The Books in Bill Clinton’s Donation¹,²

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In 1998, President Clinton donated five hundred English-language books about the United States to the Peking University Library in a high-profile tribute to the role of academic institutions in China’s sociopolitical development during the twentieth century. However, few people know that this canny donation was quietly preceded in 1995 by a gift from the Peking University Library of five hundred Chinese-language books about China to a small U.S. academic library. Although they had different motives and outcomes, these donations indicate a promising role for academic library exchanges in China–U.S. relations and demonstrate the potential benefits of international librarianship in general.

During his 1998 trip to China, President Clinton paid a highly publicized visit to Peking University (PKU), China’s most prestigious academic institution.³ While there, he held a forum with the students and faculty, spoke about the students’ role in China’s future, and donated an impressive reference collection of five hundred books in English to the PKU library in honor of the university’s centennial. In his address, the president said the books were “some of the best volumes in our history and literature, along with encyclopedias and dictionaries on every subject related to the United States.”⁴ The books in the presidential donation were selected by the staff of the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) from approved title lists and presented by the president in a ceremony on the steps of the PKU library with a huge crowd in attendance.⁵ The world press covered every moment of the event.

However, few people know that three years earlier, in the summer of 1995, the PKU library donated five hundred books in Chinese to the library of Kapiolani Community College (KCC) in Honolulu, which is part of the University of Hawaii (UH) system. The books in the Kapiolani donation covered China’s literature, language, history, and civilization, and were selected by the PKU librarians from their library’s own collection. Unlike President Clinton’s donation, the PKU presentation of books to KCC proceeded without fanfare or ceremony. There were no attending luminaries, no retinue of aides and advisors. Indeed, only one person from Beijing was on hand at KCC to present the books, a PKU librarian completing a four-month scholarly exchange at the Kapiolani library. The arrival of the do-

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nated books at KCC was timed to coincide with her stay in Hawaii but was not a condition of the exchange. It was a generous, unexpected, and unheralded gift from one library to another.

A comparison of these two donations and the circumstances surrounding them suggests appropriate directions for U.S.–China academic library cooperation and for international academic librarianship in general.

China and Peking University
For many centuries, events in China fostered a vital, but volatile, relationship between academics and politics, between scholarship and the art of governing. This was especially true in the twentieth century. In 1911, Dr. Sun Yat-sen ignited a fiery revolution that threw down dynastic rule in China and sought to replace it with his Three Principles of the People—nationalism, democracy, and a form of humanism that might be called the common good of the people. These principles arose, in part, from his study of Western values and government that began during his years as a youth and student in Hawaii and Hong Kong. Although Dr. Sun’s revolution did not immediately achieve his aims, the popular fervor it aroused for social change in China could not be halted.

An intellectual, but no less important, revolution began in China less than a decade later. Now generally known as the May Fourth Movement, this revolution of ideas actually came in two waves. The first was the New Culture Movement, which gathered great momentum on university campuses between 1915 and 1921; advocated Western ideas of scientific inquiry, democracy, and individual freedom; and fiercely attacked Confucianism. It was no less than a call to China’s students to reform and revitalize Chinese culture and thought. Of the numerous clarion publications that fostered this movement, the most prominent was the journal New Youth, edited by Chen Duxiu, a Peking University dean.

Amid this atmosphere of intellectual and cultural renaissance, the second wave of the revolution of ideas broke in Beijing on May 4, 1919, when three thousand outraged university students publicly protested the Versailles peace treaty. Instead of restoring to China the territories Germany had seized in the 1890s and lost in World War One, the Versailles treaty ceded those territories to Japan. The furious May Fourth protests were spawned at Peking University, which had become a center for educational iconoclasm. There, the faculty pragmatically scrutinized the traditional values and culture of China and carried the students with them on a surge toward educational reform, literary innovation, and, as of 1919 especially, political rectitude.

Starting with the May Fourth demonstrations in Beijing, strikes and protests spread throughout the country. Many persons died, were injured, or were arrested in the clashes. However, popular support for the movement was so widespread that the central government released the arrested protesters, dismissed pro-Japanese government officials, and instructed the Chinese delegation in Versailles not to sign the infamous treaty. The government’s acquiescence to the student-led protests, along with the infusion of modern ideas and especially the nationalism brought about by the movement, firmly established China’s new intelligentsia as activists in the country’s political development for the rest of twentieth century.

