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## Fujian Adventure: Final Report

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# Fujian Adventure: Final Report

by *Brian Williams*  
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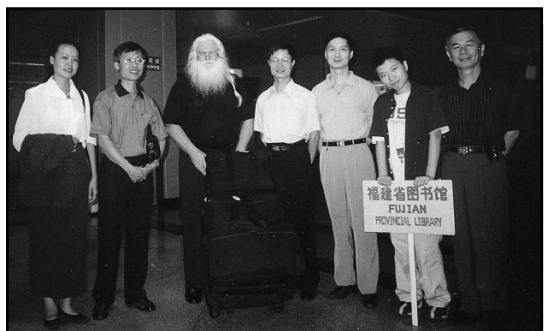
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## Background

Early in 1999, Multnomah County Library was chosen to participate in an exchange program to send one librarian to the Fujian Provincial Library (FPL) in China in the fall of 1999, and to host two Chinese Librarians from Fujian in the fall of 2000. The exchange program is run by the Oregon State Library and funded with Horner funds in recognition of the Fujian Province as a sister province to Oregon. Multnomah County Library solicited for interested and qualified librarians to go to Fujian and I was fortunate enough to be selected. The Fujian Provincial Library indicated that they wanted someone with automation and reference background. I was at the time the Multnomah County Library Automation Manager, and previously had worked as a reference librarian.

## The Visit to Fuzhou

I left for Fuzhou, China on October 5, 1999. The FPL had arranged for me to have a room at the Min Jiang Hotel in downtown Fuzhou, not far from the library. I took my meals in the hotel, if some event was not scheduled, and was driven by a library driver to the library and back every day. In the hotel, most of the staff did not speak or understand English, but were very considerate and helpful. The FPL arranged for a meal allowance that sometimes had to be supplemented. Laundry was included in the hotel cost, but not items like postage and phone calls. I was scheduled to work in the FPL for almost 3 weeks and then to go to another public library located in Quanzhou, a Fujian Province city about 100 kilometers south of Fuzhou, for another 3 weeks. In Fuzhou I was expected to: 1) meet with all the FPL sections to learn about the activities of that



The Fujian Staff meeting me at the airport when I got there October 5, 1999. Mr. Zheng, Director of the Fujian Provincial Library is on the right, his daughter next to him, Mr. Ke next to her.

section and to answer questions that the section had about related activities at Multnomah County Library; 2) give three lectures: Library Automation, Library Networks (computer networks), and Reference Services to library staff of FPL and other invited libraries; and 3) review the automation applications and network installation at the FPL and provide suggestions for improvements to the library director and deputy directors.

In addition to meeting with the staff of the FPL, the library also arranged for me to visit other local libraries and many of the area's cultural attractions. For almost all the time spent in the libraries and other sites, a translator was provided. Generally speaking, although most of the staff could understand some English, it was necessary to have the conversations and lectures translated—I speak little or no Chinese. The translators were usually either Mr. Ke, head of the Foreign Language Section of the FPL, or Miss Chen, who works for Mr. Ke. Both of them are quite proficient in conversational English, although not previously so familiar with technical automation terms.

Before leaving Oregon, I shipped two medium-sized boxes of printed material and gifts to the FPL. Those arrived safely before I got there, one to the library and the other to the post office where I had to pick it up and pay a small amount for having had it there so long. The boxes took about 2 weeks to get there. The luggage weight restriction in China is 20 kilos per person, and only one checked bag, so it is necessary to arrange to ship things if you are going to be carrying more. (No limit to carry-ons.) One thing I shipped was the Chinese version of the Multnomah County Library (MCL) ILS user guide. That was extremely useful.

While at the FPL, I had a desk in the Automation Section and they provided me with an e-mail account on their e-mail server. I had brought a laptop that broke soon after my arrival, and while the staff there fixed it, I had access to whatever other PCs I needed. I was able to arrange to have e-mail with my staff back at MCL, and I sent reports and pictures back to be put up on a Web site that is accessible to the public. The address for that site is <http://www.multnomah.lib.or.us/lib/products/china/>. That site contains several reports submitted while I was in China giving details and pictures of my visit. Information is still being added to that site, and it will be kept up as long as it seems to be serving a purpose. Besides the reports, it has questions and answers that provide dialog between the libraries in China and MCL. While visiting with library staff in China, if I did not know the answer to questions they had, I e-mailed the questions back to MCL and both the questions and answers were posted on the Web site. The site also has other interesting postings.

