CULTURAL CENTERS IN TAIWAN, R.O.C.
Organization, Functions, and Problems *

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ABSTRACT

China is the oldest continuous nation in the World. Why? Culture, the author says, which includes both permanence and change: it encourages and preserves the finest efforts of a people as their ways evolve in time. The author describes efforts in Taiwan stemming from President Chiang Ching-kuo's stated intention in 1977 to build a cultural center, including a library, museum, and music hall, in every county and city, with the focus on library services.

The author discusses plans, achievements, and problems in cultural centers to date. More than two hundred rural libraries have been established in Taiwan. Education of library staff, with courses such as rural librarianship, has been furthured, although there have been problems. As of the premier's 1990 State of the Union address, cultural development had become the top priority.

The Chinese People and Chinese Culture

"Of ancient origin and long continuity" may be a good description of the Chinese people. They have built their state on the Asian continent over a


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period of five thousand years. Many states with a history as long as China vanished long ago. The Chinese people not only have survived, they also have formed a nation that is the oldest and one of the largest and most populous of the world. Why? The answer is quite simple: we have culture.

President Chiang Kai-shek said in *China's Destiny*, "So far as the history of a nation's growth is concerned, we Chinese people are formed by amalgamation of many races, and the number of races increased from one dynasty to another. The motive power behind the amalgamation is culture, not military force, and the way of amalgamation is by assimilation, not by conquest."

What is culture? *Webster's New International Dictionary* defines "culture" in one sense -- that it is the sum total of the way of living of a group of human beings transmitted from one generation to another. In English "culture" is one word. In Chinese there are two Chinese characters for the word "culture": "wen" (文) and "hua" (化). "Wen" means "literary," "hua" means "change or transformation." The second character, "hua," is very important; we shall pay more attention to it. According to an old Chinese saying: "Immortal is that which may preserve, transitional is that which may transform." It explains that culture denotes what can be preserved and can change.

Thus different groups living in different environments develop different cultures. The environment is not an unchanging factor. For example, the development of industry and urbanization brings about changes in the structure of family organization. Says Dr. Chi-lu Chen: "Once a culture has been formed, if it is excessively rigid, it loses its ability to respond to changes in the environment. It may decay and be replaced by a new culture, either intruding from outside or growing up within the older culture. In the course of time many cultures have been taken up and developed, and innumerable cultures have decayed and perished. Our Chinese culture, however, has persisted, endured and been renewed through a long period of historical changes due to its resilience, its ability to adapt to changing circumstances." This means constant progress, not preservation of or restoration to the old order, or only compliance with tradition or stubborn insistence to reject changes. Culture is derived from changes. Sometimes the changes are so slight that no one feels them. Sometimes they are so drastic that they are felt as a revolution.
R.O.C. Drive for Cultural Development

The idea of setting up cultural centers was initiated by the late President Chiang Ching-kuo. In his oral report on administration, while he was the premier, to the first meeting of both sessions of the Legislative Yuan he announced that "to construct a modernized country, not only should the people have a rich material life, but also the people should have a healthy spiritual life." The date, to be exact, was September 23, 1977. The oral report was comparable to the "State of the Union" address by a U.S. President. In his address, the late president proposed twelve National Development Projects. He said: "To increase our national strength further, augment our social development and raise the people's standard of living, the government has decided to engage in the following projects after completion of the Ten Major Construction Projects; all our endeavors will be concentrated on these undertakings in the next few years:

