

PROMOTION, PAY AND PERKS IN THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF CHINA

by Hu Lijuan and Susan Prentice*

The National Library of China was established at the end of the Qing Dynasty in Beijing and until the move to a new, modern building in 1987 was situated in the city centre next to Bei Hai Park. The Library has a collection of approximately 17 million items. During the period of economic reforms since the end of the Cultural Revolution the Library has been going through a rapid modernisation process which has included major developments in automation as well as a steady increase in staffing. Staff are still for the most part assigned to the Library by the State following graduation from School or University. Staff numbers have grown to approximately 1700 in the case of permanent staff and 500 in the case of casual/temporary staff.

Classification of positions

Professional positions are classified into five categories. These are

1. Guan li yuan.(library-assistant)
2. Zhu li guan yuan (assistant-librarian)
3. Guan yuan (librarian)
4. Fu yan jiu yuan (assistant research fellow)
5. Yan jiu yuan (research fellow)

To qualify for reclassification it is necessary to satisfy various criteria. Classification review takes place once annually, usually at the end of the year. All members of staff are entitled to apply once a year for reclassification to the classification one level higher than their current classification. The criteria and tasks associated with each classification are as indicated below.

1. Guan li yuan (library-assistant)

Criteria

1. must be a high-school graduate
2. must have the capacity to perform basic tasks in relation to books management and loan desk work.

Staff with this classification perform the following tasks:

- filing cards
- preparing materials and serials for binding
- organising newspapers
- affixing spine-labels and shelving books

2. Chu li kuan yuan (assistant librarian)

Criteria

1. must be a university graduate
2. 2 years work experience in the National Library of China
3. ability to perform cataloguing and associated work
4. ability to solve problems involved in one's work with the aid of reference books
5. capacity to answer questions raised by readers.

Staff with this classification perform the following tasks

Check monographs or serials in catalogue and order drawers for duplicates

Catalogue books or periodicals using AACR2

Provide general reference service.

3. Guan yuan (librarian)

Criteria

1. at least 5 years experience in the National Library of China since graduation
2. capacity for book cataloguing and classification and associated work
3. ability to analyse and solve difficult problems independently
4. knowledge of a foreign language or classical Chinese.

Staff with this classification perform the following tasks:

Classify books or periodicals using the Chinese Classification Systems

Assign subject headings

Perform quality control work on catalogued materials.

4. Fu yan jiu yuan (assistant research fellow)

Criteria

- either master's degree, plus more than 5 years working experience
or more than 15 years working experience as a university graduate
- plus 1. working experience of a certain standard
- plus 2. have works for publication totalling more than 100 thousand characters
- plus 3. knowledge of more than one foreign language

Staff with this classification perform the following tasks:

Quality control of classification and subject headings

Book selection and control of acquisition

Research in library science.

5. Yuan jiu yuan (research fellow)

Criteria

- either doctor's degree and more than 5 years library experience
or master's degree and more than 10 years library experience
or B.A. degree, more than 15 years library experience

or have special contributions to library science, e.g. The
 compilation of the Chinese Classification System

plus 1. knowledge of two or more foreign languages
plus 2. capacity for high level research in library science
plus 3. published works totalling more than 200 thousand
 characters
plus 4. considerable problem-solving ability in relation to library
 work.

Staff with this classification perform the following tasks:

Formulation of acquisition policy

Research in library science.

The above are the basic conditions for application for professional positions in each of the individual categories. In addition it is also necessary for all applicants to provide a written report about their work to accompany their application. This should be an accurate and realistic estimate of one's skills, qualifications, and work experience. Applicants with publications to their credit should also include bibliographical details of their publication for consideration with the application. Applicants for professional positions must either have passed the appropriate exams, which are foreign languages or classical Chinese, or must have published translated works. The minimum requirement for translation is 100 thousand characters.

Promotion

Staff who consider that they deserve to be promoted to a higher classification must first write a report for submission to their Section Head. The report should outline the case for reclassification - a self-assessment including qualifications, experience, publications etc.

