

RENCANA-RENCANA/ARTICLES

Myanmar National Library*

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Abstrak: *Asul-usul Perpustakaan Negara Myanmar bermula dengan pembukaan Bernard Free Library pada 21 Feb. 1883. Pada awalnya ia berfungsi sebagai perpustakaan awam. Pada tahun 1952, kerajaan telah mengambilalih Perpustakaan ini dan ianya mulai dikenali sebagai Perpustakaan Negara Myanmar secara rasmi. Perpustakaan ini menghadapi berbagai masalah, seperti kekurangan bangunan yang sempurna, kekurangan tempat untuk menyimpan koleksinya yang semakin bertambah, kekurangan kakitangan ikhtisas, ketiadaan pertukaran asing untuk membeli buku-buku dan perkakas yang diperlukan dari luar negeri adalah merupakan masalah serius yang dihadapi oleh Perpustakaan ini. Walau bagaimanapun kerajaan Myanmar mengambil beberapa langkah positif seperti menambahkan nisbah kakitangan ikhtisas lebih dari 50% dalam tahun 1991, penambahan belanjawan untuk membeli buku, serta pembinaan perpustakaan baru yang dijangka siap pada pertengahan tahun 1991, memberikan harapan bahawa Perpustakaan Negara Myanmar akan menjadi suatu perpustakaan yang canggih; pada masa akan datang.*

Abstract: *The National Library of Myanmar originated from the Bernard Free Library which began in 1883. Initially it functioned as a public library. In 1952, the government took over the Library and it officially became known as the National Library of Myanmar. Like most national libraries in less developed countries, the National Library of Myanmar faces many problems. The lack of proper buildings and inadequate space to house growing collections, insufficient trained professional library staff, unavailability of foreign exchange to buy books and library equipment from abroad, are still serious problems. In spite of these myriad problems, the prospects for development of the National Library are good. The Government is doing all it can to provide buildings and space to house the collections. Establishment posts have been increased by over 50% in 1991, and positions for professional librarians have been created. The budget for collection development is also being increased. If the current trend continues, in a few years time the National Library of Myanmar will truly become one of the leading libraries in the country and be able to play its proper role in the development of libraries in Myanmar Naing-gan.*

ORIGINS

The National Library of Myanmar Naing-gan¹ has its origins in the Bernard Free Library² which first opened its doors to the public in Yangon,³ capital of British (Lower) Burma in February 1883. At the time the last Myanmar king of the Konbaung Dynasty, King Thibaw, was still reigning in Mandalay, the capital of the independent Myanmar Kingdom. It was only in November 1885 that King Thibaw surrendered to the British forces, and the whole country was annexed to the British crown on 1 January 1886.

The Chief Commissioner of Lower Myanmar, Sir Charles Edward Bernard had opened a library of his private collection of books at the centre of Yangon (the present Central State High School). This Library was the first free public library in Myanmar Naing-gan, and it was famous as the 'Bernard Free Library'. The

Library was located on Commissioner Road;⁴ it was a small unimposing one-storey building. The Bernard Free Library received valuable donations of books and other materials in its early years from Chief Justice Sir John Jardine and Pali Professor Childers, U Po Hmyin and U Myot, its first proprietors. U Po Hmyin and U Myot donated Rs.10,000 worth of palm-leaf and folded paper manuscripts (*parabaik*) to the Library. In 1920 the Library bought the palm-leaf and paper manuscript collection of Kinwun Mingyi U Kaung⁵ for Rs.15,000, and in 1924, the collection of U Tin (Pagan Wundauk) for Rs.5,000. Donation of books and manuscripts were received regularly. The Management of the Library was entrusted to the educational syndicate of the British Government. Annual grants were given to the Library by the Municipal Board and Government. By the time the Second World War engulfed Myanmar Naing-gan in 1942, the Library had collected 20,305 printed books, and about 7,500

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manuscripts. During World War II, the Bernard Free Library was totally damaged. It lost many of its printed books, and by the time war ended in 1945, there were only about 6,000 books left. Fortunately, due to the efforts of U Thein Han,⁶ the University of Yangon Librarian and a group of dedicated scholars, the entire manuscript collection of the Library, moved to the precincts of the Shwe Dagon Pagoda during the three war years, survived intact.

