

China revealed through National Library's Asian collection

The fascinating observations of European travellers to China — from the earliest adventures of Marco Polo in 1295 to the eve of World War II in 1939 — are revealed in the National Library's latest exhibition, *Xanadu: Encounters with China*, on show from 19 August to 14 November 2004.

Xanadu is an exhibition of more than 150 items chosen exclusively from the library's collections, including the London Missionary Society — an almost-unrivalled collection in Chinese language of observations about the social life of 19th century China; Walter Perceval Yetts — containing more than 3000 items relating to Chinese art, archaeology and the origins of Chinese script; and material from the library's pictures, manuscripts and ephemera collections.

Jan Fullerton, director-general of the National Library of Australia said, 'The quality and breadth of the library's Asian Collection is outstanding, and a credit to the foresight of the library's policy-makers immediately after World War II.'

Items in the exhibition include the *Munster Atlas* of 1550, the oldest atlas in the Library's collection; the first Marco Polo biography (1486–1557); Jesuit engravings depicting the fabulous summer palace 'Yuanming Yuan'; printed records of the Boxer Rebellion; photographs of foot binding and of the Empress Dowager; a 19th century lithograph of the interior of an opium den; journals describing Elizabethan travel through China; drawings of China's imperial architecture by Australian architect Hardy Wilson; and rarely-seen photographs portraying Hong Kong, Beijing and fashionable Shanghai in the 1930s.

Travel accounts by Australian journalist George 'Peking' Morrison (1862–1920) transport the visitor into turbulent 19th century China and the program of the first Australian performance of Puccini's opera 'Turandot' in 1928 is a reference to 20th century contemporary culture.



Celebrating the Lantern Festival in a Chinese home in Juliet Bredon, Chinese New Year Festivals ... Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, 1930. NLA Collection

Curator Martin Terry said, '*Xanadu* is a mirror-reflection of a China that does not exist any more. Visitors will gain a greater understanding of the history of the country and its society. There is a strong people-focus in the exhibition, through the drawings and photographs, which depict all aspects of the life of the court, as well as street life.'



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