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NEW HORIZONS IN AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

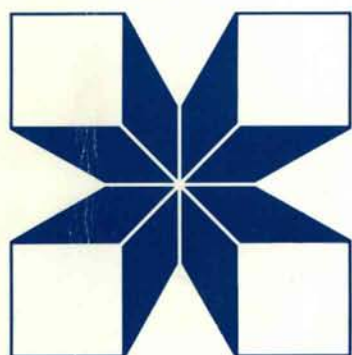
PROCEEDINGS

OF AN INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

MARCH 13-16, 1991

BEIJING, CHINA

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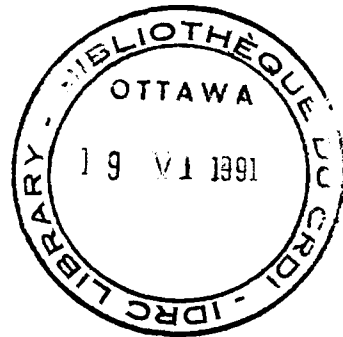
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Esta serie incluye ponencias de reuniones, informes internos y documentos técnicos que pueden posteriormente conformar la base de una publicación formal. El informe recibe distribución limitada entre una audiencia altamente especializada.

New Horizons in Agricultural Information Management

Proceedings of an International Symposium,

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Preparing English Abstracts of Chinese Documents – an Important Step Toward International Sharing of Chinese Information Resources

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Abstract

The difference of languages in various countries is one of the major barriers to international exchange of information. The Chinese pictograph system is greatly different from the alphabet of the western countries. It is difficult for western scientists and information specialists to read and to understand Chinese sciencetech documents. Therefore, publishing English abstracts of Chinese documents together with the original documents in abstract journals and their input into international information databases is an important way to introduce Chinese sciencetech documents to western scientists, information specialists and other concerned personnel, and to realize international sharing of Chinese information resources. For this reason, more personnel who can write in English and possess knowledge in a relatively wide range of disciplines and skills should be trained in abstracting in order to increase the exchange of information resources between China and the world.

I

The abstract is an outcome of the concurrent development of science and technology, information processing, and publishing in modern times. It is developing along with those three areas and has become a very important part of information services and information resources of the world. It has been a not insignificant impetus to the development of science and technology. Now there are hundreds of organizations working on abstracts; there are thousands of abstract journals; millions of abstracts are produced annually; and there is a total of hundreds of millions of abstracts in the world.

In China, only a few abstract journals in foreign languages were translated into Chinese in the 1950s and early 1960s while in the late 1970s and 1980s, Chinese abstract journals in various disciplines were published one after another, and more and more academic periodicals had their papers accompanied by English abstracts. So far, there are 200-300 periodicals which have English abstracts included with their Chinese papers. In addition, there are a few journals of English abstracts prepared from Chinese sciencetech documents, such as *Chinese Science Abstracts* and *Chinese Mechanical Engineering Abstracts*, etc. Also, some organizations have cooperated with information institutions in foreign countries in providing them with English abstracts of Chinese documents. For example, the Sciencetech Documentation and Information Centre, CAAS, has

provided CABI (Commonwealth Agricultural Bureaux International) with some English abstracts of Chinese documents every year since 1981. By January 1990, a total of 6,360 English abstracts will have been dispatched to CABI. It is not a large figure, however, it is an effective cooperation, which is significant to China, to the United Kingdom and to the world as well. As everybody knows, the difference in languages of various countries is a major barrier for the international exchange of information. The Chinese pictograph system is completely different from the alphabetic system of the western countries, which makes Chinese documents difficult to be understood by western scientists, information specialists and other concerned persons. Therefore, preparing English abstracts of Chinese documents to be published together with the original paper or in abstract journals or to be input into databases at international and national levels in the western countries is an effective and important way to accomplish international sharing of Chinese documents. We have taken a small step along this road.

II

An abstract is an abbreviated, accurate representation of a document without added interpretation or criticism. Since the target readers of the English abstracts of Chinese documents are foreigners who cannot read Chinese, the English abstracts of Chinese documents should be self-contained with major results and essential elements for the reader to understand those results. The essential elements include experimental materials, main methods, techniques, treatments and other factors or conditions which have significant effects on the results. For example, an abstract of a document on tissue culture of a plant should make it clear which part of the plant is used in the culture: endosperm, hypocotyl, cotyledon, shoot stem, leaf, etc. In another example, temperature is the most important condition for obtaining superconductivity, and the significance of the results depends on at what temperature the superconductivity is obtained.

At present, the English abstracts of Chinese documents in various publications in China vary significantly in quality. Some are very long, having 3,000-4,000 English words and covering 5-6 pages; and some are very short and simple, composed of only one sentence of a dozen English words; some have as their contents almost a translation of the full text; some are almost the same as the title of a document; some describe what prize a product or technique was awarded; some describe how the author(s) carried out an experiment, and so on. They are not standardized in both content and presentation. Consequently, their quality can not be ensured.

There are two reasons for that situation. One is that the English abstract is not well known in China. It is not known exactly what should be included in the abstract, what its correct form is and what the functions of an abstract are. Also English abstracts may be prepared by the author(s) or by others. Some of them are prepared casually with few English sentences but are considered to be correct abstracts. The other reason is that English is not the mother tongue of the Chinese, which greatly affects the presentation of contents in English. Though many Chinese scientists can read documents in English, it is difficult for them to write in English. Therefore, many of the English

abstracts of Chinese documents in various publications do not include the right contents and can not represent the real academic level of the documents.

III

As mentioned above, it is not easy for most Chinese scientists and others to prepare English abstracts of the required quality. Therefore, it is essential to train more abstractors who are able to write in English, who are skillful in abstracting and who possess a relatively wide range of knowledge so that more and more information on the results and advances of scientific research in China can be introduced to scientists, information specialists and other concerned persons in other countries and to strengthen cooperation and international exchange of scientech information.

In order to make knowledge of English abstracts and skills of abstracting popular among Chinese scientists, information specialists, editors of publications and other relevant personnel and to improve the quality of English abstracts of Chinese documents, I wrote a book entitled *Preparing English Abstracts of Chinese Documents* after I had studied a large quantity of materials and monographs on abstracting such as *IS0214-1976(E) Documentation-Abstract of Publications and Documentation* by the International Standardization Organization, *ANSI Z39.14-1971 American National Standard for Writing Abstracts* by the American National Standards Institute, *Editorial Analysis Manual* by Chemical Abstract Services, *The Art of Abstracting* by Edward T. Gremmins in the U. S. A., *Abstracting and Indexing* by Jenifer E. Rowley in the United Kingdom, materials from CABI and other abstracting organizations and dozens of academic periodicals and abstract journals both in English and in Chinese, and combined these with my experiences and problems I have encountered in providing CABI with English abstracts of Chinese agricultural documents during the past ten years. However, my knowledge is limited in English, in science and technology, in the skill of abstracting and in Chinese as well. Therefore, there are surely shortcomings in the book. Comments and criticisms are warmly welcome. Meanwhile, I would like to take this opportunity to appeal to the information institutions in all branches of science and technology and other concerned organizations in China to make an effort to train more qualified abstractors for preparing English abstracts of Chinese documents so that more and more qualified English abstracts of Chinese documents are prepared and more Chinese information resources are shared the world over.