Recollections of My Working Life in Chinese, American and Australian Libraries

Sing-Wu Wang
RECOLLECTIONS OF MY WORKING LIFE
IN CHINESE, AMERICAN AND AUSTRALIAN LIBRARIES

Sing-Wu Wang Fisher, Australia

My library career lasted forty-one years: twenty years in China and twenty-one years in Australia except for thirteen months in the United States. I worked in the Library of the National Planning Board for less than a year (1944-45), the National Central Library for four and a half years (1945-49), the Library of the Yang-ming-shan Institute for six years (1949-55), and the Taiwan Provincial Library in Taipei for nine years (1955-64). But I spent all of twenty-one years in the National Library of Australia (1964-85).

I was born in 1920 in Wenling, China. My father was a school teacher. Later he became Director for Education in Wenling County. Influenced by him, I was addicted to books. I had read almost all the Chinese classical novels by the time I was in junior high school. After passing the entrance examination jointly sponsored by all the national universities, I was admitted to the Department of History and Geography of the National Zhejiang University in 1940 and graduated from it in 1944. During my university days, my family connections were cut off by the Japanese Army. I had to support myself by working for the university library as a part-time assistant.

Because I wanted to read more books, I accepted a job offered by the Library of the National Planning Board in Chongqing after graduation. A year later I moved to the National Central Library and took a librarian position in its Chinese Cataloging Section. Both libraries were under the directorship of Dr. Chiang Fu-ts'ung. As I was not a trained librarian, I had to learn how to catalog books while I was working. The head of this section was Mr. Zhang Zun Jian, a graduate of the Boone Library School.

Dr. Chiang at that time was undertaking the task of compiling a Chinese classification scheme for Chinese libraries. The scheme was divided into fifty sections. Most of them were based on the Library of Congress Classification, but substantial numbers of entries on Chinese philosophy, history, geography, literature, and art had been added. I was asked by Dr. Chiang to assist him in the revision of his work. This scheme has been adopted by the Nanjing Library for cataloging their books.

The War against the Japanese suddenly came to an end on 10 August 1945 when the Japanese Emperor announced unconditional surrender to the Allied Nations. In early 1946, the Chinese government decided to move the National Central Library back to its original premises in Nanjing and give the Chongqing building to the newly established library named the National Roosevelt Library. My colleagues and I left Chongqing by steamship and arrived in Nanjing at the end of February the same year.
The very first task in Nanjing assigned to me by the Library was to join a group of people sent from libraries, universities, research institutions, and government departments to separate a collection of books into groups according to their ownership seals. The books in this collection were seized by the Japanese occupation army and stored in the Institute of Geology building. We spent more than a month before we finished the job.

Apart from the books that were acquired from the activity mentioned above, the National Central Library also received books from Japanese institutions and private libraries in Shanghai, together with rare books secretly acquired by the Library from the occupied areas during the war. The Library's collection suddenly increased and hit the mark of one million volumes. In order to prepare the books for the use of the public, the Library's Cataloging Division was expanded and I was concurrently promoted to the position of Editor and became Head of the Chinese Cataloging Section. We had cataloged on average 100 titles a day, which included making catalog cards and preparing the books for use.

After the Chinese Communist Army took over the strategic city of Xuzhou, Nanjing was under a threat of war. A committee consisting of the representatives of Academia Sinica, the National Palace Museum, the National Central Museum, and the National Central Library was formed by government authorities to prepare moving rare books and art treasures to Taiwan for safekeeping. Three shipments of such collections were eventually sent to Taiwan between December 1948 and January 1949. I was directed by the National Central Library to escort the first shipment which comprised sixty wooden crates of the National Library's rare books. After arriving in Taiwan, the first shipment was housed briefly in the Yang Mei Railway Station, then shifted to Taichung and stored at the Taichung Sugar Mill's warehouse. Except for watching after the safety of the books, all the six people from the National Central Library who came with the three shipments were left idle there with nothing else to do.

