

## Strengthening the links

**Extending communication between Chinese and Australian librarianship, six senior Chinese library officials visited Australia from November 6 to 22 as guests of the National Library of Australia under Australia's Cultural Exchange Agreement with China.**

The group was led by Mr Du Ke, Director of Ministry Affairs of the Chinese Ministry of Culture. Now responsible for broader Ministry affairs, until recently Mr Du was Director of the Ministry's Bureau of Library Administration. He is also Vice President of the China Society of Library Science. As a qualified librarian, having graduated in 1961 from the major library school at Beijing University, he is in a key position to help oversee the development of China's strengthening public library system.

The other five members of the delegation are all senior library leaders. They represent four of the nation's great libraries and are active in national or provincial library society affairs. The group included Mr Li Xunda, Vice Head of the Library Affairs Office of the Bureau of Library Administration of the Ministry of Culture, and well known to the members of the LAA China Study Tour 1983, the itinerary of which he helped plan and co-ordinate. Ms Li Yiti, Vice Head of the Department of Library Science Research of the National Library of China, has a special interest in planning for the new national library in Beijing intended for completion in 1987. The new National Library will undoubtedly be one of the great libraries of the world.

All Vice or Deputy Librarians from key greater metropolitan libraries, the remaining delegates were Mr Chen Shiming from Shanghai Library; Mr Dong Changxu from the Tianjin Library and Mr Qiu Keqin from Nanjing Library.

The Australia/China relationship has been strengthening for more than a decade. It is firmly based on trade and has been regularised through agreements in various spheres. The Technical Co-operation for development agreement of 1981; the understanding on agricultural exchange of 1980; the bilateral agreement on scientific and technological exchange of 1980; and, the cultural agreement of 1981 highlight the notable exchange agreements established between the two countries.

The recent visit was arranged under the cultural exchange programme administered by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs. As such it links into the history of Sino-Australian library exchanges which have evolved, at the Australian end, through the National Library of Australia, the Australian National University, the CSIRO and the LAA.

Time constraints limited the programme of activities in Australia to the ACT, Victoria and NSW. Under the overall co-ordination of the National Library of Australia the programme of visits and activities was co-operatively developed by the NLA, Canberra Public Library Service, State Library of Victoria, State Library of NSW and Library Association of Aus-



**Delegation of Chinese librarians look at Chinese publications in the National Library's Orientalia Section on 7 November 1984. Left to right: Mr Li Xunda, Vice Head, Bureau of Library Administration, Ministry of Culture; Mr Dong Changxu, Vice-Director, Tianjin Library; Mr Du Ke, Director, Bureau of Ministry Affairs, Ministry of Culture, leader of the delegation; Mr Chen Shiming, Deputy-Director, Shanghai Library; Mr Qiu Keqin, Deputy-Director, Nanjing Library; Mr Sidney Wang, Chief Librarian, Orientalia, National Library; Ms Li Yiti, Vice Head, Department of Library Science Research, National Library of China.**

Photograph by National Library of Australia

tralia. Throughout the tour the Chinese delegation was accompanied by two officers of the NLA, Susan Magnay and Beatrice Tam.

Efforts were made to provide rich and varied insights into Australian library practice, culture and life. In the ACT the professional programme included visits to the NLA; Menzies Library of the ANU; Commonwealth Parliamentary Library; Canberra Public Library Service and Erindale Community Library.

In Melbourne the group visited the State Library of Victoria; Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne; Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology Library and Department of Librarianship; North Central Goldfields Regional Library and other country services.

In Sydney the professional visits included the State Library of New South Wales; City of Sydney Library, Haymarket Branch; Bankstown City Library; Fisher Library, University of Sydney; Sydney Technical College Library; and the almost completed library of the New South Wales Institute of Technology.

Throughout the tour the Chinese delegation indicated interest in continuing exchange at various levels between Chinese and Australian librarianship. Although often registered in private conversation and informally, interest seemed to focus on three broad areas. The value of the already well traversed road of institutional co-operation (eg NAL and ANU) was reaffirmed. The exchange of materials and research was also cited as desirable. The exchange of personnel to work, teach and study was also seen as an area which might be beneficial. These and other issues in co-operation and exchange are matters for future study and development.

Realistically, the way ahead cannot be easy. Despite advantage, the resources available to Australian librarianship for international exchange are small. There are, however, rela-

tively unused avenues of support and these need to be tapped. With a view to negotiating areas of potential support beyond the Association and providing co-ordination and guidance within the LAA, a subcommittee has been formed under the International Relations Committee to help nurture Sino-Australian library relations. The Association thus has a group prepared to help complement activities underway in the broader library field.

Having grown out of the Association's China Library Study Tours, Association involvement is now based on solid foundations. Forty thousand books have been forwarded to universities and library schools along with packages of other professional materials. The report *Observations on Chinese Libraries* prepared by the members of the 1983 study tour has been presented to the Chinese Ministry of Culture and China Society of Library Science. Planning is underway to bring a small group of library educators to Australia for a short study tour in late 1985. Developments such as these accord with Australian foreign policy and may often draw tangible government support. This may in turn help strengthen the maturing role of the Association in international library relations. The visit of the Chinese delegation, significant milestone as it is in Sino-Australian library relations, needs now to be built upon in the months and years ahead.

Our Association's bilateral and multilateral relations with other library traditions and bodies must also be developed alongside the China relationship. The benefits are mutual and the price of isolationism is not stagnation.

John Barclay

Chairperson, China Subcommittee and member, International Relations Committee of the LAA.