In Fuzhou, the library has a projector that can be used with a PC, so I was able to use my laptop to project the outline and graphics as needed in my lectures. They don't have widely distributed local area network ports, and access to the Internet is pretty slow, so using the Internet in presentations would not have been productive. I brought copies of both the Library's main Web site and intranet

site on CD-ROM, so I could show examples of the work that the reference staff has done at MCL, and many other examples from the Web sites. I had several copies made of these Web sites and left copies of these CDs with both libraries.

### The Visit to Quanzhou

On October 26 I transferred to Quanzhou. There I stayed at the Zaitun Hotel, also just down the street from the library, named for a tree which is common in Quanzhou. In Quanzhou, they asked me again to give the three lectures that I had given in Fuzhou, all in one day, and to help them with their local area network, their Web site, and to provide an "Automation Plan" for the library. A translator from FPL, Miss Chen, traveled with me to Quanzhou.

In Quanzhou, I spent time with the library staff in the various sections, but also visited libraries in surrounding cities and other cultural sites. The lectures were given to about 100 library staff from many different area libraries in the lecture room of the Transportation Museum, which was next to my hotel. The lecture hall had no projection equipment so these lectures had to be illustrated with a white board, making them a little less effective.

The lectures given in Quanzhou had the benefit of my having gained experience with automation installations in several more libraries. They were focused more on what seemed to be the real needs of the audience, and also provided outlines translated into Chinese. On the other hand, they suffered by not having projection equipment, and the graphics could not be shown. But the most difficult aspect of the lectures was the translation of the computer terms into Chinese.

The library's access to the Internet was via dialup and a networking device that would manage simultaneous access through the dialup connection for a few PCs at the same time. They had the 10 PCs for the public on this system and it worked well, but it wasn't used very much because, for one, they really didn't have any staff trained to support it. They were applying for a dedicated data line to the Internet, and they had a router for that connection. But there was very little of a local area network installed and they hadn't prepared for a Web server. So, there was

not much that I could do to help them with their Web site. I did leave copies of the Web sites I brought on CD with documentation that would help them use them. One of the CDs had the support documentation that MCL provides Web page developers here at Multnomah County. My recommendation would be that they copy the Library's Web page as a template for theirs, which is quite easy to do from the CD-ROM.

I did spend some time working on an Automation Plan with lots of details covering local area networks and other infrastructure necessary for supporting library automation. A copy of the Plan on disk was left with the Quanzhou library and another with the FPL. It would be best if they distributed it widely because it has information that would benefit many of the libraries I saw there.

About halfway through my time at Quanzhou, my wife joined me. She accompanied me on many of the excursions. A description of the libraries and more of a day-to-day description of our activities is on the Web site, <http://www.multnomah.lib.or.us/lib/products/china/>.

At the end of our time in Quanzhou, my wife and I were driven back to Fuzhou where the staff there helped us ship two boxes of gifts to the U.S., helped us contact the travel agents for the next part of our trip around China, and gave us a going away dinner. The FPL presented MCL with a set of paper cuttings done by the library staff and friends of the library. After the visit to the libraries, we had planned a two week tour of China: flying to Shanghai from Fuzhou, visiting Suzhou, Hangzhou, Beijing, Xi'an, Guilin, Guanzhou, and Hong Kong. We arrived back in the U.S. on November 27.

### Observations

The libraries I visited all fell somewhere on an automation continuum, from having a cataloging and a circulation module but still using the card catalog, to being almost finished with retrospective cataloging, to having the catalog on the Web and providing PCs for the public. None of the libraries had done away completely with their public card catalogs, and they seemed surprised that MCL had. In some libraries I even had to explain the benefits of an automated catalog. The only access to shared bibliographic records seemed to be a CD-ROM of the Beijing National Library holdings they could get every month or so. Most of the libraries were doing original cataloging, using CIP extensively when it was available. The FPL was just beginning a project to create a shared catalog of the libraries in the Fujian Province.