1. Completion of the around-the-island railway network
2. Construction of three new east-west cross-island highways
3. Extension of the North-South Freeway to Pingtung
4. Construction of the second-phase project of the China Steel Mill
5. Construction of the second and third nuclear power plants
6. Completion of the second and third phases of construction at Taichung Harbor
7. Development of new cities and townships and building of large numbers of houses (at the rate of 25,000 units annually)
8. Accelerated improvement of the island-wide farm-irrigation and drainage system
9. Repair and construction of the breakwater and major river banks around the island.
10. Widening of the Pingtung-Oluanpi highway to four lanes
11. Establishment of a fund to expedite farm mechanization
12. Building of a cultural center in every hsien (county) and city, including a library, museum, and music hall for each."
We can see that the twelve projects could be classified into two groups: from one to eleven as a group and twelve alone as a group. He didn't say very much about the twelfth project. But we could sense his feelings. Two paragraphs of the speech especially deserve our attention in regard to cultural development. In one he said: "It cannot be denied that our society is sliding into extravagances. We must prevent this tendency as we dedicate ourselves to establishing a society of equitable wealth. We want to create economic prosperity but not to become extravagant in our way of living. We can make our people wealthy, but we must not encourage the waste of our resources. This is not merely a philosophy to which we must adhere in order to assure the purity and thriftiness of society, but also a principle to be grasped in upgrading our economic development. We must be sincere and earnest in correcting degenerative and vainglorious social phenomena and in advocating thrift. The government is especially determined to crack down on dens of sin and crime that damage society and to create a pure, clean, and secure society." In another paragraph, under the heading "Development of Culture, Education and Science for Progress in Construction," he pointed out: "If the economy is the trunk of the tree of national construction, education is its root. Science is the nutrient to assure its luxuriant growth. Culture, education and science are inalienable."

On Feb. 21, 1978, he again included cultural development in his oral report on administration to the Legislative Yuan. This time he was even more specific. His plan was to establish a cultural center in every county and city in five years.

In accordance with his directives, in the same year the Ministry of Education organized a guidance and planning committee for the organization and establishment of cultural centers. My humble self was one of the members of the committee. The basic plan was as follows:

1. Central Government: relocation of the National Central Library (completed in September 1986), construction of a marine museum (in planning stages), natural science museum (first phase completed in June 1986; second phase completed in August 1988; third and forth phases scheduled for completion in 1991), science and technology museum (planning office set up in 1987; construction scheduled to begin in November 1988 and be completed in 1992), and the National Concert Hall and Theater (officially opened for use on July 30, 1987)
2. Taiwan Provincial Government: construction of a library (typically including a cultural exhibition center) in each major city and county, including a fine arts museum and music hall.

3. Taipei City: construction of a main library (to be completed in 1990) with a branch in each administrative district, the Taipei Social Education Hall (completed in October 1983), the Taipei Fine Arts Museum (completed on December 24, 1983), and a youth cultural activity center (planning is completed; construction awaiting land acquisition), relocation and improvement of the Taipei Municipal Zoo (phase one completed on October 30, 1986; phase two now in planning stage), and expansion of the Taipei Observatory (planning completed; construction awaits land acquisition).

4. Kaohsiung City: construction of the Kaohsiung Chiang Kai-shek Cultural Center (completed on April 16, 1981), including a library and music and art center, and establishment of a branch library in each administrative district.

All the above projects were completed between 1979 and 1983. The plan was completed as advertised, under the administration of Premier Sun Yun-suan. In an address to the closing ceremony of the National Development Seminar on July 21, 1979, he used figures to stress the policy of the government toward cultural development. He said that the government would accelerate establishment of regional cultural centers and strengthen the execution of plans for cultural and recreational programs. In fact, a cultural development fund of NT$500 million to NT$1,000 million would be appropriated in installments to encourage cultural activities.

The National Development Seminar has been nicknamed "the shadow Legislative Yuan." It is the most important channel of communication connecting the scholars and the central government. The 1989 Seminar was attended by 228 domestic and overseas scholars.

The twelve-day 1988 Seminar in which I was a participant added for the first time a section on cultural affairs. I was elected convener and presented a paper entitled "Strengthening the Functions of Cultural Center Libraries to Enhance Basic Cultural Activities."

