

THE SILK ROAD AND LIBRARY VISITS IN CHINA

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During the Semester break, I was fortunate enough to travel to the major scenic spots and historical sites along the Silk Road in China with a small group of friends and Australian students who had been studying Hanyu in Beijing. The Silk Road was the communication route for trade and cultural exchange between China and the West since the Han (206 B.C.-220 AD) and Tang Dynasties (618-906).

We started from Beijing, passed Xi'an and travelled through the Gansu Province in the north-western part of China, as far west as Urumqi in Xinxiang. As the Silk Road covers a vast area, we could see a variety of charming yet contrasting natural scenery, including the Loess Plateau with the Yellow River and its branches (Weihe and Taohe) in eastern Gansu, the Qinling Mountain with dense plantation in southern Gansu, and the vast Gobi Desert with the snow-capped Qilian Mountain visible in the distance in the Gansu Corridor (also known as the Hexi Corridor). The desert area is well decorated with oases and patches of agriculture owing to irrigation with melting snow from the Qilian Mountain. For example, Turfan, situated in the desert area, is well known for its good quality grapes. Remains of many ancient cities and towns, for instance, Gaochang and Jiaohe, can also be seen in the Gobi Desert.

We witnessed numerous historical and cultural relics. I had the immense excitement of travelling back in the "time-tunnel" through the cradle of ancient Chinese civilisation. For example, as far back as the Palaeolithic Period, the Chinese forefathers settled down in Gansu area. It is here that Fu Xi was born who is regarded as the first ancestor of Chinese nation for his invention of characters and calendar. In the Zhou period, more than 3,000 years ago, farming was started in the Jing and Wei river basins, thus beginning the splendid culture in the Yellow River valley. I was also excited in tracing the footsteps of the past famous people, such as Zhang Qian (2nd century B.C.) — the first envoy to the West in the Han Dynasty; Xuan Zang — the famous Tang Buddhist monk and pilgrim to India for sutras for 17 years and the well known Marco Polo (1254-1323) who travelled to the "Orient". Limited space here only permits highlights of a few historical sites we visited:

- Xi'an (formerly Chang'an, the capital of a few dynasties — Qin, Han and Tang Dynasties) has rich historical relics. The famous Terracotta Warriors and Horses of the Emperor Qin are located here. The 3 burial pits discovered so far cover an area of more than 20,000 square metres and contain 8,000 warriors and horses. The average height of the warriors is 1.8 meters and that of the horses is 1.7 metres. The pottery figures were first moulded, then sculptured and colourfully painted. The warriors had different faces and expressions with real bronze weapons and wooden chariots. The tomb of Empress Wu, who was the most powerful Empress of the Tang Dynasty, is also located in Xi'an.

- Maijishan Grottoes at Tianshui and the Mogao Grottoes at Dunhuang —The magnificently carved grottoes in the steep cliffs at the Maiji Mountain and the Mingsha Hill are breath-taking. 194 caves are preserved at the Maijishan Grottoes with 7,200 statues and 1,300 square metres of frescos. The Mogao Grottoes have 492 caves with 45,000 square metres of murals and over 2,400 painted statues. It is recorded that the first cave of the Mogao Grottoes was built in 366 AD. Murals and sculptures from the 4th to 14th centuries are well preserved. The Mogao Grottoes truly live up to the reputation of being the unequalled treasury of Buddhist art existing in China as well as in the world.
- Jiayuguan is the western starting point of the Great Wall. The Jiayuguan Pass, rebuilt in the Ming Dynasty (1372 AD), was strategically located in the middle of a 15 mile-corridor flanked by the two mountain ranges, Heishan and Qilianshan. With smart design and solid construction, the Pass used to be a fortified military stronghold.
- Labuleng Lamasery, located in Xiahe County, is one of the six main lamaseries of the Yellow Sect of Buddhism in China. The monastery was built in the Qing Dynasty (1709 AD) on a grand scale with magnificent ornamentalations. Thousands of cultural relics including 60,000 volumes of Tibetan scriptures have been well preserved.

