

## **Review and Reflections on the 45th IATUL Annual Conference:**

### **Conversation Connects an Infinite Future**



The 45th International Association of University Libraries (IATUL) Annual Conference was successfully held in Shanghai from November 2nd to 6th, 2025.

Co-organized by IATUL and the Shanghai Jiao Tong University Library, the 45th Annual Conference was a milestone event, marking its first-ever convening in China since IATUL's establishment in 1955. Its successful hosting stands as a powerful testament to the global academic library community's close collaboration and shared commitment to common development. This international gathering, themed "Exploring the Future of Libraries: Connection, Innovation, and Impact," brought together over 200 delegates from more than 130 institutions and organizations across 19 countries and regions in Asia, Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Oceania. Participants engaged in constructive dialogues on new pathways for the development of global academic libraries, injecting strong momentum into the transformation and upgrading of the sector in the digital and intelligent era.

### **Focusing on Industry Frontiers, Discussing the Future of Libraries**

The conference program was meticulously designed around the core opportunities and challenges currently facing libraries. The keynote session featured a distinguished

lineup of experts. Professor Weinan E, Academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Chief Advisor to the School of Artificial Intelligence at Shanghai Jiao Tong University, depicted a new landscape for scientific research in AI era, outlining systemic changes from research paradigms and methodologies to application scenarios. Dr. Charles D. Eckman, Dean of Libraries and University Librarian at the University of Miami, redefined the role of libraries within the modern academic ecosystem—transitioning from passive knowledge repositories to "innovation commons" that support collaboration and creation. Professor Huanwen Cheng, Vice President of the Library Society of China and Professor at the School of Information Management, Sun Yat-sen University, systematically reviewed the core developmental context of Chinese academic libraries and outlined their future prospects. Mr. Rick Anderson, Dean of the Brigham Young University Library, discussed the critical topic of "Open Scholarship," delving into its importance and practical implementation strategies. Professor Jianbin Jin, Deputy Director of the Society for Academic Library of the Library Society of China and Director of the Tsinghua University Library, focused on the development of institutional repositories and explored the value and future direction of libraries. The exchange of ideas between Chinese and international experts highlighted both the common aspirations for global library development and the unique value of practices in China.

### **In-depth Dialogue among Chinese and International Library Directors, Forging Industry Consensus**

A notable feature of this year's forum was a dedicated dialogue session between Chinese and international academic library directors. Centered on the core topic of reflection on the future of university libraries in the era of AI, the session facilitated two rounds of in-depth discussion, leading to significant consensus. Directors widely agreed that the wave of artificial intelligence brings not only disruptive changes to service models, resource development, and even spatial functions but also presents a historic opportunity to redefine our value, enhance librarian competencies, and uphold our human-centric mission. There was a shared sense that facing the future requires even closer communication, dialogue, and collaboration within the global academic library community.

## **Delving into Five Core Themes, Launching Multi-dimensional Discussions**

The conference focused on five sub-themes: the role of libraries in university innovation ecosystems; resource development in open environments; service innovation and future space reconfiguration; research support under the AI for Science (AI4S) paradigm; and library workforce development and capacity building. Nearly 40 parallel sessions, 6 lightning talks, 4 workshops, and over 20 poster exhibitions facilitated multi-dimensional discussions. The vitality displayed by the younger generation in the "Voice of Chinese Young Librarians" session, the innovative ideas sparked during the lightning talks, and the enthusiastic exchanges among colleagues in front of the academic posters all vividly embodied the conference theme of "Connection, Innovation, and Impact," showcasing valuable attempts at deep dialogue and collaborative future-building between Eastern and Western library communities.

## **Interweaving Technology and Humanities, Experiencing Cultural Immersion**

The conference also aimed to create a rich cultural atmosphere within its compact agenda. From the martial arts performance at the welcome reception, which embodied the Eastern philosophy of "combining dynamic and static elements, balancing strength with flexibility", to the organized visits to the Shanghai Jiao Tong University Library and exchanges at cultural venues like Shanghai Library and museums, participants were able to personally experience unique Chinese cultural imprints, the cultural context of Shanghai, and the distinctive symphony of technology and humanities interwoven.

After the conference, we sent a survey to every participant and received a wealth of constructive feedback. Attendees rated the event highly, especially praising the venue arrangements and the quality of the professional presentations. At the same time, many pointed out shortcomings in the registration website and the payment process for overseas guests. We take these issues seriously and will actively improve them. We look forward to meeting colleagues from around the world again at our next gathering.

The successful conclusion of the 45th IATUL Annual Conference not only provided an effective platform for exchange for university libraries worldwide but also forged a stronger industry consensus: amidst the waves of digital transformation and open science, libraries can only fully play their core role in cultural heritage and academic

support by steadfastly focusing on interconnection, innovation, and empowerment. The closing of this conference represents both a summation of past experiences and a starting point for future collaboration. Shanghai Jiao Tong University Library will seize the opportunity presented by this conference to continuously deepen international exchanges and cooperation, promote the high-quality development of librarianship, and contribute Chinese wisdom and strength to building a global community for the development of academic libraries.

*Shanghai Jiao Tong University Library*

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