collections. However, if librarians over-react to this e-revolution and place too much attention on these apparently disruptive technologies, they could undermine all they have been and are trying to do, and be submerged in a deadly undertow. In terms of a simple variant in SWOT analysis, librarians’ relative strengths and weaknesses as professional people, with a long and important historical tradition and humane ethos, may well determine how we stand up to the threats facing us and seize the opportunities offered to us. At present, we are blinded by the threats and display some of our weaknesses for all to see – we are failing to grasp opportunities which utilize our own undoubted strengths as ‘library people’, a very special group of human beings.

If the profession does not attract and promote the right sort of people in libraries in the next 25 years, it will indeed drown. Actually, it may just self-destruct. I chose here the period of 25 years, because I am not an ancient seer who can crystal-gaze very far into the future. However, I have nearly 35 years experience in academic libraries. Now that I am in an honoured position which allows me to set the strategic direction of my own library, I have to think very carefully and seriously about the competence and characteristics of my professional colleagues - younger staff I am recruiting and promoting now, who are presently around 30 years old. A few of them may be university librarians themselves in 25 years time. So, while I am not a wizard, while I cannot **see** into the future, nevertheless, like any other library director, I have the power and responsibility to **influence** the future - at least to the next generation of leading-edge academic librarians.

Why concentrate on our people and our traditions? It is simple. Our real strength is ourselves. If there was ever a demand to know what the ‘brand’ of a library might be - the selling point that makes ‘customers’ come back again and again for more – it is the librarian in person. On the whole, we are intelligent, courteous and helpful. We give face-to-face personally-tailored advice, and we never give up on the reader. Our advice is largely free from payment, and, crucially, devoid of any political, social, legal or medical agenda. Where else would a twenty-first century citizen get this kind of service in a world of ATMs, pay-for-view, and automatic phone enquiry systems? What has really changed

for us since the late nineteenth century, when free warm community public libraries were blossoming, to make our services any less valid?

And what of our weakness? Again, it is simple. If we jettison tradition - the full potential and knowledge of all we have learned as a professional group of people over hundreds of years who have, do and will make a difference - we are doomed.

TWO QUESTIONS

First, then, what of the threats? Will there be academic libraries in 25 years time for my colleagues to inherit? In other words, are I and other professional senior managers around the world making the correct strategic decisions **now** to sustain and enhance the rightful and proper place of librarians in a university for decades to come?

Second, what of the opportunities? Assuming there will indeed be university libraries and a profession of 'librarians' to people them in the year 2032 (and being a librarian, I would say that, wouldn't I?), what professional and personal attributes will future academic librarians need, not only simply to survive the wave, but to show resolution and fly over it, and prosper as leaders in their institutions, ensuring the security of their younger professional colleagues for the 25 years after that – to the year 2057 and beyond?

To address the first question:

THREATS: WILL THERE BE ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN 25 YEARS TIME?

I wish to use two examples here on how professional university librarians might consign themselves to the dust-bin of history: one is about the reactive, and concerns the very nature of being a library professional and the corpus of profoundly valuable professional knowledge and expertise we have built up over many centuries; the other concerns the proactive and is about the conscious decisions we are making now which affect our very future.

The Reactive

The e-revolution really began, not with the first huge number-crunching scientific main-frame computers, but with the first personal PCs and Macs. Librarians have been very slow to claim and proclaim our rightful place in this early revolution. Let us not be shy about the fact that we were among the very first group of professionals, if not *the* first, to see the potential of computing power for our own non-specialist, computer-illiterate readers. Nowadays, many librarians call their readers 'users', or even 'end-users', because the computer guys eventually, but only quite recently, adopted our distributed individual customer

focus and, in a way which has set a dangerous pattern, gave this terminology *back* to librarians as if it were wholly new.