Like two sides of one coin, the demand for individualism and intellectual independence of the New Culture Movement and the ensuing surge of anti-imperialist patriotism of the May Fourth protests in 1919 are different, but interdependent. Only by understanding these two sides of what we now call the May Fourth Movement can we understand modern China’s political and cultural history.
During this period of cultural renewal, the Nationalist Party, created earlier by Sun Yat-sen and later led by Chiang Kai-shek, was revitalized. At the same time, Chinese communism found its foothold when the Beijing Group of the Communist Party, the forerunner of the Chinese Communist Party, was formed in 1920 in the office of Li Dazhao, the PKU library director. During this time, women’s rights were radically enlarged, popular culture flourished, an experimental literature in the vernacular language was born, a bevy of modern philosophies was espoused, migration from the country to the cities increased, and the common people were invited by the intellectuals to participate more fully in sociopolitical matters.

These cultural changes came about largely because Western ideas introduced during the West’s colonialism period in Asia had simultaneously begun to modernize the people and dismiss their traditional views, while embittering them toward the oppressiveness of the foreign presence. Because academic institutions, especially PKU, were the centers of the new thought, and because the students were ready to take up any worthy cause, the government became wary of academics, but tolerant when possible.

Other heated student demonstrations followed the May Fourth Movement in succeeding decades. But these protests, such as the December Ninth Movement of 1935, which shook the foundation of Chiang’s rule, and even the more recent protests of December 1986 and the Tiananmen Square demonstrations in 1989, can only be understood fully in light of the historical precedents set during the restless decade following the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1912. When viewed together, the twentieth century’s demonstrations by Chinese students show that students take to the streets quickly because they are serious about their hard-won role in China’s political processes. Their actions are expressions of their idealistic patriotism and, at the same time, their intense individualism.

No one, then, should have been surprised at the student rage that erupted after U.S. bombs fell on the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999, which occurred just three days after the annual May Fourth observance and only a few short weeks before the ten-year anniversary of the Tiananmen incident. In the days before May 4, 1999, Chinese newspapers celebrated the eightieth anniversary of the May Fourth Movement, recounting well-known stories that inspire national pride and reaffirm China’s self-determination. Then, on the night of May 7, with those heady thoughts still in the air, China’s embassy in Belgrade was bombed and three people were killed.

Given the history of student activism in China, it is not surprising that within ten short years, China’s students in Tiananmen Square could extol the founding fathers of the United States beneath a statue to liberty they modeled after America’s and then vilify the United States and its president while storming U.S. diplomatic missions across China after the Belgrade incident. And this was barely ten months after President Clinton brought his successful tour of China to Peking University. It is not unlikely that at least some of the students who hurled stones, paint, and defamations at the U.S. embassy in Beijing in May 1999 also enthusiastically applauded the president less than a year earlier when he told them:

For history is not just something to be studied at university. History is always unfolding. And I believe a large part of the next chapter in America’s history will be its partnership with the new China.

And, “China is a very old country, but, thanks to you—to your idealism, to your spirit, and to your future—it will remain young forever.”

Some observers might interpret these abrupt swings as signs of the students’ fickleness and susceptibility to government manipulation. But the decades-long succession of student activism that has sustained itself through generations of Chinese youth shows that China’s students are not especially fickle or capri-
They are no one’s willing puppets. They are at once fiercely patriotic, yet staunchly individualistic. Simply put, they do not think China’s current government is perfect, but neither do they think the U.S. form of government is ideal. Their version of nationalism, democracy, and the common good—their view of government of the people, by the people, and for the people—is different from America’s version.

Perhaps recognizing himself in them, President Clinton certainly knew that the PKU students he was addressing, as well as China’s other students, are young and very idealistic. Their idealism simply will not let them swallow contradictions. The president’s canny visit to PKU and his dialogue with the students publicly acknowledged and extolled their role in their government, indirectly validated the twentieth century’s succession of student demonstrations, and engaged the students in his own efforts to bring China and the United States closer together, at least for the moment.

**PKU and KCC Library Cooperation**

In the past decade, academic cooperation between China and the United States has labored under the political pressures of differing views on human rights, nuclear arsenals, missile defense systems, questionable campaign contributions, the Belgrade bombing, and charges and countercharges of espionage. Meanwhile, improvements in China’s universities have more than kept pace with the social and economic transformations that have swept the country. Project 211, for example, committed major government funding increases to elevate one hundred of China’s universities to world-class status in the twenty-first century. PKU was one of the first universities approved for the project. Improvements have included massive new construction on the specified campuses, salary increases for faculty, and the initiation of entrepreneurialism at the universities, including technology transfer programs, retailing ventures, partnerships with private firms, and rental of university-owned real estate to private companies to generate revenue for the universities.

