



From STATUES to SHADOW PUPPETS

Andrew Gosling discovers the rare and unusual Asian gifts that have been presented to the National Library

One day I saw a tall gentleman standing at the far end of the Asian Collections Reading Room. His clothes were light brown and his hands were raised, possibly in greeting. A major disadvantage of being short-sighted is my inability to recognise people at a distance. Moving closer I finally realised that the distinguished reader was, in fact, a statue.

The terracotta figure was donated to the National Library in December 2004 by the Embassy of the People's Republic of China. This magnificent full-sized modern replica of a terracotta warrior guarding the tomb of China's first emperor is one of the more

unusual Asian gifts given to the Library. The statues were discovered in 1974 buried in a tomb east of Xi'an, the ancient capital of China. More than 8000 terracotta troops, horses and weapons were found in vaults at the tomb of Emperor Qin Shi Huang, who ruled a unified China between 221 and 210 BC. The warriors were modelled on real soldiers of different ranks, and the example now housed in the Library represents a general.

The gift of the warrior was an initiative of the Chinese ambassador, Madame Fu Ying. The huge crate in which the statue was stored at the Embassy was delivered to the Library's loading-bay where three Embassy staff unpacked it. This took a couple of hours as the polystyrene casing had to be hacked off. Several men then lifted the half-tonne figure onto a trolley and wheeled it up to Asian Collections where it

above left:
Replica of a terracotta warrior from the tomb of Emperor Qin Shi Huang held in the Asian Collections Reading Room
Asian Collections

above right:
Samgang haengsilto (The Three Relationships and True Examples of their Practice with Illustrations), a popular guide to Confucian ethics
Asian Collections



above left:
Unknown photographer
Eric Liao with the Thai Buddha
he donated in 1987



above middle:
Unknown photographer
Javanese Puppet Presented
to Sir Harold L. White by the
Indonesian Ambassador
Mr S. Sukirno, 13 May 1970
b&w negative; 5.6 x 5.5 cm
Pictures Collection
nla.pic-vn3660845

above far right:
Loui Seselja (b.1948)
Khin Maung Tin, Chief
Librarian, National Library of
Burma with Jan Fullerton and
Elizabeth Watt of the National
Library of Australia, on his
visit to the National Library of
Australia on 31 March 1993
b&w negative; 3.0 x 4.0 cm
Pictures Collection
nla.pic-vn3703199

was placed on a special platform designed by the Library's exhibitions staff. Later, it was officially unveiled at a ceremony attended by the ambassador, the director-general and others.

A very different figure is located on the Library's mezzanine floor. It is a bronze replica of a twelfth-century Thai Buddha. The life-sized seated image is part of the Australian Buddhist Library, containing over 3000 books on Buddhism in English, Chinese and other Asian languages. The Liao family and other benefactors originally developed the library in Sydney's Chinatown as a privately funded resource that was open to the public. Later, Eric Liao presented it to the National Library for long-term security and access by scholars and readers. At the time of its transfer early in 1987 I visited Sydney to supervise the packing of the collection, then housed in George Street. All went well, despite a few anxious moments when the heavy bronze Buddha, some 115 centimeters tall and weighing 184 kilograms, was carried down the rather rickety wooden stairs to a van below. At this point I should confess that when Eric Liao had originally told me that the collection contained a Buddha image, I had assumed it was a small metal or porcelain piece, and had failed to ask the obvious question, 'How big is it?' Soon after reaching the National

Library the bronze figure was prominently displayed in the *Europe & the Orient* exhibition of Asian items.

On the wall in Asian Collections is a framed Javanese shadow puppet, handmade from buffalo leather. It represents the giant Kumbhakarna, a character from the Hindu epic *Ramayana*. Although he is the younger brother of the wicked demon king Rawana, Kumbhakarna is much admired for his loyalty and self-sacrifice. Bapak Sujitno Sukirno, then Indonesian ambassador to Australia, presented the puppet to the national librarian, Sir Harold White, in May 1970, together with another piece from the Javanese shadow theatre. This is a beautifully painted gunungan, or mountain-shaped symbol of world order (see cover). Believed to be of Indian origin, the gunungan represents the holy mountain, the abode of the gods, and is also identified with the tree of heaven. During the puppet drama the position of the gunungan indicates scene changes and the beginning and end of the performance. As Bapak Sukirno explained in his presentation speech: 'The puppet drama has played a very significant role in Indonesian culture, the role of educator, especially in times when only a limited number of people could obtain formal schooling. It introduces



the audience to philosophy, etiquette and the correct mental approach.'

There is one gift in the Asian Collections which visitors find hard to resist. Children and adults alike have an irresistible urge to attempt a tune on the Burmese xylophone. The instrument was presented in March 1993 by the then chief librarian of the National Library of Myanmar, U Khin Maung Tin, during an Australian tour sponsored by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. As well as being a librarian, Tin is an expert on Burmese music. The patala, or Burmese xylophone, consists of tuned wooden bars arranged in order of pitch in a frame. The cradle-shaped box under the bars is the resonator which amplifies and sustains the sound made when the bars are struck.

