

NCL Seminar on New Book Services

Digital publishing and reading habits in the ROC were highlighted at the “Seminar on ROC New Book Information Services in the 21st Century,” held by the NCL in cooperation with the Publishers’ Association of the ROC and the Taipei Publishers Association.

The keynote speakers during the first session, entitled “Reading Habits and the Information Needs of Readers,” were Prof. Hsin-yuan Chen (陳信元), director of the Editing and Publishing Center at Nanhua University, and Prof. Mei-mei Wu(吳美美), of the Social Education Department at National Taiwan Normal University.

Prof. Chen said that the network age is changing the way that the traditional publishing industry is structured and conducts business. In the future, he predicted, editors will need to prepare publications in various formats according to their content. Moreover, he said, they will need to understand the concepts of interactive editing and how to interact with readers.

Chen emphasized that the publishing industry will become more digitally-based with time. Books will increasingly be produced in digital form and sold over the Internet, he said, and publications may even be directly downloaded and paid for online, creating new challenges for publishers.

Prof. Wu dealt with the issue of reading habits in the ROC. She indicated that library patrons were most interested in publications on employment, travel, work, finance, and health. The findings were based on a survey of readers conducted by the Taichung Provincial Library last year under commission of the Council for Cultural Affairs. Over 1,000 patrons of cultural center and rural libraries responded to the survey, providing an in-depth look at reading habits at the grassroots level.

Prof. Wu noted that the figures on library lending revealed a serious discrepancy between library book acquisition and the 28,000 new books published in Taiwan each year. She said that although libraries have an obligation to uphold the rights of readers of non-mainstream books, collections should also reflect the real demand of library patrons. By providing new books of topical interest, she said, libraries can stimulate interest in reading.

Tseng Fan-chien (曾繁潛), executive director of the ROC Publishers Foundation, claimed that under the current library acquisition rules, publishers are forced into excessive discounting. He said that if reading habits are to improve, library methods of book acquisition must be reformed. Prof. Wu reminded publishers and librarians of the need to find ways to reflect the vibrancy and diversity of Taiwan's publishing industry in the public library system. The success of this task, she concluded, depends on the improvement of book marketing channels.