

Infrastructural Support for Developers of Electronic Resources for Asian Studies

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Universities, institutes, and other organizations establish infrastructures, including libraries, in order to support research, teaching, and service activities. Academic societies sponsor conferences, issue publications, and provide other pieces of the infrastructural puzzle on behalf of entire academic fields and disciplines as well as for sub-specialties within larger fields.

Reviewing the history of organizations one can identify the origin and evolution of such support structures. For example, the Council on East Asian Libraries (CEAL) is an organization that was founded by librarians and exists to support their work. CEAL's many activities, such as an annual meeting, committees, regular compilations of statistics, publication of a journal and a directory, sponsorship of an email list and a web site, and so on, constitute an infrastructure to support East Asian library collections and the librarians who work in them. Each activity addresses a need. The organization responds with an ongoing commitment to support the activity primarily by providing a structure for organizing the work of volunteers. Traditional infrastructures can be tangible objects, including: buildings, libraries, computing centers, museums, networks, laboratories, computers and peripheral equipment. In addition serial publications such as journals, newsletters and directories can be considered as parts of the infrastructure. Finally, meetings, conferences, administrative structures and support staffing are often essential.

What infrastructure needs do developers of electronic resources for Asian studies have? In particular, what infrastructures best support large, distributed, collaborative, digital projects? In what way are those infrastructures similar to the buildings and libraries of institutions or the committees and journals of academic organizations? Are there any special challenges in establishing infrastructures to support electronic resource development?

This paper discusses infrastructures that contributed to bringing three collaborative/cooperative projects in which I have been involved to fruition:

1. Japanese Journals Information Web <http://pears.lib.ohio-state.edu>
2. Kinema Club <http://pears.lib.ohio-state.edu/Markus/Weldome.html>
3. AsianDOC Electronic Newsletter <http://asiandoc.lib.ohio-state.edu>

Japanese Journals Information Web

The Japanese Journals Information Web is a new service that we announced on the World Wide Web only in January 1999. This service is being offered in coordination with the National Coordinating Committee on Japanese Library Resources (NCC), the Association of Research Libraries(ARL), and the American Association of Universities(AAU). It consists of two major elements: the Union List of Japanese Serials and Newspapers and the Japanese Journal Current Awareness Project.

The Union List of Japanese Serials and Newspapers currently comprises 6,000 titles held by twenty libraries or available over the World Wide Web. This union list succeeds a printed publication compiled by the CEAL Committee on Japanese Materials and published in 1992 that, in turn, grew out of regional union lists. This digital union list, however, has not been input from the printed one. Instead, records have been collected directly from online library catalogs into a database with pre-scripted search mechanisms that allow web-based searching and editing. Although cooperation is fundamental to the project, the database is maintained centrally at Ohio State.

The Japanese Journal Current Awareness Project (JJCAP) is an add-on service which links union list entries to sources of current tables of contents. The project was announced last week with 87 titles being offered, but it will continue to expand and grow. There are three sources for the tables of contents: publishers and participating libraries who put such information up on the web, publishers who put information about the current issue up temporarily and replace it when the next one comes out (in which case the information is downloaded, OCR' d and stored at Ohio State), and tables of contents scanned at Ohio State directly from journals received locally. JJCAP users register at the site and set up their own passwords. Having done that, they select their own customized list of journals along with preferred frequency of delivery (weekly, monthly, etc). Notices of new tables of contents are then sent to them by e-mail.

Funding. Some of the necessary infrastructure for this project was obtained through external sources. Most importantly, the server at Ohio State and workstations at Ohio State, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, and Minnesota which are being used for the project were acquired with U.S. Department of Education Title II-A funding. Support to hire staff for programming, editing, and manual input has been provided by the Japan-US Friendship Commission and Honda R&D Americas, Inc.

Origin and Development of the Project. Beginning in the mid-1980' s a number of regional and national discussions were held at which the need for increased coverage of Japanese serials in research libraries was discussed. At a meeting of East Asian collection librarians at Midwestern

research libraries held in Ann Arbor in 1989 there was interest in a photocopy current awareness service for Japanese journals that I initiated at Ohio State. In particular, it was felt that combining such a service with a cooperative collection development program aimed at increasing regional coverage of Japanese journals would be beneficial for scholars. A decision was made to investigate how to use emerging networked technologies and image processing to facilitate such a service for scholars at major universities and small colleges throughout the Midwest. In particular, librarians from the CIC (Committee on Institutional Cooperation) consortium of large research universities saw this as a potential component of the CIC Virtual Electronic Library.