Establishment of the National Library

The Bernard Free Library re-opened after the war on 1 August 1948. Annual grants-in-aid were given by the Government and Municipal Board as before. In June 1952, the Library was transferred to the Government and moved to Jubilee Hall⁷ on the Shwe Dagon Pagoda Road.

After the Bernard Free Library was taken over by the Ministry of Culture, some books and other materials were added to the collection and the National Library was established. The National Library and the National Museum were both housed in the Jubilee Hall, and these two institutions at the time formed the Institute of Union Culture.

BUILDINGS

One of the main problems which has plagued the Myanmar National Library has been the lack of a proper building to house its collections. Since its inception in 1952 the Library has had to shift four times to different buildings in down-town Yangon.

After the war Bernard Free Library was given to Yangon Municipality it was at first housed in the City Hall. After the government take-over in June 1952, it was moved to Jubilee Hall where it was housed for a decade till June 1962. The Revolutionary Government came into power in March 1962, and the Minister for Culture decided that Jubilee Hall should be used only for the National Museum, and the National Library was shifted in June of that year to Pansodan (Phayre) Street. For over two years it remained there and in early 1965 it was once again shifted to the third floor of the City Hall where it remained for nearly another decade. On 24 December 1984 it was again moved to the New Secretariat Building on Strand Road where it is at present located. The National Library is at present located on the first and second floors of the Six-Storeyed Building⁸ on Kanna Lan,⁹ in front of the Yangon Port main wharfs and jetties, sharing with

other departments of various ministries the floor area of 11,316 sq. feet. This area is too small for the National Library to perform its proper library functions. A new five-storey building is to be constructed at the corner of Shwe-gon-dine Road and Kaba Aye Pagoda Road in the next few years.

It was only after the military takeover of 18 September 1988, that the State Law and Order Restoration Committee has arranged for a new building to be built for the National Museum on Pyay Road, and in mid-1990 acquired about 2.7 acres of land on a small hillock¹⁰ in the suburbs of Bahan, about three miles from Yangon city centre, to use for the National Library. Ownership of the site has been transferred to the National Library in June 1991. This site has an old three-storey building from pre-war days formerly used as a middle school which is being renovated and new buildings will also be built on the site. Building plans are being drawn up by the Yangon Institute of Technology architects (part of the university) in consultation with librarians and Department of Culture officials. There are plans to shift the National Library in 1991 to this new site, and we are hoping that it will at last find a permanent home there.

STAFF

Another big problem facing the Myanmar National Library is the lack of adequate professional staff.

A few years after the National Library was established in 1952, the Deputy Librarian of the University of Yangon Library, U Than Htut was appointed as the National Librarian in 1955. U Than Htut had been to the U.K. in 1947 and studied librarianship at the School of Librarianship at Loughborough College, and become an A.L.A. in 1951. His assistant, Daw Nyunt Myint, went to Columbia University in the late 1950s and obtained the Masters in Library Science degree. When U Than Htut was promoted to the post of Director of the Cultural Institute in 1960, Daw Nyunt Myint became the National Librarian and was in that post for about a decade until she took early retirement around 1970. There were no other professionally qualified librarians at the National Library for a number of years till the late 1980s when two professional librarians from the University Library System joined the National Library. They are U Khin Maung Tin, M.A. (Philosophy), Dip. Lib. (Yangon Univ.) (with three months in-service training at the National Library in Singapore); and U Myint Kyaing, B.Sc. (Yangon Univ.) Dip. Lib. (Yangon Univ.) and Graduate Diploma in Information Management (Librarianship) from the

University of New South Wales. Apart from the two librarians mentioned above, in mid-1991, five new posts for professional library staff have been approved by the Ministry of Culture, and graduates of the Postgraduate Diploma Course in Library Science from the University of Yangon have been appointed. There are now seven professional posts, but at present only six are filled.

