Haiwang Yuan envisions his research as a bridge between two cultures. His office reflects his Chinese heritage. The walls contain prints of Chinese art and his computer screen may be full of Chinese characters. Or, it may contain the latest version of the Topper Information Portal, a search tool on the WKU Libraries' home page, reflecting the American influence in his life.

bridging cultures

BY BOB SKIPPER

Professor Yuan, Web Site and Virtual Library Coordinator for University Libraries, has been in the U.S. since receiving a Fulbright Grant in 1988. While he and his family have adapted to the American way of life, he still maintains contacts in China.

"If you want people to respect you, you have to respect your own culture, your roots," he said. "Because I have the two cultural backgrounds, I think I'm in an advantageous position to try to do something to bridge the two cultures. That's why I'm so interested in anything that's related to those cultures."

That respect for his culture led Yuan to his first major Web project — the China Page. The page is a collection of links to selected resources on Chinese culture, art, facts and many other aspects. It began as a class project while he was a student at Indiana University's School of Library and Information Science.

"What happened at Tiananmen Square in 1989 antagonized many Chinese citizens living in the U.S.," Yuan said. "While they wanted to denounce their country, I realized that no matter what may change, the Chinese culture was a constant.

"That's why I did the China page that provides a resource for those seeking information, or wanting to connect to the Chinese culture. The

page proved to be very popular," he said.

Yuan also became hooked on information technology. After graduating from Indiana University, Yuan began working at a Florida private school, but his interest in technology caused him to look for a networked campus.

In 1997 he interviewed for coordinator of the Educational Resource Center at Western. His presentation concerned children's safety on the Internet.

Once Yuan was hired, library faculty members encouraged him to elaborate on the presentation and develop it into an article. He published the award-winning article "Librarian, Educator and Parent Part-

nership: Keeping Children Safe on the Internet" in *Kentucky Libraries*, the journal of the Kentucky Library Association, in 1999.

Yuan moved into his present position of Web Site and Virtual Library Coordinator about a year later.

Yuan is now collaborating with a librarian in Tianjin, China's third largest city, to have an article on the same topic published in China. Even though the government regulates much of the Internet in China, he said the Chinese are facing many of the same issues as the U.S.

"Hopefully, this collaborative research will be beneficial to both cultures," he added.

Yuan said the constraints of academic research dictate that indi-

Detail of 'Children Playing at Home,' Su Han-Ch'en

vidual research projects be carefully selected.

"I took advantage of my bi-cultural background to devote my research to helping bridge different cultures," he said. "My studies compare reading patterns of Chinese and American secondary school students and my attempted endeavor at a collection of Chinese legends and folktales all testify to this practice."

For one of those research projects, "Books and reading: An initial investigation of China's middle and high school teachers' expectations of students' book use," Yuan is working with researchers on and off campus, in America and China. The challenge, he said, has been gathering information from halfway across the world.

Not all of Professor Yuan's research is international in scope. In 1999 he worked with Business Librarian,
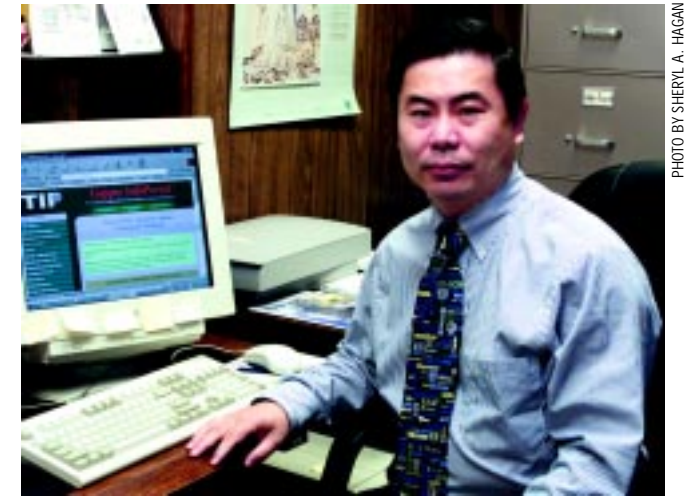

PHOTO BY SHERYL A. HAGAN

"Collaboration among researchers of different disciplines and strengths will not only enrich the scientific inquiry but also the researchers themselves who learn from each other."

Dr. Gay Perkins, and together with the Library Survey Committee, they developed WKU Libraries' first Web-based user satisfaction survey. They have also completed a second library satisfaction survey with identical content for patrons to complete on the Web compared to patrons who actually complete it in the library. These groups' responses will be prepared for a co-presentation.

"Dr. Perkins' training in social sciences research and my training in the Web technology complement each other perfectly in these projects and provide me with a great opportunity to learn from the strength of others to help myself grow in academic research," Yuan said. "Collaboration among researchers of different disciplines and strengths will not only enrich the scientific inquiry but also the researchers themselves who learn from each other."

Professor Yuan has also published "Using WebCT Software in Library Media Education" and "Web-Based Client Survey and Data Analysis: A Review of the Message Parse." Yuan was the first to utilize these two computer programs in library settings on campus, WebCT to build interactive online courses and Message Parse to automate survey data collection and formatting for computerized analysis.

One of his latest projects has been the development of the Topper Information Portal, or TIP, which went online in May of 2000.

"TIP is our effort to offer a service to help faculty, students and staff, and our community, to streamline their online searches," Professor Yuan said. "TIP is a unique search tool on the WKU Libraries' home page, which allows users to find the best university, regional and global Internet accessible resources. The fact that all library and other resources — funded and non-funded — are integrated into a one-stop shopping access point makes TIP the first development of its kind and a potential model for libraries to become the first place to come for useful information."

With Libraries Dean Michael Binder, Yuan has finished an article on the development and management of TIP. The research has been submitted to the Kentucky Library Association, the Internet Librarian 2000 Conference, and the China Society of Library Science (CSLS). The latest development is that Professor Yuan and Dean Binder have received CSLS' invitation to its Annual Conference at Hailar, China this summer – a new link between WKU and Chinese libraries.

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