PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Mei-Hwa Yang

INTRODUCTION

The UNESCO Manifesto proclaims the belief in the public library as a living force for education, culture and information, and as an essential agent for the fostering of peace and spiritual welfare through the minds of men and women. The public libraries in cities, towns, and villages that serve as frontline libraries are the most important. These libraries may serve as a community-gathering place, as a reference center for local and world news, and as an educational facility promoting literacy and cultural diversity. These basic functions, though common to all libraries across the world, are nevertheless met in many different ways according to the particular needs of a community or a region. It can be said that public libraries are a microcosm of the world to which they belong. The pattern of public librarianship in Asia is not uniform, as each region has developed its own particular individuality. Since it is rather difficult to cover all countries in Asia, the author can only highlight some countries with familiarity. The countries below are arranged in alphabetical order. For additional information please check with Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science, World Libraries Archive, etc.

1. INDIVIDUAL COUNTRY

1.1 Bangladesh

According to 2003 Library Directory, there are 1603 Non-Government Public Libraries and 68 Government public libraries, including 1 Sufia Kamal National Central Public Library (Formerly Bangladesh Central Public Library), 3 Divisional Central Public Library, 60 District Library, and 4 Branch Library. Non-government public libraries movements started with the establishment of four public libraries in the year 1854. Most of the non-government public libraries open for 3-5 hours in the evening. Very few library personnel are trained, most of them part time basis. These non-government public libraries are partly financed by subscription, partly by government grants and not fully by the local authorities (Shuva 2003).

The government public library started its journey with the opening of Bangladesh Central Public Library in 1958. Shuva (2003) pointed out that problems of public libraries in Bangladesh were: Lack of trained library personnel and training facilities, recognition of the necessity of libraries and library services in a social environment, funds, standards for public libraries, etc.
2.2 Cambodia

Like all other cultural institutions in Cambodia, libraries suffered greatly from neglect during the political, social and economic upheaval of the 1970s and have largely been rebuilt from nothing in the period from 1980 onwards. Since the 1993 elections there has been a dramatic increase in the number of libraries, as well as the number of young Cambodians using them regularly. In addition, technology is now ensuring that even people in remote parts of Cambodia can have free access to information. (Libraries, Cambodia Cultural Profile, 2006)

Libraries in Cambodia developed from two streams: the repositories of palm-leaf manuscripts containing Buddhist scriptures and religious writings that were preserved in the country’s numerous wats, and the colonial-era document archives that were established during the French protectorate in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Libraries, Cambodia Cultural Profile, 2006).

2.3 China

Since the 1980s, governments at all levels have attached great importance to the construction of public libraries, regarding them as a significant element in the development of community culture (Wu 2005). By the end of 2004, there were 2,720 public libraries, including a national library, 37 provincial libraries, 2,240 municipal libraries, 85 juvenile/children’s libraries, and 49,646 staff members.

In China, the size of the town and the amount of government investment determine the public library’s condition and collection. (Wikipedia 2007) On average 460,000 people share a library. Public libraries are rarely found in the countryside. About 90.3% of the populace never use public libraries, even though the national standard states that within every 1.5 kilometers there should be a public library and that a maximum of 20 thousand people should share a single public library.

The combined collections of all the public libraries total around 430 million volumes. However, on average a person can get access only to 0.3 volumes. 9.43 million people hold public library cards, which means only 0.73% of the population do. by contrast, two thirds of the population of the United States use public libraries and 13,000 people share a library on average.

The Library Association of China set up “The appraisal standard regulation” for all levels of public libraries, for which it serves as the principle for developing and providing public library services. In addition, “The Professional Ethics Code for Chinese Librarians” and “Standards for the Construction of Public Libraries” were formulated for community of public libraries.

The past twenty years have seen unprecedented changes in library development in China. Highlighted by the construction of the new buildings of such large libraries as the National Library of China, the Shanghai Library, the Fujian Provincial Library, and the Zhejiang Provincial Library, the library in China has experienced accelerated modernization. With rapid development in both quantity and
quality, Chinese libraries have become well-organized learning centers in small communities, and well-received cultural attractions in the urban areas (Wu 2005). With the on-going digital projects and increased implementation of high-tech equipment, such as RFID, the future of the public library in China is promising and impressive.

Shanghai Library, which covers 3.1 hectares of land, and has a floor space of 83,000 square meters, officially opened to the public on December 20th, 1996, is the largest public library in China and also one of the ten largest libraries in the world in terms of its rich collection and extensive floor space. Its holdings include 50.95 million items, ranging from the latest technical reports, patent and standard files, to ancient artifacts, and from paper copy, sound and video recordings, to digital databases (Shanghai Library website 2007).

