

REMINISCENCES OF HOLIDAYS AND LIBRARY VISITS IN CHINA AND THE UNITED KINGDOM

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I had lots of fun during my long service leave at the end of 1994 — 3 weeks in Beijing, China and 3 weeks in London and Europe. I was very impressed with Beijing. Everything (food, bus/train/taxi fares, clothing etc.) was relatively cheap. Pollution was not as bad as I expected. Despite the fact that Beijing was packed with people and traffic, particularly with bicycles and yellow cabs, the place was bustling with life and energy. The traffic and crowd flowed with rhythm. As long as one did not make a sudden unexpected movement, car and bicycle accidents would not happen. The locals were warmly approachable and well dressed. One difference that struck me, in comparison with my last visit 10 years ago, was that the city is now littered with big department stores and stylish, elegant western stores, including Jean West, Esprit, Pizza Huts and Macdonald's (I sighted 5 MacDonal stores!). The limited space here only allows the mentioning of some of the tourist places that I visited:

- Tiananmen Square, the massive square with the Mao Zedong Mausoleum in the middle,
- The Great Hall of the People's Republic of China where I attended the concert performed by the Israeli Orchestra,
- The Forbidden City where the emperors and families of Ming and Ching Dynasties ruled and lived,
- The Great Wall, the only man made object that can be sighted from the moon,
- The Summer Palace, the summer retreat ordered to be built by Empress Dowagers with glamorous pagodas, temples, lakes and gardens,
- The Temple of Heaven where past emperors made offerings to gods and asked for blessing for the nation.

Most unforgettable were the interesting and refreshing street scenes. For example, a whole street was packed with pets for sale, such as birds, owls, fish, crickets, monkeys, kittens and puppies. Early in the mornings, early-risers packed the parks practising taichi and waltz dancing (a new popular form of exercise). Late in the evenings, people gathered in open space singing Beijing opera. The numerous

restaurants specialising in different cuisines were my favourite haunts.

On a more serious note, I managed to make a number of formal and informal visits to libraries and universities.

The National Library of China

The National Library of China is housed in the new premise opened to the public in October 1987. The new library covers 7.4 hectares and the total floor space amounts to 170,000 square metres. The Library is capable of holding 20,000,000 volumes. There are 30 reading rooms with more than 3,000 seats. The computer system NEC ACOS630 was implemented in 1991. Progress has since been made in its sub systems for acquisition, cataloguing and retrieval. China MARC is available to both domestic and foreign users.

I was warmly greeted by the Deputy Director, Mr Sun Chengjian, and three department heads and was treated with a lavish lunch (Mr Sun visited University of Sydney Library and other Australian libraries with his five-member delegation at the end of 1993.) Ms Gao Fan accompanied me on the tour of the Library. I was delighted to see Ms Gao Fan whom I met in Sydney when she was the exchanged librarian in ANU Library in November 1993 for six months. Ms Gao is now working in the Foreign Relations Section. In the Library tour, I made a special request to visit the reading room service and the interlibrary loans department. In the Abstract and Index Reading Room, I was pleased to see CD-ROM database searching services being offered. The databases available were mostly science orientated and the service is rapidly expanding. The new head of the Interlibrary-loans is Cao Baohui whom I also met in Canberra. Mr Cao had one year's training and work experience at the National Library of Australia in 1993. I believe that our future interlibrary-loans requests to China will be facilitated by Cao's personal experience and understanding of the library systems in Australia and the needs of the Australian academic community.

Mr Sun asked me to extend his invitation to my colleagues and librarians in Australia to participate in the coming IFLA Conference, "The Challenge of Change: Libraries and Economic Development", which will be hosted by the National Library of China in Beijing, 25-31 August 1996. Don't worry if you cannot speak putonghua (Chinese Mandarin): the conference hall is equipped with simultaneous interpretation in eight languages. I have the themes and conference details if you are interested.

Nankai University, Tianjin

(Nankai University is a renown university where the late Premier Zhou Enlai studied. Tianjin is situated south-east of Beijing. The train trip between the two

cities takes one hour fifty minutes.)

I was invited by Professor Zhong Shouzhen, Director of Information Resource, Nankai University, to present a paper on Australian librarianship to her students and postgraduates students in library science. It took me some time to prepare the paper as it was delivered in Chinese. I began with an introduction on the University of Sydney Library, a general description on the training of librarians and library technicians in Australia, the Australian Bibliographic Network (ABN), the newly developed National Chinese, Japanese and Korean Database, and the development plan of the National Document and Information Service (NDIS). I concluded the talk on the recent development and application of information technology on Internet, both in Australia and internationally. The talk was well received and followed by many questions. The audience was very impressed by our national library network. They found the training of teacher-librarians refreshing as there was no such equivalent course in China. Some postgraduate students asked questions in English as they were keen to practise their spoken English.

The highlight of my Tianjin visit was the delicious and abundant dinner given in my honour with the library science teaching staff. I really had to watch out how much I ate in China! (By the way, diet-tea and diet-tablets are becoming popular in China. Advertisements of such merchandise can often be seen in television and newspapers.)

