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From the President

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Names are important because they have connotations and because some people care very much about those connotations. When asked by a disciple what an administrator should do as a first priority, Confucius mentioned the rectification of names. He explained that if the wrong terms were used, the situation could not be described truthfully. If a situation were not described truthfully, nothing could be accomplished. " 名不正，則言不順；言不順，則事不成 " (*Lun yu*, XIII, iii)

As librarians we pay much attention to terms and headings. We compile thesauri and lists of subject headings. We also establish authority files to maintain standards. Generally speaking, common, current and neutral terms are preferable to obscure, dated and controversial ones. We now use "Taiwan" and "Cheng, Ch'eng-kung" instead of "Formosa" and "Koxinga." (Unfortunately, the Library of Congress still insists on using the term "Manchuria" for Northeast China.)

The wrong message is sent whenever an inappropriate term is used. Apparently, any language not using the roman script is now referred to as a vernacular language by those who make decisions in the library profession. "Vernacular" is not a neutral term. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* includes these definitions: 1) using a language or dialect native to a region or country rather than a literary, cultured, or foreign language; and 2) of, relating to, or being the normal spoken form of a language.

East Asian (Chinese, Japanese and Korean) languages are literary and cultured. In the context of Chinese literature, "vernacular" is used to describe popular literature, fiction in particular, of the late imperial period in contrast to traditional, literary literature. This usage is in fact quite similar to its usage in the west. The early German and English Bibles are usually described as the vernacular versions vis-a-vis the Latin version. Yet very few people today would call German or English vernacular languages, and most Germans and Englishmen would be offended if people from other countries were to describe their languages as vernacular.

Why can't we refer Chinese, Japanese and Korean simply and properly as non-roman languages and non-roman scripts? We should aim at adding non-roman language data to our library databases such as name authority files, but these should be described correctly. A vernacular language is not a foreign language, so this usage of describing East Asian languages as vernacular may not be Eurocentric but it certainly is sending a wrong message that these languages are exotic if not non-literary and non-cultural. People may think that there is no urgency to deal with these peripheral non-essential data, and place their inclusion in ILS as low priorities.

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