2.3.1 Hong Kong

The Hong Kong Public Libraries consist of a network of 66 stationary libraries and 10 mobile libraries. They are evenly spread over the territory of Hong Kong and interconnected by an integrated automated library system to provide convenient access to a wide range of library services for the public. The library collection has 11.5 million items, including books, audio-visual materials, newspapers, periodicals, CD-ROM databases, microforms and maps (Hong Kong Public Libraries website 2007).

Hong Kong Central Library, the largest public library in Hong Kong with 2 million items in its collections, first opened its doors to the public on 17 May 2001. Equipped with advanced technologies and digital library facilities, it is also the administrative headquarters and the main library of the Hong Kong public library network as well as the major information center for Hong Kong. In addition to standard library facilities and services, it provides a central reference library of six subject departments, a toy library, a young adult library and hiring facilities comprising an exhibition gallery and a lecture theatre.

2.3.2 Macau

Under the Administration of Macao Culture, Macau Central Library (http://www.library.gov.mo/) was founded in 1895, and is composed of one main library and six branches. It has a total collection of approximately 550,000 volumes. Apart from a sizeable general interest collection, the Central Library is also a treasure trove for Macau local information, children’s literature and Portuguese history in the Far East. The Civic and Municipal Library is a small and ancient library dated back to 1656. Ho Tung Library is a typical example of a private residence turned library. It was formerly the summer villa of Sir Robert Ho Tung who acquired it in 1918, and he actually lived here in the war years from 1941-1945. The 3-storey es-
tate was bequeathed to the Macau Government in 1955. Being a garden library it
has attracted many visitors.

2.4 India

The first landmark in the pre-independence history of the public library system in
India is the enactment of delivery and registration of publications Act of Bombay
government in May 1808. Calcutta Public Library was established in 1836 and
was endowed with public donations. The first three decades of the 20th century
can be marked as the golden period of Indian library system. On 31st Jan 1902 the
Imperial Library Act was passed and Lord Curzon transformed the Calcutta Public
Library into Imperial Library in 1906. The Department of Public Libraries came
into existence from 1st November 1966 consequent upon the implementation of
Mysore Public Libraries Act, 1965. The act provided for the establishment of the
libraries. At present, the Karnataka public library system is one of the most popu­
lar and feasible systems, as compared to those in the other 28 states in India
(Kumbar n.d.).

Established on March 22, 1890, Connemara Public Library is a repository of
centuries-old publications, wherein lie some of the most respected works and col­
clections in the country. It also serves as a depository library for the UN. A truly
world class library with teak shelves and standard glass windows with a very tall
ceiling reflecting colonial ambience was the idea of the H. Irvin the consulting ar­
chitect of Madras Presidency. This large hall was set in a semi circle sandstone
building constructed in Indo- sorcenic style that never seems to have aged even
now. As a part of the centenary celebrations an additional three- storey building
with a floor space of 21,235 square-foot opened on 24th June 1999. In 2005, it
was selected as the best state central library in India (Connemara Public Library
website).

Delhi Public Library was started as a UNESCO project in the year 1951 by the
government of India. Delhi Public Library has a network of Zonal Libraries,
Branches & Sub-branches, R.C. Libraries, Community Libraries, Deposit Stations,
Sports Libraries, Mobile Library, Braille library, etc. spread all over Delhi. Some
of the outstanding features of the library activities are services to Blind, Prisoners
and offers Mobile Library service. Delhi Public Library is the biggest Public Li­
brary System in India and the busiest Public Library in South East Asia (Delhi
Public Library website).

2.5 Indonesia

Indonesia, the fourth most populous country in the world after China, India and
the US, occupies almost 2 million square metres of land area, is a vast country and
has various degrees of development from one to another region. Compared to its
neighbouring ASEAN countries, library development in Indonesia and specifically
public libraries are still far behind. In terms of physical structures and number of
librarians working in both public libraries and municipal libraries, Indonesia
stands out among ASEAN countries. However, in terms of public services, like most public institutions in Indonesia, public libraries have been neglected and have not been placed on the government priority list (Kamil 2003).

The Sumatran province of Aceh was severely damaged by the earthquake and resulting tsunami. Of Aceh's eight public libraries, two were completely destroyed. These libraries were located in the hard-hit cities of Meulaboh and Sigli. The Aceh Provincial Library (BPD) was inundated with three meters of water. Twenty-three staff members were killed, including the library's director, Bachtiar Azis, who is listed as missing along with his family. In addition to loss of life, the BPD suffered physical damage and a near total loss of its collection. All library materials housed on the first floor were swept away by the waves, and the floor was covered in 30 cm.-thick mud. A collection of books received under legal deposit and housed on the second floor was left undisturbed and survived the disaster and looting intact. (Wikipedia)

2.6 Japan

The first public library in Japan was established in 1872 on the former site of Shoheiko (the Confucian Academy). It was later called Shojoakukan and run by the government. Its name has since been changed to Tokyo Library (Tokyo Tosokan), which was also the predecessor of the National Diet Library and modelled by local governments to public libraries in many regions during the Meiji period (Koizumi 2003).

