

# Information Literacy in Chinese Studies\*

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## Abstract

The present essay proposes a dual stratification of information literacy (IL). Information search in academia generally takes place in specific subject areas. While recognizing the importance of basic IL in one's search for information, the essay observes that the search cannot be complete without the awareness of what information to seek in that particular subject field as well as the ability to locate and evaluate information in the field. Each subject area may need to have its own definition of IL. Such IL in a given area may largely overlap with, and yet significantly differ from, the general IL that is, to quote the definition by ALA (American Library Association), "common to all disciplines." The essay uses the field of Chinese studies to illustrate the point and, accordingly, suggests ways of IL instruction that is suitable to Chinese studies.

## Keywords

**Information Literacy, Information Literate Individual, Information Literacy Instruction, Library Science, Chinese Studies**

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## 1. Introduction

In my career as an instructor of Chinese studies in the United States, every semester I encountered some students in need of help in searching the information they need in their research projects. Some of them — much to my surprise — had no problem with the Chinese language, for there were graduate students among them who had actually grown up in and come from China. Nor was it a problem with their computer skills, for, first, not all search in the library required the use of computers. Moreover, the majority of the students — including those who had come from China — actually demonstrated good computer skills when they used computers to search English online materials. All this seemed to indicate that to search information in the area of Chinese studies required something more than a combination of Chinese literacy and technological savvy. The essay will explore the phenomenon from the perspective of information literacy (IL).

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\*Short paper.

Before embarking on an investigation on the notion of IL, it is necessary to first delineate the sphere of Chinese studies.

The term “Chinese studies” or “China studies” refers to the study of China from the perspectives of a wide range of academic disciplines such as language and literature, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, economics, political science, and environmental science. Temporally, the term has a narrow sense as well as a broad sense. The narrow sense covers only the study of modern China.<sup>1</sup> For instance, the [Center for Chinese Studies](#) at University of California aims to “coordinate and support the study of *contemporary China* [emphasis added]” in the university. As such, this Center has long distinguished itself as a world-renowned institution for the study of modern China. The broad sense of the term, by contrast, encompasses all the periods from the past to the present. As an example, the [courses of Chinese Studies](#) in the curriculum of University of Arizona include not only courses like Modern Chinese Foreign Relations but also such courses as Introduction to Classical Chinese and Periods in Chinese History: Early Empire 200 B.C.-200 A.D. Considering the fact that the study of pre-modern China often requires some very different approaches in information search from the study of modern China, the present essay will use the temporally broader sense of the term to encompass the approaches in both.

A term that is often used interchangeably with “Chinese studies” in Europe is Sinology (cf. [Zurndorfer, 1995](#)). But, because this term tends to lay emphasis on such a limited scope of study as Chinese language, literature, and culture, “Chinese studies” is still a generally preferred term in America for its wider connotations.

Information literacy instruction (ILI) would, of all necessity, involve learners. The learners discussed in this essay are college students and graduate students of Chinese studies. As indicated above, these learners have demonstrated at least intermediate computer literacy skill level ([Grassian & Kaplowitz, 2001: p. 156](#)) and intermediate to advanced levels of the Chinese language. Such being the case, the discussion of IL in this essay will assume such levels and, in so doing, concentrates mainly on the part of IL that is needed for Chinese studies in particular. The question of interest to the present project would thus be: If Chinese literacy combined with computer skills are still not enough for the information search in Chinese studies, then what is missing in the learners’ IL in this area of inquiry? This essay will accord much importance to learners’ familiarity with some peculiarities in the profession that they should know in order to search information in Chinese source materials.