The functions of the Cultural Center can be summarized into four categories:

1. Propagate national culture
2. Educate people in the society
3. Disseminate information
4. Advocate normal leisure life.

In order to carry out the policy of cultural development, the government established the Council for Cultural Planning and Development directly under the Executive Yuan. The first chair of the Council was Dr. Chen Chi-lu, eminent sociologist. The present chair is Dr. Kuo Wei-fan, a famous educator. The Council is organized into three business departments in addition to three administrative units.\(^5\)

The first department is responsible for cultural affairs concerning:
1. Formulation of fundamental policies of cultural development
2. Coordination and evaluation of cultural development projects
3. Coordination of the planning, revision, and execution of cultural development regulations and by-laws
4. Preservation and promotion of cultural assets
5. Planning and enforcement of cultural activities
6. Planning and enforcement of the preparation of personnel for cultural development
7. Collection, processing, and study of information in regard to cultural development
8. Planning and promotion of Chinese information systems
9. Planning, study, promotion, and evaluation of cultural exchange and cooperation
10. Other matters related to cultural development.

The second department is responsible for literature, drama, and cultural dissemination. The third department is in charge of music, art, and performing arts.

The organizational structure of the Council includes various committees which two of them are involved in cultural developments:

1. The Cultural Center Guidance Committee, composed of fourteen members, three of whom are library science professors; the chair of the Council serves as its convener.
2. The Linguistic and Library Committee, which is responsible for the development of the CCCIE (Chinese Character Code for Information Exchange).

Professor Cheng-ku Wang and I serve on both committees. The Cultural Center Guidance Committee makes inspection tours to every Cultural Center every year. The inspection tour usually takes about thirty days or so, spread over three months. A 264-page Cultural Center Work Handbook was published by the Council in 1988.\(^6\)
The focus of cultural centers is library services, as recorded in the *Guideline for Cultural Center Construction*, an original document issued by the government. Accordingly, the government poured in huge sums of money for the procurement of software.

**"Culture Construction" or "Cultural Monument"?**

In spite of the efforts of the government, the effectiveness of cultural centers has been questioned by many. Cultural construction has been ridiculed as "culture monuments." In the March 1, 1990, *United Daily*, there was an open letter from a young lady, Miss Gin Ling. In it she wrote, "In 40 years, Taiwan has created remarkable economic accomplishment, but the voidance of culture is also a shock to us. Cultural activities are the recreation only for a small group of people. Monuments of our ancestors are used as amusement parks. The new Cultural Centers look impressive and their usefulness is limited. The unlawful, chaotic actions of society, perhaps the absence of spiritual and cultural life, has something to do with them." The newspaper's headline for this letter was "To Promote Cultural Construction, There Is Not a Moment to Lose." It may not be fair to say that the mission of the cultural center is a total failure, but there are shortcomings. The reasons may be summarized as follows:

1. The Council for Cultural Planning and Development was established after the completion of the construction of Cultural Centers. The situation could be better off the other way around.

2. The construction appropriation came from different sources. The Ministry of Education and the Department of Education provided a certain amount of funds matched by funds from city and county government concerns. The mayors and county magistrates were elected officials. The construction of cultural centers were used as political capitals. The bigger the cultural center built, the better for the election campaign. As a result, the Keelung Cultural Center cost twice as much money in construction as Kaosiung.

3. The blueprints for cultural centers were designed and approved by city and county governments, without advice from professional librarians. The central and provincial government did not have much say about this matter. The authority of local self-government could not be touched.
4. The cultural center received appropriations from the provincial Department of Education, and grants and subsidies from the Council for Cultural Planning and Development. Theoretically speaking, the cultural centers are under the jurisdiction of the provincial Department of Education. The Cultural Council provides professional advice and guidance. It is not easy to draw the lines of responsibility.

5. Personnel has been a serious problem for cultural centers. In the first place, library science graduates cannot work in the libraries of cultural centers unless they have passed the civil service examinations. As a result, cultural centers cannot hire professional and qualified staff, and library science students cannot work in cultural centers. There is a bottleneck.