It was with the enactment of the Library Law of 1950 that the public libraries in Japan changed to a modern form of public library and the number of public libraries increased. In 1963, the Japan Library Association published “Management of Public Libraries in Medium and Small Cities,” which emphasized the importance of the relationship with the local community. This was an epoch-making report that revolutionized the concept of library service, the views of which spread to administrators of public libraries. In the 1970’s, movements of local residents and increased budgets of local governments accelerated the rapid progress of public libraries (Koizumi, 2003).

Each city (over 50,000 population) has its own public library. It is a very popular establishment in Japanese society. However, 51.6 % of the towns in Japan have no public library (Statistics on Libraries in Japan 2006). In Japan, “library” (tosokan) usually means public library. High school students often use the public library as a place for preparing for the college entrance examination. In the 1980’s, life-long learning came to be emphasized by local governments, which increased the use of the public library. In the 1990’s, public libraries were more likely to be built along with other public cultural facilities, such as culture centers, museums, auditoriums, and so on.
There are no ministries or central government agencies that exclusively oversee the public libraries in Japan. In terms of national legislation, the Library Law was enacted in 1950 but no national policies have been established as laws.

As of 2006, there were 3,082 public libraries and 14,070 staff members. Benefited from the world’s second largest economy, Japan spends 3.1 per cent of GNP on research and development. Budget for materials was 3,047,030 (in units of 10,000 yen) (Hosono 2006; updated by Statistics on Libraries in Japan 2006). The collection is 356,710,000 volumes. The total number of books borrowed each year is 618 million. Therefore, on average, 4.8 books are borrowed by each Japanese person. Parker (2005) indicates that comparative data from G7 countries put Japan slightly below average for the number of items borrowed per 100,000 people, but at the top of the scale in terms of books issued per library. The Mayor has much of the power in allocating resources in Japan, as in the USA. 62 per cent of people in Japan do not use the public library.

There are 1,030 libraries that offer Web-based OPACs, 606 libraries that provide Web-based functions for reservation services and 172 libraries with i-mode OPACs, 91 of them with reservation services. 97 libraries accept reference questions via e-mails (Japan Library Association 2007). During the last few decades, Japan has gone through a number of changes, ranging from high economic growth to the bubble economy and its burst, the advent of computerization, the shock of the Kobe earthquake, and the graying of its society, most Japan’s public libraries face difficulties to cope with these socioeconomic changes.

Japan’s public libraries emphasize the preservation of local literature and historical materials. Many libraries began to digitize these materials. In addition, Japan’s public libraries make every endeavor to provide services for special readers. A barrier-free environment includes such features as braille paths and music signs. Public libraries provide an oral reading service and a mail loan service. Recently, Japan’s public libraries began promoting mass health information to give readers useful health information. Tokyo Metropolitan Library, Tottori Prefectural Library (Hosono 2006) and Yokohama City Central Library (Ogawa 2007) are the leading libraries in this service.

Under partial amendment of the Local Autonomy Law enforced in 2003, the Shitei Kanrisha System (Designated Manager System) was established, which introduces appointed management to administer public institutions and facilities. A very complicated issue concerning public libraries is whether libraries operated under the Shitei Kanrisha System can function properly and provide professional services to the public (Hosono 2006).

As in many other countries in Asia, Japan’s public libraries are also facing the challenges of budget cuts and professional librarianship. Reduction in funding is the problem all public libraries face. Most libraries have smaller budgets than they had the previous year. Since public libraries must cope with significant change, more professional librarians are needed to manage the libraries. The lack of a specialized authentication system remains a question in Japan (Hosono 2006).
In October 2006, Naka City became the world’s first library system to use palm vein authentication technology. It relies on the unique pattern of veins inside each person’s hand to identify users. The system offers a higher level of security than such biometric technologies as voice print, facial recognition, fingerprint recognition and iris scan (Fujitsu 2007).

2.7 South Korea

Korea set up its first Law Library in 1963. Its goal lies in the education, investigation, research, and training of body and mind. In 1987 the government comprehensively revised the Law Library. It replaced the body and mind training with information use and educational and cultural activities. The Library Promotion Act, written in 1991 to supersede the Library Act, emphasizes the “nurturing and promotion of libraries” and stipulates that “a library shall be managed by a library professional.” The Library and Reading Promotion Action, legislated in 1994, incorporated the “promotion of reading” eventually obscuring its meaning as an “exclusive statute for governing libraries.”