Librarians are joining in a headlong rush to adopt wave after wave of new technologies. In our intense desire to be seen as ‘state-of-the-art’ digital natives, we have embraced in our university mission statements, successive re-engineerings, and medium-term strategic plans, phrases like the ‘virtual library’ (already seriously unfashionable), ‘hybrid library’, ‘institutional repository’ and ‘information commons’. Librarians need to pause for thought, and take a longer historical view. What *is* the big rush anyway? Why standardize with everyone else? Why do we need to implement RFID tomorrow? Because everyone else is doing it? Because it looks good and enhances our reputation for being state-of-the-art?

Perhaps librarians can start by seriously viewing this e-revolution as just another fad or a fashion. True, it is not quite that ephemeral. It is not quite like the 1960s, when librarians and professors thought microfilm would solve all space and preservation problems. It is not quite like the 1970s, when new display shelving and cataloguing standards were built to accommodate ever-lasting new media like...cassette tapes. However, this e-revolution is not **totally** different in speed and in range, and librarians have handled such things before and taken them in their stride. Rather, it is librarians’ collective *responses* to the e-revolution that are indeed wholly new on so many levels, with very severe implications for the profession’s future.

Since ancient times, ‘librarians’, that is people who look after books, have always either driven, or been driven by, new social, economic and technological surges such as the advent of printing itself, mass literacy, the paperback revolution and so on. We adapted to these innovations and made them our own. Now, for the first time in history, the profession is actually in danger of being submerged by another one – in this case, the ICT profession. As Abbott (1988) so succinctly put it in his history of the development of professions in human society, “Professions develop when jurisdictions become vacant, which may happen because they are newly created *or because an earlier tenant has left them altogether or has lost its firm grip on them*” [my italics]. The profession of librarian will die if its “jurisdiction”, its standing in society and avowed body of knowledge and expertise in what it does best, is vacated.

Siva Vaidhyanathan’s (2005) paper at the American Library Association talked about the “Googlization of Everything”. Google’s mission is to “organize the world’s information and make it universally accessible and useful.” Does this mission sound vaguely familiar to a library professional? Google’s motto is “don’t be evil” while it does this, and wants to be “partners” with librarians, not “rivals” (Needham 2006). In the last two hundred years, did it ever occur to a librarian to even bother to state a motto of this kind; that we should not be evil when helping readers? Did library users ever suspect any underlying evil motives of the

librarians they dealt with? In libraries and for librarians, this kind of superficial cant should and would (hopefully) never be tolerated.

In the last ten years or so, computer guys like the Googlers have discovered that the end-user does not only need to number-crunch, but also needs to *search* for *information*. The now computer-literate common man and woman can and will search for anything via Google, bypassing the local library reference desk and OPAC station. So, to go with this flow, and to make even more money from mounting flash adverts on web pages, the computer industry has re-discovered search and reference strategies; in effect, it has re-discovered what librarians have been doing for 150 years. They have even re-invented 'new' jargon for this. For 'metadata', read 'subject headings'; for 'topologies', read 'classification'. We librarians in the public sector have to admire the private sector's sheer nerve. Of course, being who we are, it may well be our own fault, because we never made anyone outside the profession understand we had long developed and honed these skills.