It is to be noted that to stress such familiarity implies no denial of the importance of other elements in IL in general. It is merely to highlight the fact that to have what is universally applicable to all IL does not guarantee successful information search in Chinese studies. The [ALA definition of IL](#), for instance, rightly suggests that IL starts from the recognition of the moment when information is needed and the ability to gauge the extent of such need. The recognition and ability are indisputably essential to the IL in all areas of study, including Chinese studies. But they still could do nothing to rid learners of their anxiety for information if they were unfamiliar with the systems of knowledge organization in the various reference tools in Chinese studies and the ways in which search should be done in the systems. Hence our research question in the above can also be formulated as: *On top of the universal essentials in IL in general, what should a learner be equipped with in order to be information literate in Chinese studies in particular?*

In the year 2000, an important book was published in the United States that teaches how to use various reference works in Chinese studies, such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, bibliographies, archives, indexes, and atlases. Entitled *Introduction to Research in Chinese Source Materials*, the book is the result of several decades of collecting, research, and classroom instruction by its author, Professor Emeritus Alvin P. Cohen of University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Although, as Dr. Cohen himself often cautions his students, the book focuses primarily on print materials, it nonetheless deserves close attention by every scholar of Chinese studies. This is because the extensive coverage of the book has provided its readers with a very comprehensive summary of the accomplishments worldwide in the publication of reference works for Chinese studies, not to mention the book’s in-depth evaluation of those works and the introduction on the ways of using them.

One of the major contributions of Dr. Cohen’s work is to lay out a basic structure of the knowledge that one needs to possess in order to do well in one’s information search in Chinese studies. As regards today’s online indexes, online maps, etc., they are largely the extensions of their printed counterparts, because they are, relative to their counterparts in print forms, often larger in the scope of information covered and wider in their availabil-

<sup>1</sup>There are some institutions in the United States that use either “contemporary China” or “modern China” to cover a wide span of time in Chinese history from the 20th century to the present. In places other than this essay, I have normally used the term modern to refer to the period from the establishment of the Republic of China in 1911 to the founding of the current People’s Republic of China in 1949. The period from 1949 to the present, in the terminology I would normally use, is known as the contemporary period. But, throughout this essay, I will use the term modern merely in contrast with pre-modern, which refers to the Chinese history from the early antiquity to the year of 1911. Hence the term modern China now refers to China from 1911 to the present.

ity to the users. In this sense, a good understanding of the classification systems that Dr. Cohen explicates in his book is also important to users of the internet tools for Chinese studies. There are books of similar nature that constitute good annotated bibliographies of reference works (e.g. Zurndorfer, 1995; Wilkinson, 2000). But I see more of in-depth explication in Cohen's book. What we can easily infer from his in-depth explication is the point that it is one thing to be well informed of the availability of a large number of reference tools but quite another to know how to use those tools. This essay will demonstrate the point that, in the field of Chinese studies, an information literate individual is necessarily one who is both aware of the availability and knowledgeable about the use.

The essay is divided into five parts. After this first part, the introduction, the second part discusses what it takes to be information literate in Chinese studies. While the discussion will inevitably touch upon what is universal to the IL in all areas of study, this part will focus primarily on what is particular to IL in Chinese studies. Due attention will also be paid to the question how such particularity may be related to the universalities. The discussion in this section will largely use the definition of IL provided by American Library Association (ALA) as its framework.

The third part deals with the use of internet in Chinese studies. The discussion will place certain importance on the interface between Chinese literacy and the skill for online search in general, because neither alone can be sufficient for the task of searching information in Chinese studies. However, as this section will suggest, to be merely literate in both can hardly guarantee effective information search, either. In some cases, efficiency can be achieved under the guidance of the bibliographical knowledge in Chinese studies. Other times, it is a question of how to apply the skills we use for searching English websites and e-catalogs to our search in Chinese ones. Either way, the importance of integrating both is evident. To demonstrate the point, this section will discuss the cases of some online reference tools and search engines. The examples are drawn from both my own use of the online resources and the discussions I had with some friends.

Based upon the studies in the sections outlined above, the fourth section discusses ways of conducting information literacy instruction (ILI) in Chinese studies. The final part is the conclusion.

## 2. Information Literacy (IL) in Chinese Studies

IL in Chinese studies is of necessity subsumed under IL in general. As suggested in the aforementioned ALA definition, IL generally starts from the awareness of the need for information. Specifically, information literate individuals are, according to the definition, those who can “recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information.” The discussion in this section will use the definition as a guideline.

