
Taiwan." Other theme displays included the Cultural Technology Pavilion, Best Comics Pavilion, Rated Publications, and an exhibition devoted to Lin Yu-tang.

Among the other literary luminaries present at this year's TIBE was Wole Soyinka, a Nobel laureate of literature from Nigeria. A total of four events on Mr. Soyinka were held during the exhibition including a seminar on "Soyinka vs. Taiwanese Writers", a poetry reading, performances from Mr. Soyinka's "Death and the King's Horseman", and meetings between the Nigerian author and Taiwanese students.

The NCL exhibit at TIBE this year showcased the library's database and READncl services.

Program Seeks to Build a Better Future for Public Libraries

In an ambitious drive to improve the quality of public libraries in Taiwan, the government has earmarked nearly NT\$1.55 billion for the "Public Library Improvement Plan." This project will be carried out jointly by the Council for Cultural Affairs and the Ministry of Education (MOE) through April 2004 as part of the Executive Yuan's "Infrastructure Expansion Plan".

While every county, city and town in Taiwan has a public library, many of these facilities are lacking in the services needed to attract readers. The Executive Yuan plan seeks to address these shortcomings through a five-part program aimed at improving the facilities and operation of public libraries, introducing automated and online services, establishing Internet resource centers (public-access databases), establishing online book acquisition systems, and augmenting the collections at public libraries. The goal of these initiatives is to refashion public libraries as dynamic and interesting places that combine the functions of library, art center,

community classroom, Internet learning center, coffee shop (chat rooms) and bookshop, thereby attracting readers and turning public libraries into centers of cultural activities. The National Central Library (NCL) and National Taichung Library will play an important role in the execution of this project by providing staff and hardware resources and advising on related development work. The five sub-programs of the "Public Library Improvement Plan" are introduced below:

(1) Public Library Facilities and Operations Improvement Plan

This plan will have an estimated budget of over NT\$1.1 billion. These funds will not be allocated equally among all public libraries, but rather be awarded on a competitive basis according to proposals submitted by the recipients. The submitted proposals will be reviewed by a committee, which will decide how the funds are allocated. Of the 500 or so public libraries in Taiwan, 353 have submitted applications for participation in the project. Of these, 290 libraries have won funding.

(2) Public Library Automation and Network

Infrastructure Plan Using network platforms and automation systems, local public libraries will in future have online access to joint databases to enhance reader services.

(3) Network Resource Center (Public Database) Plan

Since 1999, public libraries in Taiwan have shared online resources to make such materials conveniently available to the public. In their acquisition of database resources, priority is given to those resources that are in greatest demand, with attention on achieving a well-balanced mix of information types and fields. Under this plan, a common search interface will be developed to facilitate public access of materials across different databases. Promotional activities will also be

held regularly throughout Taiwan to encourage wider usage of the database systems. The total funding for this plan is NT\$70 million.

(4) Public Library Online Acquisition Mechanism Plan

Mechanism Plan

The selection and acquisition of publications is the most important task in the development of library collections. In addition to their own acquisition departments, public libraries need access to an online mechanism to help them select and acquire collection resources. Establishing such a mechanism is one of the goals of this NT\$22 million plan.

(5) Public Library Collection Enhancement Plan

Collections are the basis of all library services, and without an ample collection a library is unable to provide satisfactory services. Under this plan, the MOE has in principle decided to provide an NT\$700,000 subsidy to each county and city cultural center library in Taiwan, and a subsidy of NT\$450,000 to each town library and branch library for book acquisitions. The list of publications eligible for purchase with the subsidies will be drawn up by the libraries (including main libraries, branch libraries, and town libraries) in reference to the NCL's online bibliographic systems, such as NBINet, and online acquisition mechanisms. The publications cannot be more than five years old, and the public should be given an opportunity to suggest titles to be included on the list. The book selection should not be made by booksellers. The total amount of the subsidies provided under this plan is NT\$243.8 million.

It is hoped that the NT\$1.55 billion allocated by the government for these programs will provide some temporary relief for Taiwan's cash-strapped.

(Chinese text by Peng Wei of the NCL Acquisition Dept.)