More interestingly, Gansu is a multi-nationality province with a population of 1.6 million. Examples of minority groups, besides Han, are Hui, Tibetan, Dongxiang, Mongol, Baoan, Yugu, Salar, Kazark, Manshu and Uygur. They have all preserved their way of life, dressing in their colourful costumes, keeping their religious beliefs and festivals, speaking their own languages and living in compact communities. We passed through a number of autonomous regions. We were able to visit a Uighur family at Turfan and had afternoon tea in a yurt (Kazakh tent) at Urumqi. We saw Moslem mosques as well as Buddhist and Taoist temples in this culturally diverse province.

In the beginning and towards the end of my China tour, I took the opportunity to visit three university libraries — Peking University and Tsinghua University in Beijing and East China Normal University in Shanghai. My main goals were to update information on the automation of Chinese materials and their availability in electronic databases, as well as looking at the handling of Chinese rare books/string-bound books in cataloguing, preservation and circulation.

Peking University Library

I was warmly welcomed by Ms Qinfang Xie, Deputy Director, Peking University Library, Ms Kaifang Tian, Head of the Reference Department and Ms Zhang Chunhong, Information Retrieval Section. Ms Xie had spent one year at the East Asian Collection, University of Melbourne, between 1995 and 1996 under the Visiting Exchange Program. We were glad to meet again and exchanged both personal news and library information developments.

Peking University is one of the leading and prominent universities in China. The Library was established in 1902. The library collection ranks the first among all university libraries in China with more than 4.5 million items. It is a comprehensive research library with collection in social sciences, humanities as well as natural sciences. The traditional "string-bound books" collection is an area of particular strength, comprised of 13,000 kinds. 160,000 items are rare books. Besides, there are many modern facilities, like online searching, CD-ROMs, audiovisual materials and microforms. The collection is being steadily developed with an annual intake of 80,000 items.

For readers services, Peking University Library has 22 reading rooms, offering services and information on specific subject areas in each reading room. There are special centres providing network access to information from foreign databases, including DIALOG, Italian ESA and German STN search services. The Peking University Information Centre of Humanities and Social Sciences and the Station for Checking and Searching New Achievements of Science and Technology are set up in the Library.

The Peking University Library staff are particularly proud of their new premises and recent automation system. The new eight-storey library building will be completed by October 1998 in time of their centenary celebration. By then the new premises will have 50,000 square metres, doubling the existing premises. The new library building is financially sponsored by the well-known Hong Kong entrepreneur, Mr Li Ka Shing. Peking University Library has also signed a contract with the computer company SIRSI to implement a new integrated automation system — the Chinese version of Unicorn. The new computer system is scheduled for implementation to coincide with the completion of the new library and the library's centenary.

Tsinghua University Library

I was warmly greeted by Mr Zhao Xiong, Associate Librarian, Tsinghua University Library, who has an in-depth knowledge of automation systems.

Tsinghua University is one of the leading universities in China emphasizing teaching and research in the disciplines of science, engineering, management, information science and technology. The Tsinghua University Library was established in 1919. The new library wing was built in 1991 and is named after Mr Run Run Shaw, the famous Hong Kong film maker. The new Library building received several national awards for its excellent architectural design. The total area of the Library covers 28,000 square metres.

The total collection has 2.5 million copies with an emphasis on journal subscriptions and multimedia discs (more than 200 kinds of multimedia disc publications). The Tsinghua University Library staff are pleased with their recent progress in the construction and application of library information infrastructure. They have implemented the Chinese version of INNOPAC from 1996, operating with the Chinese software "Zhong wen zhi xing". It was interesting for me to search INNOPAC in vernacular scripts with all search

commands and instructions written in Chinese. The Online Public Access Catalogues provide public access interface to international information retrieval through Internet and nationwide information retrieval via CERNET (the China Education and Research Network). Users can obtain plentiful information from not only the Library's bibliographic and reference database, but also the virtual resources on the Internet.

The multi-functional electronic reading room was impressive, with 40 Pentium-type multimedia computers installed. They provide facilities in reading electronic books and journals, reading multimedia CD-ROMs and accessing information from Internet and audio-visual information from other networks.

The Tsinghua-Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) Service Center, established jointly with OCLC, provides nationwide service for retrieving OCLC resources. The purpose of the Center is to assist home users, especially in universities and research institutes to apply OCLC's information products and services through end-user online searching. It is also responsible for user instruction and technical support. The Center is planning to purchase searching cards for users at a favourable price from OCLC.

