

I Love My Librarian!

Award

Jianye He
Librarian for Chinese Collections
University of California, Berkeley, East Asian Library
Berkeley, California

Nominated by: Paulina Hartono and Trenton Wilson

Paulina Hartono
Ph.D. Candidate, History, UC Berkeley

Jianye He is the dearly beloved librarian for the Chinese collections at UC Berkeley. The Chinese studies community at UC Berkeley spans 25 departments, with over 50 core faculty members, and hundreds of students and visiting scholars. As widely spanning as the field is, Jianye is a familiar face to all, a friendly presence at the library and a reliable sight at China studies events, research seminars, student presentations, and even the graduate student group chat. The thirteen comments below—which range from scholars across four universities, and includes students, faculty, and staff—attest to Jianye’s care and excellence. Even so, I feel we have only scratched the surface. Jianye has also produced noteworthy contributions to library and China studies scholarship, having written literally dozens of reviews, presentations, publications, and translations, on topics from Shanghai cinema collections to Song dynasty poetry.

We are in constant awe at her knowledge of scholarly trends, her accessibility, and resourcefulness in locating materials difficult to find not only in the U.S., but even in China. Her vigorous research agenda and her boundless energy have not only left their mark on our internationally-renowned research collection—she has also helped make us better scholars, and a more closely-knit community. We are honored to nominate her for the “I Love My Librarian” Award.

Weihong Bao

Associate Professor, Film & Media and East Asian Languages & Cultures, UC Berkeley

Jianye He is an incredibly dedicated and resourceful librarian, the best kind I have ever met in my teaching at various institutions. I consider it a good fortune for us to have such an enthusiastic and devoted librarian. She has constantly supported my research and teaching. She is so resourceful and knowledgeable that she always knows where to hunt for the obscure archival materials from across the country and the globe. I have also been so impressed by her long-term planning in always acquiring the most important publications and collections, and, this is important, always in consultation with faculty to assess the priorities. Jianye was instrumental for our acquisition of the Paul Fonoroff Collection on

Chinese Film and Media Culture, the largest collection outside China. She is also a devoted member of our intellectual community: I have often seen her participating in our events, such as the Center for Chinese Studies talks, the film series I curated at the Berkeley Film Archive. It has been such a joy working with her throughout these years. Her presence on campus is absolutely indispensable.

You-tien Hsing

Professor, Geography, UC Berkeley

Pamela P. Fong and Family Distinguished Chair in China Studies

Jianye is the best librarian that I have ever worked with in my three-decade long teaching and research career in North America. The breadth and depth of Jianye's knowledge and her skills and efficiency in locating materials and offering suggestion for further exploration has been most invaluable to my own research. She has a way of finding materials within and greatly beyond the library that often feels like magic. I cannot recall one single occasion in which Jianye told me she could not help, even with an impossible request like a very local, limited-circulation memoir from Xinjiang, China's central Eurasia, published in the 1940s. It was an obscure piece produced during a time and place of great turmoil. I cannot begin to describe how excited and surprised I was when Jianye told me she found the material after calling her several contacts in the University of Shihezi in Xinjiang!

Michael Nylan

Professor, History, UC Berkeley

During the pandemic, Jianye has had to step up her responses. Multiply that by the hundreds of people every week who are like me asking questions, and one begins to see the complex and far-reaching resources that Jianye He has learned to tap efficiently and well. Meanwhile, to make this cross-Pacific network work, Jianye must surely be attending to heaps of queries from people outside the Berkeley community. I know from colleagues that she solves problems not only for the faculty from the entire California public educational system, but from other American universities and from those in China as well. And somehow she helps all the Chinese visitors to campus, from senior scholars to pre-doctoral candidates to undergraduates, identifying doable research topics with the resources at hand, even as she radically expands our sense of what's available.

I am a Berkeley faculty member, but no matter whom I send to ask Jianye for help – whether it is a visiting scholar or pre-doctoral candidate from foreign parts, one of my own students at the graduate or undergraduate level, or a student floundering in an allied field – everyone finds that Jianye is there for them. She is the perfect face of Berkeley to the world, thinking for people as well as with them, devoting herself with incredible generosity and quick-wittedness to their work. And in every single undergraduate class I teach, I invite Jianye to come to class to discuss research methods and how to use the multiple databases we are fortunate to have. In essence, she and I also teach the methodology seminar for Asian Studies graduate students together.