In August 1949 I was summoned by my university teacher, Professor Chang Chi Yun, to Yang-ming-shan to help him organize his archival materials. Later I was appointed to head the Library of the Yang-ming-shan Institute (later the National War College). The objective of establishing this Institute was to retain government personnel, including civil and military officers who retreated from mainland China. My responsibility was to build up an adequate collection to meet the needs of the students as well as that of the teaching staff. Apart from buying books, periodicals, and newspapers from the book market in Taiwan, the Library also acquired a large number of publications published in mainland China through the help of the then Hong Kong Times. All books were cataloged and articles appearing in the periodicals and newspapers were indexed as soon as they arrived. An Index to Periodicals and Newspaper Articles was published monthly and distributed to faculty members and students. This Index was the first of its kind in Taiwan. My acquisition and indexing programs were fully supported by the authorities of the Institute. At that time the purchase and display of Chinese Communist publications was officially banned by the government.
The Institute Library was greatly enriched by the acquisition of the collections of the former Government Information Office and the Dr. Sun Yat-sen Center for Culture and Education. The former contained a nearly full run of several leading newspapers published in mainland China. The latter totalled about 50,000 volumes of books on bibliography, philosophy, history, geography, the social sciences, literature, and art. When I left the Institute in 1955, the Library had a collection of 160,000 volumes of books. I used this collection and my spare time to write my first book entitled *Introduction to the Classification of Books* (in Chinese). The book was published in Taipei in 1955. In October 1955 the Taiwan Provincial Government appointed me Director of the Taiwan Provincial Library in Taipei. I held this position for nine years until 1964, except for one year and one month when I was away in the United States.

An urgent measure I took after arriving at the Provincial Library was to mobilize staff members to accession all printed materials in the stacks room and then to catalog them, because no complete record had been kept for a collection of 259,299 volumes of books in Chinese, Japanese, and other languages. All the books which were originally available for the use of the public stood on book shelves behind a wire mesh or netting in the reading room. Any reader who wanted to borrow a particular book on those shelves had to use his finger to push it out through one of the holes in the wire netting. The library assistant then picked up the book and handed it to the borrower over the loan counter after a loan record had been made. The Library staff spent nearly three years recording and cataloging this collection. When I left Taiwan for Australia, the number of books in the Provincial Library was 318,206. The increase in the number of books was not large during that time; the Taiwan government was confronted with financial difficulties and the budget allocation to the Provincial Library was very insufficient.

When working in the Provincial Library, I was also a part-time teacher beginning in 1957 in the Library Science Section of the Department of Social Education of the Taiwan Provincial Normal University, from 1953 one of the Directors of the Library Association of China, and from 1956 to 1958 Chief Instructor of the Library Training School sponsored by the Library Association.

In November 1957 the Taiwan Ministry of Education, on the recommendation of Dr. Chiang Fu-ts'ung, sent me and Mr. Ting Te Feng, Head of the Bureau of International Exchange of Publications, to attend the Seminar on the International Exchange of Publications in the Indo-Pacific Area held at the National Diet Library in Tokyo. Sir Harold White, representing Australia, was also attending the seminar. He and I were each elected to chair a section. We met frequently and discussed many things together. Once he asked me, "Would you be interested in coming to Australia to help me set up an oriental collection at my Library?" I thought that he was joking and answered him offhandedly, "If such a chance occurs, I am willing to go to Australia to work with you." Sir Harold had come to Tokyo with his wife, Lady Elizabeth and, after the seminar, the couple stopped over in Taiwan on their way back to Australia. This was the first contact I had with Sir Harold.
Through the combined support of Dr. William A. Fitzgerald, Library Consultant of an American aid organization in Taiwan; Miss Emma K. Skinner, Librarian of the American Library in Taipei; and Dr. Chiang Fu-ts'ung, Director of the National Central Library, I received a grant from the U.S. Department of State to participate in the jointly sponsored Program for Foreign Librarians. The grant provided for a maximum of 370 days in the United States. I left Taiwan on 25 May 1959. Besides working at the Cleveland Public Library under Mr. Raymond C. Lindquist, I also studied at the School of Library Science of the Western Reserve University under Professor Jesse H. Shera.

During the university holidays I visited seven state libraries, sixteen public libraries, fourteen university libraries, one private library (the Newberry in Chicago), sixteen museums, and the Library of Congress. Important cities I passed through on my tour were Boston; New York; Philadelphia; Baltimore; Washington, D.C.; Cleveland; Chicago; Detroit; New Orleans; Cincinnati; Louisville; Nashville; Buffalo; Albany; Seattle, San Francisco; Los Angeles; and Honolulu, Hawaii.