Another benefit of the transformation of China’s universities has been the accelerated electronification of China’s academic libraries, which are rapidly acquiring commercial databases and developing local ones, and swapping home-grown online catalogs for cutting-edge commercial library management systems. At PKU, the library administration took the lead in organizing and administering the China Academic Library and Information System (CALIS), a consortium of academic libraries in China that will rely heavily on digitization and database development to facilitate nationwide resource sharing.

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The program to raise China’s universities to world prominence also has led to an increase in international library cooperation. In fact, the 1995 book donation to the Kapiolani library initiated a major PKU library effort to communicate with the West in a new fashion and to bring about greater cultural exchange between East and West.

In 1994, the Kapiolani library had recently finished its new building and launched an aggressive program to build collections and services to support the college’s Asian-Pacific curricular emphasis, which in turn reflects the UH mission to be a world leader in Asian and Pacific studies. To this end, the libraries of KCC and PKU entered a formal agreement in 1994 to exchange information, materials, and staff; to cooperate in the development of information resources, including online products; to engage in joint research and writing projects; and to promote international librarianship.

It was this agreement that brought the unsolicited, but greatly appreciated, five
hundred-book donation to KCC in 1995, as well as the first PKU librarian to KCC on a scholarly exchange. This librarian was at the Kapiolani library when the five hundred books arrived, and she performed the initial cataloging of the donated books. Since then, other KCC–PKU staff and material exchanges have taken place, along with a number of joint research and writing projects.

The Presidential Donation to PKU

The books in President Clinton’s donation were familiar titles on the USIA’s standard book lists. Although presidential book donations such as the one given to PKU are uncommon, assembling collections for USIA libraries in foreign countries to spread the ideals of American democracy was an agency specialty. For the PKU library donation, the USIA selected the well-known Library of America series distributed by Penguin Putnam (100 volumes), the Great Books of the Western World series from Britannica (sixty volumes), the Encyclopaedia Britannica (thirty-two volumes), the Encyclopedia Americana (thirty volumes), and 180 individual reference works (325 volumes), for a total of 547 volumes. The president also donated a copy of his Between Hope and History and Mrs. Clinton’s It Takes a Village.

Sets such as the Library of America and the Great Books, with multiple titles in many of their single volumes, and the general encyclopedias are outstanding works, ready-made for U.S. international diplomacy. But because USIA collections were assembled with the specific needs of the receiving nations in mind, it is the 180 individual reference works selected for the PKU donation that are of greatest interest here because these works show most clearly the specific intent of the donation.

Because the Great Books and Library of America series are so large and so heavy with literary works (i.e., poetry, drama, fiction, essays, memoirs), and because the donation also included twenty-nine individual volumes of literary reference works, literature was the largest category of the presidential donation as a whole.

Books on government made up the largest portion of the individual reference works (eighty-seven volumes). Of these, law and the U.S. court system (twenty-nine volumes) comprised the largest subcategory. The Constitution and foreign relations (twelve volumes each) came next, followed by the Congress (ten volumes) and the Presidency (eight volumes).

Sixty volumes were on subjects related to U.S. minorities and multiculturalism, twenty-six volumes were on American history, and thirteen volumes were on religion. The remaining volumes of the individual reference works covered miscellaneous subjects. The complete absence of works on science, technology, and U.S. industry is conspicuous, however, and the fact that only seven volumes were on the English language is significant when compared with the language component of the PKU library’s 1995 donation to Kapiolani.


The PKU library already owned many of the titles included in the Library of America and the Great Books series, but no count of this duplication was attempted for this study. Of the 325 individual reference volumes donated, however, seventy-three turned out to be exact duplicates of titles already owned by the PKU library and 173 other volumes were already in the collection in different editions.

The PKU Donation to KCC

The Kapiolani library received 491 separate titles in 530 volumes, numbers comparable to those of President Clinton’s donation to PKU. And, like the president’s donation, the books in the Kapiolani do
nation constituted a superlative collection of Chinese thought, even though, like the Clinton donation, it included few books on science or technology. But unlike the Clinton donation, no books were included that would give China’s official views on human rights, the role of religion, or other topics that might be contentious. Nor were there any books on China’s fifty-five ethnic minorities, even though China prides itself on its extensive minority education and cultural preservation programs. And unlike the presidential donation, virtually all the books given to Kapiolani were individual works. Only thirteen titles were multivolume, none larger than a few volumes, except for the *Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature, 1927–1937* (twenty volumes).

