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Chinese mining giant adopts Aussie analyser



In a coup for Australian mining technology provider JKTech Pty Ltd, Chinese miner and chemical producer Jinchuan Group Ltd has placed an order for a mineral liberation analyser – MLA – deemed the most sophisticated instrument and software package of its kind.

The JKTech MLA software operates a scanning electron microscope to provide automated quantitative mineral analysis.

Jinchuan (JNMC) is a giant mining corporation even in Chinese terms. Situated near Mongolia to the west, JNMC is China's largest producer of nickel, cobalt and platinum. The Jinchuan Group employs over 100,000 people across its integrated mining, chemical manufacture and service areas.

JNMC is currently establishing their own Minerals Engineering Research Institute, which is where JKTech and the analyser will play an important role in technology collaboration.

According to Dr Geoff Gault, Managing Director of JKTech Pty Ltd and recent visitor to Jinchuan with the system's developer Dr Ying Gu, the MLA will be a centerpiece of the new Jinchuan research institute.

The MLA will be used as an important tool for analysing various products from the JNMC mineral concentrators, as well as evaluating ore deposits.

"This will take outdated manual mineral identification into a new realm of automation and quality assurance currently used at mining operations in Australia, North America and Southern Africa," Dr Gault said.

JKTech were fortunate to play host to both the Chairman of JNMC, Mr Li Yong-jun, and JNMC's Director of Science and Technology Madam Xiao-xia Yu, during their visit to Australia in July 2004, introducing them to the MLA system.

From that point on, a process of knowledge transfer and system specification began as JNMC recognised the value of mineral liberation analysis technology.

"I think why Jinchuan chose us over the competition is simply because the MLA is more advanced technology. It is recognised as the technology leader in this field and the mining industry has rapidly adopted its application."

According to Tom Seymour who is a partner at Price Waterhouse Coopers, Australia has a good reputation in China for its advanced mining technology.

Mr Seymour leads PWC's China strategy, and over the last 18 months has worked with Chinese state-owned mining companies, assisting them to seek investments in the Australian market and also assist Australian companies exporting Australian mining technology.

"We have seen Australian companies with a great opportunity to export technologies and skills into the China market and also for Chinese state-owned companies to invest into Australia," Mr Seymour said.

"The MLA technology provides a good practical example of a Chinese mining company and an Australian technology provider working together."

He said Chinese companies see Australia as being very advanced in the mining industry, both in terms of the use of technology and leading the industry in terms of environment, safety and production standards.

"The use of technology and advanced production techniques are key aspects of global leading practices that Australia is known for in China."

Mr Seymour said that as Jinchuan is one of China's significant state-owned mining companies, its presence in Australia would also indicate it is one of the more advanced Chinese state-owned enterprises.

Early in 2006 technologists from Jinchuan will undergo MLA training at JKTech's Brisbane headquarters.

Geoff Gault expects this to be the start of a long and productive relationship between JKTech and the Jinchuan Group.

He said another factor leading to strengthening this association was the close relationship between JKTech and the Julius Kruttschnitt Mineral Research Centre with its world-renowned minerals engineering research capabilities, thereby ensuring that JNMC will take full advantage from the MLA technology.

Dr Gault said MLA technology in China marks a continued expansion of the system's world-wide reach.

At the end of 2005 there are 25 MLA systems installed around the globe, which Dr Gault describes as 'phenomenal' considering that only six systems were in existence as recently as 2002.

"From 1996 to 2000 we were in development mode under the direction of Dr Ying Gu, so in just nine years we have taken a system design concept to a position of undisputed world leader in the field – and we continue to expand," Dr Gault said.

He said there were more units already planned for installation during the first few months of 2006.

At present the MLA is about to be deployed by Mexico's largest miner Penoles, by Richards Bay Minerals in South Africa – the world's largest mineral sand mining operation – and also by the Geological Survey of Finland to analyse material from Europe's greatest and one of Earth's deepest holes in its crust.

While these three projects alone are significant on a world industrial and scientific scale, the Chinese result is significant because it opens the door for further applications of MLA technology in one of the world's fastest growing economies.

Captions for photos:

Jinchuan Pic.jpg: Meeting and greeting at Jinchuan in western China, from left are JKTech Managing Director Dr Geoff Gault, a senior Jinchuan representative, and JKTech's MLA Group Manager Dr Ying Gu.

Jinchuan Seal Edited.jpg: Success in China comes with its own seal, as verified in official documentation, pictured, from the Jinchuan Group to JKTech Pty Ltd.

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