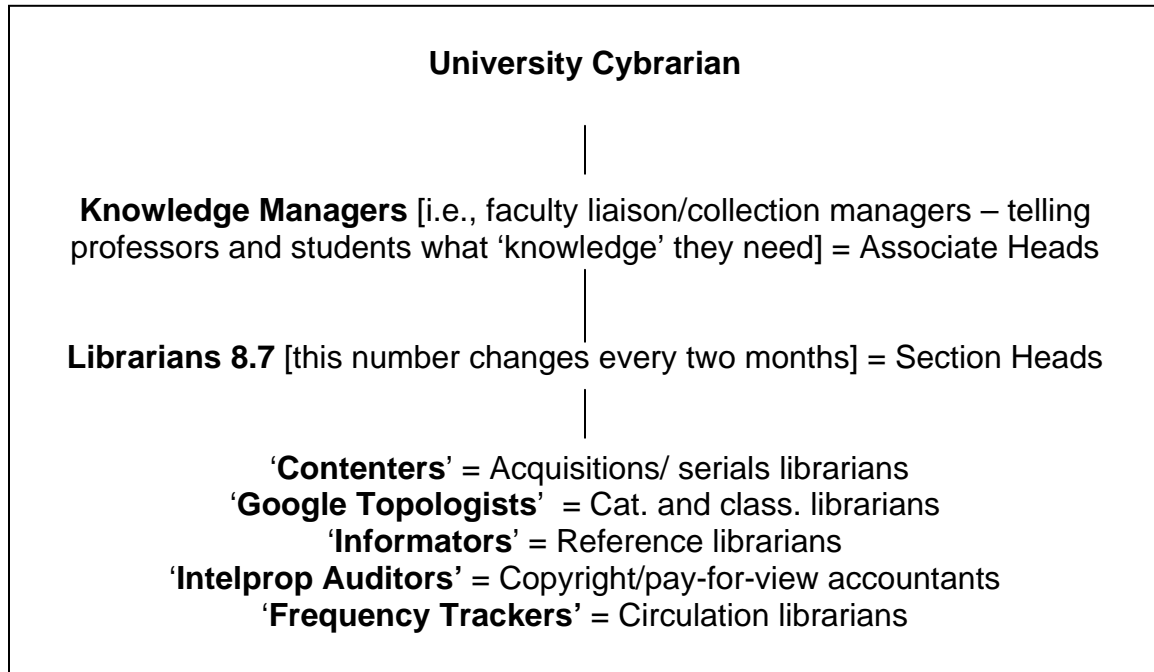
In the 1970s/1980s, the Bath University Centre for Catalogue Research in England called for simplified cataloguing (Seal, Bryant and Hall, 1982). After all, to my knowledge, no reader ever asked a librarian for the exact size of a book in centimetres. So why record it? This move to simplification was stillborn in the MARC revolution and the wave of catalogue conversions built upon standardized records which took place upon the advent of the online integrated library system. Well, we did it! We unified our very complex catalogue records worldwide over about 20 years. Did the public at large ever notice the sheer scale and importance of this huge undertaking? No, because we failed to tell them. Would they have cared if we did? Probably not, since they never asked us to record the size of a book shelved in Berlin or Hanoi anyway. They just wanted to get at the text.

So how have librarians reacted? Not by insisting that these things were already in existence, and therefore did not need re-invention, but by eagerly and rather too speedily adopting these new terms imported from another profession, and giving up their own long-held traditions. So, let us now all convert our catalogue web-pages to look like, and to be linked with Google! It seems to have taken a Google to show how unified and standard catalogue records can be simply exploited by a 10 year-old child or an 85 year-old retiree. Looks like we have been aced by Google in the user-friendly stakes, does it not?

Googling web-pages is fine if it helps the library readers in the short term. But, a word of caution. Let us please look further than the next five years in our decision-making.

Are we losing our nerve and giving up valuable ground? Are we vacating our "jurisdiction"? By 2032, if we follow some of the stuff coming out of the

professional literature, an academic library staff ranking system in one of our strategic plans may even look like this:



Do I exaggerate? Just a little. But given our recent past professional record, I wonder (for the record, I *am* being ironic). Certainly, some of our fellow professionals now seem to view ‘librarian’, ‘book’ and a physical place called a ‘library’ increasingly as dirty words.