### 2.1. Recognition of the Need for Information

As the ALA definition indicates, the ability to become aware of the need is generally, and rightly, considered as the basis in IL. It thus deserves our focused attention.

To arrive at such awareness at the right moment is an acquired ability. The ability is such an intuition or — shall we say — serendipity that, once acquired through proper training, will enable a scholar to identify those missing link(s) that need to be filled in his or her construction of scholastic knowledge, including, as a matter of course, the attempts to reconstruct the past. It is hence an ability to identify what gaps should be filled so as to bring coherence to one's argument, theory, or narrative. As such, what it would take is more than mere language literacy. It would take, instead, both an understanding of the subject under investigation and some clear idea about the possible directions that the research project may take. Such should be the case with the IL in all subject areas, of which Chinese studies can be no exception. This is an ability the lack of which would sometimes generate the anxiety for information that one feels in research, no matter how fluent one might be in the Chinese language.

### 2.2. Information Locating

Yet, IL does not stop at the mere recognition of the need. As the ALA definition requires, the next step after the recognition would be to locate the needed information. There are basically two steps in the searching. While the initial step would be to identify the source of the information, the searching cannot be completed without the second step, in which one is to locate the physical or virtual page that contains the needed information. If the

first step requires one's awareness of the existence and availability of the sources, what the second step requires is one's familiarity with the pattern in which the source is organized. Neither step alone can successfully locate information.

As a convenient example, once a graduate student asked me how to convert a certain date in the 10th reign year of Emperor Kangxi (d. 1654-1722) from Chinese lunar calendar to the Western calendar — or Common Era (C.E.) — that we now use. The reference tool she brought to me for the query was a Sino-Western calendar conversion book. Apparently, she was information-literate enough in Chinese studies to locate the right source for her task. The question she asked me was how to distinguish the digits for the dates in Chinese lunar calendar and those for C.E. dates. Having used the book both in graduate school and in my work, I was able to show her how the two sets of numbers were organized and paired in the book. With the understanding of the peculiar arrangements of numbers in the book, she eventually found out that the date she was trying to identify was Friday, May 23rd, 1671. The ability to locate the source (i.e. the conversion book) and the knowledge on the organization of numbers therein are both essential to the completion of the searching.

If the information sought is in a dictionary, encyclopedia, or index, then an information literate individual in this subject area should be one who knows the Chinese writing system well enough to use those reference tools. According to [Cohen \(2000\)](#),

In compiling and using all kinds of Chinese reference works, catalogs, and indices, the organization and arrangement of the entries make the difference between straightforward and convenient use versus awkward and inefficient use.... The classification and retrieval of Chinese characters is not a trivial exercise. It has been an important issue in the compilation of reference works from the time of the earliest dictionary (first century B.C.E.) right down to the present...

In addition to a brief description of some of the ways of classification that are rarely seen today, Dr. Cohen, in his book, provided explicit explanations of some most commonly used classification systems, such as semantic classification ([Cohen, 2000: p. 28](#)), phonetic classification (*Ibid.*), and graphic classification (*Ibid.*, pp. 39-51). Even a native speaker of Chinese is not necessarily familiar with all these systems.

For instance, people from the Chinese mainland and those from Hong Kong and Taiwan must be alert to some differences in the graphic and phonetic classifications in the reference works variously used in those regions. Some of the differences are vast, and some subtle. It would usually take discerning eyes plus a little time to get familiar with the systems on both sides.

There are also some pre-modern (i.e. pre-1911) encyclopedias whose contents were organized according to medieval phonetic system, a system that is totally unknown to any native speaker of Chinese who lacks training in it. In my own case, I have taken a graduate-level course on the medieval Chinese phonetic categories according to which the contents of some pre-modern reference works are organized. Since these reference works are still of considerable importance to scholars of pre-modern China, it is good to build the knowledge about such old system into one's IL in Chinese studies. Scholars of Chinese Buddhism need also to know that some pre-modern reference books for Buddhist texts adopt the word order of a certain 6-century textbook called *The Thousand-Character Classic* 千字文 to arrange the order of their contents.

