

## **A report on visits to major Chinese research collections in the United Kingdom, Paris and Singapore, August – September, 2014**

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### **Introduction**

In late summer and autumn 2014, I went on a one month private study tour with Dr. Hui-chuan Wang to England, Paris and Singapore visiting libraries and museums. Hui-chuan is an artist, who paints in Chinese style and obtained a PhD at the University of Melbourne. Her research interest is architectural mural paintings. We have a common interest in Chinese rare book collections and Chinese antiques located in overseas museums. This report provides a summary of our library visits. The aims of our visits to libraries were to meet with Chinese Studies librarians and to find out what is so special about their collections, as well as how the research potential and value of these special collections could be expanded to be utilised by Chinese Studies scholars in Australia.

### **The Bodleian Library, Oxford University, 26th August 2014.**

[The Bodleian K B Chen China Center Library](#) is a departmental Library, which had just moved into the Dickson Poon University of Oxford China Centre Building at the time we visited. Hui-chuan and I were shown around by Mr. David Helliwell and Mr. Joshua Seufert.

The collection comprises 200,000 volumes of Chinese books, however on site there is only a teaching collection containing 20,000 volumes. The rest of the collection is stored at a repository located 40 miles away providing 24 hour retrieval services.

The collection adopted the Harvard Yenching Classification, but recently started using the Library of Congress Classification. In terms of library systems, it is different from the Bodleian's central library system. It provides character display on the OPAC but can be accessed via Pinyin Romanisation. Detailed analytic bibliographic records for congshu 叢書 series are available for searching.

The coverage of the collection is comprehensive, comprising classical and modern works on most aspects of China, except art and archaeology; and a reference collection associated with Chinese Studies in all languages.

David and Joshua took us to the Rare and Manuscript area of the Chinese Collection stored in the Special Collections Library, a temporary location in the basement of the Science Library Building. The whole special and rare books collection will be moved to the [Weston Library](#) (the new Bodleian Library) which is opposite to the old Bodleian Library. At the time we visited, the Weston Library was under refurbishment and was scheduled to be opened in September 2014.

The most significant piece in the Special Collection is [the Selden map of China](#), ca 1612-1615, drawn by merchants from China. It appears that this is the first map showing China as part of a greater East and Southeast Asia. There are shipping routes from Quanzhou, China to other parts of the region. The [map](#)

itself has no name, but was donated to Oxford in 1659 by John Selden. David Helliwell told us that he titled it *the Selden map of China*. We did not get a chance to see the original piece but a reprinted copy.

David showed us many rare Chinese books. *Shi shu* 四書 from the Sinica Collection, is the first Chinese rare book in the collection, donated by Sir Thomas Bodley, and brought back by the Dutch East India Company. The library's early stage of Chinese rare book collecting in the seventeenth century was not of scholarly editions. Many items were collected by merchants, and were books unwanted by the Chinese. Many of these books are now not to be found in China. One example is *Huangdi nei jing* 皇帝內經.

We were shown the original copy of the *Shi xue* 視學, by Nian Xiyu 年希堯(清), brought back by the Jesuits during the 1800s. The missionary materials form an important part of the rare books collection.

The Backhouse Collection, considered the best and finest Chinese manuscript collection, was donated to the Bodleian Library between 1913 and 1923 by [Sir Edmund Backhouse, 2<sup>nd</sup> Baronet](#). Some of the manuscripts are from the Qing imperial collection with the seal of the emperor stamped on the books, eg. *Zhu zi quan shu* 朱子全書, containing the seal of the Emperor Kangxi Collection (康熙藏印), and *Wu lun quan shu* 五倫全書, Ming edition 明刻本. Other real treasures are the *Yongle da dian* or the *Yongle Encyclopedia* 永樂大典, 1567. The Bodleian Library holds 19 volumes of the whole set. There is a set of *Gu jin tu shu ji cheng* 古今圖書集成 in the collection, but unfortunately one box is missing. Sir Edmund Backhouse's typed China memoirs held at the National Library of Australia are discussed by Andrew Gosling elsewhere in this issue of the EALRGA Newsletter.



The Chinese rare and manuscript collection of the Bodleian Library, located in the basement of the Science Library Building, 26 August, 2014.