At present there are only about 23 posts altogether from Librarian to library attendant, and the National Librarian has the status and salary equivalent only to an assistant lecturer in the university. In the University Library System there is one post with a professor's status and salary; 8 library posts ranked as lecturers; 34 library posts at the assistant lecturers' level; and 38 library posts at the level of tutors.

In the last three months of 1990, the National Library was promised more posts, and the number of library posts will be raised from the present 23 to a total of 38, an increase of 15 positions. In the new setup to be implemented in 1991, the National Librarian will be at a rank equivalent to a lecturer at the university; other appointments include three librarians at the assistant lecturers' level and six assistant librarians at the tutor level.

BUDGET

The National Library has also been hampered by lack of adequate funds for collection development. The annual budget is usually around 100,000 kyats (one lakh)¹¹ to buy books and periodicals. This is only about one tenth of what the Universities' Central Library has been getting for its annual budget. Compared to the University Library System, the National Library's budget is only about what a smaller university library gets for its collection development. In the last two years the National Library has been able to increase its book budget, but not substantially.

The lack of adequate funds prevents the National Library from buying old Myanmar manuscripts on palm-leaf (*pesa*), and paper (*parabaik*), and it is able to buy only a few old printed books and periodicals which come on the local second-hand (antiquarian) market each year. Like most libraries in Myanmar, the National Library also lacks funds in foreign exchange to buy from countries outside Myanmar. Gifts and donations from foreign foundations and organizations cannot be accepted. Out of its total book budget of about kyats one lakh, kyats 40,000 are used for buying books, and kyats 60,000 are used for buying

periodicals all in the local bookshops. Within the last four years, prices of Myanmar books and periodicals have risen by about 20 times due to inflation. It is clear that a great deal still needs to be done in collection-building and consolidation of the National Library.

COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT

In mid-1991 the National Library's book collection stood at about 139,000, of which about 105,000 volumes were in Myanmar language, and the rest in English (about 34,000 volumes). The periodical collection comprised 412 titles in Myanmar (about 326,965 issues), and 84 titles in English (about 123,320 issues). The manuscript collection had 9,158 *pesa* (palm-leaf mss. bundles) and 1,700 *parabaik* (paper-folding mss. volumes), a total of 10,858 volumes. Amongst the rare manuscripts are about 505 items in Mon language and 55 *sarkhwei* rolls of palm-leaf (i.e. Royal Orders, Orders of the Hluttaw Parliament, etc.). Included in this collection of rare mss. are about 6,600 mss. from Taungwingyi Museum and Library in Central Myanmar, brought down to Yangon on the orders of President U Ne Win in the late 1970s, a few months before the building and most of its collections were burnt in a big fire. Some very rare items are in this collection and they were fortunately saved just in time.

In 1965 the book collection stood at about 40,000 volumes. Therefore during a period of about 25 years the book collection increased by about one lakh (100,000) items. In the English book collection are about 2,000 volumes of rare items on Myanmar. The Library acquired the Darwood¹² Collection of rare books in English on Myanmar especially from the late 19th century and early 20th century colonial period -- a total of 791 items.

Under the Press and Publishers Registration Act of 1964, the National Library is the only Library which enjoys depository rights in Myanmar. A copy of every book registered under this Act is to be deposited at the National Library. But in actual fact the Library obtains only about one third of all items published in the Union of Myanmar. Government publications are exempted from Registration under this Act, and official publications are usually not sent to the Press Scrutiny and registration Department of the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Department which collects publications for the National Library.

In early 1991 the Librarian of the National Library and the Chief Librarian of the Universities Central Library held a meeting in the Press Scrutiny and

Registration Office to discuss with Publication Officers and representatives of various government departments to solicit their help in collection development of the National Library and the Universities Central Library.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The Ministry of Culture has two main directorates, namely

- (1) The Cultural Institute and
- (2) The Department of Fine Arts (see Chart I).

