CULCON XX

May 10-11, 2001, Los Angeles

NCC Recommendations to US CULCON Panel on Information Access Issues Related to *Digital Culture*

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Since CULCON XIX asked the NCC to continue work on information access issues with colleagues in Japan and the US, those efforts have continued to focus on many projects related to CULCON's new focus on *Digital Culture.* Broadly speaking, the NCC and its counterparts have worked to advance all of the Information Access Working Group's seven recommendations. The NCC is pleased to provide a summary of activities and initiatives directed at facilitating access to digital cultural resources in the library and information field. This summary will highlight the considerable progress that has been made as well as several significant challenges that need to be resolved:

Key advances in *Digital Culture*-related projects in the library and information field since the last CULCON Meeting in 1999 include:

- The electronic interlibrary loan (ILL) and document delivery (DD) pilot project between the AAU/ARL/NCC Japan Journal Access Project and Japan's Association of National University Libraries (ANUL) successfully demonstrated how the technology that facilitates electronic ILL/DD can support the supply and demand for materials in many areas of research. Participants who reviewed the project after its completion at the end of 2000 now advise the prompt implementation of systems of global interlibrary loan and document delivery that would employ digital technologies such as those tested. New efforts will build on the strong professional working relationships established among project organizers.

- Japanese bibliographic databases are vastly more accessible than they were a few years ago, and the National Diet Library's plan to make the *Zasshi Kiji Sakuin* available free of charge, will be of great benefit. Other bibliographic utilities are expanding the scope of their offerings to include important archival materials, and the National Institute for Informatics (NII, formerly NACSIS) has produced major innovations that will further enable access to Japanese databases and resource sharing among all libraries in Japan and globally.

- The NCC is working to develop strategies for consortial licensing of expensive bibliographic utilities, database services, and newspaper archives to serve all scholars and students, especially those in smaller institutions without Japanese studies librarians or without the budgets to afford expensive site licenses.

- Important new online digital access projects have been launched by the NCC in collaboration with the Council on East Asian Libraries of the Association for Asian Studies, and other organizations:

- EASyHelp, a pilot project to develop an electronic scholarly reference service designed especially for East Asian faculty, students, and scholars who work in isolation or at small institutions without specialist librarians or significant Japanese language collections, is being tested, and

- EASyGuides, online quick reference materials to develop Japanese language computer and information literacy skills among faculty, students, scholars, non-specialist librarians, and the general public, are being developed.

- Other projects are currently underway to develop a series of hands-on training programs in Japanese electronic resources for users and non-specialist librarians. And another project seeks to provide librarians with training in the cataloging, preservation, and digitizing of unique and fragile Japanese language materials held in both Japanese and North American collections.

Yet there remain obstacles that impede the full scholarly use of the *Digital Culture* resources current available. Specific issues that will most benefit from CULCON's high-level attention include:

1) Examining issues of copyright in a digital environment. Will the proposed copyright revisions currently under consideration in Japan and the US be driven largely by economic concerns, which may lead to "the privatization of digital knowledge?" Or will new understandings of copyright take advantage of the power of the Internet to broaden general knowledge and to raise the level of communications and research? Open electronic access to and exchange of scholarly information may lead to greater innovation in basic research, broader scholarly collaboration, and, possibly, the potential for scientific breakthroughs facilitated by online cooperation. Any restrictions to current copyright laws will certainly be felt in classrooms, at all levels of education. Either knowledge produced by the scholarly community will be freely available for use by the educational community or it will become yet more inaccessible because it will be available only from overly-restrictive commercial sources.

2) Encouraging vendors of electronic resources to license their services more economically and with license terms that support educational access to and use of those products. Through consortial licensing agreements and the continued aggregation of databases, more products are becoming widely available and the economies of scale may drive down costs. However even if digital databases become more inexpensive, without the adoption of balanced licensing terms, many East Asian collections will not be permitted to subscribe to those databases because the terms are too restrictive.

3) Encouraging policies to facilitate fee payment methods for digital services that apply across national borders, in multiple currencies, and under the administrative oversight of a range of institutional bureaucracies. The National Institute of Informatics is implementing an international standard to permit exchange of ILL requests between the NACSIS-ILL system and OCLC ILL system. Implementation is projected for completion in October 2001. The development of effective means to pay ILL fees is also a high priority; exchange of payment requires both technical and policy solutions.

4) Supporting further opening of access to Japanese statistical data sources for analysis by scholars and practicing social scientists worldwide. Raw data from basic statistical samples are widely available and used internationally following accepted provisions to protect individual privacy. Japan stands out as an exception to these accepted patterns. Social scientists and other scholars encourage Japan to revise its policies regarding confidentiality and to open its raw data to researchers.

CULCON's attention to these four issues is strongly encouraged by the NCC and by its counterparts in North America and Japan. We believe that CULCON's focus on these issues can lead to

resolutions that will benefit the exchange and scholarly collaboration between Japan, the US, and individuals in all nations, in this new millennium. The results of the document delivery pilot project commissioned by CULCON XIX clearly demonstrated the ease, potential range, and practicality of research collaborations and resource sharing in an electronic environment. Although the licensing of databases is becoming more open, formidable obstacles remain to attaining the objectives defined by CULCON's new focus on *Digital Culture.* Much hinges on reaching agreement on current copyright laws in the digital environment, on the broader licensing of digital data, on the acceptance of uniform methods for tracking ILL requests and paying associated fees, and on the further opening of data sources to scholarly inquiry. The NCC seeks CULCON's assistance in our efforts to resolve these issues, to enable citizens of Japan and the US open access to *Digital Culture.*