The aggregate nationwide public library holdings amount to 38.4 million books. That breaks down to 78,000 books per public library and 0.79 books per capita. The average full-time staff size per library is 12 employees. An estimated 2,000 professionally qualified librarians serve in public libraries, corresponding to 4.3 librarians per library and 38 percent of the total library workforce. Annual operating costs per library amount to 710 million won (US$760,000) on average, 12 percent of which is accounted for by acquisition of library materials. There are 5,129 staff and 30,544,742 collections at present. Since 2000, funds have been consistently increasing. Each library was allocated 4.5 hundred million Korea dollars in 2000, 5.4 hundred million Korea dollars in 2001, and 6.5 hundred million Korea dollars in 2002. Most big cities are allocated more than 100 hundred million dollars on average (Libraries in Korea 2006).

As stipulated by the library law, all Korean public libraries have established a single cooperative network to maximize the quantity and the quality of their services. The current cooperative network designates the National Library of Korea as the central organization and maintains 16 major Provincial Libraries, 35 Regional Libraries, and 514 Communities Libraries. As of the end of 2005, many public libraries adopted the RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) system based on ubiquitous technologies and provide e-books and e-journal services. Some public libraries also provide the search and receipt of audio or text messages through mobile phones (Libraries in Korea 2006).

Korean public libraries are managed under a dual system. At the central level, the Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development are responsible for the management of public libraries; at the local level, public libraries are divided into those
administered by provincial and city governments and those under provincial and municipal educational offices. This complicated system undermines cooperation and mutual support among libraries in many areas, including policy coordination, staff development and personnel assignments, collection development and cooperative preservation of materials, and interlibrary loans (Libraries in Korea 2006).

Library and information resources have been recognized as an essential part of the nation’s resources and national information infrastructure. Therefore, systematic and up-dated strategies and policies on library and information resources are needed to assure the accessibility and usability of information to individual users (citizens). The execution of the Library & Information Policy has since been transferred from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and a reorganization of the Library was implemented in 2004.

The Korean Ministry of Culture set up “the Library Promotion Law” in 1991. In order to promote the dissemination of information, cultural activities and lifelong education, it expanded the original pure education concept to one of lifelong education. In 1994 the government set up “the Library and Study Promotion Law” which inherited the objectives of “the Library Promotion Law”. Based on the Library Law, the goals of the Korean public library are the dissemination of information, cultural activities, and lifelong education. The digital library designed for children and juveniles is scheduled to open in 2008. IFLA held its 72\textsuperscript{nd} annual conference in August 2006. All these things show that the vitality of Korea’s library enterprise.

For future development, the Korean central and local governments have several plans to raise the scale and scope of public library services and to help the libraries function as centers for collecting and disseminating information and promoting community cultural activities in an age of knowledge. They plan to increase the number of public libraries to 750 by 2011 under the “Library Development Roadmap” announced by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. This will translate into one public library for every 60,000 persons (Libraries in Korea, 2006).

2.8 Laos

The library system of Laos is not based on a common governmental law, and all public libraries in Laos are to be considered local branches under the National Library. Public libraries are presently found in Luang Prabang, Oudamsay and Pakse. Three bookmobiles are in Laos serving areas without a local public library. One of these being attached to the National Library as a donation from the Japanese government and serving the suburbs of Vientiane. Following a number of changed locations the National Library is now to be found in a stately building on Thanon Setthathirat in Vientiane. In 1990-92 UNESCO has sponsored three library volunteers from the West to help organizing the library techniques of the library. This impact is still to be felt in the library, but as the government’s priorities presently are centered on the development of the school system, library budgets are limited (Evald 2004).
2.9 Malaysia

Diversity of peoples characterizes the population of Malaysia. The multicultural nature of Malaysian society is mirrored in its multi-racial, multi-lingual and multi-religious makeup. The multi-ethnicity of Malaysia, has posed a great challenge to public libraries in providing services to meet the informational needs of one of the most culturally and linguistically diversified countries in the region. What poses a great challenge is the formulation of a strategic plan to enable the effectiveness of services, with the goal of creating a knowledge-based multicultural, multiracial, multilingual, and multi-faith society. This challenge is compounded by scenarios where problems occur in terms of varied literacy levels, a lack of mastering the languages, and low library literacy (Yaacob & Seman, 1998).

Up to the mid-1960s, the establishment of public libraries in Malaysia was hap­
hazard and mostly without government funding. In 1968 the “Blueprint for Public Library Development in Malaysia” was published. The Blueprint attempted to draw up minimum national standards for Malaysian public libraries, which could be used to assess existing services and serve as guidelines for evaluation and action, and for setting new goals for future public libraries (Bates, n.d.). Since 1968 the National Library Committee has followed the recommendations of the Blue­
print.