The local area networks were invariably installed incorrectly, at least by our standards. And almost every installation was done differently. The lack of professional training and standards was obvious from the work that was being done. The cabling will probably work, but it lacks the flexibility to adapt to future needs and the modularity we feel is important in our networks. The connections to the Internet are also slow. The libraries most commonly had 64K DDN lines to their Internet provider, the local phone company. To use our own installations as an example, we



Brian Williams presenting a wall hanging from Multnomah county Library to the Director of the Quanzhou City Library, Mr Xu, who is visiting Multnomah County Library this fall.

might use this bandwidth in a branch library with text terminals to connect the branch to our main server, but send a few graphics sessions over that bandwidth and response time gets very slow. The libraries don't have much choice, of course. The government controls cost and availability of more bandwidth. There are signs that the government recognizes the need of libraries to have better bandwidth, and even between the time I arrived and the time I left, the FPL had improved their Internet access.

The staffs of the libraries I visited were often enthusiastic about projects to create databases on the Web for their customers. Many had several databases already on the Web, such as a database of publications on economic reform, local products and commerce. The reference departments seemed to be aggressively providing information to industry in their areas. Several of the libraries were interested in digital libraries, and some were beginning to provide access to digital material on their Web sites or from their local area networks. Most libraries had some public PCs. Many times these were in "multimedia" reading rooms and provided access to CD-ROMs, but in addition there were rooms with PCs for access to the Internet. E-mail did not seem to be provided for the staff of the libraries in general, but the director and heads of the sections typically had e-mail accounts. E-mail, listservs, and newsgroups are not used as much in China as they are in the U.S.

### Lessons

Anything taken to China in Chinese that describes the library or library activities will make the visit more worthwhile. Try to get the library descriptions translated and reproduced in some quantity before you go. This will take time, so plan months ahead.

Even though the emphasis of my visit was on automation, the real interests of the Chinese staffs ranged across all areas of librarianship in the U.S. They want to know about the library staffing, what is done in each section, the size of each building—just about everything. Much of that can be prepared ahead of time. Ship your handouts, books, and gifts before you go. Having resources, documents, and Web pages burned to CD is very convenient. A pictorial description of MCL and local sites would have been valuable to take. A picture is worth a thousand words—ten thousand if you don't speak the language. A digital camera is essential.

The laptop proved invaluable for preparing lectures and reports and for giving lectures. And it is important to have enough hard drive space to store several gigabytes of pictures and software. I would try to get one that weighs less if I did it again. Three pounds is about right. Make sure that projection equipment is going to be available and prepare graphics ahead of time, if needed. I could have taken a small projector with me. Having to lug around a heavy transformer is not ideal, but you will need to bring one if your equipment is not battery powered or needs U.S. voltage. Laptops will usually run at 220 volts. Try to plan for not needing a transformer, but don't count on being able to get one there. You can only get them in the larger cities on the tourist routes.

### Thanks

My wife and I owe Multnomah County Library and the Oregon State Library a big thank you for the opportunity to participate in the librarian exchange, and the Chinese a big debt of gratitude for all the hospitality they provided us. The hosts went out of their way to make sure that we had whatever they needed and we well taken care of. The experience and opportunity was invaluable. **Q**

### To Know

by Paula Germond  
Periodicals Assistant  
Shoen Library, Marylhurst College

You *know* libraries—deepwood silence,  
dry-muffle scent, magic carpet words,  
pixelated cyber-tunnel lights  
to everywhere.

You know,  
Do you know sandalwood rush,  
doorblast whirlwind,  
desperate shadows spilling desert  
from their shoes, dark eyes  
to the closing sundog,  
begging with their hands  
and two broken words—  
sanctuary?

You *know* what is holy  
and not to be judged.  
Do you *know* where you stand,  
the converge that  
now makes this sacred ground?  
Northwest of Mecca,  
under wet shining maples,  
you see against the window stain  
last echoes of the call to prayer?  
It's all a degree of sun and side-slant  
of light through bookdust  
in spite of rain.

Above the closet oasis,  
your 200s say nothing.  
The wolf of failed prayers makes  
a fire-escape exit, tail down low.  
Salvation pools  
in the closet with The Faithful, pours  
out from under the door.  
Evening's thin thread  
blesses you  
with Something  
you had not known before.

*Paula's poem was inspired by visitors to Marylhurst from the Middle East. In addition to writing poetry, she also writes and illustrates children's books.*