The USIA selectors used their booklists of approved titles from which to develop a collection appropriate for the PKU library. The PKU selectors also chose titles cautiously for the sake of diplomacy. But in addition, the PKU librarians had to restrict their selections to books from their own library. The books for Kapiolani, then, had to come from subject areas in the PKU collection with substantial duplication. And although those subject areas had to be rather immune to datedness to ensure lasting value in the overall donation, the books themselves would not likely be the most current works available in their fields. Still, even within these narrowed parameters, there was plenty of room in the PKU collection of more than four million volumes for selectors to develop a variety of possible main emphases for the collection, such as history, philosophy, politics, culture, and so forth.

A review of the Kapiolani donation, in fact, clearly shows two distinct concentrations. First, like the presidential donation, the books for Kapiolani included a great deal of literature. Of the 530 Kapiolani volumes, 247 were works of classical or modern literature. This is not surprising because in China, as in the United States, literature is a valued and highly refined art form, except that China’s literary tradition reaches back through four millennia.

The second concentration of the Kapiolani donation, and the most telling difference between the two donations, was in the field of language. Although the Clinton donation included only seven titles on English, the Kapiolani donation included no fewer than eighty-nine titles on the Chinese language, fifty-nine of which were language dictionaries. These dictionaries ranged from basic Chinese and bilingual works to dictionaries of synonyms, antonyms, homonyms, and others of a more esoteric nature. Examples included *Dictionary of Chinese Function Words and Their Usage in Classical Chinese*, *Dictionary of Loan and Hybrid Words in Chinese*, *Dictionary of Chinese Verb-Resultative Complement Phrases*, and *Dictionary of Categorized Double-Ordered Idioms*. The thirty nondictionary titles on the Chinese language included chrestomathies, vocabularies, grammars, and other language-learning texts.

Books on the Chinese language were selected for three proficiency levels. For instance, *Eight Hundred Contemporary Chinese Words and Phrases* was one of numerous books for beginning students of Chinese, whereas *Handbook of Commonly Used Sayings* and others like it were included for those with intermediate Chinese-language skills. At the expert level were titles such as *Practical Dictionary of Categorized Contemporary Chinese Adverbs* and *New Usage of Classical Sayings*.

In addition to language dictionaries, and like the Clinton donation, the Kapiolani donation included eighty-four dictionaries in various special subjects, such as finance, philosophy, psychology, and sociology, for a total of 143 dictionaries.

History was the next largest subject area in the Kapiolani donation, with sev-
enty-three volumes, again covering thousands of years. But PKU sent very few books on government or politics to KCC, and this despite PKU’s prominent role in China’s political development.

Because KCC was just starting its Chinese-language collection, none of the books donated by PKU were duplicates of titles already in the KCC collection, although 168 titles were held at the Hamilton Library, the research library of the UH system located on the Manoa campus. Now, all the books in the Kapiolani donation are available to the university community through the UH OPAC. That this collection would be freely accessible across the UH system was an important fact not lost on the PKU selectors.

Discussion
The similarities and differences between these unrelated book donations illuminate their underlying motives—statecraft on the one hand, and international academic communication on the other. With their book donation, President Clinton and the USIA intended, as the president himself said, to carry U.S. history and literature to PKU. However, many of the books in the donation were not really about the United States at all but, rather, concerned classical and other historical societies and were written in eras that predated America by centuries and even millennia. Inclusion of these books in the donation was not inappropriate, however, because many earlier civilizations, societies, and nationalities have influenced U.S. society and culture. China is rather different, for although foreign influences there have certainly been profound over the millennia, the total impact of the influence is sharply less noticeable because of the sheer age of China’s civilization and its efforts to maintain isolation and social stability for most of that time.

Many of the books selected by the USIA also clearly pressed U.S. ideology and presented the United States as a nation founded on democracy, law, religious tolerance, and ethnic diversity. This is not an unfair image at all. But it shows America’s best political face. Such is the nature of statecraft. The collection serves as a subtle reminder of the differences between the two nations on such things as human rights, religious freedom, democracy, and other politically loaded issues.

On the ideological side, consequently, the books may always be tainted by the Belgrade incident. Yet, the donation of books turned out to be an unexpectedly shrewd gift. For although the political goodwill that President Clinton spread during his China trip in late June 1998 was shattered in early May 1999, the books and their favorable images remain, prominently displayed and readily accessible in a special place on the shelves of the PKU library. Standing on the library’s steps during the presentation ceremony, President Clinton told the students:

I hope these books will help to further our friendship for another generation. I hope, too, that more and more Americans will come to China to study and more and more young Chinese will go to America to study [applause]. … I believe a lot of the world’s problems would be quickly solved if the world’s young people were permitted to live together and learn together and serve together. You can set the standard, and I hope you will [applause].