The National Library Act was passed in 1972. In reviewing the achievements and performance nearly a decade later, the Persatuan Perpustakaan Malaysia pre­pared its revised Standards for Public Libraries in Malaysia and subjected them to review by a wider audience at the Joint Conference of the Persatuan Perpustakaan Malaysia (PPM) and the Library Association of Singapore (LAS) in March 1977 (Mustafa & Wilkinson, 1977).

In 1981, the Persatuan Perpustakaan Malaysia issued its Library Building Stan­
dards for Malaysia4, which contained provisions for public libraries as well. These standards too were reviewed by a wider audience at the Seminar on Library Build­
ings in 1981.5 The major difference between Piawaian untuk Perpustakaan Awam di Malaysia and the Library Building Standards for Malaysia is that the former was never formally adopted or endorsed by any library, administrative or financial authority while the latter was adopted ‘in principle’ by the Costs and Standards Committee of the Government’s Economic Planning Unit (Wijasuriya n.d.).

By 2006, there were 1,129 public libraries, including 14 state public libraries, 174 village libraries, 92 branch libraries, 6 regional/metropolitan libraries, 115 branch/district libraries, 60 town libraries, and 844 rural cyber information centers/libraries, 88 mobile libraries. Each state has developed an infrastructure for its public library system, with the aim of providing service to both the urban and rural
regions. The main public libraries at the headquarters co-ordinate these functions with the branches in all districts while the mobile library systems try to reach regions not accessible to the public library system.

The National Library of Malaysia has developed an E-Library User Education Module funded by UNESCO. The E-Library User Education Module is an online self-tutorial or learning package aimed at educating the public to become skilled library users. This module is available in Malay and English and can be accessed at http://www.elib.gov.my. It is now being adapted for use in public libraries in Asia Pacific countries (Dato 2004).

2.10 Myanmar

The National Library in Yangon (Rangoon) founded in 1952 is administered by the Department of Cultural Institute, Ministry of Culture. The National Library has now collected about 618,000 books and periodicals. It has a rare collection of materials on Myanmar and has a rich collection of rare and valuable Myanmar manuscripts about 15,800 in titles. This library was first free public library in Myanmar and it was known as “The Bernard Free Library”, which was established on the 21st February 1883. The library has become a legal depository of Myanmar-Naing-Ngan, since the Printers and Publishers Registration Act promulgated in 1962 (Background History of the National Library of Myanmar). For further information, please see Online: Burma/Myanmar Library. http://www.burmalibrary.org/introduction.html, http://www.myanmar.com/Ministry/culture/text/P001.htm.

2.11 Pakistan

Pakistan has had a rich heritage. Some of today’s leading libraries were founded in the nineteenth century: Karachi Metropolitan City Library (1851), Punjab Public Library, Lahore (1864), and the Civil Secretariat Library, Lahore (1885) (Khurshid 1990). As of 1989, there were 281 public libraries. With 215,000 volumes the Punjab Public Library is the largest of public libraries, and the country’s third library in size. The next largest public library is the Dayal Singh Trust Library in Lahore, with 122,700 volumes; followed by the Liaquat Memorial Library in Karachi, with 120,900 volumes.

Public library development has been greatly enhanced through the establishment of the Punjab Public Library Foundation in 1985 (Khurshid, 1990). To provide a center for continuing education, information, enjoyment and positive use of leisure, the Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan had decided to convert its existing Central Secretariat Library into a public library for the residents of Islamabad by the name of Islamabad Public Library on 1st July 1996. This Library has a collection of 34,000 Books (Islamabad Public Library 2002).

2.12 Philippines

There are a total of 949 public libraries from the northern province in Batanes to the southernmost province of Tawi-Tawi, including 1 Regional library, 1 Congres-
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Republic Act 7743 is titled “An Act Providing for the Establishment of Congressional, City and Municipal Libraries and Barangay Reading Centers Throughout the Philippines, Appropriating the Necessary Funds Therefore and for Other Purposes.” It was approved by both houses of Congress on June 1, 1994 and approved by then President Fidel V. Ramos on June 17, 1994. In consonance with the spirit of RA 7743, The National Library of the Philippines (NLP) annually provides the public libraries with book allocations. The Public Libraries Information Network launched in 1999, links the National Library and the public libraries in terms of sharing information and materials through the computer (Cruz 2002).

For 2001, the total collections of public libraries all over the Philippines have reached 1,004,707 volumes of books, 30,631 serial copies, and 49,929 other kinds of library materials. Because of such, the number of readers using these libraries had increased to 1,214,478 while cardholders numbered 44,180 (Cruz 2002).

