



12-1-1993

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Tseng, Chi-chun (1993) "The National Central Library and Its Future Development," *Journal of East Asian Libraries*: Vol. 1993 : No. 101 , Article 23.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jeal/vol1993/iss101/23>

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THE NATIONAL CENTRAL LIBRARY AND ITS FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Chi-chun Tseng

National Central Library, Taiwan

The foundation of the National Central Library (NCL) dates back to 1933, when the Ministry of Education of the Republic of China (ROC) appointed Chiang Fu-tsung as director of the Preparatory Office of the future national library. Shortly after this, the Ministry handed over to the Preparatory Office more than 46,000 volumes of antiquarian books and more than one thousand Ch'ing dynasty palace examination scripts, while the Office itself purchased 1,500 bronze and stone rubbings from the Meng family collection in Tientsin. These books and rubbings formed the original collection of the NCL.

The following year, the Preparatory Office took over the work of international exchange of publications from the Academia Sinica and, from then on, the NCL began to build up its collection through exchanges with other libraries. In 1935, an amendment to the Publication Law provided for a compulsory deposit system for books; publishers were required to deposit at the national library one copy of each book or periodical published in the ROC. This gave the NCL the legal basis for collecting all works published in the ROC and preserving all government documents. In 1936, the Preparatory Office purchased the old Academia Sinica headquarters with the assistance of a grant from the Anglo-Chinese Boxer Indemnity Fund Committee, and the library was able to open its first public reading room.

During the period of the Japanese invasion, in addition to continuing with its normal work, the NCL made a concerted effort to acquire rare editions in the occupied areas to save them from the ravages of war. These valuable works, acquired under the most difficult conditions, now form the backbone of the NCL's rare books collection. In 1949, the NCL transferred to Taiwan along with the government of the Republic of China. In an effort to save funds and manpower in difficult wartime conditions, the government merged the NCL, the National Palace Museum, and the Central Museum under a single administrative office, and a book depository was established in Taichung County. There was no way that the NCL could continue its normal operations under these conditions and its main duties were confined to processing and preservation.

The NCL received the order to resume operations in 1954, and the Ministry of Education not only handed over the library's original collection but also transferred eighteen cases of maps that had been in the collection of the Peking Library. Two years later, the NCL opened its reading rooms to the public again in its new premises in Nanhai Road, Taipei. The NCL's most important achievements in this period were:

1. Building up its collection of books in the humanities and social sciences
2. Opening specialized reading rooms, such as a reference room and periodicals room, a fine art collection, and Japanese and Korean collection

3. Developing interlibrary cooperation
4. Opening a microfilm center for the purpose of transferring rare books to microfilm
5. Compiling and publishing catalogs and indexes
6. Sponsoring international conferences
7. Promoting library automation
8. Taking part in international book fairs overseas and organizing book exhibitions in Taiwan
9. Sponsoring training courses for library personnel
10. Offering guidance to public libraries in the ROC

The NCL's collection soon outgrew its Nanhai Road premises. In particular, suitable accommodation was urgently needed for the 120,000-volume rare book collection. Thus, as a result of urgent pressure from the NCL's director, Professor Chen-ku Wang, and with the support of the Ministry of Education, plans were laid in 1978 for a new building in Chungshan South Road. Eight years later, on September 28, 1986, the new National Central Library building was officially opened. The new library is a multipurpose structure designed and equipped to international standards. As well as housing the library collection and reader services facilities, it includes accommodation for educational and cultural activities. Its inauguration was an important event in the NCL's history.

Successive NCL directors had urged that the library's extensive collection of rare books should be used as the basis of a Chinese studies center designed to serve Sinologists in the ROC and overseas. In 1980, the ROC government approved the establishment of an "Information and Resource Center for Chinese Studies" to be headed by the director of the NCL. The center was given its present title, the Center for Chinese Studies (CCS), in 1987.

The NCL's future development should be focused on the following areas:

1. *Collecting a broad range of valuable and useful books and materials*

The principle of collecting valuable and useful materials should be applied alike to ordinary books, rare and antiquarian books, authors' manuscripts, and government documents. The NCL should continue to expand its already large collection of rare books. In particular, as relations with mainland China gradually improve, the mainland will be an important source of such material. Manuscripts of noted literary or public figures are also important, and should be acquired on a selective basis.