In the cases above, knowledge about the classification systems in reference works is of no less importance than the awareness of the existence of those reference works themselves. Without such knowledge, it would hardly be possible to locate the needed information even when one is actually holding the right reference book in one's hand. This is because many reference works in Chinese studies, especially pre-modern ones, are often exceedingly voluminous. It is almost impossible to thumb through the volumes to locate the right page.

Many modern and early modern reference works use both graphic and phonetic classification of entries. Speaking of phonetic classifications, there are many systems of romanization for the pronunciations of Chinese characters. Dr. Cohen's book, for instance, introduced as many as nine commonly used romanization systems, such as Wade-Giles, *Pinyin*, and Mandarin Yale ([Cohen, 2000: pp. 30-38](#)). In order to be information literate in Chinese studies and able to search information in most of the reference tools, one needs to know at least *Pinyin* and Wade-Giles. The past few decades witnessed increasing popularity of the *Pinyin* in the scholarship of Chinese studies in most part of the world, including the United States. But there have been a lot of research works and reference tools in English that still use Wade-Giles. Among them, there are the books and articles by Dr. Cohen himself. Therefore, Wade-Giles romanization is still of considerable importance to Sinologists in America.

### 2.3. Evaluation of Needed Information

Over 10 years ago, a research project was carried out to partly discuss the textual issues of an essay collection that was ascribed to a Chinese official in the second century B.C.E. The research project concluded that the collection was authentic. Along the development of its argument, the project cited the way in which a verb was consistently used in the text. In so doing, it stated that such peculiar way of using this common verb could be attributed to the historical period in which the text was said to have been produced. This piece of evidence was later questioned by Luo Shaodan in an article published in the then UC-Berkeley based *Journal of Chinese Linguistics*, where the said research project was suspected to have based its discussion on an unreliable edition of the text (Luo, 2003). Luo's suspicion was derived from the fact that the extant pre-modern versions of the essay collection had all been clearly recorded in bibliographies of early Chinese texts and made available to scholars today in various forms of duplication. In none of those versions could one find the peculiar use of the verb as described in that research project. Had the project discovered an unrecorded early version that was different from all the known early versions, it would have been an earthshaking discovery in the scholarship and it should have declared it. Now its discussion of the verb indicates that the version used in it was different from all the known versions. Such being the case, one has reason to question the reliability of that actually undeclared and unspecified version. This example speaks of the importance of evaluating the data one uses.

Today, there are many early versions of pre-modern Chinese texts that exist only in what Dr. Cohen refers to as collectanea 叢書.<sup>2</sup> In all classes of Chinese bibliographies, instructors worldwide would invariably advise their students to pay close attention to evaluating the texts they adopt from collectanea. They have good reasons to do so, because pre-modern compilers of collectanea, due to the possible limitations in their knowledge about early texts, the degrees of reliability of the early texts they were able to obtain, and the political agenda that they might have in mind, could have presented to us unreliable editions of early texts. In the example cited above, the research project rightly resorted to linguistic method to evaluate data. While enthusiastically hailing project's linguistic research as a "bold and important" initial step, Luo Shaodan (2003) has offered the following suggestion with a view to further improving our IL in Chinese studies.

Any progress from there [i.e. the said research project] must go hand in hand with the development in other areas of study. For want of a more comprehensive list, such areas may include history, archaeology, and knowledge about pre-modern education, pre-modern book culture, and pre-modern literary genres and styles. ... Since the approach is a linguistic one, our knowledge about the pre-modern Chinese itself also needs deepening. None of these fields can undergo significant development without support from other fields. [Linguistic critics] ... may need to make particular effort to avoid examining texts in a 'linguistic vacuum,' losing sight of factors in cultural backgrounds (e.g. family taboo names), textual reproductions, literary genres, individual writers' personal inclinations, etc.