Skye VanValkenburgh

Visiting Scholar Program Administrator, Center for Chinese Studies, UC Berkeley

At the Center for Chinese Studies, we host roughly 25 visiting scholars a year. For our visiting scholars, Jianye is the personification of a “home away from home.” She consistently makes sure that our visiting scholars feel integrated into the Berkeley community by recommending upcoming research talks on topics of interests. Considering how many people she serves at the library, she never treats scholars as if they are faceless strangers to be forgotten after each interaction, and the individual care she puts into each patron is that of someone who deeply cares to leave others feeling like they are valued. These are not just random scholars to be given information as if they are on an assembly line, they are people, with hearts, minds, of their own, and this sort of treatment of international scholars who may have insecurities when it comes to speaking in their non-native language, is especially important.

During a pandemic, a sense of community can be especially difficult to achieve, and even more so for international students and scholars. At the Center for Chinese Studies we hosted our weekly Visiting Scholar Brown Bag Talks, a two-hour seminar, where CCS visiting scholars present on their research and engage a community of peers in rigorous academic discussion ranging from classical Chinese literature to weekly visiting scholar talks. These talks were moved online due to the pandemic, and Jianye He, who has consistently participated in the lectures, came to all of these meetings and brought with us both an attentiveness, hunger for knowledge, and the generosity of someone who wants others to bring their best and well supported thoughts to the table. She consistently recommended to our scholars additional reading materials, as well as provided emotional support for scholars who were having difficulties due to travel bans and skyrocketing airline tickets, purchasing return flights to China, understanding the complexities of the George Floyd protests, and frankly anxious about the state of U.S.-China relations in the midst of a pandemic where tensions were at an all-time high. Our scholars have consistently praised Jianye as being both welcoming, and in a time where the United States is becoming more isolationist and less friendly towards our friends from overseas, this sort of inclusive treatment is not only refreshing, but much needed.

Paul Pickowicz

Distinguished Professor Emeritus of History and Chinese Studies

Though I am not a member of the UC Berkeley faculty, I have detailed knowledge of Ms. He’s professional skills. For many years I took my current PhD students (usually 8-10 students) on multi-day research trips to the UC Berkeley library. This was expensive, considering transportation, lodging, and meal costs, but it was extraordinarily useful. The key reason was the enthusiastic lead role Jianye played in preparing for the arrival of my students and in actually helping them day in and day out when they were in the library in a pressure packed effort to locate and use relevant research materials on a wide array of modern Chinese history topics. It’s important to point out that Ms. He was not simply competent, she was always genuinely enthusiastic about the topics on which my students were working. I always marveled at the way she bonded with my students before, during and after our intense and demanding visits. The students not only made remarkable progress by interacting with Ms. He, as outsiders they felt truly welcome at the library.

Joseph Esherick

Hwei-chih and Julia Hsiu Chair in Chinese Studies Emeritus

Professor Emeritus, History, UC San Diego

For many years, while I was a professor of History at UCSD, I used to bring graduate students for a quick visit to Stanford and Berkeley to identify, scan, copy and borrow relevant sources for their seminar papers. Each year we would send ahead to Jianye a list of topics and a selection of titles. Our first meeting in Berkeley would be with Jianye. I know that to this day, many of those students, all faculty somewhere now and some in the UC system, keep in contact with Jianye and come by to visit her for advice if they are in the Bay Area. This sort of personalized, knowledgeable, professional service to young scholars is absolutely indispensable to their professional development, and there are few people who do it as well as Jianye.

Finally, let me note that in the current lockdown when in-person library visits are impossible, Jianye has been incredibly helpful to me in locating electronic resources. On one occasion, I was missing a date on a newspaper source that I had cited, and when there was no digital version available in the U.S., she emailed a student in China who within a day send back a file with the relevant source. This combination of eagerness to help, knowledge of the relevant materials, and network of contacts who can access the relevant materials is absolutely extraordinary. In a career that now spans over fifty years in the field of Chinese history, I have never met a librarian as knowledgeable and helpful as Jianye He.

