

# RETROSPECTIVE EAST ASIAN COLLECTIONS AT THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA: IMPROVING AWARENESS AND ACCESS

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The National Library of Australia's East Asian language collections are the most extensive in the country with over 400,000 volumes of Chinese, Japanese and Korean monographs, 15,000 serial titles and materials in other formats including microform and electronic resources.

While current holdings are well-covered in the National Chinese, Japanese and Korean (CJK) Service and on the Library's own online catalogue accessible through the Internet, efforts are being made to improve awareness of and access to the Library's significant holdings of older materials. The Asian Collections home page <<http://www.nla.gov.au/asian>> provides details on a number of these collections.

## **Chinese Card Catalogue Conversion Project**

This project which began in March 2000 is already making a significant impact on the number of items only accessible through the Chinese card catalogue. It had been estimated that there were about 75,000 title cards in the catalogue with imprint dates from the 16th century to 1996 when the Chinese staff began use of the CJK system.

The aim of the conversion project is an initial sweep of entries in the Chinese card catalogue to identify matching records on the CJK database and RLIN to add holdings to the CJK system and discard cards. Only categories where a good hit rate can be expected are being searched at this stage, concentrating on imprints since 1980 and Australian Bibliographic Network (ABN) produced cards.

By the end of September 2000 about a quarter of the total number of drawers in the card catalogue had been checked for eligible entries for conversion and 7,500 holdings had been added to the CJK system.

## **London Missionary Society Collection**

A project to catalogue the rare and unusual Chinese language London Missionary Society Collection was successfully completed between February and September 2000. In all, 722 titles were catalogued onto the National CJK Service, including 27 manuscripts, 7 newspapers and 2 maps. While most titles were in Chinese there were also 37 in Japanese, 3 in Korean and 2 in

Manchu. The collection includes publications dating from the early 17th century up to the 1950s.

The National Library acquired the London Missionary Society Collection of Chinese language sources in 1961 as part of its effort to develop strong research holdings on modern Asia. The Library's Liaison Officer in London at that time, F. W. Torrington, first sought advice from experts at London's School of Oriental and African Studies and the British Museum. He then wrote to the National Librarian, Harold White, on 4 May 1961 :

"I have to report that the London Missionary Society has offered to sell to the National Library a collection of Chinese works of about 600 volumes. The majority of these works were published in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and they cover a wide range of subjects - religion, history, literature, politics etc. Works on theology comprise about one fifth of the total ... Some of the historical and literary material is of considerable value and rarity. The most valuable items in the collection are the pamphlets relating to the T'ai P'ing rebellion ..."

Contemporary materials acquired from the London Missionary Society include pamphlets published by the Taiping rebels and original Taiping proclamations. The latter were issued at the height of the movement in 1853. The proclamations claimed success for the Taiping armies and urged the people to be peaceful and carry on with their normal lives. Taiping publications include a Taiping calendar and seven other rebel pamphlets on their religious and social program bound together and annotated "Brought from Nanking by W.H.M[edhurst]... July 7 1854".

Walter Henry Medhurst was one of a number of remarkable linguists and evangelists whose Bible translations and other religious writings are well represented in the London Missionary Society Collection.

After the Taiping items, the most significant materials in the Collection are the Bible translations and other Christian works in Chinese. Of particular importance are the more than sixty editions of the Old and New Testaments translated into literary and colloquial Chinese and local dialects by Medhurst and other missionaries. A number of these translations are now rare.

There are numerous other religious works. While most are Protestant there are also Chinese versions of writers such as Thomas a Kempis (1389?-1471) and the Jesuit Father Ferdinand Verbiest, whose unique map of the world hand-painted on silk in China in 1674 is also housed at the National Library. There are also hymn books and catechisms and even an illustrated Old Testament in Shanghaiese. Apart from Christian books there are also works from the Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist traditions.

Works on non-religious topics cover a considerable range of subjects. There are rare editions of classic Chinese historical and literary works. There are

also several titles on scientific and medical matters, including early Chinese translations of Western science books.

Except for the rarest items which are held in a strongroom, the London Missionary Society material is housed together in the National Library's Asian Collections. The books are generally in good condition.

In developing its holdings about Asia the National Library has placed a strong emphasis on China's modern history. The London Missionary Society collection contains valuable resources on Western influences in China and Chinese responses to the foreign impact.

There has been considerable interest nationally and internationally in this collection, especially after an article was included in National Library of Australia News, July 1998, and later also made accessible on the Library's website at <<http://www.nla.gov.au/asian/form/lms.html>>. The description above is based in part on this article. In addition to the cataloguing of the collection it is hoped to produce a published list.

### **Walter Simon Collection on East Asia**

The Walter Simon Collection of more than two thousand books is housed in Asian Collections. While the Western language component of just over one thousand titles has already been catalogued onto the online catalogue, plans are under way to add the East Asian language books. The latter are currently searchable through the card catalogue in the Asian Collections Reading Room. Books in Manchu are included in a guide to Manchu holdings in Australia produced by the German librarian Hartmut Walravens.