### [British Library](#), 27<sup>th</sup> August, 2014.

My original aim in visiting the Chinese Section of the British Library was to view the Stein Collection of Dunhuang Manuscripts. Sara Chiesura, Curator of the Chinese Collection, looked after our visit.

[The Stein Collection](#) is held at the International Dunhuang Project (IDP) Office. It is required to make a special arrangement with the IDP in advance in order to view the collection. I was not aware of this beforehand. As a result, we could not visit the IDP Office. However the Stein Collection is available online to access free of charge. The IDP has greatly expanded its research value for International scholars, who can remotely access the manuscripts without visiting the collection. The British Library also promotes some of the Dunhuang manuscripts regularly on display at the [Sir John Ritblat Gallery](#).

Among the items on display at the Sir John Ritblat Gallery, there were three valuable Chinese pieces:

1. *Diamond Sutra* 金剛經 (OR8210/P2 ). It is one the first printed publications in China, 11 May 868.
2. *Early printed Almanac*, (OR8210/P6).
3. *The Eighteen Luo Han* 十八羅漢 (OR6205), 18th century.

Each item has an OR number representing the unique record number in the [IDP](#) database which helps users to access the online copy.

One of the world's most celebrated documents held in the British Library is the [Magna Carta](#), 1215 (the Great Charter) which was on display at the previous exhibition in the Gallery. We just missed it.

Sarah gave us a tour of the Gallery, the reading room of the British Library. The British Library is a closed collection. Library users are required to request books through the library system. Books cannot be borrowed and must be read in the Reading Room. We were brought to see the [King's Library](#) tower, a tall glass tower containing the King George III Collection. We also visited the exhibition on the British Library's book conservation and preservation.

The British Library is the copyright library for the United Kingdom. It receives every book published in the United Kingdom including colonial publications, for example the publications published in Hong Kong before the Handover.

There are 100,000 items of Chinese rare books in the British Library. In addition to the Stein Collection, the Chinese Collection contains 400 oracle bones 甲骨文, 20 volumes of the *Yongle Encyclopaedia* 永樂大典. Most of the rare books in the collection are Ming and Qing publications; some are Yuan publications.



The four Chinese treasures in the British Library Collection.

Sarah had requested the following treasure items for us to view:

1. *Ten bamboo Studio* 十竹齋蘭譜, 1634.
2. *The Yongle Encyclopedia* 永樂大典, 1567.
3. *Hong Lou Meng* 紅樓夢, 1811.

To my surprise, we were allowed to flip the rare books page by page to view and to take photographs of the text and illustrations. It was an amazing experience. In Australia, we are not allowed to touch the rare books by hand. We have to wear gloves when reading rare books.

Sarah is the curator of the Chinese collection at the British Library. Her role includes responsibilities within the Chinese collections for international relations with Chinese partners, fund raising, new acquisitions, learning activities, exhibitions, talks, and publicity. She was the only curator in the Chinese collections at the time of our visit. About the cataloguing of the material, she does not do cataloguing on an everyday basis, but she is carrying on retro-conversion activities of the old card and microfiches catalogues with Chinese partners (i.e. Universities and other cultural institutions). Sometimes, PhD students based in UK contribute in dealing with cataloguing some parts of the collections (for example: Mongolian, Manchu or other rare material).

The British Library Chinese Collection has attracted great interest from researchers worldwide wishing to conduct research there. To enter the British Library, users are required to [register for a reader pass](#) online beforehand.



**The SOAS Library, the University of London, 27<sup>th</sup> August, 2014.**



SOAS, the University of London

The SOAS Library is one of the major collections in the world supporting research on Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Its focus is on the modern and contemporary period. On a tour led by Ms Wai Hing Tse, Hui-chuan and I had the opportunity to visit the general collection as well as the special collections, which include archives, manuscripts and rare books. The special collections represent early British interaction with Asia and Africa, and its colonial archives. The archive collections comprise unpublished primary sources and they are mostly not catalogued, including correspondence, diaries, photographs, etc. given to the SOAS Library.

The information below about the archival sources has been obtained from the [SOAS Library's Collection web site](#).