The "family taboo names" is mentioned in the above in response to the effort in the research project to draw conclusion about the date of the text on the basis of the lack of a certain demonstrative pronoun. Bearing in mind some known cases where the Chinese character standing for the pronoun was used in persons' names in Chinese history, Luo cautions that conclusion about the date of the text should be suspended until one is able exclude the possibility of the character's being part of a taboo name in the family of the author of the text. (*Ibid.*, pp. 290-291) This is because in pre-modern China, it was a taboo to use in one's writings the characters that were in the names of one's parents and in that of the emperor. If the taboo names of a pre-modern author's family are unknown, the absence of the character throughout the text may not bear any significance in our attempts to ascertain the date of the text.<sup>3</sup> Today, knowledge about taboo names is widely applied in the scholarship of textual criticism in Chinese studies.

<sup>2</sup>"Because of the unfortunate occurrence of many insurrections, civil wars, and foreign invasions throughout China's long history, numerous books were lost or destroyed. The early 13th century saw the beginning of the practice of assembling several 'titles' together and reprinting them in a unified format. Such assemblage, which might comprise any number of 'titles' and can take the form of either a single physical volume or a multi-volume set ..., is called a *ts'ung-shu* 叢書, for which the term 'collectanea' is used in English." (Cohen, 2000).

<sup>3</sup>The Chinese character in question can be romanized as *si* 斯. In Chinese, *si* can be used both as a demonstrative pronoun and as part of a person's given name. (A rough analogy could be drawn from the case of the English word "white." It can be used both as an adjective to denote a color and as part of a personal name — as in the name of the writer, E. B. White.) It is to be noted here that, as a text which pre-dates the essay collection that the Northern European scholar studied, the *Analects* 論語 is filled with the occurrences of demonstrative pronoun *si*. Considerable occurrences of demonstrative pronoun *si* can also be found in *Book of Poetry* 詩經, the songs collected wherein even predate the *Analects*.

What this example shows is, among other things, the importance of cultural knowledge in the IL of Chinese studies. The knowledge is important to our evaluation of information.

Such importance of background knowledge and subject-matter knowledge is also universal to IL in all areas of inquiry. IL instructors, as [Grassian and Kaplowitz \(2001\)](#) point out, would ideally “help people learn generic critical thinking criteria first, followed by the subject expert who would help people learn how to apply these criteria to the topic under study.” Regardless what research topic a student of Chinese studies may explore, it is essential that IL instructors in this subject area help the student to build the awareness of the importance of such background knowledge into their IL. Since the task is often left to librarians and since students prefer to direct their queries in this regard to librarians rather than to their professors,<sup>4</sup> equipment of subject-matter knowledge and background knowledge is often required of Chinese studies librarians. This is suggestive of the importance of proper training in Chinese studies for Chinese studies librarians.

## 2.4. Effective Use of Information

An information literate individual, according to the [ALA definition](#), is also one who can “use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose.” The example cited above suggests that effective use must be based upon accurate evaluation.

In pre-modern China, there have been forgeries that were produced roughly between the 3rd to the 7th centuries but professed to be texts of much earlier times. Failure in ascertaining the real dates would result in the mistake of basing one’s study of the professed early period upon these forgeries. But one must also be aware that these forgeries are nonetheless of value to research projects on the Chinese texts production, Chinese culture, and Chinese intellectual history of the time in which they were produced. In addition, there are academic institutions and libraries in China that use these forgeries as samples to teach students of Chinese bibliography how to tell forged texts and authentic ones apart. It would be a waste if we dispensed with these texts for being spurious.

It is thus to be noted that good evaluation marks the beginning of proper use of information. The IL in Chinese studies would necessarily include the ability to use data to the maximum possible extent in which they are of value to one’s research project.

## 3. Using the Internet

Nowadays, more and more information sources — including those in Chinese studies—are being made available in the internet, which makes knowledge about information technology and experience in surfing the internet more and more of an integral part of one’s IL.

