A Successful Effort and Satisfying Results

--A Chronicle of Inviting Overseas Chinese Scholars to Lecture for the Defense Science and Technology Intelligence Agencies

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"The Internet Information Construction and Service Technology Training Class" was held on Beijing between 23rd and 27th of June 1997. This is a beneficial exercise in inviting overseas Chinese scholars to return to China and give lectures and conduct scholarly exchanges. More than 50 people participated in this event. The training class was a great success.

A Successful Attempt:

The four overseas scholars invited back to lecture received their masters' degrees in information science in the early 1980s from Beijing University and Wuhan University. They then went abroad to study for their doctorate degrees in American universities. After getting their doctorates, they have either worked or taught in the U.S. for many years. After several discussions and negotiations, the topic for this training class was chosen to be "The Internet Information Construction and its Service Technologies." It emphasizes the acquisition of Internet information resources, Internet information services and the development trends of related new information technologies. The main purpose of this class is for technological management personnel and middle-level technicians to broaden their knowledge of the key technologies of the Internet construction and services and to explore certain fields with certain depth. Some seminars were added during the training as requested by the participants. During the five days of training, the four scholars gave numerous lectures on various technologies on some 20 topics. For each topic and lecture, a lecture outline was provided. After each lecture, some time was provided for Q&A and exchange of opinions.

The 20 topics of the lectures were as follows:

The development trends of the global new information service technologies;
The main status of the global database development;
The structure of information service organizations;
From data to network database
On pre-processing and re-processing of information;
On recent studies and experiments in information indexing (TREC);
On the currently popular database management systems and their comparisons;
System analysis and its design principles and technologies;
How to choose systems?
On the technologies of processing digital graphic information;
ISP's service range and its characteristics;

ISP marketing technologies;
Contents-based ISP information service industry;
On World Wide Web search engines;
On document transmission;
Intellectual property rights;
On the concept and applications of the Intranet
Joint cataloguing;
On the programming languages for HTML, SGML and WEB

Results:

This training class achieved its anticipated effects. Both the trainees and the lecturers have expressed satisfaction. The trainees all believe that the lecturers were all experts in their own disciplines; that the lecturers understood our needs, without language and sentimental barriers. Many of their lectures were based upon their own experiences and research results. Their lectures were lively and concise, providing much new knowledge and inspiration about new technologies. The lecturers stated that it was their honor and rare opportunity to pay back to their motherland by providing their expertise and knowledge. They expressed positive impressions of the trainees and praised them. After they went back to the U.S., they have all written back to us and said, "This is the most successful training class we have held," "the trainees are all of high caliber, very attentive in the classroom, respectful of their teachers. They all moved us greatly;" "After we came back to the U.S. we still miss the wonderful time we spent in Beijing."

To sum up the feedback submitted by all, this training class reflects the following salient points:

A. It keeps in step with the development of information technologies, and meets the urgent needs of training cadres.

Everyone believes that this training class, by focusing on information resources construction, the network information service and the developments of related information technologies, provides a strong purposefulness. For example, topics such as "From data to network database," "on pre-processing and post-processing of information," "contents-based ISP information service industry;" "on World Wide Web search engines" and "on the programming languages for HTML, SGML And WEB," etc. are all knowledge deserving urgent grasp and mastery in our information construction and service. According to sources, this training class covers roughly a quarter of the 75 continuing education courses for information experts as demanded by the 1996 American Information Science Association. The trainees commented that this class was a high-level lecture series on technologies; it's a continuing education crack course with great efficiency. It's truly a re-fueling opportunity for those technicians who have worked for many years at the front line.

B. It helps connect our country's efforts in constructing information system with the efforts of international information developments.

   The four lecturers come with their frontline experience, expertise, background, and professionalism they had gained in the fields of colleges/universities, Internet service industry, and software development in a foreign country. For a long time, they have been following the development and trends of foreign information technologies, and have paid particular attention to China's characteristics and the gap between China and the foreign countries. During the class, they shared with the trainees their thoughts, observations and research results, which has proved beyond any doubt to be inspirational to further develop our information system and, based upon China's specific needs and conditions, to connect with the international information technologies. For example, on the search engine on the Internet, the lecturers introduced the delivery technologies and the METADATA (working second documentation) Standardization trend that are gradually being applied since the beginning of this year, which assumes guiding implication for our own research projects.

C. The lecturers made recommendations and provided valuable information:

   The four lecturers, during the course of their deliberations, often made recommendations for our domestic information construction efforts or provided us with valuable information. For example, when introducing TREC, the lecturers suggested that the information indexing and searching software developed by some agencies inside China in recent years be sent abroad to be reviewed by TREC, they further provided specific information on how and when to apply for the participation and the review of TREC. When discussing the pre-processing and post-processing technology, the lecturers introduced the specific cases of how American commercial networking service system added value to WPI and chemical databases. In the discussion on "choosing systems," they shared their own experience of dealing with American companies. When talking about "the ISP Marketing Technologies," they listed many workable methods with practical applications. In addition, there have been many exchanges between the lecturers and the trainees after the class. The trainees have stated that they learned a great deal of precious consultation and valuable information.

A Few Recommendations:

To Make it permanent on a regular or non-regular basis to invite overseas Chinese scholars to hold seminars or training classes inside China, as a means to train science and technology experts through continuing education. Senior Engineer Liu Qiang, who visited the U.S. last year, who was involved in this year's training class from beginning to end, said with great emotion, "Judging from the range and depth of the information exchange, training classes like this are more effective. To invite our own people back to lecture does not have any language and sentimental barriers; it is purposeful, with deep discussions and more and more people can benefit from it."

As we understand, currently there are several dozens even up to one hundred overseas Chinese whose profession is library information. They love our motherland, care about the development of our country's library and information systems, and are extremely willing to make their own contribution to us. We should view this group as our science and technology (S&T) corps' foreign legion. We recommend that our nation's S&T foreign exchange programs include this group into the consideration, and utilize various methods to fully realize their potential. For example, we can invite them back to China to lecture, hire them as scholarly advisors, and research project advisors; we can also go through this group to strengthen our connection and cooperation with foreign database manufacturers, wholesale merchants, ISP, and ICP etc. Through them, we can also send people to participate in overseas conferences on technology or make inspection trips overseas. Also, through them we can select personnel to study abroad, to visit or partake in certain research projects.

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