6. Taiwan is simply too rich for her own good. The latest report from the United Daily (March 22, 1990), Taiwan, R.O.C., was rated No. 12 on export and No. 16 on import in the countries of the world. People are with money and do not take low-salary jobs. Today, laborers have to be imported. The cultural centers cannot keep their staff very long.

7. The personnel problems seriously hurt the operations of cultural centers. Cataloging of books is way behind schedule.

8. Because of the revision of copyright laws, at least one audio-visual section at the Taichung Cultural Center is closed for good. According to the March 19, 1990, China Times, other audio-visual sections probably will follow suit. The section in cooperation with Sony has more than one thousand tapes in stock. From a judicial viewpoint, the audio-visual section of a cultural center is considered the same as MTV. MTV operates illegally. But a cultural center is a governmental institution. It must not violate the law.

9. The cultural center has to compete with MTV, department stores, amusement parks, and theatres for patrons. So far, the cultural center is fighting a losing war.

What to do? Future Prospects

What is said sounds bad enough. But the situation is not hopeless. The Council for Cultural Planning and Development has been working very hard to overcome the problems.
In 1989, the Cultural Center Guidance Committee made a special tour to evaluate the performances of cultural centers, using rating scales. The findings will be announced soon. The Council will place a twenty-page advertisement in the May 1990 issue of Tain-Hsia Magazine to promote concepts of culture; ten scholars are asked to contribute articles for the advertisement. The theme is "To create living space for equal wealth." The Council decided to emphasize cultural development. The responses from communities and elsewhere were tremendous. When Dr. Kao Wei-fan made his presentation at a hearing of the Legislative Yuan on cultural development, forty-four questions were registered for him. In his exchange of views with legislators, he said that he will sponsor a conference for culture development soon. In order to strengthen the finances of cultural activities, each cultural center has been requested to formulate a Culture Foundation of NT$20 million with NT$10 million provided by the Council as a matching fund.

The Department of Education of the Taiwan provincial government reinforces cultural construction from another angle. Under a three-year plan, each of the 309 villages and towns of Taiwan will have a library. More than two hundred rural libraries have been established. In the current budget year, the Department of Education is going to purchase 400,000 volumes of books in three areas (agriculture and forestry, fishery, and business and industry) to build collections of cultural centers. In addition, NT$40 million is to be appropriated for cultural lectures, exhibits, and literary activities. I was requested by the Department to compile a book entitled Theory and Practice of Village and Town Librarianship, which was published in 1989. The Library Association of China has been active in providing in-service training for library staffs. In the last two years, while I was chair of the education committee of the LAC and also director of summer workshops, we offered courses on rural librarianship taught by graduate students of the New York University Library School. With their teaching experiences, they were contributors to the book mentioned above. This year, we have already made plans for the Summer Workshop. A portion of the trainees will be recommended by the Council for Cultural Planning and Development and the provincial Department of Education, as in the last two years. Both government organizations subsidized the expense of our workshops. The Council will be reorganized as the Ministry of Culture in the latter part of this year.

The most encouraging news is that in Premier Lee Huan's "State of the Union" oral report to the Eighty-fifth Session of the Legislative Yuan in
February 1990, he placed cultural development as the first priority in his four-point program. As you may see, recalling the earlier part of my presentation, in twelve years cultural development projects climbed the ladder from the bottom to the top. This fact alone is a great leap forward for cultural centers.

NOTES


4. Chiang Ching-kuo, President of the R.O.C., Address at the Legislative Yuan on September 23, 1977.


7. Guidelines for Cultural Center Construction (Taiwan: Department of Social Education, National Taiwan Normal University, 1982).


9. Social Education and Cultural Construction (Taiwan: Department of Social Education, National Taiwan Normal University, 1982), 53-54.