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Tribute to Eugene Wu

Weiying Wan

Eugene Wu

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TRIBUTE TO EUGENE WU

On March 25, 1998, on the occasion of the Plenary Session of the Council on East Asian Libraries, Eugene Wu, recently retired as Librarian of the Harvard-Yenching Library, was honored for his many years of distinguished service to the field of East Asian librarianship and CEAL. Weiying Wan, Head of the Asia Library at the University of Michigan, presented him with a plaque reading

On the occasion of your retirement
the Council on East Asian Libraries
wishes to recognize and salute
Eugene Wen-chin Wu
for your four decades of
extraordinary achievement
and leadership
in the fields of
East Asian librarianship and scholarship
and your many contributions to CEAL

Weiyiing Wan then read the following citation:

Citation

To Eugene Wen-Chin Wu, for his distinguished service to the profession and to the Council on East Asian Libraries.

For four decades you have been the dynamic leading force in the development of research sources for modern and contemporary China studies. As Curator of the East Asian Collections at Hoover Institution and as the Librarian of the Harvard Yenching Library, you presided over the growth of two outstanding collections whose riches have made possible the coming of modern Chinese studies.

When there was little direct access to China, you obtained for Chinese studies the invaluable Chen Cheng Collection. When there was urgent need for bibliographic information on modern and contemporary China research, you and your collaborators accepted the challenge by producing the invaluable bibliographic and research guide, Contemporary China: A Research Guide, based on the resources of libraries and research institutions around the world. Your survey of three continents, and your talents as scholar, diplomat, and entrepreneur, led to the establishment of the Center for Chinese Research Materials (CCRM), further enriching the base for scholarship.
As Chairman of the Committee on East Asian Libraries, you launched the study of the range of problems faced by our libraries, bringing national attention and new funding to their solution. Among your many other accomplishments have been your role in planning for the Library of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the library workshop conducted in Szechuan for the United Board for Christian Higher Education, and your unfailing generosity in sharing resources and information.

History remembers leaders for the exemplification, their accomplishments, and their expressions of ideals. We admire you for the aspiration you inspire in others, for your achievements which benefit others, and for your dissemination of knowledge shared with others. The Council on East Asian Libraries honors itself in recognizing so distinguished a career.

Farewell Speech

Eugene Wu

Thank you very much for this award. It's a great honor to follow Ed Beal and T. H. Tsien in receiving this recognition from CEAL, and I am deeply grateful.

As you know, I have been a librarian for a long time, 46 years to be exact, first with the East Asian Collection at the Hoover Institution and then with the Harvard-Yenching Library at Harvard. My service coincided with the development of East Asian libraries in North America and with the growth of CEAL. It’s enormously gratifying to see how East Asian libraries have developed in the last fifty years, and how CEAL and its predecessor bodies have functioned effectively in guiding that development.

We have come a long way from the days when CEAL meetings were held in someone’s hotel room at AAS meetings, and there were no CEAL committees and there was no fax or e-mail. But a lot of work was done, such as the wholesale revision of the ALA and LC cataloging rules, the Oriental Vernacular Card Reproduction Project at LC, and the founding of the Chinese Materials Center in Taipei, the initiation of the statistical survey, the publication of the CEAL Bulletin, etc. The role CEAL played in the development of East Asian libraries in North America was so vital that it is difficult to imagine where we would be today without the leadership that has been provided by CEAL. In receiving this award, I would like to pay tribute to those who labored long and hard for the benefit of our field, people like Kaiming Chiu, Ed Beal, T.H. Tsien, Raymond Nunn, Dick Howard, and Warren Tsuneishi, just to name a few.

With the advent of automation and the changed funding pattern in recent years, the latter especially regarding Japanese library resources, CEAL no longer has to be responsible for everything that has to do with East Asian libraries in North America. RLG has its East Asian Studies Advisory Group, OCLC has the OCLC CJK Users Group, and there are the National Coordinating Committee on Japanese Library Resources and several consortia on the acquisition of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean materials. But each of these groups has its own constituencies, and they do not reduce the importance of CEAL as the national organization of all East Asian
libraries. CEAL is still ideally suited to lead the national discourse on many of the problems facing East Asian libraries, and to help reach a national consensus on how best to approach them.

The recent discussion on pinyin is a case in point. And one question that has been brought forth by the pinyin discussion is whether we should continue to use romanization at all, given the technological advances in dealing with the CJK scripts and the paramount importance of better and easier communication with libraries in East Asia which do not use romanization. CEAL should begin making an examination of this question. The recent discussions on upgrading the EACC code, the Unicode, and the incorporation of CJK scripts in the authority file are all matters of national concern, and CEAL has an important role to play in all such discussions.

The increasing availability of electronic resources in CJK languages and their acquisition by our libraries poses another problem that can best be dealt with from a national perspective. With limited financial resources, what is the most cost-effective way to achieve a proper balance between print materials and electronic resources for our libraries? Should a national consortium, or regional consortia, be formed for the collecting and sharing of such resources and their costs? Should RLG and OCLC be asked to mount these resources on their databases and pass on the costs to the user libraries? (The OCLC CJK Users Group has already begun discussions with OCLC on this question.) The problems involving electronic resources will undoubtedly become more complex in the future. CEAL can help articulate a national vision so that the opportunities presented by this new challenge will not run ahead of our understanding of them. We need to move quickly, but we also want to make sure we do not end up at the wrong place.

The success of the Japan Documentation Center at LC, at the Reischauer Institute for Japanese Studies at Harvard, and recently at the University of Pittsburgh suggests the need for such centers for Chinese and Korean studies as well. CEAL can take the lead in exploring the issues involved in establishing them.

Similarly, there is the question of preservation. Traditional CJK publications in the stitch-bound format require special treatment which cannot be provided by conservators trained in dealing with Western-language materials. Might it be possible for CEAL to seek financial support to invite an expert book conservator from East Asia to conduct workshops in this country to train our own people in at least the rudiments of conserving CJK materials?

Finally, there is the question of training East Asian librarians. While a great deal of on-the-job training takes place at individual libraries, especially regarding the application of technology, East Asian libraries lack a systematic training program for those entering our field, or a program for continuing education. The academic side of East Asian studies maintains its vigor by training Ph.D. students, often with financial support, but East Asian libraries do not have such a system. Many years ago, the University of Chicago instituted a joint Ph.D. program between its Library School and its East Asian Studies Department, but that program, though quite successful, is now defunct with the demise of its Library School and the retirement of T.H. Tsien. For the long-term health of East Asian libraries, CEAL might want to explore the possibility of reintroducing the Chicago program elsewhere, or at least help solicit funds to conduct short-term summer institutes such as the ones that were held at the University of Wisconsin, the University of Washington, and the University of Chicago many years ago.
There is no doubt that you can think of other programs CEAL can do. The point is that CEAL, as the national organization of East Asian libraries and librarians, is the body that is best equipped to continue to guide the development of all East Asian libraries in North America. It has an impressive track record on which to build. Let’s rededicate ourselves to making CEAL an even stronger and an even more effective organization for the next 50 years.

Thank you again, and I wish you continued success.