Miriam Gross

Associate Professor, History, University of Oklahoma

I first met Jianye as one of Dr. Esherick's Ph.D. students when we came to UC Berkeley for our annual research trip to partake of the spectacular East Asian Collection. After I became a professor at the University of Oklahoma, I continued to visit the library many summer and winter breaks. Jianye spent countless hours helping me delve through the libraries' extensive online collections and services as well as tracking down hardcopy materials on and off site. She was creative, persistent, and exceptionally patient, still looking after I had given up. When all else failed, she would contact networks of past visiting Chinese scholars who had returned to China and have them send things to me from their university's libraries. I have worked with many librarians and I have never encountered one who treats each scholar's research with such care and determination.

Finally, I have been astonished by Jianye's work constructing the Chee Kung Tong (致公堂, Chinese Freemasons) archive. Established in 1848, the 170-year-old Chee Kung Tong Society had strong connections with Dr. Sun Yat-sen and his revolutionary network in the United States. In May 2018 the society decided to bestow their archival collection on the East Asian Library. Jianye had many conversations and visits with them to facilitate this gift. She went on the weekend to pick up the over 5,000 items covering a century of history. While this was a specular gift, it arrived as boxes and boxes of undifferentiated paper and other items. Jianye has spent hundreds if not thousands of hours, often at night so it does not interfere with her regular duties, categorizing all the material, creating a database for future users, and assembling an archive from the ground-up. It is an amazing piece of work of enormous value that goes above and beyond any possible normal work scope as a librarian. Jianye is the best Chinese librarian I have ever encountered. Her vision has helped shape the East Asian Library into a globally recognized treasure for Chinese scholars.

Emily Baum

Associate Professor, History, UC Irvine

This past summer, in light of Covid-19 restrictions on travel to the People's Republic of China, I and a few other colleagues held a series of public webinars on the topic of digital resources on Chinese history. When putting together a lineup for the first event, numerous people pointed me in the direction of Jianye. She responded immediately and thoughtfully to my request, listing at least ten different databases she could discuss alongside others that had recently been brought to her attention. The event was a fantastic success due largely to Jianye's efforts. She prepared a clear, detailed presentation that succinctly summarized the scope and functionality of several online sources; during the Q&A, she pointed attendees in the direction of multiple additional databases; and she even offered her contact information in case students without access to East Asian studies collections wanted to follow up with her directly. From beginning to end, Jianye was a consummate professional: incredibly knowledgeable about different time periods and subjects related to Chinese history, and eager to be of service—even to those outside of the University of California system.

Ling Hon Lam

Associate Professor, East Asian Languages & Cultures, UC Berkeley

Over more than a decade, Jianye has been my go-to expert whenever I am at my wit's end looking for primary materials or scholarly works for my classes or research in the fields of premodern Chinese literature. Resourceful, knowledgeable, well-connected and responsive, she is always enthusiastic to help, and very often delivers more than I ask for. She knows the collections not just in our library but across the country and in China so well that she can locate and obtain the resources that would have been otherwise beyond my reach. As an ardent researcher and scholar herself, she has an acute sense of what my projects and courses are about and what they need for development. Even before I submit a request, she would take the initiative to notify me about a new acquisition, and she would make it available for me right away. My scholarship and teaching have profoundly benefited from what I would call "proactive assistance" from her. It is my great fortune to be able to work with Jianye, and without reservation I fully support her nomination for the "I Love My Librarian" award.

Nicholas Constantino

Ph.D. Candidate, History, UC Berkeley

My transition from amateur enthusiast to confident researcher would have been impossible without Jianye's support. Since I first came to UC Berkeley as a graduate student in 2014, Jianye's patient and personalized guidance had afforded me the confidence necessary to navigate the East Asian Library's immense collection of difficult sources. She is always willing to help me overcome roadblocks in my research, regardless of their complexity, often sitting down and looking at my sources with me. Because of her support, I have been able to pursue more robust research questions, which would have otherwise seemed impossibly ambitious.