- [Missionaries and missionary organisations](#)
- [NGOs, charities and campaigning organisations](#)
- [Businesses and commercial bodies](#)
- Individuals whose lives and works relate to Africa, Asia, and the Middle East

We were presented with some of the archives to view from the [John Swire & Sons collection](#); from the collection of Business and Commercial Bodies as well as the [Robert Morrison collection](#) from the collection on Missionaries and missionary organizations.

The Robert Morrison Collection is divided between the rare book collection and the manuscript collection. The book collection contains Morrison's evangelisation in China, and the English Bible translated into Chinese. [Robert Morrison](#) (1782-1834), the first Protestant missionary to China, was himself very interested in Chinese history and religions. Because of the restricted location of evangelisation at that time, he spent most of his time in China in Guangzhou and Macau. He therefore collected many books about Guangdong for his collection. There are 1000 titles of Chinese books published in the Qing dynasty, with some Ming dynasty items. The books cover gazetteers, Confucianism, Buddhism and other Chinese beliefs, literature and folklore. These books were bound in the Western

style and were catalogued so they can be searched online from the SOAS Library catalogue. Morrison's English Collection is kept at the University of Hong Kong Library.

The Morrison manuscripts are kept at CWML (Council for World Mission Library) where Morrison's Bible manuscript is kept.

We were shown the following rare items from the SOAS Library rare book collection:

- *An Album of flower painting* 陳舒花卉, by Chen Shu, from the Johnston Collection. Chen Shu was a scholar for the Qing government. He was good at Chinese painting and Chinese calligraphy. He presented his paintings to the Emperor Xuantong (Puyi). Emperor Xuantong later presented this painting album to his English tutor [Sir Reginald Fleming Johnston](#) (1874-1938). Johnston served as an English administrator when he was in China. Returning to England, he became a professor of Chinese at SOAS. After his death, his private collection was a bequest to the SOAS Library.



*An Album of flower painting by Chen Shu (陳舒花卉)*

- *The Yongle Encyclopaedia* 永樂大典, 1567. The rare books collection has three copies of the original edition of the *Yongle Encyclopedia* and three reprint copies. I could not believe that we had viewed and flipped through these world treasures twice in one day. It was just amazing. Wai-ling showed us how to differentiate between the original and the reprint copy of the *Yongle Encyclopaedia*.

#### [The East Asian Library, University of Cambridge](#), 10 September, 2014.

I have always had a great desire to visit the East Asian Library at the University of Cambridge. The story began when Mr. Philip Kent, University Librarian, the University of Melbourne, returned from his first European library trip. He mentioned in his first public lecture that he would create a Cambridge-like cherry blossom carpet Library for the East Asian Collection at the University of Melbourne. I had great curiosity about this "cherry-blossom carpet" and wanted to find out myself how impressive it is. However the main purpose of my visit was to understand about the Cambridge Chinese collection.



The reading room, East Asian Library, University of Cambridge

Mr. Charles Aylmer, Head of the Chinese Department at the University of Cambridge Library, hosted our visit. He gave us a detailed introduction about the Chinese collection, the electronic resources and the services of the Library.

[The Chinese Collection](#) was started in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The oldest items in the library collections are the [Chinese inscribed oracle bones](#) 甲骨文 dating back to between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. The oldest printed book is a Buddhist sutra *Fo shuo da cheng guan xiang man-na-luo jing zhu e ju jing* 佛說大乘觀想曼拏羅淨諸惡趣經 dated 1107 ([Kornicki](#), 2008), translated into Chinese by Faxian 法顯. There are two volumes of *Yongle Encyclopaedia* 永樂大典, 1567 in the rare books collection.

In 1886, [Sir Thomas Francis Wade](#) (1818-1895), a diplomat and Sinologist, later the first Professor of Chinese in the University, donated his collection to the University Library. The [Wade Collection](#) comprises 883 works and 4304 volumes of Chinese and Manchu books. There are also Western books about China. More information can be obtained from the Wade Collection web site. The Wade Collection made me think about the famous [Wade-Giles Romanization](#) 韋氏拼音 adopted by libraries for the transcription of Chinese for over a century, which was developed by Wade, and revised by Giles, and Giles's [A Chinese-English dictionary](#), the oldest Chinese-English dictionary ever, adopting the Wade-Giles Romanization.

