

Korean and other languages. We are grateful that we can continue to share his knowledge and expertise.

- The full Chinese Text of this article is written by Teresa Wang Chang and published in *The Bulletin of the Library Association of China*, No. 74, June 2005; pages 9-11.
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## Events

### ■ “Public Library Joint Database” Education, Training and Promotion

Since 2004, readers in Taiwan have enjoyed free access to over 30 database systems through the government-backed “Public Library Joint Database” program. In order to increase utilization of this resource, the NCL commissioned the Interlibrary Cooperation Association to organize courses for teachers and librarians on using the system. Between February 2004 and April 2005, the association arranged 50 such courses across Taiwan. A total of 1,624 people attended the courses, including 43 elementary school teachers, 225 middle and high school teachers, 934 librarians, and 27 others. Covering 13 subject areas, the 38 databases included in the system to date were selected from over 100 Chinese and foreign language databases at the NCL according to their suitability for public library needs. (Chinese text by Chung Hsueh-chen)

### ■ American Corner Opens at National Taichung Library

National Taichung Library (NTL) inaugurated the American Corner in Taichung on May 7 at the library’s Reference Room. The facility, the first of its kind to be established by the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), represents the beginning of a new service model for public libraries in Taiwan.

According to statistics compiled by the Ministry of Education, 14,054 Taiwanese students applied for U.S. visas in 2004, representing 45% of all U.S. visa applications processed in Taiwan; and in 2003, nearly 480,000 Taiwanese citizens visited the U.S., according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These figures underscore the pressing demand in Taiwan for information on U.S. education and culture. The American Corner helps to meet this need by providing convenient access



Chen Chi-nan, Minister of Council for Cultural Affairs (center), Douglas H. Paal of the Director of the American Institute in Taiwan, Taipei Office (right), and Taichung Mayor Jason Hu at the grand opening ceremony. (Photo by National Taichung Library)

to information on the U.S., supported by the NTL's ample facilities and central location.

The U.S. has established American Corners around the world in cooperation with organizations and government agencies in the host countries as a reference service for people interested in learning more about the United States. The first American Corner was established in Russia, and in Asia there are similar facilities in Thailand, Korea, and now Taiwan. One of the unwritten rules about American Corners is that they are always opened in cities without a U.S. embassy or representative office. Since AIT operates offices in Taiwan's two major cities of Taipei and Kaohsiung, Taichung became the top contender as site of the new American Corner. The NTL was a perfect candidate due to its size, features, and operating concept, all of which closely matched the needs of the center. Strong support and assistance from NTL director Hsueh Mao-sung and Taichung Mayor Jason Hu also helped seal the deal.

The American Corner in Taichung is stocked with materials acquired directly from the U.S. by AIT, including publications on U.S. society, English-language education and research, and U.S. education and travel. The facility is also equipped with computer terminals providing access to a wealth of U.S.-related information, virtual exhibitions, American art and music, and chat rooms for exchanges with experts in various U.S. industries and fields. In a departure from past practice, the American Corner will also provide a lot of "soft" cultural information, such as introductions to works by well-known U.S. novelists. In future, the American Corner plans to

invite U.S. novelists and cultural workers to Taiwan to give presentations and foster closer cultural exchanges between the U.S. and Taiwan.



*The reading room at the American Corner  
(Photo by National Taichung Library)*

### ■ **National Taichung Library Opens Virtual Reference Service**

National Taichung Library (NTL) officially launched its "Virtual Reference Service" website, providing a convenient and free channel for the public to get reference help from library personnel. The new service is available from the "Reference Assistance" link on the library's Chinese-language website ([www.ntl.gov.tw](http://www.ntl.gov.tw)). The service also serves as a cooperation mechanism, enabling readers at participating public libraries to submit inquiries and staff at the participating libraries to work together on responding to such inquiries.

Through this cooperative model, participating libraries can share reference resources and personnel to enhance the scope, operation hours, timeliness, efficiency, and professional quality of library reference services available to the public,