

AUSTRALIAN LIBRARY DELEGATION TO CHINA, 4-17 October 1987

1. Introduction

A delegation of Chinese librarians visited Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne in November, 1984. The return Australian delegation arranged under the Australia-China Cultural Agreement coincided with the opening of the new National Library of China (NCL) building in Beijing on 6th October, 1987.

The Australian library delegation consisted of:

Mr W.M. Horton, Director-General, National Library of Australia
(leader of the delegation)
Mr Lawrie Ryan, State Librarian of Queensland
Mr Euan Miller, State Librarian of South Australia
Mr Nadanasabapathy, University Librarian, Murdoch University,
Western Australia
Mr Andrew Gosling, Chief Librarian, East Asia, National Library
of Australia.

The Australian delegation was responsible for return airfares to Beijing, with other costs met by the Chinese Government. Travel and other arrangements in China were very efficiently handled by the Chinese Ministry of Culture's Bureau of Library Administration. Mr Du Ke, Director of the Bureau, who led the 1984 Chinese library delegation to Australia, was our principal host. Mr Li Xunda, Vice Head of the Library Affairs office and also a member of the 1984 delegation, accompanied us throughout our week in Beijing. Mrs Wang Lan of the Hunan Provincial Library acted as our interpreter for the whole two week visit, a task she performed with great ability and unfailing good humour. Miss Liu Xiaoqin, Vice head of the Public Library Division, also accompanied us outside Beijing, while Mr He Yang of the Library Affairs Office was responsible for Mr Euan Miller's visit to Shandong Province. The Australian delegation was most grateful for the invaluable assistance of all these people, who helped make our visit a success.

2. Itinerary

The delegation was in Beijing from Monday 5 to Sunday 11 October, in Shanghai from Sunday 11 to Tuesday 13 October, in Guangzhou from Tuesday 13 to Thursday 15 October and in Shenzhen from Thursday 15 to Friday 16 October.

3. Opening of National Library of China

The opening ceremony, held outside the new building, took place on the morning of 6 October. Fortunately the weather was warm and sunny. NLC staff were assembled in front of the magnificent new structure, while Chinese dignitaries and

foreign guests stood on the steps. After a musical introduction by a military band and addresses by Mr Wang Meng, Minister of Culture and others, the official opening was performed by Vice-Premier Wan Li.

Australia was well represented at the opening. In addition to the five-man delegation, the University Librarian of the Australian National University, Mr Colin Steele, and two of his staff, Asian Studies Librarian Mr Y.S. Chan and Ms Susan Prentice, Senior Librarian, East Asian Studies, were also present. Other countries attending included Canada, Chile, Hong Kong, Japan, New Zealand, Nigeria, North Korea, Norway, the Philippines, United Kingdom, USA and USSR, as well as the President of IFLA, Mr Hans-Peter Geh from West Germany, and representatives of UNESCO, Western Library Network, OCLC and other organisations.

4. China International Book Trading Corporation (CIBTC)

Following the opening ceremony of the National Library of China, the delegation had discussions with CIBTC staff: Mr Gong Jiefu, Director, President's Office; Mr Yao Yinsheng, Assistant to the President and Bai Wentong, Manager of the Library Service Section, Euro-American Department. CIBTC has been the National Library's blanket order agent for Chinese national publications since 1974. It has sent NLA over 18,000 Chinese monograph titles since then, and currently supplies 1000 serial titles as our main subscription agent in China. We were able to discuss this fruitful relationship and also CIBTC's proposal to mount a book exhibition in Australia.

5. Tour of NLC building

In the afternoon, visiting librarians were given a very thorough tour of the new 22 storey NLC building, one of the largest libraries in the world. The structure combines traditional and modern architectural styles harmoniously. It covers 7.4 hectares and has a floor space of 14,000 square metres. There are 33 reading rooms, more than 3,000 seats, and it is expected to receive about 8,000 readers each day. The reading rooms will be open by 15 December 1987 except for Newspapers and Rare Books, which will be moved to the new site during 1988.

6. General discussion

Following the tour, an informal discussion session with visiting librarians was led by Mr Ren Jiyu, Director of NLC, and his deputies. Mr Ren explained that the new building was large enough to house the collections until the end of this century. There was also room on the site for extensions. On the question of co-operation with other libraries in China, it was explained that NLC has an inter-library loan service to some 100 libraries in China, as well as lending directly to readers. NLC also supplies union catalogue cards for Chinese books and has produced the Chinese Library Classification and the Chinese Thesaurus.

On acquisitions it was stated that, of 40,000 titles published annually in China, NLC acquires 25,000. Primary and secondary school level texts, picture books, children's books and reprints are not collected. 70% of NLC's budget is for purchasing publications, and 30% for salaries and other expenses. 90% of the book budget is spent on foreign materials. At the end of 1986 NLC held 13,778,124 volumes, including 6,471,741 monograph volumes and 65,716 periodical titles.