Since 1945, the Cambridge University Library has acquired a large number of Chinese books for the collection. The Library building was erected in 1998 and enabled the Chinese-Japanese-Korean collections to move together into the East Asian Library, occupying three levels of space. The reading room is located on the 3<sup>rd</sup> level, 1<sup>st</sup> floor, South-east of the library building. It houses a selection of reference works in the Chinese, Japanese and Korean languages. The card catalogue is still there, but serves as a decoration for the room. The cherry-blossom carpet is specially designed and created, very soft and comfortable. Most of the books are open access, allowing users to borrow. The East Asian Library comprises half a million Chinese books, (300,000 titles of printed books plus 200,000 Apabi ebooks). It is worth mentioning that the Chinese collection includes a huge collection of congshu 叢書.

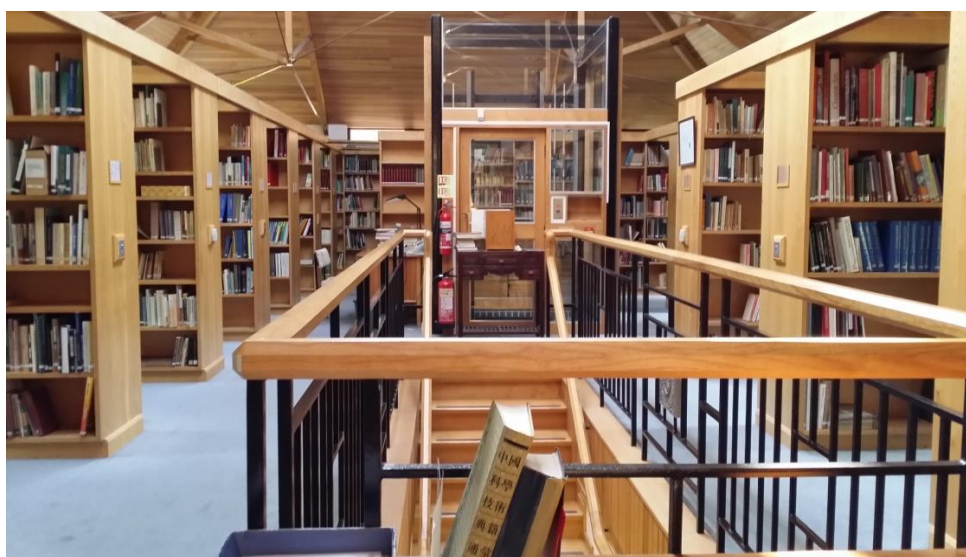


The web site [Cong shu in Cambridge Libraries](#) provides the contents of separate titles in each congshu, and is online searchable.

The [collection policy](#) of the Chinese collection is comprehensive, but does not include translations into Chinese. The collection shares responsibilities with the [Joseph Needham Institute Library](#) which collects traditional Chinese medicine, the history of Chinese science and archaeology.

Charles mentioned to me the Million Book Project (Universal Library), a project scanning books in many languages, providing free access and online full text searching. The China project is entitled [CADAL](#) : China Academic Digital Associative Library.

**[The East Asian History of Science Library](#), the Joseph Needham Institute, University of Cambridge, 10 September, 2014**



The East Asian History of Science Library, Joseph Needham Institute

About 10 minutes walking distance from the University Library building, we arrived at the [Joseph Needham Institute](#). Our original appointment was to meet the Librarian John P.C. Moffett on the 9<sup>th</sup> September. However we had changed our plan to visit the Library to the 10<sup>th</sup> September. John had left for China on the same day as our visit and it was Ms Susan Bennett who looked after us.

Susan gave us a brief history about the Institute, the architectural design of the building and the biography of Joseph Needham. We were then allowed to browse the collection at our own pace.





An exhibition about Joseph Needham at the Institute

[Joseph Needham](#) 李約瑟 1900-1995, a British scientist, historian and Sinologist is famous worldwide for the achievement of the [Science and civilization of China](#) series published by Cambridge University since 1954. The project was founded by Joseph Needham, and has been continued by the project's research team.