The Chinese warrior, Thai Buddha, Javanese puppets and Burmese xylophone are not at all typical of the Library's Asian Collections, which mainly consist of published and electronic resources in Asian languages. The few non-book items in the collection have been donated as part of larger collections, as with the Buddha, or are gifts from Asian organisations, such as libraries and embassies, with which the Library has strong relations.

Donors vary from individual scholars, writers and collectors to large institutions. Several gifts have been received from Asian

royalty. They include a set of the Thai Buddhist scriptures from King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand; a large painting of Uluru by the artist Nishiyama Hideo, presented by Prince Yoshihito to mark the visit to Australia of Prince Hiro-no-miya (now Crown Prince of Japan) and to commemorate Prince Yoshihito's own stay in this country; and Iranian children's books from the then empress Farah Pahlavi of Iran. National libraries in the region are major sources of donations, though strictly speaking most are exchanges rather than gifts. An outstanding example is the National Diet Library in Tokyo which for over half a century has been supplying the National Library of Australia with a wide range of Japanese official documents in exchange for Australian publications.

Many of the oldest and rarest Asian books held by the Library were donated. They include an extremely rare Chinese publication from 1476. This Ming dynasty history was presented in 1968 by the eminent sinologist Professor Otto van der Sprenkel of the Australian National University. I described his life and work in the November 2004 issue of *National Library of Australia News*. Van der Sprenkel's gift was a 32-volume text by the historian Shang Lu and his colleagues. Published by the Ming Palace Press and entitled *Xu Zi Zhi Tong*



Harold and Jean Williams in their library at Shioya, Japan, in 1969, before its contents were donated to the National Library
 Courtesy of Mrs Jean Williams

Jian Gang Mu (Continuation of the Abridged Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government), it continues earlier histories of China and is based on the traditional Confucian belief that the past is a mirror or guide to good government.

An Australian woman's remarkable collection is now the National Library's most important resource for older Korean books. In 1911, Jessie McLaren and her husband travelled from Melbourne to Korea as Presbyterian missionaries. They stayed there for 30 years. McLaren's interest in Korean history and culture led her to collect many rare volumes, some of which she

was able to bring back to Australia at the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941. In 1984, after McLaren's death, her daughter, Rachel Human, donated these books to the National Library in order to keep them together and make them freely available for scholars and readers.

The McLaren–Human Collection, as it is now known, is rich in old and rare titles, dating from the fifteenth century to the early twentieth. *Samgang haengsilto* (The Three Relationships and True Examples of their Practice with Illustrations) was first published in 1434, but no copies have survived. The example acquired by McLaren is believed to date from later in the fifteenth century, making it one of the oldest and rarest printed books in the Library. A popular guide to Confucian ethics, it is a parallel Chinese and Korean edition. The three basic Confucian relationships are between parent and child, ruler and subject, and husband and wife. This is one of the earliest works published using the Korean alphabet, which had been officially adopted by royal decree in 1446. It includes 330 inspiring moral tales from Chinese and Korean history, accompanied by many woodblock illustrations. Bearing in mind the rarity and fragility of this book, the Library has carried out careful preservation work and has made it available electronically at nla.gen-vn1142677. Titles from the following century include *Tongmunson* (Anthology of Korean Literature), published between 1506 and 1544. This major selection of poetry and prose was compiled by the eminent Korean writer, So Ko-jong (1420–1488). *Toegye*

Sonsaeng munjip (Collected Writings of Yi Hwang), dates from 1599. Hwang (1501–1570) was one of Korea's most prominent Neo-Confucian philosophers. He was also a famous government official, poet and educator.

The Harold S. Williams Collection is exceptional, not only in its coverage but also because the donor established a trust in perpetuity for the maintenance and development of his collection. Williams was an Australian businessman and writer, who spent most of his adult life in Japan. He developed one of the world's strongest holdings of books, manuscripts, photographs and other resources about what he described as 'the contributions made by foreigners to Japanese life and culture, the manner in which they have impinged on Japanese history and all matters relating to the foreign settlements'. He decided to donate this private collection to the National Library in 1969. His widow, Jean, and son, Peter, later added further items. The trust set up by Williams has funded the purchase of many more books and serials in Japanese and Western languages, as well as preservation work, research and publishing.

The National Library continues to receive valuable gifts. In 2004, Sing-Wu (Sidney) Wang, the Library's chief librarian of the Orientalia Section from 1964 to 1985, donated his own collection of more than 4000 books, journals and personal papers in Chinese and English. Professor Peter Rimmer of the Australian National University has recently obtained the Kondoh Seiichi Collection, on the history of Japanese transport, as a gift for the Library. While most publications are purchased, donations have played a prominent part in the development of the Library's world-class resources about Asia.

ANDREW GOSLING is former chief librarian, Asian Collections at the National Library of Australia, where he is now undertaking Asian bibliographic projects funded by the Harold S. Williams Trust