Editorial Note

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EDITORIAL NOTE

We wish to call your attention to LC's announcement of its "Plan for Romanization" which appeared in the LC Information Bulletin, Vol. 37 (October 27, 1978). Because of the implications of the announcement on the future operation of East Asian libraries, we are reproducing it in its entirety in this issue of the CEAL Bulletin, pp. 43-44. As any decision by the Library of Congress at this time to adopt full romanization in cataloging without the use of Chinese, Japanese, or Korean scripts is likely to become a permanent practice resulting in "all Library of Congress records (monograph and serials), whether in card, machine readable, or other forms" being available in romanized form only, CEAL urges all East Asian librarians and their users to seriously consider the grave consequences to which such a permanent practice would give rise, and register their concern accordingly with the Processing Department of the Library of Congress.

The basic argument for the use and retention of the original vernacular scripts in cataloging is that a fully romanized catalog card for any East Asian publication in the vernacular would at best be an unintelligible, ambiguous, and degraded record to librarians and users alike. The distinction between alphabetic languages and East Asian languages in romanized form must be clearly understood. While it is possible, in the case of alphabetic languages, to deduce from romanization the original forms, such a reversibility, in the case of East Asian languages, does not really exist. The homonyms in East Asian titles and the homophones in East Asian names alone are sufficient to render useless a fully romanized catalog record without the original scripts. It may be argued that insofar as technology still does not lend itself easily to automating catalog records in East Asian scripts, consideration of possible benefits of full romanization should therefore outweigh the sacrifices for the sake of economy. The real issue, it seems to us, is whether any major change in practice serves the interest of scholarship for which all research libraries exist. We submit that doing away with East Asian scripts in cataloging East Asian publications does not contribute to the fulfillment of that objective.

We are painfully aware of the budgetary constraints now operative in the maintenance and development of all research collections. East Asian libraries, because of the nature of the materials they must deal with, find themselves in a special situation which calls for special solutions. Procrustean measures may present certain economic attractions in the short term. As librarians and administrators responsible for the procuring and servicing of East Asian materials for scholarly pursuits, we would be derelict in our duties if we were to confuse our priorities for temporary convenience. East Asian research collections are an expensive proposition, but it remains our conviction that in the matter of automation the logical solution to the problems caused by nonroman scripts would be our diligent attention to and support of further research and development. In this, we urge the East Asian community, in addition to making known their concern to LC, to rededicate themselves to working with all concerned in order to find a satisfactory solution to the problem we face.

For your information we have included in a special appendix in this issue correspondence on this subject with the Library of Congress.

(Eugene W. Wu)