

# 12TH CENTURY CHINESE BUILDING MANUAL

BY JOHN MAIDMENT

**T**HE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE Library has been fortunate to acquire, through the generosity of the Friends of the Baillieu Library, a copy of *Yingzao Fashi*, a significant 12th century Chinese building manual. This is a richly illustrated work and believed to be the only copy held by an Australian library.

The Library has acquired the 1925 edition which, in the words of bookseller Richard Neylon, “is the only edition to gather together all of the extant manuscripts or scraps of manuscripts — apparently no complete or authoritative copy existed — and form it into a comprehensive work”. The copy is extremely rare and we are privileged to obtain such an influential work. Richard Neylon had hunted for many years to find a copy and finally obtained one from an obscure Sino-Russian library through a contact in Europe; in several places in the book there is a discretely placed library stamp.

The work consists of eight individual sections, printed on rice paper and bound together at the fore-edge with silk thread in the Chinese manner. The whole is accommodated within a cloth-faced and paper-lined box held closed with ivory toggles. It is in immaculate condition and has received minimal use. The colour plates, produced from wood engravings, are rich and vibrant and of extraordinary quality and crispness. Some of the more elaborate and detailed plates may have been hand-detailed.

This constitutes the oldest Chinese building manual and was compiled by the Ministry of Works of the Song dynasty in 1100 and published in 1103. It exemplifies, according to Dr Qinghua Guo, lecturer in the University of



Peter McInnes, President of the Friends of the Baillieu Library and Dr Qinghua Guo, lecturer in Asian architecture at the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning, admire the colourful and intricately drawn illustrations featured throughout *Yingzao Fashi*.

Melbourne’s Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning, “the greatest achievements of Chinese architecture of the day.” Dr Guo coordinates the teaching of Asian architecture within the Faculty and is an acknowledged expert on 12th century Chinese architecture. She wrote an article on *Yingzao Fashi* for *Architectural History: Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain* in 1998, in which she states that the work was compiled by Li Jie, a Superintendent of State Buildings.

The main body of the work specified the units of measurement, design standards and construction principles with structural patterns and building elements illustrated in the drawings.

Two of the volumes incorporate both colour and black and white plates. The

illustrations include ornamental patterns of fantastic complexity, some of which elaborately interweave and have affinities with Grecian and Moorish ornamentation. Other illustrations include decorative motifs and designs based on animals such as the goat, elephant and bear, together with mythical birds and beasts. A strong element of humour is evident — there are bizarre composite creatures shown with the head of a bird, wings and the body of a beast. One has strange body markings looking like a Friesian cow! The colours include vibrant greens, reds and blues. These are shown as examples for the decoration of walls and ceilings.

The remaining volumes are mainly printed in monochrome. One has  
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elaborate diagrams of building components, including details of interlocking timber joints, many of great ingenuity: the captions here are printed in contrasting red ink. There are designs for the timber framing of palace-type buildings all displaying highly sophisticated skills in constructional design.

Dr Guo writes, "the author, Li Jie (1065–1110), was one of a few great figures from ancient times that we know something about in the field of building science and technology." Li Jie received a commission from Emperor Zhe Zong in 1097 to formulate a new work composed of a total of 3,555 items in 357 sections, a task which took three years. It consist of five parts, each breaking down into 13 sections.

We are told that a copy of the building manual was owned by the Danish architect Jørn Utzon, architect of the Sydney Opera House, and that the manual exerted a strong influence upon his work.

Purchase of the *Yingzao Fashi* is particularly apposite given the large numbers of overseas students studying within the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning and the University of Melbourne's strong commitment towards internationalism. Combining the dual virtues of beauty and utility, the book will prove to be an invaluable resource for higher degree research and give generations of students at the University wonderful insights into oriental building practices 900 years ago. We acknowledge the support of the Friends of the Baillieu Library in making this wonderful purchase possible. ♦

John Maidment OAM is the Architecture and Planning Librarian of the University of Melbourne.

## THE THESIS COLLECTION

BY LESLEY CAELLI

**T**HERE ARE SOME 200,000 ITEMS spread across nearly a dozen collections in the University of Melbourne Library's Special Collections. Yet none of these collections is as widely used as the Thesis Collection.

On the surface of it, the University of Melbourne Thesis Collection looks like a fairly dull group of books. In fact in terms of aesthetic value the volumes are quite plain. Ordinary bindings, unexciting paper with dull type-faces and often few illustrations. But the intrinsic value of a thesis lies not in its outward appearance, rather it is the wealth of knowledge contained in these unremarkable looking books that makes the collection one of the most valuable in the Library.

The actual origins of the Thesis Collection are somewhat hazy. Special Collections took custodianship of the collection in the early 1970s, but it had been in existence one way or another for many years before then. One of the earliest theses listed in the Library card catalogue is by Sydney Dodd and was passed in 1910, while the University's first Ph.Ds were awarded in 1948 to Erica Wolff (Arts) and Rupert Horace Myers (Science). Since then the University of Melbourne has put much into developing its standing as a centre of research. The Thesis Collection plays an important role in this development, both as a permanent archive of past research and as a point of access to a diverse wealth of information.

It is this diversity which turns the Thesis Collection into a dynamic, ever changing organism. The theses cover

topics ranging from science through to the arts and humanities, and every subject in between. A thesis isn't just a collection of words bound together between two covers. It is the culmination of one person's dedication to their field of study, a labour of love on which they have spent many months in painstaking research and writing. It is an exciting and challenging time for anyone undertaking research, and when the final product is completed, all research students like to think that their months of commitment and hard work will not go unnoticed.

Although the basic method of researching and writing a thesis has gone unchanged over the years, one area which is having a profound impact on the production of theses is advancements in the fields of communications and information technology.<sup>1</sup> In the past the only method of presenting a thesis was in the form of a typewritten manuscript. Today's research students have access to a wide range of multimedia components and it is not unusual for a thesis to be submitted with an accompanying video, CD-ROM or floppy disc forming an integral part of the work. For Special Collections this raises many issues in terms of storing multimedia items as well as providing access to those who wish to utilise this material.

Currently the Thesis Collection is in the midst of a major relocation project. With between 600 and 700 new theses added to the collection each year, it has finally outgrown its current home and the decision was made