In addition to the Stanley O. Gregory collection, the National Library of Australia houses photographs of China created and collected by a few other Australians during the first half of the twentieth century.

Hermann J. Asmus was an Australian living in China during the 1920s. He worked for the railways before joining the British Tobacco Co, in 1923. The Asmus collection is a combination of his own photographs as well as others he acquired, including postcards. His collection covers Australia, China, East and Southeast Asia. Around 160 of these images are of China; some have also been digitised and are now available online. Many of the Asmus images are of Beijing, Shanghai and Wuhan, as well as other cities and rural scenes. The images show palaces, temples and other buildings, as well as depicting different communities of people at the time, including Manchus, Tibetans and Europeans in China.

Harry Glathe was an Australian born in China, where his father was a merchant. Between 1933 and 1936 he took approximately 400 photographs of scenery, temples and other buildings, as well as various aspects of social life, while travelling as a dye and cloth salesman in Yunnan, Guangxi and Guangdong. He later joined his father’s company in Shanghai, before returning to Australia. The National Library houses Glathe’s nitrate negatives in four small albums. About 160 of the black and white or sepia images are also reproduced in the typed manuscript record of his travels in southern China, also held by the Library. Glathe was notably proficient in Mandarin Chinese, and also spoke some Cantonese (due to his work in southern China); he even embarked on his own translation of the classical text Dao De Jing (Tao Te Ching) in later life, the unfinished manuscript of which is also in the NLA collection.

Hedda Morrison, née Hammer (1908–1991), moved from Germany to China in 1933. Unlike Glathe and Asmus, she worked as a professional photographer in China, producing outstanding photographs of Beijing and the nearby countryside, depicting the palaces, temples, street life, food, entertainment, arts and crafts. She left China in 1946, after marrying Alastair Morrison, son of the famous Australian correspondent and adventurer, George E. Morrison (popularly known as Morrison of Peking or Chinese Morrison). The Morrisons subsequently spent two decades in Sarawak (Malaysia), before settling in Canberra. While Harvard University in the United States houses the main archive of Hedda’s China photographs, the National Library does hold some examples, as well as a few of the well-known photo books she published on China. The Powerhouse Museum in Sydney houses a large collection of her works, along with a significant collection of Chinese arts and crafts she created with her husband. Hedda continued to be a prolific photographer in Australia; the NLA also holds twenty-four albums of her images of Australia taken between 1961 and 1988.

(Andrew Gosling)
Photographs of 1930s China by Stanley O. Gregory

Gallery hours: 9am–5pm, Monday to Friday
Selected weekends: 27–28 February and 19–20 March, 10am–4pm

Curator: Dr Olivier Krischer (olivier.krischer@anu.edu.au)

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