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KARL LO - A TRIBUTE

March 9, 2007

Eugene Wu

“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: A time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot... a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance...” (Ecclesiastes 3:1-4)

Dear Friends:

We are gathered here today not to mourn Karl's passing, but to celebrate a life that was full of meaning and achievement. Karl was energetic, vibrant, helpful, supportive, dedicated, and a visionary in his chosen profession. Jenny tells me that Karl didn't want to have a memorial service, because he didn't want people to talk about him. That was another aspect of Karl: he was always unfailingly modest.

I knew Karl for more than forty years, since he began his library career at the University of Kansas in the 1960's. I got to know him better when he moved to the University of Washington in the 1970's, where some twenty five years earlier I had been a student helper at the UW Library. As time went by, our professional relationship developed into a personal one as well; I found him to be a very kind and caring person, and we became close friends. Karl had a very keen and questioning mind and was strictly analytical in his approach to problems, perhaps because of his early scientific training. I always admired the conviction and logic with which he would advance an argument. That is what was so special about him. He was a man of conviction and vision. Having witnessed the impressive successes research libraries had in automating the operations beginning in the 1970's, Karl was among the few who saw the potential for the same things happening in East Asian libraries, if East Asian scripts could be machine-processed the same way Roman alphabets were. And he was certain that that could be done, because much progress was already being made in that area at the time in East Asia, particularly in Taiwan. So he urged his colleagues in the East Asian library community that we should hasten to learn from our colleagues in Asia for our own benefit. Ever since that time, from the mid-1970's until his last days, he never ceased to be the sparkplug for the role high technology could play in East Asian libraries.

Moreover, Karl was a doer. He took an active part in technological developments himself. He became a consultant to Academia Sinica in Taiwan, where Dr. C.C. Hsieh had earlier invented CCCII (Chinese Character Code for Information Interchange), from which the Research Libraries Group (RLG) in 1982 derived the now national standard EACC (East Asian Character Code for Bibliographic Use). He was also consulted by OCLC on the development of its CJK (Chinese, Japanese, and Korean) program, and he helped organize the OCLC CJK Users Group in 1991. The Wade-Giles-to-Pinyin software Karl developed as a self-taught programmer was used by many East Asian libraries and by OCLC in converting its huge file of Chinese records from Wade-Giles romanization to Pinyin between 2000 and 2003, a gigantic achievement that benefited the East Asian studies community world wide.

While at UCSD Karl was a founder of the Pacific Rim Digital Library Alliance for open sharing of digital and other materials before such international cooperation in the sharing of digital materials became common. Always generous in sharing his knowledge and talents, Karl conducted with me two month-long workshops on library management in China in 1982, one at Sichuan University in Chengdu and one at the Shaanxi Normal University in Xi'an, and he lectured specifically on technology application in libraries. That was twenty-five years ago. He also organized the Summer Institute for East Asian Librarians at the University of Washington in 1988. In short, Karl practiced what he preached, and he was always passionate about what he was doing. Anyone who knew Karl well can tell you that he was always questioning the status quo, and with a twinkle in his eye he would ask, was there anything more we could do. In a speech given at the celebration of the 20th anniversary of OCLC's CJK Service on April 8, 2006, in San Francisco--perhaps his

last public appearance before an East Asian library group--Karl said he had four fantasies: "(1) Replace the EACC (East Asian Character Code) with Unicode; (2) Reach beyond MARC (Machine Readable Cataloging Format); (3) Be fair and square with IP (Intellectual Property) rights; and (4) Put our PCs on a grid." That was vintage Karl Lo. He was always thinking ahead, and always ahead of the wave.

Thinking of Karl, I thought of what Robert F. Kennedy once said, borrowing from Bernard Shaw: "There are those who look at things the way they are, and ask, "Why?" I dream of things that never were, and ask, "Why not?" Karl, we love you and will miss you greatly!