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CEAL Task Force for Review of the ERMB Interim Report

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Background

In response to the huge demand of managing e-resources, ERMB (The CEAL Task Force on Metadata Standards and Best Practices for East Asian Electronic Resources) was appointed in November 2013 by the CEAL President and charged to investigate the best practices for creating, manipulating, and managing electronic content and metadata for resources in East Asian languages. Since March 2014, ERMB has organized training workshops and symposia to promote international metadata standards including NISO (National Information Standards Organization) standards, PCC (Program for Cooperative Cataloging) Provider-neutral Guidelines for e-resources. It also led the effort to translate NISO standards into Chinese in collaboration with Chinese academic institutions. Some of the ERMB workshops were organized in conjunction with the CEAL Committee on Technical Processing and/or Committee on Public Services to promote standardized metadata for e-resources among catalogers, bibliographers, and public service librarians. Following the PCC/CONSER DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals) model, ERMB cooperative cataloging project for three Chinese e-journal collections has been a great showcase for collaboration among the CEAL community.

In light of emerging trends such as digital humanities, digital harvesting and repositories as well as e-resource metadata in the next-gen library systems, the CEAL Task Force for Review of the ERMB was formed in June 2020 and was charged to examine the current ERMB Task Force's charge to see whether or not the ERMB can be expanded or redefined, or it should be established as a new standing committee. This preliminary report aims to share our early findings with CEAL members for feedback. The Task Force will recommend any proposed changes or updates for the CEAL Executive Board's consideration by December 2021.

Statistics and importance of e-resource metadata

According to the CEAL statistics of 2020, CEAL member libraries currently subscribe to a total of 96 e-journal databases (including more than 2.3 million titles), 138 e-book databases (including nearly 34 million titles), and 23 audio-visual databases (including

more than 0.3 million items). Almost all the content is in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean languages, except for a minimal fraction of non-CJK-language materials.[i] This sheer volume of e-content CEAL colleagues are managing justifies the ongoing need for quality metadata at all levels.

However, it is generally agreed that metadata provided by CJK e-resource vendors, if any, have been less than satisfactory. The typical examples include missing serial title changes such as former titles, wrong citations, wrong publisher information and publication dates, and wrong URLs, which are exactly the issues addressed in the NISO PIE-J (Presentation and Identification of E-Journals) standards. Cooperative cataloging projects such as those on Chinese e-journals led by ERMB are indispensable, and even more urgently needed under the circumstances of ever-increasing electronic and digital resources available to patrons in East Asian studies, via institutional subscriptions or open access.

Other organizations

Many of CEAL's peer organizations on area studies librarianship have long been engaging in metadata-related work. For example, the ACRL European Studies Section Slavic Cataloging and Metadata Committee led the effort of creating the Slavic Cataloging manual. A number of institutions with Slavic cataloging specialists have independently added Cyrillic paired fields to WorldCat records and submitted Slavic-related subject headings through SACO (Subject Authority Cooperative Program) Slavic funnel. Recently the Middle Eastern studies librarianship community has conducted workshops and conversations on exploring and implementing linked data, BIBFRAME, and Wikidata.[ii]

In Japan, institutions such as the Center for Open Data for Humanities demonstrate high demands of open data in digital scholarship, and the first issue of "Metadata reviews," an open-access journal on metadata was published in May 2021, indicating strong interest in metadata issues in the Japanese library community. As for metadata standards, the National Diet Library of Japan (NDL) created a webpage for Dublin Core metadata rules and best practices, but no metadata guidelines for general e-resources.

Among these activities, even though the importance of metadata is recognized, there has not yet been a particular focus on e-resources metadata standards and the promotion of these standards. Therefore, CEAL's consolidated initiatives and devoted programs thus far on e-resource metadata standards and best practices make CEAL stand on the vanguard of such efforts in the area studies librarianship community.

Recommendations

After reviewing ERMB's past activities, CEAL statistics, and other organizations' e-resources related activities, the Task Force came up with the following recommendations:

- Collaboration between technical services and public services

E-resource metadata issues are closely related to vendor relations and license agreements. To ensure that e-resources are discoverable through quality metadata, libraries should include the provision of standardized metadata while negotiating license agreements with vendors. For this reason, the Task Force believes it is imperative that ERMB involve both technical and public services (including collection) specialists.

- Communication among the CEAL CJK community

So far ERMB's activities have heavily relied on Chinese projects such as the NISO standards Chinese translation project and China-U.S. Forum on Standards for Digital Resources. Although Chinese e-resources have been most prevalent, there are also Japanese and Korean e-resources projects in progress, such as those on KISS (Korean Studies Information Service System) database and NCC database. ERMB can play a leading role in connecting e-resources projects across C, J, and K.

- ERMB's role as a standing committee

It is important for CEAL stakeholders to communicate with each other to establish e-resource metadata standards that can be used throughout the CJK community. Collaborative cataloging projects across C, J, K, and a group consisting of CJK representatives that monitors the application of metadata standards are needed. The Task Force recommends that CEAL elevate ERMB from a task force to a standing committee that can organize and maintain such projects.

- ERMB should expand its activities

Given the growing interest in digital scholarship, the Task Force thinks that ERMB should expand its activities to cover a more diversified range of e-resources besides library subscribed databases, such as born-digital resources, OA resources, and DH projects, with regard to standardized metadata for discovery and sharing.

Please note that these are tentative recommendations that have not yet been approved by the CEAL Executive Board. We welcome any feedback.

Conclusion

It is a consensus among the library community that e-resource metadata quality has a significant impact on resources' discoverability. In the case of CJK metadata, the problem caused by poor-quality metadata is even more prominent, since it involves issues such as CJK scripts and standardized Romanization. In addition, with the emerging technologies, such as linked data, and their roles in digital scholarship, metadata management is now necessary for much broader types of e-resources. Therefore, ERMB's task of investigating best practices for creating and managing e-resource metadata and promoting metadata standards becomes increasingly more important. The Task Force for review of the ERMB recommends that CEAL change the status of ERMB to a standing committee with expanded roles.

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[i] Statistical count is based on three files that the CEAL Statistics Committee provided to the task force. The files are 1) AudioVisual Databases with subscribers - CEAL Statistics Database 20200202; 2) EBook Databases with subscribers - CEAL Statistics Database 20200202; 3) EJournal Databases with subscribers

- CEAL Statistics Database 20200202. The authors wish to thank the CEAL Statistics Committee for their assistance in generating the data.

[ii] The authors would like to thank Leigh Billings and Evyn Kropf from the University of Michigan for sharing useful information.