Students of Chinese studies need to first learn that many techniques in searching the internet in general apply to the use of internet resources for Chinese studies. The sequence from the generic to the specific that [Grassian and Kaplowitz \(2001\)](#) suggest for teaching critical thinking criteria should also work in teaching how to search Chinese online sources. IL instructors in this area of study should thus first make sure students know the general rules.

During my time using University of Massachusetts (UMass) Library, a student once came and asked for reference assistance in his research project to analyze the primary school and secondary school textbooks published in China from 1930 to World War II. It turned out that he did natural searching by typing in the words “Chinese textbooks” in English and the word for “textbooks” in Chinese. As could be expected, he found nothing in UMass virtual catalog. I took the opportunity to introduce to him the concepts of keyword and subject heading. Once a number of subject headings were identified for his topic, we were able to identify some well targeted materials in both English and Chinese. The student by no means lacked Chinese literacy, English literacy, or computer literacy. Apparently, what he did need in this case was a little generic information literacy.

Likewise, one who uses Chinese search engines must realize that an understanding of the hierarchy in search vocabulary is as important to information searching in Chinese studies as it is to any information searching in general. In 2005, I once conducted a searching in an online database called *Chinese Academic Journals* (CAJ).

<sup>4</sup>Students of China related subjects (e.g. Chinese history, Chinese politics, etc.) particularly prefer to avoid directing a lot of such “basic-level” queries to their professors, who, after all, are the ones to grade their work and their performance. Likewise, there are faculty members specialized in Chinese studies who would also discuss most of the IL issues in Chinese studies with librarians so as to avoid bothering their colleagues and peers in this subject area with a lot of seemingly basic inquiries.

What I looked for there were articles about Chinese teapots. Since CAJ is a Chinese database, entries have to be provided in Chinese. The following is an English translation of what I got in the searching.

#### Chinese Academic Journal

Category Method	Keyword 1	Keyword 2	Title word 1	Title word 2	Articles found	Comments
One keyword used	“teapots”	–	–	–	51	High yield but low relevancy
	“tea ware”	–	–	–	62	Very high yield but very low relevancy
Two keywords used	“Chinese”	“teapots”	–	–	6 (Note: One article is irrelevant)	Low yield but good relevancy
	“Chinese”	“tea ware”	–	–	15 (Note: Two articles are irrelevant)	Medium yield and good relevancy
One title word used	–	–	“teapots”	–	14 (Note: Three articles are irrelevant)	Medium yield and good relevancy
	–	–	“tea ware”	–	20 (Note: Few are about teapots)	Medium yield and medium low relevancy
Two title words used	–	–	“Chinese”	“teapots”	0	No yield and no relevancy
	–	–	“Chinese”	“tea ware”	2 (Note: Both mention teapots)	Poor yield and so-so relevancy
	“Chinese”	–	“teapots”	–	0	No yield and no relevancy
One keyword & one title word used	“Chinese”	–	“tea ware”	–	4 (Note: Two are relevant)	Poor yield and medium relevancy
	“teapots”	–	“Chinese”	–	1	Very poor yield but very high relevancy
	“tea ware”	–	“Chinese”	–	2 (Note: Both are relevant)	Poor yield but high relevancy

Searched on June 5th, 2005.

As one can see here, different combinations of categorical entries brought about different quantities as well as different qualities of the searching results. Where the entry term “teapots” yields too few results, for instance, one must be aware that the scope of the searching can be expanded by entering a broader term like “tea ware.” The importance of using and adjusting such combinations is by no means unique for the searching strategies in Chinese studies. Such importance is universal. Precisely because it is universal, instructors of IL in Chinese studies may need to teach some general strategies like this before they can teach what is unique in their area of academic inquiry.

