

Chinese Conference Under a Snow-Capped Peak : A Personal View

by Andrew Gosling

The 13th Biennial Conference of the Chinese Studies Association of Australia, 9-11 July 2013, was held this year in Hobart. It was hosted by the University of Tasmania, Hobart and the venue was the Old Woolstore Hotel, part of which is indeed a renovated wool store. This was the first time since CSAA began that the gathering has taken place in Tasmania. It was my twelfth CSAA conference (I missed the 2009 event) since the first in Melbourne in July 1989.

Hobart was cold but very sunny. The summit of Mount Wellington, towering over the city, was covered in snow. With the conference venue only a couple of minutes walk from the River Derwent, delegates had the opportunity to see the harbour, including two ships back from Antarctica, as well as tasting some of Hobart's famous seafood at restaurants such as Mures and The Drunken Admiral. The conference was officially opened by Lara Giddings, Premier of Tasmania, at an evening reception held at Hobart's striking new art gallery, The Museum of Old and New Art (MONA), which overlooks the river, north of the city.



Photo: Hobart waterfront and Mount Wellington

As with other events held in Hobart, such as the Asian Studies Association of Australia conference in 2002, attendance was not as strong as in larger mainland cities, but with about 60 delegates, the gathering had a friendly atmosphere and it was possible to meet and talk with most if not all those there. The standard of presentations was generally high and there was a wide coverage of topics on contemporary and traditional China. The theme was Journeys and a few sessions did relate to actual or figurative journeys, for example "Journeys in Song Dynasty China"; "Transnational journeys" (Chinese in Australia) and "Spiritual journeys".

Other panels included historiography, law, rural China, education, Taiwan, politics, labour, human rights, arts and culture, religion, cinema and cyberspace. The session called "A prosperous age" was of particular interest to librarians. Duncan Campbell of ANU in "Book rituals: book collecting in a prosperous age" spoke about the great Chinese book collector Huang Peilie (1765-1825); Robyn Hamilton of the University of Auckland in "Evidence of expanding cultural horizons in the Qianlong-Jiaqing transition period (1795-1800)" covered the role of women literati particularly Luo Qilan (b.1755);

while Yayan Zhu of ANU in “Three Mountain Street” discussed imperial archives and private libraries in Nanjing during the Ming-Qing transition..

The keynote presenters were: Kerry Brown, the new director of the University of Sydney China Studies Centre on “The networked leadership: the inner lives of the new generation of Chinese elite leaders;” Gloria Davis, Convenor of Chinese Studies, Monash University on “Journeying with Lu Xun;” and Geremie Barme, head of the Australian Centre on China in the World on “The Fishing Terrace (Diaoyutai) in Beijing: hidden power in a travelling palace.” This was of special interest to me as in October 1987, as part of the Australian Library Delegation to China; I stayed at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse.

It was particularly pleasing that the lunchtime library panel on 10 July was well received by a large audience. The lecture theatre was full, largely thanks to the efforts of one of the organizers, Nathan Woolley of ANU. The three speakers were: Di Pin Ouyang of the National Library of Australia on “Trends in the usage of the Chinese collections at the National Library of Australia;” Bick-har Yeung of the University of Melbourne Library on “A national collection to support research on southwest China at the East Asian Collection, University of Melbourne;” and Darrell Dorrington of the ANU Library on “Going online: recent collection developments at the ANU Library.” Although time was limited all three spoke eloquently and there was also good discussion after each presentation. I chaired the session. This was probably the most successful library panel at a CSAA conference since 1999 at Murdoch University in Perth, where we had the strong support of Mr Nadasabapathy (Nada), the University Librarian, who had a considerable interest in Chinese studies and library collections.