7. International Symposium on developing Strategy of Computer-based Chinese Data Processing

The one-day seminar on 7 October was chaired by Mr Tan Xiangjin, Deputy Director, NLC, who spent 1980 to 1982 studying automation at NLA. The first paper on Chinese bibliographical data processing at NLC was by Mr Tan and his Colleagues, Mr Zhou Shengzheng and Mr Zhu Yan. In discussion, Mr Bill Welch of Library of Congress queried why NLC had automated circulation before acquisitions, the answer being that circulation was only a small part of automation and was being carried out on a trial basis. Dr Kan of the University of Hong Kong Library asked why the Chinese Character Set Code for Information Exchange containing 7,445 characters was arranged in two sections, the more commonly used characters by Pinyin and the remainder by radicals, rather than in one sequence. It was agreed that a single sorting sequence was preferable. Dr Kan also commented that the Pinyin/Wade-Giles conversion system for characters developed by NLC would be very useful for foreign libraries. NLC replied that the basic conversion set was complete, while a second, third and fourth set were in process.

Mr Andrew Wang then presented a paper on OCLC's CJK approach to the automation of Chinese characters. Dr Kan queried how widespread the use of OCLC's CJK system was, and was told there are now 54 US users. Mr Chen Liwei of the Ministry of Electronics Industry, PRC, spoke on key issues in Chinese language information processing. On the problem of word-division in Chinese, he strongly advocated that Chinese books be published with spaces between words, with the writer responsible for segmenting his text.

In the afternoon session there were papers by Marianne Scott of the National Library of Canada on networking in Canada, by Mr Zeng Minzu of Beijing Document Service on systematisation of Chinese information processing, and by Mr Xu Rujing of the Institute of Scientific and Technical Information, PRC, on approaches to problems in computer-based Chinese information processing. Copies of all these papers are held in Asian Collections, NLA.

8. Meeting with Mr Zhou Gucheng

On the afternoon of 7 October the overseas librarians visiting China were received at the Great Hall of the People by Mr Zhou, Vice Chairman of the Standing Committee, National People's

Congress.

9. Institute of Scientific and Technical Information of China (ISTIC)

On 8 October we visited ISTIC and were addressed by the Deputy Director, Mr Zhang Fenglou. He explained that ISTIC is a comprehensive national information centre for scientific and technical documents, which collects domestic and foreign sci-tech information, and retrieves, translates and publishes this information. Like NLC, ISTIC has just completed impressive new premises which we toured. ISTIC's collections in 1986 included 15,000 foreign sci-tech periodicals and some 700,000 foreign monographic items. There are over 1,200 staff. We were pleased to see volumes of ANB on the shelves at ISTIC, part of NLA's exchange with the Institute.

10. Chongwen District Cultural Centre Library

We visited the new cultural centre in the Chongwen District of Beijing and were met by the Director, Mr Yuan. The modern premises included facilities for language learning, ten-pin bowling, billiards, dancing, amateur theatrical performances and television and recording studios. The new library on a separate site is still under construction. It is planned to include a guesthouse which will bring in revenue for the library, which will hold 500,000 volumes.

11. Beijing University Library

After lunch we visited Beijing University library, where we were met by the Director, Dr Zhuang Shoujing, and Vice Director, Professor Pan Yongxiang. Dating back to 1898, the University has 15,000 students as well as 500 foreign students and visiting scholars. The Library, which began in 1902, is the largest academic library in China with 4,000,000 volumes, two-thirds in Chinese, and including 1,500,000 ancient books. 100,000 volumes are added annually and 7,000 current serial titles are received. Foreign publications take up 80% of the annual book budget which is RMB 2 million (A\$770,000). There are 250 library staff. The Library is developing its own computerised system for Chinese materials and uses LCMARC for Western language works.

12. Huairou County Library

After visiting the Great Wall of China at Mutianyu, an hour's drive from Beijing, on the morning of Friday 9 October, the delegation inspected the local county library and was greatly impressed by its collections and services.

13. Visit to Jinan

Mr Euan Miller, State Librarian of South Australia, visited Jinan, capital of Shandong Province from 9 to 11 October.

South Australia and Shandong have a sister state-province relationship. Mr Miller had useful discussions on exchanges of staff, publications and other matters with his Shandong library colleagues.

14. Discussions with NLC

Mr Horton and I discussed NLA-NLC relations with Mr Hu Sha, Deputy Directory, NLC, and other staff on Saturday 10 October.

15. Institute of Medical Information (IMI)

Mr Horton visited the Institute of Medical Information of the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences on Sunday 11 October. NLA has close links with IMI, and IMI staff have undertaken Medline training at NLA.