On the basis of this report and the Section Head's own assessment of the work of the applicant, the Section Head decides whether the case is justified or not. If it is, the Section Head gives the applicant an application form for reclassification. This accompanies the applicant's report when the application is considered by a meeting of all the Section Heads within a Department.

There are 5 sections in the Department of Cataloguing and Acquisition for Foreign Language Books which is fairly representative of the various departments in the National Library of China. Once an application is approved by the Section Heads, it proceeds to the next level for consideration by a meeting of all the Department Heads. All together there are 28 Departments and Divisions. If it is approved by

Department Heads, it then goes to the Zhi Cheng Ping Shen Wei Yuan Hui, which is translated as the Assessment and Investigation Committee, which is roughly equivalent to a Classification Review Committee. This committee comprises about 13 or 15 or 17 members. It is always an odd number because the committee has to vote! With the exception of the Director of Personnel, all other members are Assistant research fellows or Research fellows.

The Assessment and Investigation Committee considers the applications on the basis of an individual's exam results, skills, experience and attitude towards work.

Applications for reclassification require the approval of this committee to be successful. Unsuccessful applicants may resubmit applications for reconsideration the following year. Since there is a limit on the number of reclassifications that can be approved, not all applications are initially successful. The main reason, of course, is finance since applicants who are approved for reclassification are also awarded the associated salary, regardless of age.

Until recently at least, the situation was very different in China. Salaries were directly related to length of service, regardless of the ability of an individual. In this circumstance, the older you were the more you got! Since the mid 1980s however, much has changed in China. Now age is irrelevant so that it is even possible for a young person to receive a high salary, on the basis of the professional position one occupies, similar to the system practised in other countries of the world including Australia.

Pay

As everybody knows, China and Australia have two different social systems, and the cost of Chinese labour is low. As you can see from the Australian market, the cheapest products are definitely made in China. It is therefore not possible to compare Chinese salaries with those of Australia where the cost of labour is high.

It is useful here to provide an example. Typically a member of staff a member of staff classified as a *guan yuan* (librarian) might be responsible for quality control of the cataloguing and classification of English language monographs. This might involve checking the work of four cataloguers - all of whom are professional staff. All staff have to fulfil a daily quota. The typical daily quota of a *guan yuan* would be checking the cataloguing and classification of 42 titles. For a *guan yuan* who has worked in the Library for about 16 years, the salary components would be: (1) the basic salary. (2) length of service wages and (3) other supplementary wages. The basic salary is 130 yuan. With 25 years of service including previous work in the countryside immediately after graduation, one yuan for one service year as well as other supplementary wages including bath and hairdressing allowances, newspaper allowance, transport and food allowances, and medical allowance, also calculated according to length of service as well as others, the total monthly wage packet would be approximately 250 yuan. All staff know how much their colleagues earn. Salaries are not a secret in China.

Perks

The Library also provides other welfare services for its employees. Staff can see a doctor free of charge, enjoying (with the exception of dental care) a free public health service. Besides public holidays, all staff also have recreation leave. The amount of leave one has is also calculated according to classification and length of service. In addition to public holidays, a typical *guan yuan* might have 15 days holiday per annum.

China also has its Gold Coast which is called Nan Dai He. The National Library of China has its own recreation and health resort at Nan Dai He and the staff of the Library are allowed to spend their holidays there for one week each year.

The Library pays on behalf of its staff not only for accommodation expenses but also their bus and train fares. The staff themselves pay only for their food.

Of course there are many other conditions of service which are not touched on here. It is hoped, however, that this brief introduction will provide an impression of promotion, pay and perks in the National Library of China.

* This article was originally presented as a talk given to the staff of the Australian National University Library in August 1993 as part of a six month period of training and work experience undertaken by Hu Lijuan under a long-standing exchange programme between the Australian National University Library and the National Library of China. We worked on it together as an oral presentation which was delivered shortly before Lijuan returned to China in August. This version has been adapted for publication by me in Hu Lijuan's absence. I have tried to preserve some of the spirit of the oral presentation while modifying the colloquial style of the original to produce a version more appropriate for publication.

Susan Prentice

