

access to many unique treasures for many years now. In more recent years the Library has focused much attention on digitization of its special collections, thus further ensuring long term and convenient access to these resources. In fact, the Library has in many ways set new standards in digitization of rare materials focusing its attention on materials that many libraries digitize such as rare books, theses, local government documents, periodicals and newspapers, but also on lesser digitized items such as rubbings of stone inscriptions in Taiwan, news programmes and genealogies.

The National Central Library has also set its mark in terms of leadership for libraries in Taiwan and the region. It has played host to many international seminars, workshops and conferences that have highlighted the Library's broad areas of expertise and provided much needed training to others seeking such expertise. Perhaps most significant among these is the annual *International Professional Librarian Training: Sinological Resources and Services* seminar that brings together East Asian librarians from all over the world.

One of the keys to future success for research libraries will be their ability to collaborate with other libraries. Dramatically shifting technologies, changing user behaviors and demands coupled with limited and often reducing library budgets mean that such collaborations will be more necessary as time proceeds. The National Central Library, Taiwan, has been cognizant of this need for many years. Its long list of cooperative partnerships with libraries around the world is testament to: 1. the realization that libraries must work together for the common good of their users, but also; 2. the Library's willingness to share its expertise and resources through cooperative projects for the benefit of its partners. The University of Hong Kong Libraries is truly proud to be one of the Library's cooperative partners having signed an exchange agreement on May 13, 2009. Our agreement covers areas of cooperation that include exchange of materials, exchange of experience in

service, personnel and related activities, digitization initiatives, bibliographic database creation and publishing.

Having just completed our centenary celebrations in 2012, the University of Hong Kong Libraries is all too aware of the significance that celebrating such events brings. It is a time to celebrate, a time to pause and reflect on successes, a time to consider our future and it is also a time to start to chart that future to ensure our ongoing success. Reflecting on the achievements of the National Central Library during this 80th anniversary, it is clear to me that their future is well assured as they have built a solid foundation upon which the success of future research libraries will be measured. I once again congratulate the National Central Library on their 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary and I wish the Library the greatest of successes into the future.

■ ***The future of National Libraries: One perspective from the National Library of Singapore***

*By Ngian Lek Choh  
Director, National Library, Singapore*

Congratulations to the National Central Library of Taiwan on your 80th Anniversary!

Thank you for inviting me to contribute to this very special occasion. I have been Director of the National Library of Singapore (NLS) for seven years now, and I feel fortunate to have the chance to see the growth of the library and the rapid changes in the way users use our collections and services. I will use this opportunity to share my learning over the years and my insights on the future of national libraries.

For many years, the National Library of Singapore has not been well-understood by users in Singapore, mainly because Public Libraries in Singapore are very well-developed, and also very convenient and accessible. This means that most of the users in Singapore know what they can get from the public libraries, and comparatively, they are less familiar with the collections and the services of the National Library.

With the opening of the new National Library building in 2005, the National Library and its services became more visible, and use of the National Library has been growing and is still going strong. We attribute this to the special and unique collections that the National Library has that are not found in the Public Libraries, especially digital content. At the physical library, the NLS receives over 1.8 mil visitors a year. On the digital side, the NLS has been working on digitising its rare books, photos and newspapers and making them accessible to the general public, outside the library, 24x7. Use of its digitised Singapore content is over 10 mil page views a year.

The key function of a National Library is to collect and organise the country's documentary heritage for current and future generations to use. This appears a simple matter. However, it is not.

It is not simple mainly because the expectations of users have been rising and rising fast. In the old days, users are content to make an effort to visit the library to use the materials as there is no other way to access these materials. Today's users want everything at their fingertips, and fast. They cannot wait.

How then can the national library remain relevant to them, as national libraries do not usually lend out materials, and users have to come to the library to use a large proportion of the library's materials? From what we hear, visiting libraries to get the content is not our users' preferred way of accessing these materials.

In my view, National Libraries have to keep pace with the needs and expectations of users. Users want to be able to access the information and library materials fast, and they want the library and its content to be as accessible as Google. If we are not out there where they are, users will not use the library's materials and services as much as they could and should.

Librarians in national libraries are acutely aware that many of the materials in the national libraries are unique and valuable materials that can help users understand the social history of the country, and help build identity and rootedness

in its citizens. However, they are also painfully aware that unless users can have easy access to them at their fingertips, they are not going to use these materials, regardless of the value and uniqueness of the content. Our users have constantly told us that they are happy with what they can get on the web, even though more relevant and useful materials may be available in the library's carefully curated collections.

Users will come and use our collections only if they can find the library's content very easily. This makes our job highly interesting and challenging.

How can national libraries make our content much more accessible?

The national library has a statutory role to require all published materials to be deposited at the library and to make these accessible to the general public. One possibility is for the national library to secure copyright for remote access for as much of the materials that are digitised, and make them accessible to the public remotely, outside our library walls.

This is possible for most of the materials that are published by government agencies, schools and community groups such as health groups, clan associations, religious groups, special interest groups. The reason why these publishers will allow libraries to put out the digital copy of their materials for free is that they are mostly non-profit making agencies and they exist to serve the needs of a community or a special interest group.

In the past 5 years, the NLS had also been very fortunate in that three pioneering publishers of books in Chinese, i.e. Youth Bookstore, Shanghai Books Company and Popular Books Private Limited had given NLB rights to digitise books that they had published in the past and to put them out for readers all over the world to enjoy them. The digitised items are now accessible through the NLS' BookSG service.

What the NLS now needs to do is to secure the rights for commercial publications for users to access them from outside the library, and this could be offered at a fee. The journey to bring this about will not be easy, and it will entail a great deal of

time and effort.

However, for national libraries to be relevant and successful, users must feel that their needs are met and if they prefer to use library materials from wherever they are, this is one way libraries can work towards, to bring as much of its unique materials to its users via the web, either freely or for a fee.

This is one perspective that I would like to share here. I have to say that I have been immensely impressed by the National Central Library, Taipei, Taiwan for its progressive effort to create a rights approval service for commercial and other publishers at the point of receiving legal deposit items.

Our heartiest congratulations again to the National Central Library on your 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations!

■ ***“If books are not good company, where will I find it?” How Libraries Show Us Ourselves***

*By Thomas C. Leonard  
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Berkeley, U.S.*

Great libraries are arrays of mirrors. They gather light from the past, show us places that were invisible, and allow us to see ourselves in sharper focus today. I have visited the National Central Library in Taipei and seen its collections; but I have not worked with them. Therefore I cannot testify about the world they reveal. I can speak about the mirror array at the library of the University of California, Berkeley. We are across the Pacific but able to shed light on what Americans understood about the Chinese people.

We have, of course, a vast collection of Chinese materials in our C. V. Starr East Asian Library. The white granite building with its bronze screen is a tribute to an immigrant from Taiwan, our former Chancellor, Chang-Lin Tien (1935-2002, figure 1). He is honored as the first Asian American to lead a major research university in the United States.



*Figure 1: Chang-Lin Tien*

Here, and in other libraries across campus, we have the record of our faculty’s engagement across the Pacific, beginning with the scholar who built library collections to start the conversation, John Fryer (1839-1928, figure 2).



*Figure 2: John Fryer*

The picture of Professor Fryer, appropriately dressed as a Chinese Official of the Third Rank in government service, following his educational work in Hong Kong, Beijing, and Shanghai. The photograph rests in our Bancroft Library. Nearby is this picture of his famous contemporary, Samuel Clemens (1835-1910, figure 3): Mark Twain.



*Figure 3: Samuel Clemens*