2. *Actively promoting and developing the National Bibliographic Network*

The National Bibliographic Information Network (NBINet) went into operation in October 1991, when the NCL and sixteen university libraries in Taiwan began on-line cataloging. On account of the support NBINet has received from the participating libraries, the database

has grown steadily to the present level of approximately three hundred thousand entries. The NCL has set up a Bibliographic Center and plans to develop the network so as to increase NBINet's effectiveness for participating libraries. Using NBINet, a book need only be cataloged in one library for all the participating libraries to benefit through on-line access. This development is extremely significant as it saves both time and manpower. We intend in the future to expand the network to include, first of all, private universities and then the entire public library system. It is also planned to link NBINet to the international network, Internet. This development will have a significant impact on the work of cataloging and processing Chinese books in university libraries overseas.

3. Transferring the library's collection to laser disks and making them widely available

In October 1989, the NCL signed a contract with the Industrial Technology Research Institute's (ITRI's) Institute of Engineering to develop the two CD-ROM systems: one for the NCL's Chinese-language catalog and one for the index to Chinese periodical literature. These were completed last year. The disk of the Chinese catalog contains approximately 100,000 entries on books processed between 1981 and 1989 which may be retrieved, edited, transferred, supplemented, or printed on paper or cards.

The index to Chinese periodical literature on CD-ROM contains 150,000 articles from more than one thousand journals published between 1983 and 1989. The manufacture of these two CD-ROMs was a landmark event in the ROC library world, and it was a courageous experiment. At the time of manufacture, international standards for such products had yet to be established, so we have encountered quite a few difficulties since the CD-ROMs came into use. Now we are preparing to sign a new contract with ITRI's Computing and Communications Research Institute to produce second updated editions of these two CD-ROMs according to international standard ISO9960.

In another groundbreaking experiment, the NCL is currently producing a database of contemporary authors. This will contain brief biographies of more than six hundred contemporary writers, indexes of their works, and critical articles about them, plus the full text of some of these critiques. If all goes well, we shall also include other important material and reproductions of the full text of some works. This is an important area of development for the NCL.

4. Using the NCL's collection of rare books to make the library a world-class center for Chinese studies

The Center for Chinese Studies is an important feature of the NCL. One function of the CCS is to maintain channels of communication with Sinologists all over the world. It does this through publishing academic journals and by sponsoring various scholarly activities. In addition, the CCS organizes exhibitions of books on Chinese studies, has established files on Sinologists, and has initiated a program to assist overseas Sinologists to carry out research in the ROC.

The other important function of the CCS is the collection of material on Chinese studies. The Center purchases relevant works from overseas, including doctoral and masters theses, and acquires important documents from mainland China.

5. Accelerating the promotion of ISBN/ISSN and CIP

As the Republic of China's only national library, the NCL has to represent the ROC in the international library community. International exchange of publications and publications for ISBNs and ISSN all have to go through the NCL. The NCL is also in charge of cataloging in publication (CIP). To date, 1,200 Taiwan publishers have applied for ISBNs, and a total of 65,000 have been issued. Applications for CIP have been received by 500 publishers and 12,000 numbers have been issued. Adoption of the ISBN system will do much to promote the international dissemination of books.

6. Strengthening contacts with important libraries throughout the world to promote exchange of publications and cultural exchange

The NCL's Bureau of International Exchange of Publications has exchange agreements with 1,072 institutions in 91 countries all over the world. Another of the NCL's tasks is to organize book exhibitions overseas. The exhibitions play an important role in cultural exchange as the exhibits are donated to the sponsoring country's local universities or other institutions.

7. Formulating various library standards in cooperation with the academic community so as to facilitate library automation

Automation is an inevitable trend in the library world, but automation cannot proceed until we have formulated certain norms and standards for library work. It is the NCL's responsibility to formulate these standards in cooperation with academic institutions. Once these standards are established, the work of library automation will run smoothly.

To sum up, the NCL is a national library whose objective is to carry out and assist in academic research. In addition to consolidating the library's collection, we should accelerate efforts toward automation so as to make the NCL an important disseminator of information in today's information society and ensure equal access to resources.