As indicated earlier in this essay, the uniqueness is often rooted in specific cultures and the peculiarities of individual disciplines. One who searches online for materials about a specific Chinese person should be aware of the popularity of public names in the Chinese society until the mid-20th century.<sup>5</sup> Knowledge about the use of public names would be of particular importance in the searching about pre-modern Chinese persons. For instance, if we use the name of Li Bai 李白 — a Chinese poet in the 8th century — as an entry to search in the electronic version of a pre-modern collectanea called the *Siku Quanshu* 四庫全書, we will get only 7024 results. If we use both the poet’s name and his public name as keywords, the expanded searching will yield as many as

<sup>5</sup>As an example, the given name of Mao, the former leader of P.R. China, is “Zedong” (or Tse-tung in Wade Giles romanization). Mao’s public name is “Runzhi” (or Jun-chih in Wade Giles) “The most common type of alternate name,” says Cohen (2000) “is the ‘public name’ (*tzu* 字), which is sometimes translated as ‘courtesy name’, ‘style’, or ‘cognomen’ This name could be used by anyone to address an individual politely. ... In principle, a male’s first *tzu* was given by his parents (or someone designated by them) about the time of his ‘coming into adulthood’ ... Women in public life also used a *tzu*, apparently adopted at the time of betrothal or at a ritual where they received a special hairpin (*chī* 笄) of adulthood.”

24,613 results, all about this same poet.<sup>6</sup> If the pre-modern person we search for is an emperor, we must be sure to search for his royal temple title (Cohen, 2000: pp. 475-476) and reign title (*Ibid.*, pp. 477-478). A web searching by an emperor's name would yield astonishingly few results, leaving the searcher with an erroneous impression that the searched emperor attracted unduly little attention in historic scholarship. The fact is: in the scholarship of pre-modern Chinese studies even today, an emperor is still far better known by his royal temple title and reign title than by his own name. Without this knowledge, an information searcher cannot be considered as information literate in pre-modern Chinese studies.<sup>7</sup>

In the previous section, I touched upon the importance of the familiarity with various systems of romanization of the Chinese language. The acceptance of the *Pinyin* system by Library of Congress and ALA expedited the gradual prevalence of the *Pinyin* in American society of Chinese studies. But an information searcher must think again if s/he thinks s/he can use the *Pinyin* in all online searching. If we wish to search information in the website of Warring States Project in the USA,<sup>8</sup> then we will notice that the romanization for Chinese that is used there is consistently Common Alphabetic. Considering the widely recognized growing importance of this website to scholars of early China, no one can afford to ignore this particular romanization when using this website.

#### 4. Suggested ILI in Chinese Studies

There are things we teach, things we do not teach, things that we teach on asynchronous basis, and things that we teach face-to-face.

In most of the academic libraries in America, budget for Chinese collection is limited and personnel are few.<sup>9</sup> Direct costs such as needed supplies and indirect costs such as staff time (Grassian & Kaplowitz, 2001: p. 159) must be used economically and efficiently. Certain assumptions have to be made about the learners so as to concentrate the maximum possible costs on the most important parts.

It was stated in the beginning of the essay that computer literacy and Chinese literacy were both assumed for the learners. Teaching of very basic computer skills and Chinese language skills should be outsourced respectively to Computer Science Department and Asian Languages Department and, in so doing, excluded from ILI in Chinese studies.

The learning immediately above that level can be done in an asynchronous manner. The availability of many useful websites can save a Chinese studies IL instructor the labor of designing his/her own asynchronous tours.

For instance, online searching in general should be learned at tutorial websites like [Browsing and Searching Internet Resources](#) or UTSA's [Library 101](#) (Libraries Tutorial), where learners can learn at their own pace.

Likewise, instead of teaching learners the encoding of Chinese in the internet, IL instructors in Chinese studies can refer learners to websites like [Chinese@FSU](#) and [Chinese Computing](#).

As a further step, the instructors may also want to advise learners to familiarize themselves with the online sources of Chinese studies by visiting websites like [Bic-har Yeung's website](#), which is based in University of Melbourne. Interested instructors can also read the [Chiu's \(1996\)](#) and [Yi's \(2002\)](#) explorations on the use of the internet in Asian studies. Chiu's article focuses on IL in particular.