In fact, we are continually changing our names of things. The post-graduate schools of library science and our own professional associations have had something to do with this. In their desperation to attract students and members, did they delete or hide the term ‘library’ in their titles in order to look hip and modern? In 1990, Douglas Foskett, a much-loved and respected London University librarian who lived to a sprightly old age, wrote about the “communication chain”, and graphically illustrated the “pyramid of organized knowledge”, with, at its apex, “wisdom”, which, rather than “knowledge”, is actually the ultimate aim of all human intellectual endeavour. Foskett complained of our lack of clearly defined concepts which we claim as our objectives. We librarians in truth cannot ‘manage’ individual wisdom, and so we certainly cannot manage our professors’ individual knowledge. I refuse to use the phrase ‘knowledge manager’ in the context of academic library services. While ‘knowledge management’ may have some uses for our library organizational structure and sustainability, the concept of an academic librarian as a ‘knowledge manager’ may be construed as a totally spurious term to apply to the services we offer for faculty and students. As Townley (2001) has noted,

“...knowledge management is outcome-based, whereas *libraries are people-based*” [my italics]. Foskett (1990) says:

“The transformation of information into knowledge depends on an act of intellectual integration. The transformation of knowledge into information depends on skills in communication, mastery of language and the tools of expression, understanding of other people. When a research worker sets out to communicate his results to the world, he has to achieve, as nearly as possible, a conversion of his knowledge into public information without loss of meaning....

The greatest writers on science have proved by their practice that communication succeeds best when their information is presented so that its human significance comes through. They allow the glow of their human personalities to illuminate the flow of the information, and what might be a dry recitation of facts springs to life. Then, the reader, or listener, receives the maximum help in making the transformation of publicly presented information into his own personal knowledge.”

One extreme logical outcome of this supine, reactive behaviour is that we may indeed eventually give up the term ‘librarian’ to describe what we do. We have even developed our own ‘science’ of librarianship which is now a respectable academic discipline, because we are not just practitioners. Or are we? Isn’t one of our key strengths that we can **do** things? That we undertake large ICT projects and complete them on time and within budget? Can you name me one other profession that has changed its job title so often? Have physicians become ‘body system managers’? How does that make us look? Of course, given the computer professionals past track record, librarians will duly give up the term ‘librarian’ since it is so old-fashioned (after all, it has been around for hundreds of years), only to have the computer professionals adopt it themselves in 25 years time as a really cool way to describe what they do! In short, librarians themselves will allow themselves to wither away and die; they will have committed professional suicide.

The Proactive

Librarians are, of course, not actually sitting around and waiting for their own death. In fact, librarians are being very active in their attempts to secure their future. After all, we are being paid to solve problems, to manage our libraries in the face of change, to **do something**. Some of our actions are misguided and are only of short-term benefit. I want to mention just one example in relation to this, which relates to the acquisition of print and e-collections by librarians for their libraries.

Academic librarians are buying less print now. This is not because there are less printed books published every year – in fact, that figure is forever rising. True, no

librarian has ever or will ever be able to afford to buy everything published in every format. In the eighteenth century, when published materials were so much more limited, one English book-collector drove himself to the grave trying to achieve this goal. Neither can any library expand its shelves forever to accommodate millions of new books and expect unlimited resources and space to add a brand new wing to the library every five years. So, librarians are moving to eBooks and e-Journals in an attempt to do three things:

- Remain state-of-the-art and of relevance to our readers;
- Save on money;
- Save on space.

As long as we solve, in concert with major utilities like OCLC, the very crucial questions of digital preservation and archival platform stability, the initial expense of investing in e-Books and e-Journals will, we hope, be offset by major long-term benefits as we move to a new type of library service. However, I do not think it will be all high-flying over the new hi-tech oceans. Librarians are making some decisions now which may threaten a bright long-term future, and could sink our plans for this revolutionary library service.

One of the most significant trends in libraries over the last forty years is the moving of older less-used printed books from the physical space known as a 'library'. We have relegated them to *remote* (librarians' own word for this process), non-public stores, and in a gentle kind of group madness retained only the last best copy of a single book title. That means we have 'disposed' of the rest. In these stores, books cannot be immediately reached by professors. It is totally impossible for professors and students simply to walk along the shelves in the company of a trained professional librarian and find a golden treasure they never knew existed. This 'serendipity' is very important in libraries – it is a human process which cannot yet be fully replicated via an online screen, although some are trying ⁽¹⁾. A reader might say, "On computers, I can find what I'm looking for, but I can't find what I am not looking for!" Paradoxically then, remote storage addresses short- and medium-term issues only, by creating **remote** book warehouses. My personal view is that this storage initiative will hasten the end of several of our academic libraries as independent physical entities and community spaces. Twenty-five years onward, we may not be thanked for it, by our successor librarians and by society in general.

