

China: the awakening of a giant

November 27 1983. Sydney, Melbourne, cocktails, attentive service and *Flashdance* as Cathay Pacific Flight CX100 wings northward ... Hong Kong, flickering imperial rind at the mouth of the Pearl River. Now as for centuries southern gateway to China. All in a flash.

The LAA Second China Library Study Tour was underway. Two years of exchange and negotiation culminated in meeting our national guides at Guangzhou (Canton) Railway Station. Mr Ma Tsun-fun is from the head office of the China International Travel Office; Mr Li Xun-da, wearing two hats, is the head of the Foreign Relations office of the Bureau of Library Administration of the Chinese Ministry of Culture and also Head of the International Liaison Office of the China Society of Library Science. Both became esteemed friends of us all.

LAA China 2 ... down to business ...

LAA China 1 was tentative and exploratory. LAA China 2 was immediately down to business. Both reflect the reality of China in 1978/79 and 1983. Five years of struggle for modernisation has left an indelible imprint on the face of the country. China is a nation and a people on the move, embracing change and lurching forward against great odds. Here we witness determination, self-confidence and energy, all of which suggest the full awakening of the Emperor Napoleon's 'sleeping giant'.

Culture shock! Most westerners experience it on entering China. Noise, bustle, crowds, cooking smells, bicycles and street markets dazzle with their difference. After five years away even old China hands are stunned. Economic, social and educational changes are immediately discernible.

The 'Four Modernisations', not long begun in 1978/79, are firmly underway. A remarkable campaign, nationally oriented under the leadership of the Party, but designed to run over a fifth of a century. Its hallmarks are soft sell, stability, continuity, a loosening of the reins by the central government, planning and openness to foreign ideas and practices. All sections of the community will benefit through improved living standards which are perceived, in no small degree, as emanating from increased food and industrial productivity. A complete turn about from the decade of 'politics first' - 'The Great proletarian Cultural Revolution' or period of 'The Turmoil' as it is increasingly being dubbed. China is enigmatic and no doubt there is continuing struggle between the moderate and radical sectors of the Party. Nevertheless it seems inconceivable that the floodgates once opened will easily be shut.

Didn't Lenin suggest that libraries exist in social context? Modernisation presupposes improved information services. The chang-



John Barclay, convenor of the LAA China Study Tour, watches as Mr Uan Xuekuang, Deputy Director of Shanghai Municipal Library and Secretary General of the Shanghai Society of Library Science, holds a copy of Mao Tse Tung's poem, *Laushan Pass* (1935). Each member of the Tour received a copy of the poem, and a copy, with translation, was also presented to the LAA.

ing social, educational and economic demands placed on China through the modernisation drive provide the changing contexts for libraries and information services across the country. The legacy of the Cultural Revolution has left innumerable strictures on growth. Nevertheless the determination and eagerness of Chinese librarianship to make the leap is patently obvious, even to the casual observer.

The LAA delegation was not casual. We visited seventeen libraries in almost as many days. Always cordially and warmly received, plied with the ubiquitous covered cups of green tea. Discussions, candour, tours of facilities, and probing question sessions proved the norm.

We also talked about Australian library issues, especially automation, library education, and educational libraries - university, college, and school. We saw historic sites and craft works and assisted the Chinese balance of payments, because, let's face it, just a little of the study tour was holiday!

Tangible support of Australia-China Council

Recognition of the foreign relations role undertaken by the delegation was demonstrated by the tangible support of the Australia - China Council. Their grant is gratefully acknowledged. The preparation of materials for presentation in China achieved through the grant has helped assure continuing communication. Papers prepared by Denis Richardson, Dorothy Peake, John Barclay, Barbara McLean and Helen Thompson on key Australian library issues were widely distributed throughout the study tour; we were often told that they would be translated in whole or part for wider dissemination. The papers were also publicly outlined and dis-

cussed at Wuhau and Peking University library schools.

Lasting impressions of Chinese librarianship are many. Almost everywhere we saw new libraries on the drawing board, under construction, or already completed - proof of the profession's and the nation's wish to overcome the problems of bulging stacks and inadequate reading facilities.

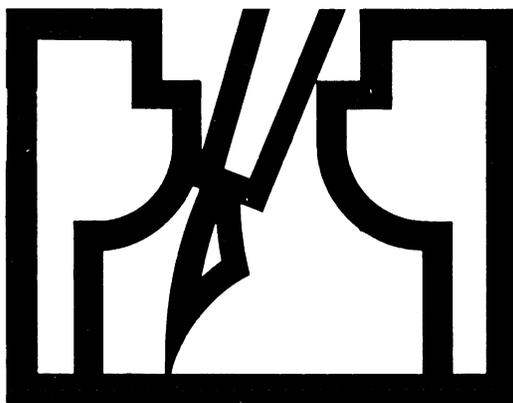
We heard about and saw incipient attempts at library automation. The shrewdness and wisdom of the emerging computer-aware Chinese information professionals will have to be cultivated as the advice from a plethora of foreign experts is sifted, culled and integrated into Chinese library practice. Limiting factors that are immediately discernible concern such basics as consistent power supply; lack of adequate numbers of trained personnel; the long lack of uniform standards in the field of bibliographic control; and the unique problems caused by the Chinese script and multiple-alphabet/script character of Chinese library collections.