The [\*Science and civilization of China\*](#) series

The East Asian History of Science Library is a living library, comprising the private collection assembled by Needham and his long time research assistant, later his second wife, [Lu Gwei-djen](#) 鲁桂珍. The focus of the collection is traditional Chinese medicine, the history of Chinese science and archaeology. The Library collection is a supplementary collection to the East Asian Library, the University of Cambridge.

I had conducted benchmarking exercises while browsing the Needham collection with the East Asian Collection, the University of Melbourne (UoM). The latter also holds a very strong collection on architectural history and the archaeology of China. The [Thomas Chong collection](#) from the UoM Library is a collection of Chinese medicine published from the 1890s to the early 1920s. I found both collections are world-class to support research on the science and civilization of China.

[Far East Libraries, College de France](#), 19<sup>th</sup> September, 2014.



The Institute of Advanced Chinese Studies, College de France

Crossing the Channel via Euro Star, we arrived in Paris for a one-week tour. The visit to the College de France was scheduled for the 19<sup>th</sup> September, the second last day of our stay in Paris. We were looked after by Ms Wingfong Shen, Chinese Librarian at the Institute of Advanced Chinese Studies.



The Reference Room, Far East Libraries.

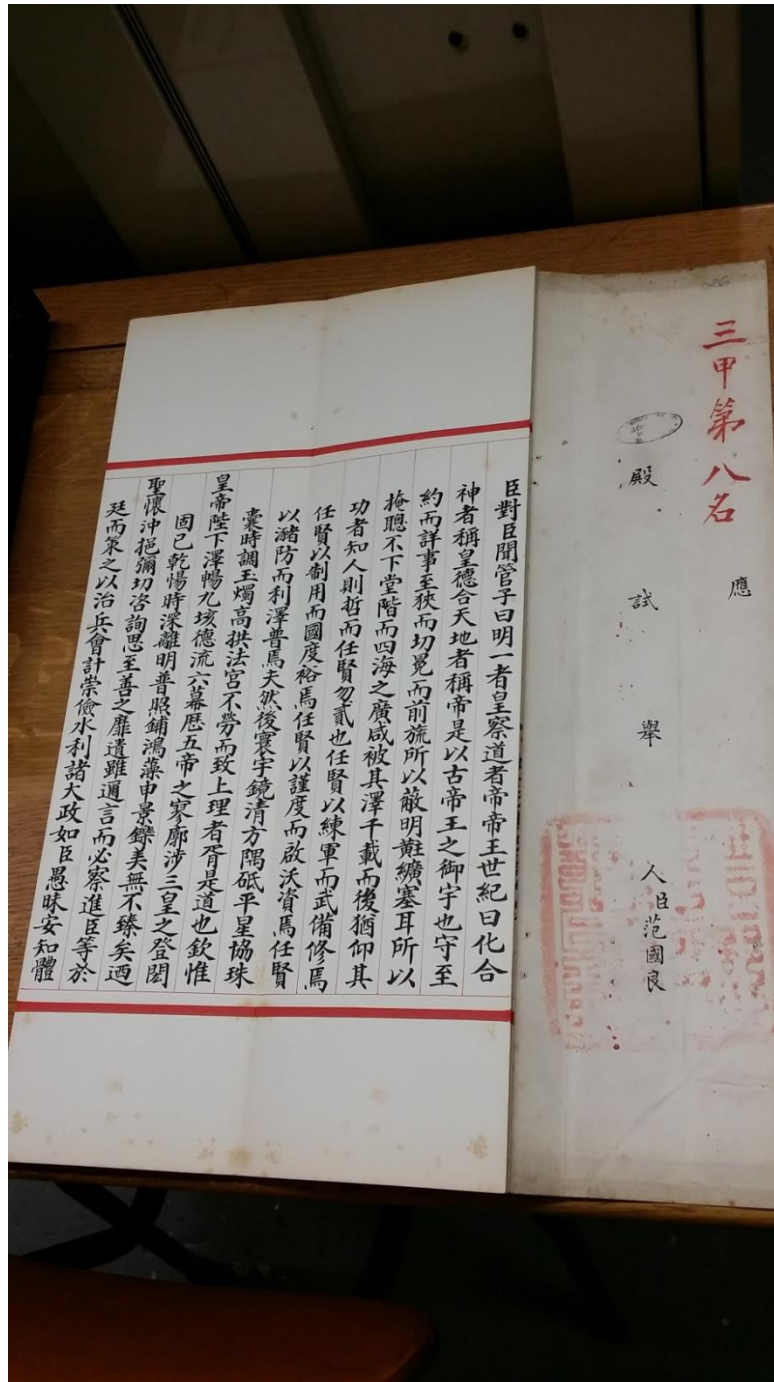
College de France is the highest research institute in France. The College comprises more than fifty research disciplines (subjects) and each discipline has its own library to support related scholarly research. [The Far East Libraries](#) is the library supporting research by the institutes of China, Japan, Korea, India and Tibet studies. These institutes share a common reading room and each institute has its own librarians to look after related collection development and reader services. The library is not open to the general public. The East Asian Libraries inherited the library collection of the Institute of Advanced Chinese Studies, University of Paris, Beijing in 1951, and as a result the Chinese collection was greatly improved in terms of quality and quantity.