Librarians need to look beyond this issue, and beyond the end of most of the careers of current senior managers, and ask ourselves how our successors will view this trend. As the libraries empty of print content and are replaced by e-provision, where does that lead us? To libraries emulating bookshops and café complexes like Borders? Do we know enough to be sure that real learning takes place in such informal surroundings? Do we have to dumb down completely and pander to a non-reading 18 year-old so that he/she can just 'learn' at his/her pace, or do we also try to 'teach' them to begin to operate effectively in the

rigorous and challenging environment of a print and online research library?
Why actively go out to “cheapen” our cultural heritage?

“[The (UK) Reading Agency] TRA’s motto – ‘new ways of working with libraries’ – has that larding of PR language that does everything to destroy confidence. Experience suggests that ‘new ways of working’ often represent a cultural cheapening, by comparison with old ways. In the library, the old way went like this: you browsed amid the shelves, selected a book, read it, and then exchanged it for another.

TRA’s first big initiative is a programme for children called ‘The Reading Maze’, concocted with the intention of ‘inspiring children to read’. It is a ‘reading challenge’. We need reading challenges because ‘libraries are changing’. Why are they changing? Because of an earlier initiative to connect all public libraries to the Internet, and, consequently, to neglect the purchase of books.... Don’t say this aloud in front of the children. You’ll only frighten them. And take our word for it: they don’t really want... a ‘reading maze’. They want a book. If you think we’re being old-fashioned, ask Harry Potter.” (‘J.C.’, 2003).

In short, I do not feel we have enough information yet about the amazing and challenging times we find ourselves in, to consign most of the printed record to last best copy oblivion, and to consign some of our libraries **and** even our very profession to footnotes in history. If we throw away all our family jewels, all the print content of our libraries, then why have a library at all? I am not arguing for stagnation, I am simply asking my fellow librarians to think long-term before they decide to go for the latest trend. Librarians are, or should be committed to preserve the written record in any medium **forever**. I am asking us to be ‘conservative’ not only in preserving the written record but also in cherishing and nurturing our own professional ethos. As chapters 9 and 70 of the 道德經 (*Dao De Jing*) succinctly note ⁽²⁾:

持盈常保 (*Chí yíng cháng bǎo*)

被褐懷玉 (*Pī hè huái yù*)

“Maintain fullness to the brim, (keep thy peace and thereby) secure abundance.

Hide the jade in thy bosom and cover it in rags (for there is no wisdom in undue exposure).”

OPPORTUNITIES: LIBRARIANS’ PROFESSIONAL/PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES

So, what is to be done? It is the people in this profession who will be crucial to its survival; their active and reactive decision-making will and do influence the

future. Assuming that we retain the term 'librarian' to describe our professional duties, our 'brand' – and I most strongly advise we do - what **professional** and **personal** attributes will we 'librarians' need, not only simply to survive as 'warehouse curators', but also to prosper as leaders in our universities in the year 2032?

Professional Attributes

Can I assume that library schools, or schools of knowledge science or whatever they want to call themselves, will deliver graduates who are fully conversant with and can cope with anything the e-revolution is throwing at us? I hope I can take this as read, and that their **ICT-literate** graduates are ready to move into libraries to build for the generations of readers to come, and willing to embark on a path of life-long learning and teaching. People who interact with ICT professionals on the common ground amongst the professions, but who arrive at any joint meetings with a library service agenda.