Yifan Zheng

Ph.D. Candidate, East Asian Languages & Cultures, UC Berkeley

What Jianye has been doing goes far beyond people's expectation of what a librarian should and can do. She is our academic adviser of all subjects, a private counselor and therapist, a bridge that connects the students and professors, besides a professional 24/7 accessible librarian. Jianye majored in Chinese classical literature in college and graduate school, but she trained herself through all kinds of workshops to become an expert in history, philosophy, film and media studies, etc. for the sake of helping scholars and students in various fields. As a result, her service not only facilitated everyone's research but also integrated the community.

Many of us would agree that Jianye is a ray of sunshine to our Berkeley students and professors. Her "lunch group" which include scholars and visiting scholars across departments has actually become a hub of academic information, and is actually a "support group" for us when we are under stress or facing various challenges. Recently, Jianye played a more pivotal role in doing research under the Covid pandemic. She communicates between the university administration, professors and students, makes sure that everyone's needs fulfilled or at least heard and responded to. Jianye also keeps everyone updated on progress such as when the library will resume article delivery service, how to make appointments to pick books, etc. I am sure she will be the first person I come to consult whenever I need advice in my research even years after I graduate, and I know that she will be there, ready to support.

Menghsin Horng

Librarian, Oakland Public Library

Faculty Librarian, City College of San Francisco

Over the years, Jianye has become my most reliable ally. She is versatile, with a comprehensive knowledge of the collection from premodern to modern sources, social sciences to the humanities. When I shifted from doctoral studies at Berkeley to a Masters in Library and Information Sciences (through San Jose State University), Jianye was my most enthusiastic cheerleader and mentor through the entire process. She offered sage advice and career guidance numerous times during my years of library school coursework. I was honored to work closely with her during a semester-long internship at the C.V. Starr East Asian Library. She guided me through an incredibly rich internship program, showed me detailed processes from book ordering to grant writing, and helped me make connections across campus departments and at regional library conferences. I was struck by the lengths she took to stay on top of volatile publishing markets, generate extra funding, proactively reach out to faculty and students both on campus and internationally.

As I entered librarianship, the esteem that colleagues felt for Jianye was palpable and inspirational to my own work. In particular, as I now work in a public library and community college library settings, I strive to emulate her service ethics. Her emphasis on availability and air of approachability are guiding principles to how I interact with patrons now.

Trenton Wilson

Ph.D. Candidate, History, UC Berkeley

For many PhD students, it often feels as if Jianye is at the center of the Chinese studies universe at UC Berkeley. She's an invaluable resource and/or friend for countless students who regularly seek her out in

her office or online. She passes along information about new research tools, library-related classes, and other useful campus resources. Jianye has emailed me countless times to let me know about (for instance) a Digital Humanities seminar that I might take, lectures on China-related topics, or other academic events on campus.

If PhD students in Chinese studies have not sought out Jianye in the library, they have likely seen her in classes related to research methodology. She is a regular presenter in Professor Michael Nylan and Professor Varsano's research methodology class for premodern Chinese studies and in Professor Wenhsin Yeh's modern Chinese history methodology class. She meticulously prepares research guides for these classes, introducing students to topics related to textual history, print culture, gazetteers and other topics.

Jianye's energy is inspiring and reinvigorating. When I seek her out at the library, she is inevitably excited about some interesting source she has found or a recent paper/talk she has written/delivered. I'm always interested to hear about some new discovery she has made regarding Sino-Korean exchanges or the history of Chinese communities in the U.S. I recently ran into Jianye on a walk and she shared with me no fewer than three presentations she was preparing to give about the future of library collections, conducting research on China, and sources for the Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco in 1915. Even during the time it has taken to write this letter (with the library still closed due to the pandemic), Jianye has responded to two separate inquiries that I made about locating sources given present restrictions.

Jianye's commitment to teach students about the resources at the East Asian Library, on the one hand, and her own research and writing, on the other, make her an excellent librarian and an "uncrowned" member of the Chinese studies faculty at UC Berkeley.