After I had finished two semesters at the Western Reserve Library School, Dean Shera encouraged me to complete my masters degree. He voluntarily gave me a full scholarship and wrote to Mrs. Mary Ann Adams, my program administrator at the Library of Congress, suggesting that I should stay for another eight months. The Department of State agreed to his proposal, but the Taiwan government used an existing regulation to oppose my application. I, therefore, flew back to Taipei on 28 June 1960.

From my studies and work and visits to libraries in the United States, I understood well the philosophy, techniques, and administration of American library services. As soon as I returned, I added the following services to the Provincial Library: a reference service room, a young people's reading room, and audiovisual services. As the Provincial Library shared only one floor in a not very big three-story building with the Provincial Museum, I was unable to carry out all these projects. After making many efforts, I had my proposal finally accepted by the Taiwan Provincial Government to erect a separate building for the Provincial Library.

To find a suitable site for the Library was as difficult as it had been to obtain funds. With the assistance of the Taipei City Government, I located a piece of land at No. 1 Hsin Sheng South Road belonging to the Taipei Institute of Technology. After a period of hard bargaining and negotiation, the Provincial government and the Yang-ming-shan Institute agreed that the Provincial Library could use that land on condition that the Provincial government should also build a smaller library building for the Institute. The Provincial Library building was four stories high with a total space of 5,280 square meters. It could house 900,000 volumes of books and seat 1,070 readers. Each floor was designed to perform one of the following four special functions: information, education, research, and recreation. The first and second floors were constructed in 1962 and 1963 respectively. The fourth floor was completed in 1968.
Before I left the Provincial Library for Australia, I also finished my second book called *On the Development of Library Services in Taiwan* (in Chinese) which was published in Taipei in 1963.

In January 1964 Sir Harold visited Taiwan again after having taken part in the UNESCO Seminar on Asian and Pacific National Libraries held in Manila. His purpose on this second visit was to tell me that his proposal to establish an oriental collection had been approved by the Australian government and that he wanted me to spend two years in Australia to help him. On hearing this, I realized that his former invitation had been serious. I immediately consulted with the Taiwan Provincial Government and was told that I could accept his invitation to go to Australia on leave without pay for one year only. In April the same year, I received an official letter from Sir Harold in which he specified the terms of my appointment, including salary, travel allowance, and the duration of employment. He accepted the government's precondition that I would work for him for one year only. But as the end of his letter, he added the following, "As you know from our talk in Taipei, I would hope that the appointment would extend one year, which I proposed in the first instance so that we would both have experience of the actual working arrangements before considering an extension."

After permission for my departure was given by the Provincial government and my temporary replacement was appointed, I left Taipei and arrived in Canberra on 21 October 1964. From the fifties, Sir Harold had developed a very aggressive acquisition policy and had carried it out throughout his stay at the National Library of Australia. Under his direction the National Library had acquired a little more than 40,000 volumes of books in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean with the majority in Chinese. These were retrospective materials; I felt that current publications were essential for the National Library. After close investigation and negotiation, I placed the following blanket order for the Library: with the Chiao Liu Publications Service in Hong Kong in 1965 for Chinese materials published in Hong Kong and China, with the Chinese Materials Center in Taipei in 1974 for Chinese publications issued in Taiwan, with the Maruzen Company in Tokyo in 1968 for Japanese works published in Japan, and with the Universal Publishing Agency in Seoul in 1975 (later changed to Eulyoo Publishing Company). The Japanese negotiating agent was Mr. Azusa Tanaka who was the first exchange librarian arranged by Sir Harold to come to Australia from the National Diet Library. Before I retired there were nine exchange librarians from the National Diet Library who worked two to three years in the National Library of Australia.

With regard to the exchange of publications, the Library had maintained relations with the National Central Library in Taiwan since 1954, with the National Library of China since 1965, with the Korean National Assembly Library also since 1965, and with the State Central Library in Pyongyang since 1972. Between 1966 and 1971 the exchange relations with the National Library of China were interrupted by the Cultural Revolution. The Library also had active exchange programs with various universities and research institutes in China, Taiwan, Japan, and North and South Korea.
The main strategy of Sir Harold's acquisition policy was to buy complete collections. Following his idea, the Oriental Collection has acquired the following collections: the libraries of Walter Percival Yetts on Chinese archaeology and fine arts; of Fang Chao Ying on modern Chinese history; of the London Missionary Society on the Taiping Rebellion (1851-1864) and Christianity; of General Sakakibarra on Japanese civil and military history, biography, and Shintoism; of Herbert Allen Giles which comprises old Japanese maps, Japanese translations of Chinese classics, Japanese works on Chinese studies, and Chinese literary works; of Earnest Julius Walter Simon on Chinese, Manchu, and Mongolian languages and literature; of Tadashi Nakano on economics and the Japanese economy; of Otto van der Sprenkel on Chinese history; and others.