We sensed difficulty in achieving co-operative ventures at the local and broader levels. Basic transport and communications limitations are problems. Another significant factor inhibiting co-operation is the bureaucratically institutionalised tripartite division of library and information service organisation under the Ministries of Culture (National, Provincial and Public libraries); Education (Educational libraries); and Science (Scientific libraries).

Collections burgeoning ... exploding ...

Collections are burgeoning; exploding may be a better word in many cases! Questions on the issue of new buildings versus weeding or

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Media Liaison Officers

The Library Association of Australia is endeavouring to establish a higher public profile.

Some success has been achieved particularly with regard to government submissions in areas such as Freedom of Information, copyright and sales tax. Our submission to the IAC Inquiry into Computer Hardware and Software also met with considerable success.

There are many other issues, often of local rather than national importance, where the

TIP-OFF

News from the Executive Director

Association may wish to issue a public statement, eg. when a particular library service comes under attack from members of the public or its governing body, or to promote library services.

In order to continue this work the Association has been having discussions with several public relations consultants with a view to using such a service.

Whether or not this project goes ahead it would be of great benefit for the Association to have a Media Liaison Officer in each state. The Officer would need an interest in the areas of PR, publicity and marketing and perhaps some experience in these fields as well.

It is envisaged that the Media Officer would carry out the following duties:

- (1) Monitor activities within their state that may require a media release. This may be a co-ordinating role with information being channelled from the branch, sections, SIGs, regional groups etc.
- (2) Advise the LAA Head Office of issues requiring media releases.
- (3) Carry out some PR projects if and when the need arises or when the Branch is able to commit itself to such a project.

The majority of press releases should originate from Head Office and guidelines on how, when and what to issue are currently being prepared.

A full briefing will be given to all Media Liaison Officers. Names of interested parties should be forwarded to the Executive Director before Monday 26 March.

In the Industrial Information Officer's absence

A complete review of the role of the Industrial Information Officer is being carried out before the position is filled. During this time the LAA is still handling matters of this kind. Depending on the nature of the enquiry it will be handled by Gordon Bain, Sue Phillips or Jenny Adams. Please do not hesitate to contact the LAA Office should you require industrial information.

Jenny Adams
Executive Director

Overseas Members

Some overseas members may prefer to receive their copies of *InCite* and *Australian Library Journal* by airmail.

A request for this service should be accompanied by payment; the airmail postage to UK is \$A30 per annum, to the USA \$A23.00. Rates to other countries will be supplied on request.

Libraries: After 1984

Come to Brisbane for the combined LAA/NZLA Conference 27-31 August 1984.

LAA China Study Tour continued from page 1

come to mind. Yet poor transport systems and the lack of union listings even at the provincial level may sustain large retrospective collections probably to the year 2010. However, union listings are being commenced at least for some materials and in some places. Bibliographic control has re-emerged so that standardisation and uniformity are no longer a dream. Indigenous publishing of books and periodicals has increased dramatically and library acquisition of local and foreign materials is expanding as fast as the book vote. There is even some experimentation with direct purchase overseas — a new development as all foreign books have traditionally been purchased through the Chinese Book Import and Export Company.

The critical personnel problem is being tackled on a number of fronts. The two library schools of 1976 have grown to nearly twenty. On site library school courses are offered, as are correspondence and short courses. Many library staff are given time off for self improvement. That China's library education need is immense became clear when I was informed that a library in a tertiary education institution had just appointed its first library trained graduate. Although this was unusual, most libraries had only a few fully trained library personnel. Library education in China will need great stimulus over the next twenty years to be able to provide qualified staff to manage the information needed for modernisation and the nation's future.

Although foundations are solid and resolve is firm, many of China's problems are classic developmental ones. It has energy, resolve, application and determination to advance. In this context Australian librarianship and the LAA may be able to offer some small contribution.

Relations between Australia and China are sound and clearly strengthening. The Chinese are eager to develop contacts with equivalent institutions or groups in Australia. Some Australian states have entered into 'sister' relationships with Chinese provinces. Some universities are co-operating in aid projects with counterparts in China. There are Chinese academics and librarians working in Australia on exchange or attachment. Discarded and new library material have been sent to China. There is considerable scope for Australian librarianship to increase its involvement.

The Association's Study Tour is following up its visit to China by preparing a report on the group's reactions to Chinese libraries and information services as requested by our Chinese hosts. The group also hopes to bring a mid-level library educator to Australia for a short visit. The possibility of a follow up study tour in 1987-88 has been broached. Various members of the study tour are investigating possibilities for developing institutional relationships. Finally a book of observations and impressions of Chinese librarianship is in preparation for publication in late 1984. LAA: China Society of Library Science communication and exchange is continuing...

The members of the study tour delegation played their part in the LAA's emerging international relations effort. We gained from the richness of the China experience both at the professional and cultural levels and tried to give something of our own experience in return. If there is an LAA China Library Study Tour 3 in 1987/88, then present trends suggest that relations between our two associations will be much stronger. *John Barclay*
Convenor

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