Chinese Academy of Social Science (CASS)

The Chinese Academy of Social Science is the national centre for social science research in China. It is made up of 31 research institutes, three research centres, two publishing houses and a graduate school. Professor Li Huiguo (the Vice Director of the Centre for Documentation and Information, CASS), sponsored by the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, visited the University of Sydney Library and other Australian institutions in early 1994. Professor Li invited me to give a talk to his colleagues--a small audience of about 20 people including the Director of the Library (Ms Lu Qisu), the department heads of cataloguing, acquisition and serials and librarians in middle management. I delivered the same paper prepared for the Nankai University. The Centre for Documentation and Information was in the middle of reorganisation and office move. The Centre was also in the initial stage of choosing a new computer system. The staff were well informed and were very keen to learn about the experience and strategies used in the evaluation, selection and implementation processes for the automated library system in the University of Sydney Library. I was glad that I have learned something both from my Library's New System Project and the National Chinese, Japanese and Korean Project and that my answers sounded impressive. The talk was followed by a "gongting cai" lunch (i.e., an "imperial cuisine" style lunch with lots of different dishes in small portions).I was tempted to try some diet-tea the next day after eating so much!

In Beijing, I also strolled around bookshops and managed a number of informal visits to the Beijing University, the Beijing Language Institute and "Zhongguan Cun" (the suburb where universities and computer companies are found and is known as the area of high technology).

An Overview of China's education and research network

China's economy has been growing very fast in recent years and China is becoming more and more open to the outside world. This economic growth has made it possible and necessary for China to establish the communication and resource infrastructure for education and research in China and link the Chinese academics to the global Internet. China Education and Research Network (CERNET) is the first nation-wide education and research computer network in China, which is presently under construction. The CERNET project is funded by the Chinese government and directly managed by the Chinese State Education Commission. The Head of the CERNET Technical Board is Professor Wu Jian Ping, Computer Engineering Department, Tsinghua University.

In China, there are 1,090 universities, 390,000 professors and staff members, 94,200 graduate students and 2,184,000 undergraduate students. The CERNET will be implemented in two stages. In the first phase (1994-1996), the national network centre, ten regional network nodes, the nation-wide backbone and the Internet connection will be established. More than 100 university networks will be connected to the CERNET in the first two years. In the second phase (1997-2000), CERNET will connect all the universities, institutes, thousands of middle schools, primary schools and other education and research entities in China. (When I returned to work, I received my first email message from China!)

Library system in the UK

After three weeks in Beijing, I flew to London for four days. I only had time to visit two libraries — the Oriental & India Office Collection of the British Library and the School of Oriental & African Studies Library, University of London. It was difficult to get a clear picture of the national library network in the UK within such a brief visit. It seems that there is a lack of an national online library network for bibliographic and cataloguing sharing and there is no equivalent of our ABN (Australian Bibliographic Network).

Oriental & India Office Collection, British Library

I met Frances Wood and Graham Hutt in the Chinese Section and Hamish Todd in the Japanese Section in the Oriental & India Office Collection, British Library. The Chinese section is using the German database system, Allegro, for cataloguing,

which is developed inhouse. Allegro has the capability of coping with Chinese vernacular scripts. However, the Japanese section does not catalogue in Allegro but catalogues direct online into the Japanese network, NACSIS-CAT, which is maintained by the National Center for Science Information Systems in Tokyo. The British Library started participating in the NACSIS-CAT Pilot Project in March 1991 to test the international network connection and experimental construction of a union catalogue of Japanese materials in U.K. (Five other research libraries in UK participate in the pilot project, including University of Cambridge, Bodleian Library, University of London, University of Sheffield, University of Stirling and the Centre for Japanese Studies.) The librarian in charge of the Korean section was on leave and I did not have the opportunity to talk with her. I was informed that the Korean section has not yet started to use any Korean vernacular scripts in cataloguing.

School of Oriental & African Studies, University of London

I was warmly received by Mary Auckland, the University Librarian and Wallace Batchelor who once studied librarianship and worked in Australia. They invited me to a delicious Christmas lunch (which was a nice contrast after having three weeks of Chinese meals) followed by a library tour.

The School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, operates their own stand-alone Libertas system. The staff in the Japan Section collaborated in the creation of the Japanese Union Catalogue (The same project as the British Library accessing to NACSIS-CAT). In 1992, almost 25,000 post-1969 records were matched with Japanese language JMARC records in the National Diet Library's database catalogue on CD-ROM. These records were downloaded onto floppy disks and passed to Cambridge University Library for inclusion in the Union Catalogue. It is interesting to note that the subject librarians in the School of Oriental and African Studies look after all aspects of their own subject area, including acquisitions, cataloguing and reader services. The Chinese, Japanese and Korean collections are shelved separately.

It was not easy to return to work after a long holiday. However, I can assure anyone considering a holiday combined with library visits that it is a worthwhile experience.