Funded by the Commission on Information and Communications Technology (CICT) through the PHP4 billion eGovernment Fund, the Philippine eLib – the country’s first public electronic library – boasts of a collection of more than 800,000 bibliographic records consisting of more than 25 million pages of local and international materials, 29,000 full text journals, and 15,000 theses and dissertations on diverse subject matters. The Philippine eLib was conceptualised in 2003 through the efforts of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST), led by Undersecretary Fortunato T. dela Peña, and four other government institutions. The Philippine eLib aims to enrich local content in digital format for community and global access. It also aims to promote and accelerate the exchange of knowledge resources among citizens, and international users (Rojales 2005).

2.13 Singapore

Driven by the desire to make Singapore a center of education and knowledge, the National Library Board (NLB) has one of the best public library systems in the world, one that strives to provide convenient access to knowledge resources. Public libraries are positioned as an integral part of the national learning infrastructure, actively supporting Singapore as a learning nation (National Library Board Singapore 2007).

From the outset, NLB has been directly responsible for both the national library and the public library functions. This responsibility was provided for by the first National Library Act (NLA) of 1958. In June 1992, the Library 2000 Review Committee undertook a review of library services to formulate a master plan for developing library services over the subsequent 10 years. Singapore’s government endorsed the Library 2000 recommendations with a budget of $1 billion over eight
years (Varaprasad & Kua 2006). The NLB was established on September 1, 1995 to spearhead the transformation of library services in the Information Age.

NLB’s mission is to provide a trusted, accessible and globally connected library and information service so as to promote a knowledgeable and engaged society. It sees itself as an inspiring beacon of lifelong learning, bringing knowledge alive, sparking imagination and creating new possibilities for a vibrant and creative Singapore (National Library Board 2007).

The Library 2000 vision seeks to continuously expand the nation’s capacity to learn through a network of libraries and information resource centers, which provide services and learning opportunities to support the advancement of Singapore. The Library 2010 Report sets out NLB’s strategic direction for the next phase, which aims “to bring the world’s knowledge to Singapore to create a positive social and economic impact”. Library volunteers are seen as strategic community partners who actively play a part in value-adding and improving library services to the public. Active citizenry is encouraged as part of NLB’s Library 2010 Blueprint to forge public libraries into social learning spaces (Siew 2007). There are currently 1 National Library, 3 Regional Libraries, 20 Community Libraries (10 co-located within shopping malls/town councils), and 10 Community Children’s Libraries.

Singapore was one of the first countries to apply RFID to its libraries. Its libraries provide self-service loans. NLB continues to project the image of an organization of excellence and innovation. The first public library blog in Singapore: library@orchard was launched on July 25, 2007. Public libraries in Singapore have become greatly integrated with the community and are seen as inviting and relaxing, places for meeting people and sharing with other book-lovers. Key challenges include building its professional capability, staying relevant to the society and the economy, making use of new available technology, etc. It is noteworthy that many parts of the world have replicated Singapore’s efforts and success in their own countries.

2.14 Taiwan

There has been significant progress in various facets of libraries in Taiwan since the 1980s, such as library buildings, budgets, collections, services, library automation and networking and application of the Internet under government support. In general, libraries in Taiwan operated smoothly during the past two decades under cultural promotion programs, ICT development and national digitalized projects of the government, especially in the beginning of the new millennium.

The first private public library was established in January 1901 under the cooperative promotion of the officials and the public during the Japanese Occupation Era (Librarianship in Taiwan 2007). The Provincial Taipei Library was founded in August 1915. In 1978, under the Government Cultural Construction Planning, public libraries advanced a big stride forward to a new milestone. The Library Devel-
opment White Paper was issued in 1999. The Taiwan Library Law was enacted in 2001.

As of 2006, there were 562 public libraries (branches included) and the total collections in the public libraries reached nearly 27.6 million volumes in Taiwan. Loans total 39,055,813 volumes to date. According to statistics, 78,052 promotional activities were held and 4,393,450 people participated.

In 1992, Guidelines for the Management of Public Libraries was issued as a standard to evaluate library resources and services in Taiwan. The Public Library Information Service Network (PLISNET) was established in 1996 and completed in 1999 for the purpose of accessing bibliographic records and sharing library service systems via networking environment at the levels of provincial/municipal, and county/city public libraries. In addition, mobile library service enhanced the value and use of collections.

The Implementation of the Public Library Improvement Plan to enhance library space, buildings, facilities, and the library automation and networking infrastructure was hosted by the Ministry of Education and the Culture Commission in 2003. The total budget came up NT$ 317,641,666. In 2004, the new building of the National Central Library of Taiwan, which occupies an area of 59,000 square meters, was opened.