In addition, existing websites and printed handouts can also be used to teach romanization system. Although learners' Chinese literacy must be assumed, an instructor cannot assume learners' knowledge of all the romanization systems needed in their online and traditional information searching. The aforementioned example about the Warring States Project highlights both the importance of romanization systems to information searching and the fact that few learners know all the romanization systems they may need in searching online. Fortunately, what instructors still can assume is learners' knowledge of at least one romanization system, because the majority of modern learners of the Chinese language, including even many native speakers of the language in their home countries and regions (e.g. Chinese Mainland, Singapore, etc), starts from learning a romanization system before they learn Chinese characters. From my former experience of teaching in the USA, I know how difficult and time consuming it is to teach a system of romanization. But we can conduct our initial lesson by helping the

<sup>6</sup>The statistics is obtained from Zhang, Sanxi 張三夕. (Ed.). 2003. *Zhongguo Gudian Wenxianxue* 中國古典文獻學. Wuhan: Huazhong Shifan Daxue Chubanshe, p. 369.

<sup>7</sup>See (Cohen, 2000: pp. 503-508) for a list of sources for name variations.

<sup>8</sup>The Warring States Period was a period in Chinese history roughly from 5th century B.C.E to 221 B.C.E. The Warring States Project is a research project launched by a group of American scholars of early Chinese history.

<sup>9</sup>For example, libraries of University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Amherst College, Smith College, New Hampshire College, and Mount Holyoke College share only one librarian of East Asian studies.

learners to take advantage of the one romanization system that they know. Specifically, instead of going to great lengths to teach a multiplicity of romanization systems, an instructor can refer learners to the online conversion tables between different systems or print out the tables for them.<sup>10</sup> With the tables available to them, the learners will be able to search in various search engines that use different romanization systems.

What should be taught face-to-face is the professional peculiarities in the IL in Chinese studies. Examples include the aforementioned use of medieval phonetic system in knowledge classification, the taboo names, public names, and Chinese lunar calendar. While these things can also be described in a number of websites or printed handouts, they — as many friends and students have actually complained — prove to be extra obstacles that loom large between information seekers and the information sources that they wish to use. Specifically, the learners have to spend a lot of time reading such large quantity of web pages or printed materials and endeavoring to figure them out before they can finally start to try using the sources. The whole process is, according to my friends and students, rather inefficient and time consuming. What the learners need is someone who can stand in front of them, explain things, offer a show-and-tell, and answer questions in spontaneity. The instruction on information evaluation, in particular, may sometimes require the instructor to hold an 18th-century pirated edition in one hand and an 11th-century original edition in the other and point out to the students the features by which one can possibly distinguish the two. Considering that the text in original edition was often altered in pirated editions either out of the pirating compilers' intention or due to their misreading of early texts, the ability to distinguish the two is also an important part of IL for scholars of pre-modern Chinese history and culture. It is a good thing that Chinese studies librarians in many academic institutions often jointly offer ILI courses with faculty members specialized in Chinese studies. In China, for instance, many accomplished librarians serve as university instructors at the same time and participate in university instructions on authentication of Chinese rare books.

## 5. Conclusion

In sum, while there are general basics in IL that are applicable in the searching and use of information in all areas of study, information professionals in different subject fields need to build their specific basics into the IL in their fields. Each subject area may need to have its own definition of IL, which may lend itself to the ILI particularly in that area. As this essay demonstrates, IL in Chinese studies in this information age is indeed based upon, and yet much larger than, a combination of Chinese literacy and computer literacy. Some knowledge of the culture and the discipline is important for the Chinese majors who wish to be information literate in this area.

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<sup>10</sup>For example, the aforementioned Common Alphabetic system in the websites and publications of Warring States Project is one of the most rarely used systems of Chinese romanization. Instructors do not need to learn in order to teach the system. All they need to do is either refer interested learners to the Chinese Romanization Tables in the website of the Project or print out the page of *The Original Analects* specified at the bottom of the website.