The Cultural Institute is headed by a Director General (Dr. Ye Htut). The Institute is made up of two component departments: the National Library; and the National Museum, both located in the capital, Yangon. Out of the 14 States and Divisions which make up the Union of Myanmar, there are now 12 State and Division National Libraries and Museums all under the Cultural Institute. In the States and Divisions the branches of the National Library and the National Museum are combined and are usually housed in a single building.

In recent years newly-designed buildings for the State and Division National Libraries and Museums have been built and opened in Mandalay (Mandalay Division), Mawlamyine¹³ (capital of Mon State), Taunggyi (capital of Shan State), and Patheingyi (Ayeyawady¹⁵ Division). There are also branches of the National Library and Museum in Sittwe¹⁶ (Rakhine¹⁷ State), Myitkyina (Kachin State), Loikaw (Kayah State), Hpa-an¹⁸ (Kayin¹⁹ State), Hakka (Chin State), Sagaing (Sagaing Division) and Bago²⁰ (Bago Division).

The only two divisions which do not at present have branches of the National Library and Museum are the Tanintharyi²¹ Division and the Magway²² Division.

TECHNICAL PROCESSING AND STANDARDIZATION

The National Library, like most libraries in Myanmar, uses the Dewey Decimal Classification System and the Anglo-American Cataloguing Code. Professional library training is being carried out since 1971 in Myanmar, solely at the Department of Library Science, University of Yangon, and very few librarians get a chance to train outside Myanmar. The Department of Library Science at the University is headed by the

Chief Librarian of the Universities' Central Library, and standardization is being achieved mainly through UCL, and not the National Library -- at least at present.

For the Postgraduate Library Diploma Course at the University, DDC and AACR are taught in some detail, and also the compilation of bibliographies. The six professional librarians at the National Library are all graduates of this course.

UCL and the Department of Library Science at the University have also worked out expansions for DDC numbers on Buddhism, on Myanmar language and literature and on Myanmar history (with period divisions) and geography (with area divisions). DDC numbers have also been assigned or expanded for subjects popular with Myanmar writers, such as histories and legends of pagodas, alchemy, traditional medicine, astrology, fortune-telling and so on. Subject headings in Myanmar language have also been compiled. As the AACR for Myanmar personal names is inadequate, UCL and the Department of Library Science has compiled extensive lists of Myanmar pen names and pseudonyms (contained in two mimeographed foolscap-sized volumes), and also rules for Myanmar personal and religious names and titles of royalty and nobility, all in collaboration with IFLA, and also rules for names of persons for some of the main ethnic groups of Myanmar.

Through UCL and the Department of Library Sciences, standardization is being achieved at all the main libraries in Myanmar, including the National Library. It is hoped that eventually the National Library will take a leading role in library development and standardization in conjunction with UCL.

The National Library has separate card catalogues for Myanmar books and manuscripts, and also for books in English. There are typed cards for Author, Title and Subject Catalogues. Filing is by ALA filing rules, word by word, and for alphabetization in Myanmar script, the system worked out by the Myanmar Language Commission during the period when the Chief Librarian of UCL served as secretary to this Commission (i.e. from 1971 to 1976) is used. The Myanmar alphabetization scheme was widely circulated in several drafts all over Myanmar, and the final draft printed in Myanmar newspapers before it was finally approved. It is now used not only by the National Library, but by all libraries in Myanmar.

Apart from the card catalogues the National Library also maintains 25 Accession Registers in big

ledger-sized volumes for different types of materials and according to the way in which they were acquired, e.g. Myanmar government publications, UN depository, presentation and gifts, etc. There is also a Visible Index card catalogue for periodicals by title.

The National Library obtains one copy on deposit through the Press and Publishers Registration Act. It buys two copies of significant non-fiction, and one copy of fiction published in the country.