However, certainly in my interviews with prospective candidates, I would also be looking for individuals who do understand, unlike most 25 year-olds, that there is a written record beyond the online screen. In other words, they not only have to be ICT-literate, they also crucially need to be **literate in the older general sense** of the word. They need to know something about books and their intellectual history. Many of my younger colleagues have never seen a printed book being bound – they have no idea how this ancient and very user-friendly artifact is constructed. Is this kind of knowledge really necessary in the new online utopian world? I would contend that it is essential. If new librarians are ignorant of the history of the book, how will they understand the full-text digitized version of what they are looking at on-screen? Indeed, how else can we exploit and promote the new world of e-Books for the benefit of our readers (note, whatever the delivery system – we are all still '*readers*')?

In truth, academic librarians need to be serious **readers** themselves. One of the key professional attributes professors think we have is that we read a lot. One medical professor told me there was no need for him to explain my symptoms because, as a librarian, I must already know about them, since I had read the books in the library. Professors may have some delusions about what we do all day, but if they think we are reading up on every subject under the sun, that we are 'generalists' who understand the broad spectrum of the intellectual and scholarly universe – and we do - this is a very strong link in our professional armour and should be exploited by individual librarians at every turn.

Librarians will also need to be even more professionally **global in perspective**. We will need to import best practices and benchmark our libraries continually against others of a similar type anywhere in the world. Some university administrators are surprised that their librarian colleagues travel so much and have so many conferences and visits to other libraries. It is absolutely essential

to do this, to maintain a state-of-the-art library service. Librarianship is one of the very few truly international professional skills. We librarians can move from Taiwan to Thailand to Togo and still function as full professionals. This professional internationalism must be maintained; is it essential for our survival and sustained future as key players in the world of education.

Librarians need to have, or be encouraged to nurture: a sense of importance of their work, coupled with a sense of proportion; a sense of humour and a sense of decorum; a sense of their unique place in the university and their university as a unique place; and above everything else, a sense of wonder along with practical **common sense**. For example, when considering the adoption of new technology, let us be very careful to ensure that: it works; and, it is of lasting and sustained benefit. In mounting services, we should not experiment on half-tested technologies and theories during the only three or four years most undergraduates have to experience a full-time university education. We need a very strong internal alarm system which can detect spin, fluff, and cant when we hear or see them.

In addition, I would make a very strong plea that librarians anywhere in the world, while upholding the basic rights under intellectual property laws, remain totally **committed to the free flow of information**, to open archiving, and to freedom of information, especially in the face of international global market pressures and the commercialization of information over the Web. This is one of the fundamental tenets of the profession, and no person in 2032 and beyond should be able to call himself or herself a librarian if he or she does not hold this as an absolute moral certainty, to be defended at all costs. In the grey areas of copyright legislation, err on the side of fair use and open access when advising scholars.

Our professionals need to be expert in **public relations**, fully involved in 'selling' our very valuable brand to our reader communities. We will be wholly immersed in the curricula of our academic institutions. We will have a clear understanding of the education market and be active in researching outcomes and assessing our impact.

We will continue to be totally **vigilant with our spending** of public money when striking deals with commercial vendors.

Librarians, and only librarians, have the body of professional knowledge and expertise to train our readers to be *literate* in the new e-revolutionary world. Our students need the assistance of trained professionals who can gauge the quality and provenance of the information on-screen. The question of how we can convince researchers, curriculum designers and young, largely unread undergraduate students that librarians are the answer to their prayers leads me onto the personal attributes required by the librarian in the 2030s.

Personal Attributes

The first and key personal attribute is an **outgoing personality**. One of the major changes in our profession over the last 25 years is the recognition of the need to recruit against the traditional mould. Fifty years ago, the shy, bookish, eighteen year-old leaving school would be advised by a careers teacher to go into libraries. While some of this still goes on, the people who have been really successful during the e-revolution, certainly in academic libraries, have been quite different. They can still be bookish; there is nothing wrong with that! But they are also lively, responsive, and adaptable people with a profound belief in the future of reading and study, set within the traditional scholarly pursuits of research and teaching. They know how to outreach. They can stand up in front of 20 people or 2,000 people and give their views on why and how libraries are not just useful - but absolutely essential. They are true 'advocates' of the profession and they always make a difference when they walk into a room.