The current Chinese collection holds 300,000 titles of Chinese printed and rare books. It is the best Chinese collection among European libraries. The rare book collection comprises ancient local gazetteers 地方志, congshu 叢書, classical Chinese works 古典文獻 published before the late Qing and early Republican period. To share the holdings information of the Chinese rare book collection, the Library compiled an annotated bibliography entitled 法蘭西學院漢學研究所藏漢籍善本書目提要 = *Catalogue annoté des ouvrages chinois rares conservés à l'Institut des hautes études chinoises du Collège de France* [An annotated bibliography of the Chinese rare books held by the The Institute of Advanced Chinese Studies, College de France], 2002.

We were shown the following treasures by Ms Shen :

*Shizhu zhai shi pu* 十竹齋石譜 (in *Shizhu Zhai shu hua pu* 十竹齋書畫譜 series), Ming edition;  
*Ba xun wan shou sheng dian tu shuo* 八旬萬壽盛典圖說, Qing edition;  
*Guanshiyin pu sai ci rong wu shi san xian* 觀世音菩薩慈容五十三現, Qing Shunzhi edition; and  
*Miao fa lian hua jing. qi quan.* 妙法蓮華經 七卷.

The most significant treasures in the rare book collection are the thirty-three entrance examination papers 殿試 for Qing government officers from the Shunzhi period 順治 to the Guangxu period 光緒 held at the Wuying Palace 武英殿, Forbidden City.



Entrance examination paper written by Guoliang Fan, who received a third ranking academic score.

While browsing the closed stack, to my surprise I found that it holds a very strong collection of archaeological books on China. To elaborate, Ms Shen told us that this collection was carefully selected by Professor Alain Thote, Director of Studies, Ecole pratique des hautes etudes. Professor Thote's research areas are the art and archaeology of pre-imperial China and methods of burial in ancient China. No wonder I have never seen such a good collection before in other library collections. My interest has been excavation reports on archaeological sites in China because this subject is one of the collection strengths of the East Asian Collection at the University of Melbourne. I searched the College De France



library catalogue later, using Chinese traditional characters “fa jue bao gao” (發掘報告), and found 105 items.

**The Chinese Library, National University of Singapore, 23 September 2014.**

On our way home from London to Melbourne, we stopped over at Singapore. Our last library visit was to the Chinese Library, National University of Singapore. Dr. Sim Chuin Peng, Head, Chinese Library is no stranger to me. We were twice classmates attending the International Librarians’ Workshop organised by the National Central Library, Taipei. Dr. Sim gave us an introduction first about the history, collection and services, followed by Ms Chow Chai Khim, who gave us a tour around the library collections.



The Chinese Library, National University of Singapore

The Chinese Library is situated in the north wing of the Central Library building. It comprises 620,000 items, focusing on arts and humanities. The collection strengths are shown below:

- Chinese rare books, 150,000 volumes
- Complete Siku (四庫) series
- Chinese newspapers published overseas
- Journals published during the Republican Period
- Southeast Asian resources
- Japanese books about Southeast Asia
- A unique collection on the Chinese in Southeast Asia



The Collection on the Chinese in Southeast Asia

The collection on the Chinese in Southeast Asia comprises publications many of which are not for sale. These are Chinese association archives, bulletins, family genealogy, school commemorative publications, and photographs, etc. In terms of material types, there are books, journals, newsletters, newspapers and biographies, description and travel, etc. To share and preserve the resources of this unique collection, the NUS Libraries had undertaken a digitalisation project in 2004. More information about this project can be obtained from Dr. Sim's article entitled *Historical Documents on the Chinese in Southeast Asia: Digitization and Collection Development in the NUS Libraries* ([article](#); [slides](#)). The web site [东南亚华人历史文献](#) provides full text access to the content of the database.