Walter Simon (1893-1981) was born in Berlin and spent the first half of his life in Germany. At university he first specialised in Romance and Classical philology, before becoming a librarian. After completing his doctorate he turned to Sinology and began a parallel career as an academic.

Walter Simon's research included ancient and archaic as well as modern Chinese, Tibetan philology and Manchu studies. The Simon Collection reflects his interest in an extraordinarily wide range of ancient and contemporary languages and cultures.

Simon's twin careers as an academic and librarian flourished during the 1920s and early 1930s. He began studying Chinese in 1920, became a teacher of East Asian linguistics at the University of Berlin in 1926 and Professor there in 1932. As a librarian he was sent on study visits to Britain in 1929 and to China in 1932-33 on an exchange with the National Library in Peking.

The rise to power of the Nazis soon forced him out of Germany. As a Jewish scholar he was forbidden to teach at university from 1934. Early in 1936 he left his homeland for England. He was 43, married with two young

sons, and faced an uncertain future. However he had excellent references from the leading European China scholars of his day and was offered a lecturing position at the then School of Oriental Studies, University of London.

In 1947 he was appointed to a new Chair of Chinese at the University of London, where he remained until retirement in 1960. In this position he is credited as being one of the founders of modern Chinese studies in the United Kingdom, replacing the more traditional approach through classical texts which had prevailed well into the twentieth century.

The National Library acquired the Walter Simon Collection in stages between 1970 and 1982. Sydney Wang, who was Chief Librarian, Orientalia, for more than twenty years, recalls that Simon first visited the Library in April 1970. Sydney suggested that his collection come to Canberra, later noting in his annual report that publications on "Chinese, history and literature and the teaching of the Chinese language [had been] purchased from Professor Walter Simon".

Two cases of Chinese and Manchu works from Simon were dispatched for Australia in February 1973 on board the "Discovery Bay". This Manchu acquisition was of particular significance. The 234 volumes of books and 13 manuscripts more than doubled the size of the Library's modest Manchu collection.

On 3 April 1974, Walter Simon wrote to Sydney Wang from London not long after another visit to the National Library. He referred to the dispatch of the "remaining 150 books or so of the Western books in Sinology, general linguistics, Romance and Classical philology."

After Walter Simon's death, his son Harry formally offered to donate his "father's working collection on Tibetan, Manchu, Mongolian and related languages and studies to the National Library to serve the needs of any scholar who may be working in this field from time to time. My family and I would be very pleased if this could be done and if his name could be associated with the collection". 850 books in 15 boxes were shipped from England on the "Jervis Bay" in January 1982. In addition to the books there was a small collection of Walter Simon's correspondence, research notes and journal articles, now in the Library's Manuscripts Section.

During the past fifty years the National Library of Australia has acquired a number of important Asian formed collections from scholars and book lovers. Among these collections Walter Simon's is the richest resource on the languages of East Asia, especially Chinese, Tibetan and Manchu.

The above is based on a longer article about the Simon Collection which will soon be published in National Library of Australia News to improve awareness of this valuable resource.

## Harold S. Williams Collection

The Harold S. Williams Collection at the National Library is widely regarded as one of the world's most significant resources on the history of foreign settlement in Japan and foreign interaction with Japanese society. Williams (1898-1987) was an Australian businessman, writer and collector who spent most of his adult life in Japan. He built up an extensive library of books, manuscripts, pictures, journals and other materials, which he later donated to the Library. The books in the collection are fully catalogued and accessible on the Library's online catalogue.

Williams also established the Harold S. Williams Trust Fund to be "applied primarily for the maintenance, improvement and purchase of additions" to the collection. Projects have recently been undertaken with support from the Trust Fund to prepare a detailed list of manuscripts in the collection and to carry out preservation.

The *Guide to the Papers of Harold S. Williams* in the National Library of Australia has been published during 2000 by the National Library (ISBN 0 642 10718 1). It was compiled by Corinne Collins, a former staff member in the Library's Manuscripts Section. The Williams papers include subject files, correspondence, scrapbooks, articles, lectures, notes, drafts of his works and the works of others, photographs and programs.

The bulk of the Guide consists of descriptions of the 13 series into which the Williams papers are divided. For example the entry for Series 1 folder 67 on Japan-Australia trade reads:

"Notes, references, press cuttings, correspondence and typescript relating to the early history of trade between Japan and Australia. The commodities included camels, coal, Japanese swords and rifles, meat, silk, tea and wool."

The Guide also includes a select bibliography of works by Williams; a box list; a folio box list and a microfiche list for the photograph albums.

### Future plans

Now that the London Missionary Society Collection has been fully catalogued, it is planned to carry out a similar task with other East Asian formed collections. A special position has recently been established to undertake collection control projects for older and more difficult Chinese language materials. Additional staff have also been taken on temporarily to assist with the Chinese Card Catalogue Conversion Project.

The National Library is making steady progress towards its goal of providing ready access to its entire East Asian collection for researchers and readers both in Australia and overseas.

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