

A VISIT TO TAIWAN

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Eric Wainwright, Deputy Director-General of the National Library of Australia, attended the International Conference on National Libraries: Towards the 21st Century, 20-24 April 1993, held in the National Central Library, Taiwan. He reports here on the conference and on current developments at the National Central Library.

Taiwan conference: Towards the 21st Century

The conference was given massive support by the National Central Library (NCL) of Taiwan, which had received special government funds for its organisation. I estimate the direct costs to have been about A\$300,000, plus perhaps as much again in library staff time.

All papers were available in written form at the beginning of the conference; they provided information on a number of topics and included an up-to-date and detailed description of national library developments in Taiwan. They also included a useful set of views from different countries on the roles and functions of national libraries. There was much discussion on the implications for the national libraries of electronic information and global networking. It is clear that nobody has any real answers to the networked information resource discovery issues. Jose-Marie Griffiths from the United States gave an interesting paper which referred to recent research on metadata approaches which could be used at an international level.

There was a significant number of representatives from national libraries from Asian countries including Indonesia, the Philippines, Nigeria and Thailand. Among a number of staff I met was Lawrence Chen, University Librarian, National Taiwan University (NTU). The Library recently installed the Innovative Interfaces system with full CJK capability. Unfortunately, I was unable to fit in a visit to NTU, but Mr Chen said his staff were very pleased with the installation to date. I also met Theresa Ju and Chris Chang of Join Computer. Join Computer is one of two main Taiwan companies making terminals with CJK handling facilities - in their case, with the CCCII character set. They also have a library application system suitable for smaller libraries. Join supplies CJK terminals to both Dynix and Innovative Computer, as well as a wide range of non-library applications. Join Computer is also associated with Transtech, who market library software with a CJK handling facility. The other Taiwanese company with a "standard" CJK card - "big five", which is currently cheaper than CCCII, but has a more restricted character set, is Taiwan Computer Company.

Visit to the National Central Library, Taiwan

The National Central Library, which was the host for the International Conference on National Libraries - Towards the 21st Century, held in April 1993, occupies a nine storey building of about 40,000 square metres floor area in South Central Taipei, and was opened in 1986. The Library has a staff of about 470, including those staffing the "Taipei Branch", which is essentially Taipei's Central Public Lending Library and has a sizeable collection itself of over half a million volumes (including a large braille collection and much Japanese material from the occupying years 1895-1945, since its predecessor was the Taiwan Governor-General's office library). The Library has also recently established an information and computing library in the Taiwan Information Science and Technology Exhibition Centre. This is the Taiwan centre for continuing professional development in information science and technology, and supports research and demonstration projects. The main building includes a sizeable conference hall, a media briefing room, general conference room, classrooms where library studies programs are taught and, interestingly, the office of the Library Association of China. It is attractive, spacious, though a bit Spartan, and reasonably well designed. Interesting facets include a vertical/horizontal conveyor system linking stacks to supply points, specially built cabinets for housing rare books and manuscripts, each with its own temperature/humidity control, a general reading area for students working with their own materials right at the entrance and separate from the general reading room to which the Library's own collections are supplied (thus preventing readers' bags from having to enter the serviced reading room), and a reading room providing open access to acquisitions of books published in the last five years.

The Library has a relatively new Director, Dr Chi-chun Tseng, appointed in March 1992. I met him briefly during the conference and also spent about two hours with other staff, as well as touring the library building and seeing demonstrations of the Library's automated systems.

Systems development

Much of my discussions was centred on systems development. Developments are promising, and the Library has just about reached the stage of development where some cooperation with the National Library of Australia may be beneficial to both parties.

The Library has several different systems using Chinese MARC:

1. **The National Bibliographic Information Network (NBIN)**, established in October 1991, which is a "mini-ABN" consisting of the National Central Library, 16 university libraries and one major public library. The system is built on Utlas (Canada) software extended to handling the Chinese character set. Authority work is carried out almost wholly by the NCL with some assistance from one authorised university library. Of particular interest to NLA is that, provided that we have PC with a Chinese card supporting either CCCII or "Big-5" character manipulation, we can have search access to the NBIN database immediately through TANet and the Internet. NBIN is supported

not through individual use charges, but as an up-front shared cost by the participants, and it was stated that any requests for access for cataloguing purposes would have to be approved by the participants, and that they do not have a mechanism for charging at present. Tape output is available in Chinese MARC format.

2. Dynix, including Chinese implementation, is operating in the Taiwan branch (ie., Taipei Public Library) with acquisitions, cataloguing and Open Public Access Catalogue (OPAC).
3. Dynix has been implemented for the handling of the Centre for Chinese Studies Special Collections. Although a division of the Library, the Centre appears to have a high measure of autonomy in its budget and resources, which has enabled it to implement Dynix separately. Only the cataloguing module has so far been implemented, and the Centre Director is happy with the progress of the Chinese handling capabilities to date.
4. Local system: the rest of the NCL uses a locally developed system produced by Transtech for acquisitions and cataloguing and serials control. This includes facilities for operating the national International Standard Book Number (ISBN) and Cataloguing in Publication (CIP) programs. It was stated that the Library is "seeking an integrated solution".
5. The Library produces two CD-ROMs:
 - Chinese bibliographic data on CD-ROM, that is, NCL records. The first version uses a non-standard CD-ROM drive. I was advised that we should await production of a commercial version in 1994 using a standard drive. There appears to be some doubt that a 1994 release will in fact take place. This would be marketed by a commercial company. It would be primarily a catalogue support product.
 - Index to Chinese periodical literature. The second version of the file, covering Taiwan periodicals in Chinese and English, will be published shortly and NCL will advise NLA of availability.

Note that the CD-ROMs require a PC with Chinese script display capabilities for use, but potentially both CD-ROMs would be a useful addition to NLA's Chinese bibliographic capabilities.

Discussions with a number of people with CJK handling skills at the conference suggest that there are likely to be real standards problems until computer operating systems are developed capable of handling multibyte characters on a normal basis. Apple Computer is believed to be the leader in developing this. There is argument as to whether a two, three or four byte standard is needed and criticism by the Chinese that Unicode will be unsatisfactory, as it provides too restricted a character set, because too much available space is being given to other language character sets.

General observations

Here are a few general observations based on the visit to NCL.

The NCL has had a long program of sending staff to other libraries, generally doing cataloguing or other bibliographic work, and primarily in the United States, but also to the United Kingdom, Uruguay and Korea. The Director would be interested in extending this Australia.

The Centre for Chinese Studies is interesting in that it is a part of the National Central Library, with the Director of NCL also being its Director; at the same time, it has a high degree of autonomy over its budget. It has an advisory committee responsible for policy development, and it has a significant range of activities including a long term program or retrospective collecting and microfilming from overseas collections, grant programs, publications and conference organisation. I believe that it represents another model of potential interest to the National Library of Australia when considering any similar centres.

The Library has a Committee for Library Research which brings together a group of outside librarians (appointed for limited terms) to provide advice to the library on major development projects in applied research initiatives.

The Library also has an international exhibitions program, and has exhibited at shows and conferences in many countries in America and Europe. It is the co-sponsor (with the Government Information Office) of the 1994 Taipei International Book Exhibition.