The library is open to all, but does not lend any materials except on inter-library loan to some of the bigger libraries in Myanmar, like UCL with which it has close inter-library lending arrangements. No lending or deposit fees are charged. The library material can be consulted in three reading rooms:

- (a) General Reading Room,
- (b) Periodicals Reading Room on the first floor, and
- (c) Manuscripts Reading Room on the second floor.

The closed stacks are not open to the public, and the catalogues have to be consulted and call slips entered for books, periodicals and mss. required by readers. Copying by hand or photocopying is allowed only after permission has been given by the librarian in charge.

CONCLUSION: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

Like most national libraries in least developed countries,²³ the National Library of Myanmar faces many problems. The lack of proper buildings and

inadequate space to house growing collections, insufficient trained professional library staff, unavailability of foreign exchange to buy books and library equipment from abroad, are all serious problems facing the National Library of Myanmar.

In spite of all these myriad problems, the prospects for development of the National Library are good. The Government is doing all it can be to provide buildings and space to house the collections.

Staff positions have been increased by over 50% in 1991, and positions for professional librarians created. The budget for collection development is also being increased. With the appointment of six librarians who have obtained the Postgraduate Diploma in Library Science from the University of Yangon, the National Library will now be able to take a more active part in library professional activities. The two top positions in the National Library have now been filled by professional librarians with many years of experience in the University Library System, professionally the most developed library system in Myanmar.

The librarians of the National Library are now working closely with their former colleagues of the Universities Central Library and other university libraries, especially in the fields of library training, compilation of both current and retrospective bibliographies, and standardization of library technical processing and bibliographical control. If the current trend continues, in a few years' time the National Library of Myanmar will truly become one of the leading libraries in the country and able to play its proper role in the development of libraries in Myanmar Naing-gan.

CHART I



NOTES

- * This article includes information contained in U Khin Maung Tin's 'A Brief History of the National Library of Myanmar'. (An unpublished typescript in English by the National Librarian), 2p.
- ¹ The official name for the country (Union of Myanmar). Formerly known as the Union of Burma and between 1974 and 1988 as the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma.
- ² Named after the Chief Commissioner of British Burma, Sir Charles Edward Bernard.
- ³ Known as Rangoon until mid-1989.
- ⁴ Known after Independence in Jan. 1948 as Bogyoke Aung San Street.
- ⁵ U Kaung was the last Myanmar Foreign Minister during King Mindon's and King Thibaw's reigns. A noted scholar and author, his collection is still a valuable source of Myanmar literature, law, and records in the National Library.
- ⁶ Well-known Myanmar poet, writer and scholar, who wrote under the pen-name Zawgyi.
- ⁷ An Assembly Hall in Yangon, built to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria. Now demolished.
- ⁸ The New Secretariat is now commonly known by this name.
- ⁹ New name for Strand Road.
- ¹⁰ Locally called Burjorjee Kon (hill) after its pre-war Indian owner. It is at the corner of Kaba Aye Pagoda Road and Shwegondine Road in the Komin Kochin Quarter of Bahan Township.
- ¹¹ The exchange rate is about kyats 6.5 to US\$1. Therefore the budget is about US\$15,384. But as books and other imported materials are available in Myanmar Naing-gan only at the unofficial black market rate which is about ten times the official rate, it means that this is only US\$1,538.
- ¹² J.W. Darwood, the rich proprietor of Messrs. J.W. Darwood, who first introduced tramways in the capital.
- ¹³ Formerly known as Moulmein.
- ¹⁴ Formerly known as Bassein.
- ¹⁵ Formerly known as Irrawaddy, i.e. the Irrawaddy River deltaic division.
- ¹⁶ Formerly known as Akyab.
- ¹⁷ Formerly known as Arakan.
- ¹⁸ Formerly known as Pa-an.
- ¹⁹ Formerly known as Karen.
- ²⁰ Formerly known as Pegu.
- ²¹ Formerly known as Tenasserim Division.
- ²² Formerly known as Magwe Division.
- ²³ Myanmar was accorded LDC status in early 1988 by the UN.

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