The Taipei Public Library (TPL) has formulated its “Strategic Plan 2005-2010” as a guideline for its operations and management development in the future. In 2005, by utilizing the RFID system, the Taipei Public Library inaugurated the world’s first self-service library at an MRT station. It is noteworthy that the Taipei Public Library went through ISO 9002 TQM assurance in 2000 (Taipei Public Library website 2005). The Beitou Branch of the Taipei Public Library is the first green building library in Taiwan. It opened to the public on 17 November 2006. In 2007, it was given the National Award for Architectural Excellence and the Outstanding Environment and Cultural Award. It embodies the principles of an ecological environment and serves as a multi-faceted learning center (Tseng 2007).

In 1996, the National Taichung Library hosted the “Public Library Information Network Guidance and Consultation Committee” which assisted 21 county and municipal libraries under their Bureaus of Culture and more than 400 town and village libraries to complete library automation projects. From 2003 to 2004, the National Taichung Library completed the “Improvement Plan of Public Library Space and Operations” and the “Public Library Automation and Network Project” in assisting more than 300 public libraries to complete software and hardware facilities improvements (National Taichung Library website 2007).

2.15 Thailand

“Public library” was developed from the “public reading room”, which was firstly established in Bangkok in 1916 by the Education Department. In 1973, the public
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Library was upgraded to an educational unit attached to the Adult Education Division of General Education Department. Later on, Non-Formal Education Department public library regulation 1992 to make public library be community information center for promotion of community learning and activities, as well as for development of community learning network. At present, there are altogether 850 public libraries over the country, which can be classified into 3 sizes: large-sized public library, middle-sized public library, and small-sized public library (Lerd-suriyakul 1999).

Public Library Section, Recreation Division, Department of Social Welfare, Bangkok Metropolitan Administration has provided only the bus mobile library services to serve the people in Bangkok Metropolitan Area. There are now nine buses. The first bus began in 1991, the second in 1995, the third in 1996, the fourth to the seventh in 1997, and the last two in 1999. The purpose of mobile libraries is to make libraries go into communities of the disadvantage including the children, to make them love books and reading which will be useful to themselves (Priwatworawute 2000).

Mobile floating library began to provide service in January 1999 with intention to expand service to promote reading and learning of people living along the rivers and canals in terms of books, toys, videos, exhibitions and learning packages concerning reservation of water resources to make those people realize and participate in keeping their rivers and canals, as well as their environment clean. In addition, volunteers are provided to carry the book bags to the doors of those who are unable to travel conveniently from their homes to the floating library for service (Priwatworawute 2000).

Besides 850 public libraries under the responsibility of the department of Non-Formal Education, there are still 13 public libraries attached to the Bangkok Metropolis Administration, 30 municipal public libraries, as well as 7 public libraries of Srinakorn Bank. Public library is considered as a significant knowledge source and learning center for population of all sexes and ages. They will have the opportunities in studying continuously. Thus, it is seen significant to improve public library to have more efficiency and ability response to the needs of learning of all target groups so that Thai society will finally turn to be a learning society (Nimsomboon 2003).

Thai Library Association (TLA) has initiated the presentation of awards for the “best libraries” of the year encourages the improvement of the public libraries and their activities in 1976, and set up “Standards for Public Libraries” in 1990. The Council of Education’s Secretariat Office suggested in 2005, that public libraries should promote digitization, develop staff continually, and cultivate community relationships (Salaladyanant, 2006).

According to Sacchanand (2007), the status of public libraries in Thailand is still not satisfied. The evaluation of public libraries in Thailand, conducted by Sacchanand, Prommapun and Sajjanand (2006) and funded by the Educational Council of Thailand, showed that their performance was less than average. In re-
gards to the passing criteria developed ($X = 3.00$), it was found that public libraries in Thailand as a whole and classified by types and regions did not pass the criteria. Most public libraries are substandard due to insufficient funding and staff. Budget and finance had the lowest average mean. Some 43 percent of the evaluated libraries, mostly in the Non-formal Education Department, receive an annual budget of less than Bt50,000.

### 2.16 Vietnam

When Vietnam achieved independence in 1945, there was just one library serving the entire country. Today under the overall guidance of the Ministry of Culture and Information’s Library Department, the National Library of Vietnam oversees a network of 64 provincial and municipal libraries, 577 district libraries and some 7,000 commune and village libraries or book cabinets. A further 7,000 reading rooms are attached to Post Offices of Culture run by the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications (MPT). Over 17,000 libraries and reading rooms operate under the guidance of the Ministry of Education and Training. However, Vietnam’s library sector still faces a number of serious challenges, principally at local level where problems of inadequate premises equipment, collections and standards of service, lack of specialist training and standards of services, lack of training and limited application of information technology continue to hamper development (Vietnam Cultural Profile 2006).