The growth of the Oriental Library in these years was faster than that of the main library. At the time of my retirement in 1985, the collection had increased to 324,434 volumes, including 190,318 volumes in Chinese, 115,936 volumes in Japanese, 17,176 volumes in Korean, 629 volumes in Manchu, 20 volumes in Mongolian, and 355 volumes in Tibetan.

To attain my masters degree, I applied to the Australian National University and was accepted as a candidate for the M.A. degree in the Department of History. Before doing this, I secured Sir Harold's approval and encouragement. Because the only requirement of the course was to write a thesis, I did not use the Library's time. I was awarded the M.A. degree in 1969. My thesis was titled "The Organisation of Chinese Emigration, 1848-1888, with Reference to Chinese Emigration to Australia," and was published under the same title by the Chinese Materials Center, San Francisco, in 1978.

While I worked in the Oriental Collection, unexpectedly I received a letter from Miss Edith A. Case, Personnel Officer of the Cleveland Public Library. She asked if I was interested in working in the John G. White Collections again. I discovered that at that time the Australian Immigration Law specified that non-Europeans in Australia there on a temporary basis who wanted to become permanent residents must live in Australia continuously for fifteen years. Thinking that my employment in the National Library could not last for so many years, I accepted the Cleveland Public Library's offer. On my behalf the Cleveland Public Library filed an application with the Immigration Office in Cleveland. The American Immigration Law was a complicated affair and, after a long period of waiting, my family and I received visas in 1970.

Before we went to the American Consulate-General in Sydney for an interview, I reported my intention to Sir Harold. He told me that the requirement for permanent residency in Australia for non-Europeans had been changed from fifteen years to only five years and that I would be eligible for permanent residency on 22 October 1969. He promised to make the proper arrangements for my family and me to stay in Australia permanently.

At about the time I received the offer from the Cleveland Public Library, I also heard from Chiang Fu-ts'ung. He informed me that the Taiwan Ministry of Education, on his recommendation, had agree to appoint me to succeed him as Director of the National
Central Library. He urged me to return to Taiwan immediately. To encourage me to accept his proposal, he asked my university teachers, my close friends, and the then Chinese Ambassador to Australia, Dr. Chen Chi-mai, to persuade me; he also demanded that Sir Harold allow me to leave Australia.

I was totally confused about how to deal with the three opportunities presented me at the same time. My wife, May, and my three daughters, Angela, Ruth, and Kristina, were firm in their opinion. They regarded Australia as a heaven and prayed that I remain there. Their stand, the conditions of the work at the National Library of Australia, and the change in the Australian Immigration Law impelled me to resign from the Taiwan Provincial Library, to refuse other offers, and to stay on in Australia. Dr. Chiang had always been very kind to me and I owed him a great deal; when I turned down his proposal, I did not have a suitable explanation to give him. The Cleveland Public Library, fortunately, understood my situation and accepted my apology. I remain, however, discomfited about the patience and tolerance shown me by Raymond C. Lindquist, Dr. George J. Maciuszko, and Miss Edith A. Case who awaited my arrival.

Sir Harold retired on 14 June 1970 and was succeeded by Mr. Allen Percy Fleming. When in December 1972 Australia and the People’s Republic of China established diplomatic relations, Mr. Fleming saw the chances of improving relations with the National Library of China and of acquiring both more current and retrospective materials from China. He decided to send me to China. Before going to China, I attended the 29th International Congress of Orientalists which was held in Paris and, afterward, visited oriental libraries in London, Leeds, Sheffield, and Moscow. I reached China on 11 August 1973 and left on 23 August after visiting Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou. In Beijing I visited the National Library of China and Guozi Shudian (International Bookstore, now the China International Book Trading Corporation).