The NUS Library has developed a libguide about [Chinese free online E-Resources](#), providing useful links for Chinese Studies research.

### Sharing Experiences

Travelling and visiting libraries is very stressful. To make your life easier during travel, I found that management of the library visits is vital. Unlike Australian academic libraries, the libraries we visited were not open to the public. Each library requires prior arrangement with the librarian in charge in order to be shown around their rare books and treasures. I recommend that before organising your flights conduct your research for library visits first. Gather as much information as possible. Most of the information can be found from the web.

- Which library do you want to visit? What is so special about their collections?
- Who are the librarians you want to meet?
- Are the librarians available during the time of your visit?
- Will the library be closed for audit during the time of your visit?
- What is the location of the library and how do you get there?

I did have a very detailed travel plan. I wrote to each librarian to organise the visits. My biggest desire for this trip was to view the Dunhuang manuscripts in the British Library and the [Bibliothèque nationale de France](#) (National Library of France). However I failed to see these two collections. The Dunhuang Manuscripts in the British Library are kept at the International Dunhuang Project (IDP). Special arrangements have to be made with the IDP office in advance in order to view the manuscripts. I was

naive enough to assume that the manuscripts are kept in the Chinese Collection of the British Library. As a result, I only saw a few manuscripts which were on display at the [Sir John Ritblat Gallery](#). During the week we were in Paris, the [Bibliothèque nationale de France](#) was closed for audit. We did not have the opportunity to see the French Dunhuang manuscripts. To me, not seeing the Dunhuang manuscripts was the biggest regret of the whole trip.

The Far East Libraries of the College de France is located inside the Institute of Advanced Chinese Studies building on a busy city street in Paris. We read the map, and we were supposed to be at the right address but we could not find out how to get into the building. It sounded pretty silly at the time, but we walked round and round the institute building for nearly an hour in order to find the entrance. We asked people passing by, and they directed us here and there in French that we could hardly understand. The building only has one entrance, but it was closed. Actually we needed to knock on the door, and talk to the entrance security in order to get in. What a nightmare it was and waste of time! Having a little bit of French would certainly have helped the situation! If we had a phone with a local sim card to call Ms Shen to guide us the location, that would be make life much easier too!

## Conclusion

I learnt an enormous amount from visiting these major Chinese collections in the United Kingdom, Paris and Singapore. Each collection has its own treasures and specialties. Many rare titles in their collections are no longer to be found in China. What made their collections so special? Obviously it was a result of their countries' historical associations with China. European missionaries went out to Asia beginning in the Ming Dynasty (15<sup>th</sup> century). The legacy of individual rare collections, in my own opinion as a Chinese, was a result of Western superiority, the complex interactions of political and commercial power and uneven relations with the British, the French and China at a time of Western expansion into East Asia. Besides history, each university has had the passion and vision to invest in a comprehensive Chinese research collection to support classical and contemporary Chinese Studies research. The curators of these collections are to be praised. They are all very knowledgeable about Chinese history, culture and civilization, and research on Chinese studies conducted in and outside China. They have a great passion for their collections, and are books lovers who seem to know every single title in their collection. They have compiled bibliographies, made analytic cataloguing entries to congshu series providing access to books in their collection via their library catalogue in order to expand the research potential for their special collection to all Chinese studies scholars worldwide. These are remarkable contributions to Chinese Studies research.

I would like to acknowledge the librarians I named in my report for their kindness and hospitality. Last but not least I wish to thank Dr. Hui-chuan Wang who accompanied me and shared the library visiting experiences with me.

Endnote:

\*The author would like to extend her sincere thanks to Mr. Andrew Gosling who read and polished this report.