Report from CEAL, San Francisco, April 4-8, 2006   Kyungmi Lee

I went to a meeting called CEAL. It stands for the Council on East Asian Libraries and consists of approximately 300 members who work in various aspects in dealing with Chinese, Japanese and Korean language materials. Its umbrella organization is Association for Asian Studies. Because of the subject specialties, OCLC's CJK User Group meeting has always been held at the same time. In addition to the CEAL and OCLC CJK User meetings, I also attended the OCLC Connexion Client 1.5 CJK user workshop.

Here are a few things that I want to share with you.

"Vernacular" vs. "Script" or "Characters": When to use which term?

There has been a discussion among East Asian librarians for a long time on this issue. It is common among library professionals to use "vernacular" to describe the written form of the Chinese, Japanese and Korean languages. However, the proper meaning of vernacular can only be "using a language or dialect native to a region or country rather than a literary, cultured, or foreign language" or "the mode of expression of a group or class". For example, in history of Chinese literature, one speaks of vernacular novels and short stories. And early non-Latin translations of the Bible are often described as vernacular. These are the proper usages of the term "vernacular", not when it is used to describe a script, the original written representation of a language.

Some would still argue that when people say "vernacular", they mean materials in the languages of China, Japan and Korea. Is there an alternative? A lot of East Asian librarians found that using "original scripts" instead of "vernacular" works perfectly well. In fact, RLG, OCLC and LC have long stopped calling CJK "vernacular". We don't use vernacular for roman script material. Do librarians speaking Chinese refer to English material as vernacular? If we insist on calling CJK "vernacular", we continue to set them apart from the mainstream. CJK the vernacular languages, the exotic languages.

The director of East Asian Library at Columbia made a great presentation on this matter. Her point was so well addressed that after her presentation, I noticed that people used vernacular as an old habit but then corrected themselves right away. It was the mutual agreement that we stop using vernacular from now on. So, if you keep using vernacular, now you know you are committing a violation. It is "original script".

Next thing I want to share with you gets a bit technical.

CJK compatibility database and Korean Online Romanization dictionary

The CJK Compatibility Database is developed by LC to help catalogers to quickly and conveniently identify and replace non-MARC21 characters with MARC21 equivalents, or a missing character symbol. To help you understand, let me give you how I would use

this database. When I catalog materials in Korean original script, I use Microsoft IME (input method editors) to input Korean or Chinese characters.

Korean and Chinese characters I input using IME are from the Unicode character set. The Unicode character set includes several hundred duplicate CJK characters as well as many others that represent close variant. Generally, one of these variant is a MARC21 character, while the other is not. Because only MARC21 characters can be displayed in USMARC records, a non-MARC21 character in a bibliographic record must be replaced by its MARC21 equivalent. When I catalog in OCLC, if I submit a record for validation and there is a non-MARC21 character found, the system will give me an error message. I can use this database to identify the character and replace a non-MARC21 character with its MACR21 equivalent. The database also gives the Unicode value for each character, along with other information that may be helpful in identifying the characters and describing how the MARC21 character may be input. If any of you want further information, please let me know. I will send the address for the website.
http://www.loc.gov/ils/cjk_search/cjk-about.html

Another database I want to share with you is Korean Romanization online dictionary. What it is that it lets you look up Korean words by inputting them in a search box, just like an ordinary online dictionary, it will return you the correct form of Romanization which is based-on McCune Reischauer system. This is cooperative undertaking, and I am a proud contributor to this dictionary. The dictionary is growing as more words are added by members of the project and will be greatly useful for any catalogers dealing with Korean language materials. http://www.romanization.org

The most interesting part of the meeting was the fellowship dinner. We had 10-course Cantonese style banquet with live music in a restaurant in Chinatown. The Chinese female singer was singing Chinese, Japanese and Korean contemporary songs while we were eating. What became entertaining was that when the singer sang a Korean song, one of Korean librarians thought that it was not good enough. So she ran into the stage herself and sang the same Korean song again (I was not the one). It was such a big hit that soon after people who thought that they could sing started jumping to the stage. Chinese Japanese and Korean librarians were competing to each other. A Chinese librarian who was once trained for Beijing Opera sang lyrics from a play, and Japanese librarians grouped together like a choir, and the past president of the CEAL played his own harmonica. I found that Karaoke was such a great way of making friendship.

It was the first time I went to CEAL meeting, and the most frequently asked question to me was "So, you are from Stony Brook. Where is that?" I didn't find anyone from SUNY system except myself, and I was very happy to represent Stony Brook University to this amazing group.