The message of the Peking University donation to Kapiolani is an equally hopeful variation on the same theme: Help scholars and students communicate with each other, and ideology will take care of itself. The PKU selectors might have chosen an emphasis other than language and communication for their book donation, but they knew that, although it is not uncommon for Chinese academics to speak or read at least some English, very few Americans speak or read Chinese. They knew that increasing Chinese-language facility in the United States, and particularly at the University of Hawaii, which has achieved world prominence in Asian studies, is essential for enhancing
The wealth of language-learning texts in the Kapiolani donation will be invaluable in communication, translation, and international understanding. And better communication, not ideological exposition, was the overall intention of the PKU donation to Kapiolani and the University of Hawaii. If President Clinton and the USIA would democratize China, the Peking University donation will help the two nations communicate with each other.

The emphasis on language and communication in the books donated to KCC conveys trust in logic and reliance on reason. It certainly is a good direction for international librarianship. Furthermore, it resonates with the hopeful implication of all scholarly pursuits, including librarianship, which is that people can be expected to make wise and correct decisions only if they have unrestricted access to abundant knowledge and information.

Conclusion
Both the donation from the Peking University library to Kapiolani and President Clinton’s donation to the Peking University Library have high academic value, and each could stand alone as a fine independent collection for use by students in the respective institutions. The Kapiolani donation was intended to show China’s long history and rich culture, whereas the Clinton donation sounded political overtones and built an ideal image of American democracy. In both collections, literature was predominant.

Yet, no real connection exists between the donations. One was not the precedent for the other. But both donations tell stories beyond their subject matter about national self-images, intellectual treasures, and the sociopolitical role of academic libraries in today’s world. And, again, like two sides of the same coin, the donations also tell where international academic information exchange might be headed and where it should be steered. Both types of international book donations should continue because each plays to a different level of society. But political donations—on the level of nation to nation—are subject to the scandals and discredit that plague statecraft and make stories for the media. Academic exchanges—library to library—are less susceptible to disgrace and defamation and also are more likely to become long-lived joint projects.

For instance, in late 1996, about a year after the PKU donation to Kapiolani and about midway between these two donations, the PKU and KCC libraries effected another type of book exchange that might be an ideal model for international library cooperation. With help from instructional faculty and administrators in both camps, librarians arranged an exchange of titles from the publication lists of the University of Hawaii Press for the PKU library and of the Peking University Press for the KCC library. Although this exchange involved many fewer books than either of the two donations discussed here did, it eliminated the likelihood of title duplication and the librarians were able to select the titles they most wanted and needed for their respective collections.

PKU–KCC cooperation continues at the present time. A second PKU librarian recently completed an exchange at KCC, and another staff exchange is being considered. Both libraries hope to arrange another book exchange from the publication lists of the PKU and UH presses. Visits and consultation between the libraries are frequent. Moreover, several joint research and writing projects have been undertaken. This article is one of them.

International academic cooperation between China and the United States is more important now than ever before. The Chinese government is intent on maintaining national stability while implementing broad bureaucratic reform. Achieving these dual goals amid the great social and economic change that is already proceeding across the country at a near-precarious rate calls for a most delicate balance within China. At the same time, China is participating more fully in the world’s community of nations and
entering high-level international arenas such as the World Trade Organization, Olympic games sponsorship, and nuclear diplomacy. It is vital to international economic and political welfare that China and the rest of the world come to know each other better. The West, especially, must understand that, like many other developing nations, China cannot and does not desire to modernize or democratize according to Western models.

International academic cooperation and cultural exchange programs are the leaven in China’s development plans. Academic cooperation between U.S. and Chinese institutions of higher learning is seen in China as an especially important process in establishing clearer communication between the two nations that is relatively free from ideological contentions. Cooperation between the academic libraries of the two nations can play a leading role in this process.

Notes

1. The idea and title for this paper were suggested by Richard G. Stern’s essay “The Books in Fred Hampton’s Apartment,” from his collection by the same name (New York: Dutton, 1973).

2. The authors heartily thank Dai Longji, current director, and Lin Beidian, former director, of the Peking University Library for their involvement in the Kapiolani donation and their facilitation of the research and writing of this study. We also thank Hueyduan Kwok, Yao Kuangtien, and Sachiyo Fujita of the University of Hawaii for their invaluable assistance in compiling the comparative data.

3. Although commonly known as Beijing University (Bei Da), the institution’s official English name remains Peking University and is used throughout this article.


5. Ibid.

6. The analysis of the titles in these donations was based on the USIA donation list, the PKU and Kapiolani library accession lists, and the books on the shelves in both libraries.


18. Pei and Hao, for example.


20. White House.


23. White House.

24. White House.