The National Library of China, on one hand, agreed to increase the volume of the exchange of publications but, on the other, was unable to promise sending us their duplicates. Guoji Shudian was the sole wholesale agent in China for importing and exporting publications in all languages. I wanted to place a blanket order with the Bookstore for all publications issued in China. At first, Mr. Jin Zhong-lin, Chief of the Export Department, was cautious with me; I was the first person who had ever made such a request. I explained to him that the National Library wanted to have all the books and serials published in China come into its collection and that he could consider the National Library as one of his retailers. Finally he accepted my proposition with the exception of provincial publishers whose publications were available through the Joint Publishing Company in Hong Kong.

The Joint Publishing Company in Hong Kong was responsible for the distribution of mainland publications to countries outside China. I visited the Company on the 23d of August; the manager had probably received information about my visit from Beijing because he did not question me but was delighted to comply with all the conditions and terms which I made representing the National Library of Australia. The two blanket orders began in
April 1974. It was these successful negotiations that initiated the flow of Chinese publications from mainland China.

The National Library of Australia invited Mr. Tan Xiang Jin and Mr. Ting Zhi Kang, Deputy Directors of the National Library of China to visit Australia and to attend the National Director's Conferences held in Canberra from May to June 1978 and in May 1979. Mr. Lu Ji Ping, Director of the National Library of China, in return, invited Dr. George Chandler, Director-General of the National Library of Australia (succeeded in April 1974 by Mr. Fleming), to spend two weeks in China. The Australian delegation, comprised of Dr. and Mrs. Chandler, Mr. W. D. Thorn, Miss Judith Baskin, and Mr. S. W. Wang, went to China from the 6th to the 12th January 1980. At an informal meeting in Beijing, Mr. Ting Zhi Kang expressed the desire to have a younger senior librarian trained in Australia. Dr. Chandler was willing to consider this proposal but unable to give a firm answer at the time. Returning to Australia, I reminded Dr. Chandler that the Australia-China Council in Canberra had a special fund set up to afford assistance for just such cultural exchanges.

Once we arrived in Canberra, Dr. Chandler worked very hard to secure the necessary funds for a successful candidate to stay in Canberra for two years. The candidate would study English for one year. When both libraries had agreed to the negotiated terms, Mr. Ting chose as the first librarian to participate Mr. Tan Xiang Jin. He came to Australia in July 1980 and returned to China in July 1982. During his stay in Canberra, he studied English at the Canberra College of Advanced Education (now the University of Canberra) and learned the procedures of library services working in various sections of the National Library.

I used materials gathered during my visit to China in 1980 to publish an article entitled "Recent Development of Library and Information Services in China" in Essays: in Commemoration of the Golden Jubilee of the Fung Ping Shan Library, 1932-1982 (Hong Kong, 1982).

In 1978 the East Asian Libraries Group of Australia was formed in Canberra. I was elected Chairman of the Group for 1978-79 and 1982-84; Vice Chairman for 1980-82; and Editor of its Newsletter for 1984-86. Entrusted by the Group, I conducted two surveys of East Asian language collections in Australian libraries in 1977 and 1983 respectively. Besides taking part in conferences held in Tokyo and Paris, I also attended conferences and seminars held in Taipei, Seoul, and San Francisco. I visited China five times. Except for the first visit, all the rest were by invitation from the National Library of China or from the Beijing Normal University. After retiring from the National Library of Australia, I was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia on 9 June 1986 by the Queen of Australia, Elizabeth II, for service to the National Library, particularly to the Oriental Collection.

Reviewing my forty-one years of library service, I was blessed with the good luck to make the following contributions: (a) to help reopen the National Central Library in Nanjing and to move the Library's rare book collection to Taiwan, (b) to complete a catalog of all
printed materials and to erect a new library building for the Taiwan Provincial Library in Taipei, (c) to provide an adequate library service and to build up a sizeable collection for the Yang-ming-shan Institute, (d) to implement Sir Harold's acquisition policy, to improve exchange relations with East Asian national libraries, and to build up the largest East Asian language collection in Australia for the National Library of Australia.

Although I gave up the offers to work in the National Central Library in Taiwan and the Cleveland Public Library in the United States, I believe I made the right choice to stay in Australia. The excellent working conditions in the National Library and the Australian way of life have not disappointed me. I love Australia. I do not have any regrets.