Tsinghua cooperates with IBM on the Digital Library Project. The Web server for the electronic journals has now been set up. The objective is not only to build some databases, but also to develop a complete processing procedure and service mode for these new types of data.

Special centres are established in the Library, with the support of the State Education Commission, to provide services to all Chinese universities and colleges. For example:

- Literature-Information Center for Engineering and Applied Sciences
- Foreign Teaching Materials Center
- The Center of Originality-Verification for Science and Technology.

The East China Normal University

I was greeted by Mr Yu Hai-xian who attended the "Japan Foundation Japanese Language Study Program for Professional Librarians" in Tokyo, a course which I also attended in 1992. We chatted heartily about our "good old student days" in Japan and exchanged a few elementary remarks in Japanese, but our conversation in Japanese did not last long ... speaking Japanese in China seemed to be a bit out of place.

The East China Normal University, established in 1951, is a prestigious teacher training university with emphasis on educational science and environmental science. The Library is located in a new building which was built in 1989 and financed jointly by the State Education Commission and Mr Run Run Saw, the Hong Kong film maker who donated a number of library buildings in China. It now covers a total floor space of 21,774 square metres. The library collection holds more than 2.8 million volumes including 370,000 volumes of foreign books and 270,000 volumes of ancient Chinese books, of which 2,000 volumes

are rare books. The traditional string-bound books are well preserved in specially designed camphor-cabinets which are kept in air-conditioned rooms (this could be a model of preservation for the string-bound books kept in the East Asian Collection, University of Sydney Library!). The collection is renowned for its strength in science of education, psychology, geography and local chronicles.

The library system, an inhouse system using Fujitsu computers, is connected to CERNET and Internet via the Shanghai Education and Research Network (SHERNET). The Library is designated as the Information Center for Humanities and Social Sciences which provides services to readers from other high learning institutions in the country. Besides providing reader education, library staff are active in holding lectures and symposiums and organising culture and arts exhibitions for the local community. Library staff are encouraged to do research, especially in ancient and modern Chinese literature, computer databases, library and information science.

The library staff are particularly pleased with their innovative effort in setting up a computer room in the Library with about 30 PCs for student use. The computer room, run by the Library, was financed by the Department of Real Estate, College of International Business which was recently established in the University in 1993.

An overview of China's education and research network and the "Project 211"

China's rapid economic growth in recent years has made it possible and necessary for China to establish the communication and resource infrastructure for education and research in China and to link Chinese academics to the global Internet. It is pleasing to note that the first nation-wide education and research computer network in China, CERNET, managed by the Chinese State Education Commission, was completed in 1995. CERNET is centred at Tsinghua University and includes eight regional network centres set up in different parts of China (the Northeast University at Northeast China, Jiaotong University and Nanjing University in East China, Huazhong University of Science & Technology in Central China, Zhongshan University in South China, Sichuan University of Electronic Science & Technology in Southwest China and Xi'an Jiaotong University in Northwest China). CERNET, linked to international networks, forms the backbone infrastructure of China's information network, thus completing the first phase of China's "Project 211" which aims to improve China's higher education and modernise academic libraries in the 21st century.

The next phase of "Project 211" is to establish CALIS (China Academic Library and Information System) led by Peking University. The prime objective of CALIS is to install integrated automation systems in the libraries of the 100 designated key universities by the year 2000, the beginning of the 21st century. These library systems, connected to campus networks, are linked to the Internet via regional and national networks. It is intended to automate about 1,000 academic libraries by the year 2010.

Planning is underway to develop a national database of bibliographic resources for cataloguing, information retrieval and document delivery. The proposed databases for development are as follows:

- United MARC for Chinese books
- United MARC for Chinese serials
- United MARC for western language books
- United MARC for western language serials
- Chinese dissertation abstracts
- Chinese university journals abstracts
- Union MARC of Chinese ancient books
- Union MARC of AV materials
- Chinese fulltext electronic publications

It looks as though our counterparts in China, librarians and information specialists, will be very busy in the next few years implementing "Project 211". Information on and access to the unique resources in China will undoubtedly benefit scholars and researchers in China and the rest of the world, including Australia.

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