16. Shanghai Library

We flew from Beijing to Shanghai on Sunday 11 October and visited the Shanghai Library on Monday 12. Shanghai Library, founded in 1952, is one of China's largest and most active public libraries. It has a collection of over 8,000,000 volumes, a capacity of 1,400 seats and a staff of 600. It houses 1,500,000 Chinese classics and has unique holdings of pre-1949 periodicals and newspapers. Other strengths include audio-visual materials, in particular, recordings of Chinese opera. Presently located in the former Shanghai Race Club, the Library is currently planning new premises covering 80,000 square metres, which should be completed within 7 or 8 years. The Library has been active in publishing major Chinese reference works and reproductions of rare books. Shanghai Library has also developed strong exchange relations with overseas libraries including NLA.

We also visited the Shanghai-San Francisco Friendship Library, a branch of Shanghai Library established under the sister city relationship between the US and Chinese cities. This Library consists primarily of American imprints donated by San Francisco.

17. Zhongshan Library, Guangzhou

Zhongshan is the provincial public library for Guangdong Province, and is named after Sung Zhongshan (Sun Yatsen). We were received by the Chief Librarian, Mr Tong Deshan, his Deputy, Mr Zhao, and other staff. The Library's origins date back to the beginning of this century. We toured the new building, which opened in November 1986. This is 29,000 square metres in area, and there are 2,700,000 volumes of which 1,600,000 are in the new building. The Library holds 26,000 periodical titles. Strengths of the collections include local Guangdong literature, material on and by Sun Yatsen, and the Overseas Chinese and Southeast Asia.

Zhongshan Library has active exchanges with foreign libraries

including NLA, and has close links with neighbouring Hong Kong, having received a number of major book donations from Hong Kong residents.

18. Pan Yu County Library

We later visited Pan Yu County Library, one of 100 county libraries in Guangdong Province. Pan Yu is a prosperous town in the fertile Pearl River Delta region south of Guangzhou. We were met by the Deputy Mayor, Mrs Feng, the Librarian, and other local dignitaries. Outside the Library a large sign welcomed the Australian Library Delegation. We were impressed by the modern building and facilities of the Library and by other modern cultural, sporting and residential premises in the town.

19. Shenzhen Library

Shenzhen, just north of Hong Kong, is the largest and most important of 4 Special Economic Zones (SEZ) established in the early 1980s to earn China foreign currency and acquire foreign technology and management expertise through allowing foreign investment in joint ventures and other enterprises.

The SEZs are showpieces of China's current modernisation drive, and this includes libraries. Shenzhen Library, a striking modern construction totalling 13,494 square metres in area, was completed in June 1986. It is a public library with 11 specialised reading rooms, language laboratories, audio-visual studios, and a large theatre. Computerised systems are being developed. The Library has special strengths in material relating to the SEZs.

20. Shenzhen University Library

This is a new and modern university, founded in 1983, and situated on a bay looking south to Hong Kong. There are now some 3,000 students and 700 staff. Covering many disciplines, the university places special emphasis on sci-tech, foreign languages, management and economic subjects relevant to the SEZs. Computers, language laboratories and video recording studios are used for teaching purposes. The Library, which can accommodate 7,000 readers and over 200,000 publications, is housed in an attractive new building designed around a central open area. We were received by the Vice President of the University, Professor Zheng Tianlun. This was our final library visit in China before our return to Australia via Hong Kong on Friday 16 October.

21. Conclusion

All members of the Australian Library Delegation agreed that the visit to China was most worthwhile, and that it further strengthened the already close library relations between China

and Australia. We were most grateful for the opportunity to participate in the opening of the new NLC building, and to discuss closer co-operation with our Chinese colleagues in areas such as exchanges of staff and publications, automation and exhibitions. We were made very aware of China's high regard for Australia in the library field, and of the value of previous Australian library visits to China including the 1980 NLA-ANU delegations led by former NLD Directors-General, Dr George Chandler and Mr Harrison Bryan respectively.

Particular thanks for the success of the delegation are due to our Chinese hosts, Mr Du Ke and his subordinates from the Bureau of Library Administration, the staff of NLC and the other libraries we visited in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen. We are also grateful to the Australian Ambassador, Dr Garnaut, and Cultural Counsellor, Mr Gantner, for arranging a lunch at the Australian Embassy, Beijing, which was hosted by Mr Horton to thank our Chinese colleagues for their hospitality.

In summary, the delegation was greatly impressed by the rapid progress being made by Chinese libraries. Modern library buildings are being constructed, and there is a strong commitment to automation and to improved services for users.

Andrew Gosling
Chief Librarian, East Asia
National Library of Australia