While heavily used, Vietnamese public libraries are typically under-resourced and struggle with limited budget, facilities and resources to provide comprehensive information services to the community. According to statistics issued by the Vietnamese Government Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Welfare, there are an estimated 5.1 million people in Vietnam with some form of physical disability. Through the support of the Vietnamese government Ministry of Culture and Information, and the active assistance of organizations such as the Force Foundation, the General Sciences Library of Ho Chi Minh City has taken a leadership role in the provision of services to the visually impaired. Although for some time limited to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, these services are now being expanded and delivered throughout the public library system of Vietnam (Bac 2005).

### 3. GENERAL DISCUSSION

Public libraries are deeply related to the functioning of a legitimate democracy. Governments should recognize the role that libraries have in promoting literacy, economic development, life-long learning and access to information. They should encourage a holistic, cross-functional approach to social inclusion, which includes the services public libraries provide. They should also ensure that public library
services are funded appropriately and in a sustainable way to enable this complex and difficult work to be undertaken effectively. The patterns of evaluation of library services are complex and library systems should be devised to more clearly reflect the impact that libraries have in communities, which should not be limited to book borrowing.

Generally speaking, Asian countries share the same experience and confront the same challenges with each other in the following aspects:

3.1 Common Traits

The National Library plays a leading role in public library development. Some national libraries function both as a “public library” as well as a “research library.” Due to a shortage of staff members, volunteers are heavily used. The use of volunteers can present challenges, but for those with limited resources, the opportunity to contribute to the library in a meaningful way should be perceived as a means of engaging with one’s society.

3.2 Problems and Issues

In the twenty-first century public libraries in Asia are currently confronted with unprecedented challenges in terms of operations and management, such as the following: limited resources, expanding user demands, growing competition in the provision of information services and social networking, an enhanced focus on accountability for public sector organizations. In addition, they must come to grips with the following issues:

The learning abilities of children and youngsters are decreasing. They must come up with new ideas and areas of services to help meet the unique needs of Asian children and youth. In particular, they need to recruit children and adolescent librarians to help develop such services. Although there are library standards in Asian countries, they have limited relevance to the types of services offered. There is a lack of financial resources. Providing library services to the public usually requires substantial amounts of money and manpower. However, some local governments are reluctant to invest in libraries.

On the other hand, it is encouraging to see that many innovative projects are being implemented in the Asian countries.

3.3 Innovations

Several countries have undertaken a variety of digital projects, such as Mainland China, Taiwan, Japan and South Korea. New devices include: RFID, which was first introduced in Singapore, and Palm Veins technology, which was first used for library-card holders in Japan. In addition, many e-learning practices are being implemented in Taiwan and some other countries.
4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the future, public libraries need to demonstrate their value to those that establish and support them. Knowing how to develop a research agenda to support the value of libraries and library services is extremely important. Focus should be placed on the conditions that make for good learning environments, good environments for human relations and interaction, and good environments for promoting literature and reading. Libraries help in nurturing a society of life-long learners who can accelerate the creation of intellectual capital and create a new cycle of national innovation. This is an important factor of competition, one that is much needed for success in a competitive knowledge-based economy.

The problems of the public library are various and continuous. While some appropriate policy directives exist, the level of success in implementing such policies seems to depend on a combination of factors. These include favorable factors relating to organizational structure and resources, just as serious consideration of local concerns and structure contribute to successful implementation. A shift from collection orientation to user-behavior orientation should be addressed.

The responsibility of the state and local governments for library management should be highlighted. Public libraries should not only provide a functional space, but create a welcoming social space as well. Effective ways must be devised to maintain community enthusiasm, interest, and involvement in the library project. Community empowerment is therefore recommended. Transforming strategies include: leadership training on topics that include participatory planning and decision making as well as collective actions; active mobilization of community participation in library activities; and the creation of a support system for local initiative and actions.

In addition, the formulation of national information policies should be undertaken. Public librarians need to take on a proactive role in providing appropriate library services for their communities. Librarians should have a thorough knowledge of their own communities in terms of both sociological and psychological aspects. Cooperating closely with other government authorities in the same community is highly recommended. In developing countries, personal relationships remain important and people are still friendly and optimistic. Public librarians should take advantage of this good point to take library services to the grassroots level (Nimsomboon 2003).

It is hoped that the public libraries in Asia would adopt a more pro-active approach in seeking out opportunities to deploy their unique skills, expertise and resources with those who have not traditionally used their services. They should be more vigorous in publicizing the nature and value of the services they provide. They should understand the nature and extent of excluded groups and the ways in which libraries can help them and recognize the potential to be derived from work-
ing in partnership with other groups and organizations. They should implement staff training and development programs to enable staff members to be confident in their roles as teachers and mentors in addition to those of information specialists and managers (Parker 2005).

References


Mei-Hwa Yang


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