Second, these new generation librarians are **brave and persistent**. They are proactive people who have not been and cannot be afraid of taking the argument in spoken and written word to their student unions and also to the highest level in universities in an attempt to persuade university presidents by sheer force of will that what their libraries are doing is a key component in the future success of their institutions. In addition, we need to try to protect our services and our staff by quelling our senior university managers' "destructive passion for endless reform" with seemingly "endless reorganizations" in higher education; "...a process by which we become the hollow men" (Minogue, 2003).

Third, academic librarians need to be **quick-thinking and articulate of speech**, and they need to know how to write position papers on demand. Senior academic administrators do not have a lot of time of their hands. While walking across to lunch with their President, university librarians should be ready for a surprise question like, "How much money do you need to start up this RFID thing?", and be quick to answer in a single sentence, with an accurate and adequate dollar figure for the total cost, because the President will hold them to that sum for ever more. We should continue to be masterful in precision and concision.

Fourth, librarians' **political sense** needs to be very sharp to survive in senior policy committees, to fight for resources against other departmental interests in the university, and to negotiate hard with ever more rich and powerful external vendors. In my experience, when one says for example that one's library is one of the best in the Pacific Rim, people tend to believe it. When a librarian says he/she is the university's expert in a particular field, say in information literacy, people will believe it and let the librarian take the initiative – as long as he/she delivers something concrete at the end of the process. *Crucially*, by delivering on promises, librarians will continue to build up a level of respect from other professional colleagues, and continue to thrive on their acknowledged expertise.

Presidents instinctively know that their libraries are at the heart of their universities. They know they are showpieces – but they are expensive showpieces in terms of money and space. It is incumbent upon librarians to remind them frequently and *explicitly* that people are gregarious, and students need to congregate somewhere. Thus, their libraries are also very much alive and evolving as formal and informal places of learning *and* teaching, as community centres and campus hubs of activity.

Fifth and finally, librarians need to possess a *yin-yang* combination of **steadfastness and humility**. By pushing when necessary, pulling back as the situation dictates. They will know when to bend, and know when to stand their ground - to “straighten up and fly right” ⁽³⁾. If we are too persistent in our demands, our academic colleagues will stop listening. If we are too humble and reticent, there will be nothing for our academic colleagues to listen to at all.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

I do hope that I sound more like a practical-minded optimist than a Walter Mitty dreaming of the past, or a Jeremiah, a prophet of doom. I do not entirely disagree with Herring’s view that we would be mad to travel our “...old, comfortable road...” In fact, I am also arguing for vigilance about our future professional conduct: if we do not “refashion” ourselves, others will do it for us (Herring, 2001). This is truly the most exciting time in history to be a librarian – even more exciting than the fifteenth century Gutenberg revolution in Europe. Of course our profession needs to change and adapt, and sometimes quickly. I am looking, like Herring, for substance not hype. Lewis’ model for *organizational* change to 2025 is a good start, but it says little about the *personal attributes* we need to cherish to carry these things through (Lewis, 2006).

In addition, I do strongly advise adopting some psychological precautions against contracting the creeping disease of neophilia – the love of ‘the new’ simply because it is new. As the iconoclastic London Imperial College professor, Edgerton (2006) says about the place of technology within wider historical processes:

“The twentieth century was awash with inventions and innovations, so that most had to fail. Recognizing this will have a liberating effect. We need no longer worry about being resistant to innovation, or being behind the times, when we chose not to take up an invention. Living in an inventive age requires us to reject the majority that are on offer.... The history of invention is not the history of a necessary future, to which we must adapt or die, but rather of failed futures, and of futures firmly fixed in the past.

We should feel free to research, develop, innovate, even in areas which are considered out of date by those stuck in passé futuristic

ways of thinking. Most inventions will continue to fail, the future will remain uncertain.... Stopping projects at the right time is the key to a successful invention and innovation policy, but doing this means being critical of the hype that surrounds, and often justifies and promotes funding for invention.”

Am I old and jaded? If you disagree fundamentally with what I am saying, and think it is all conservative head-in-the-sand rubbish, fine! Challenge me! Just be actively and continually thinking about the survival of this profession and understanding of its wonderful origins and traditions. I am very proud to be a librarian, and am amazed at the opportunities and experiences this profession has given me during a white-hot, very intense period of change. Yet change is constant – so what is really new about this situation? We need historical perspective. *If* (and I cannot emphasize this too often) we treasure the rich traditions of our profession, remain proud of being **librarians**, and avoid in word and deed any “cheapening” of our values and services, I think that the librarians of 2032, 2062, and on beyond 2092 will still find ourselves vital and respected contributors to the maintenance of culture and to the deep pursuit of intellectual endeavour in society – ***in short, people who make a difference.***

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Footnotes

(1) At a Chinese University of Hong Kong Library System conference in 2006, Professor Akihiko Takano of the Japan National Institute of Informatics demonstrated his "longest bookshelf in the world" – i.e. the ability to select a book online and move an image of its spine to add to one's very own 'shelf' at the top of the computer screen.

(2) I am grateful to Dr. Anita Liu of the University of Hong Kong for her exposition here, "Since 'aggressiveness' and 'harshness' are not characteristics which are encouraged in Dao, hence, others taking over and intruding upon the formal role/domain of the traditional library (and library functions) is a little 'strong' (剛 *gāng*). Dao advocates 'gentleness' (柔 *róu*), thus, the idea is that one ought to advance oneself to the best possible state (to the brim) and secure (or reap) the goodness henceforth; when one is full of goodness, people will come to you without a need to expose the jade (show off)".

(3) *Straighten Up and Fly Right* – words and music by Nat King Cole and Irving Mills, 1943.

Bibliographical note:

My comments above are deliberately meant to reflect my personal experience and views, but, of course, the future of libraries and librarians in universities is a huge topic which has been extensively reported in the library literature. Here are just a few examples of note:

- (a) Association of College & Research Libraries. Blog on the future of libraries: <http://acrlblog.org/> For example, on disruptive technologies, see *Makeover for the Academic Library* <http://acrlblog.org/2006/01/09/makeover-for-the-academic-library/>
- (b) Bennett, Scott (2003). *Libraries Designed for Learning*. Washington D.C.: Council on Library and Information Resources.
<http://www.clir.org/pubs/reports/pub122/pub122web.pdf>

(c) Council on Library and Information Resources (2005). *Library as Place: Rethinking Roles, Rethinking Space*. Washington D.C.: Council on Library and Information Resources.
<http://www.clir.org/PUBS/reports/pub129/pub129.pdf>

(d) To get some idea how our communities use online information so that we librarians can build appropriate response strategies, see OCLC (2005) *Perceptions of Library and Information Resources*.
http://www.oclc.org/reports/pdfs/Percept_all.pdf

In addition, OCLC has hosted forums of senior international librarians on library futures, for example: *Future Patterns of the Library Landscape: Moving Libraries beyond Their Comfort Zones*.

http://www.oclc.org/search/search.pl?q=cache:http://www.oclc.org/memberscouncil/meetings/2005/may/200505agenda.doc+future+patterns&output=xml_no_dtd&site=uspublic_usen&ie=UTF-8&oe=utf-8&client=default_frontend&

(e) For a British view, see for example, Society of College National and University Libraries (SCONUL) (200?) *Sconul Vision 2010*.
http://www.sconul.ac.uk/pubs_stats/pubs/vision%202010

(f) Sherman, Will (2007). *Are Librarians Totally Obsolete? 33 Reasons Why Libraries and Librarians Are Still Extremely Important*. Paper given at NCLIS Symposium, 2006.
<http://www.stevenson.brevard.k12.fl.us/docs/librarians.pdf>