The ensuing investigations undertaken at Ohio State led to some successful grant applications. First, experiments were made at Ohio State under a university seed grant. Following that, successful applications were made to the U.S. Department of Education and the Japan-United States Friendship Commission on behalf of Ohio State and nine other universities: Berkeley, Columbia, Duke, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, MIT, Minnesota, Wisconsin. The funds received were used almost exclusively for acquiring equipment for each participating institution, including a large server at Ohio State. Participants were required to put up resources about journals or other resources of their Japanese collections. The resources selected by each institution for posting on the World Wide Web could either contribute to resource sharing efforts or promote/facilitate access to the particular resources.

Based on good understanding of the value of sharing table of contents information as a basis for resource sharing which has been fostered by the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC) and was already evident in the 1989 meeting in Ann Arbor, the Midwestern research library participants emphasized contribution of journal information. In contrast, the four libraries outside the region (Berkeley, Columbia, Duke and MIT) emphasized other kinds of information in the projects that they developed.

Summary of infrastructure. Looking at the ten-year-long development of a project for sharing current tables of contents digitally, the importance of the Ann Arbor meeting sponsored by the Japan-US Friendship Commission at which discussions led to a shared vision and goal cannot be overemphasized. The evolution of ULJSN also owes much to discussions at annual meetings of CEAL and important discussions also took place over email in the fall of 1997. Although this low-budget cooperative project did not have any provision for additional meetings beyond those, the existence of a shared vision and goal was a driving force propelling the project forward step by step. Other essential elements of the infrastructure all fell into line once the vision and goals had been established, including: server space (Ohio State), programming expertise and time (Ohio State), leadership (ARL, AAU), coordination of participation (NCC, CIC), commitment (Ohio State). Staffing support has been contributed out of regular and special budgets at participating institutions

and some funding for student hours has been provided by the NCC to Ohio State. No provision has yet been made for planning or for periodic meetings.

2. Kinema Club

The Kinema Club web site is quite different. It was formed originally as a web site to help scholars share information about library resources for Japanese cinema studies. For communication relative to the web site a small mailing list was set up (kineclub@lists.acs.ohio-state.edu) in Fall, 1994. The mailing list evolved into a scholarly discussion forum gradually and in 1998 a new, public list was established for discussions of Japanese film (KineJapan@lists.acs.ohio-state.edu). The community quickly evolved from a small group of scholars to a world-wide community of people from all walks of life who have an interest in Japanese cinema. In March 1999 a Kinema Club Workshop will be held in Ann Arbor to discuss the field of Japanese cinema studies. The availability of the mailing list and the web site have certainly had an impact on that.

Funding. There has never been any funding for the Kinema Club website or mailing list. Individuals participating in developing resources for the site have gotten some funding on their own, but none has been requested for the project as such. At Ohio State, some student workers have been assigned to edit the bibliographic database that is one of the main resources on the web site or have been assigned other work to develop Kinema Club resources. However, those assignments have been relatively limited in scope.

Origin and Development of the Project. Kinema Club evolved out of some email exchanged I had with Markus Abe-Nornes (U of Michigan) in 1994. The basis of its growth was his leadership and vision which meshed closely with my goals for the East Asian Libraries Cooperative WWW site. These shared goals helped us set up collaborative structures that worked well and continue to evolve, despite the fact that both of us are extremely busy.

Aaron Gerow (Yokohama National University) is the chief editor of the KineJapan mailing list, which is the most time-consuming work among the various duties that are shared. It was Aaron's idea to set up this public mailing list and his commitment to making it a success has made it work. Markus and I are back-up editors.

Summary of the Infrastructure. The Kinema Club web site and KineJapan mailing list rest on a simple structure composed solely of shared vision. Nonetheless the project has developed tangible results. Truly the server is an electronic shelf on which this dynamic, digital publication develops and grows.

Certainly there are problems with supporting an emerging academic/scholarly community through a web site maintained at a library. Is this a model? (I am considering setting up a similar set of projects -- web site and mailing list for Japanese comics/manga.) The commitment of the individuals involved to the project, their willingness to take on time-consuming tasks, and the cooperative spirit and good humor that everyone involved has shown have been the essential components of this highly distributed digital project.

3. AsianDOC Electronic Newsletter

AsianDOC (Asian Database Online Community) was formed at the 1993 International Congress of Asian and North African Studies conference in Hong Kong. A mailing list was set up (asiandoc@lists.acs.ohio-state.edu) in Fall 1993 for announcements related to databases of or about Asian language materials or related to Asian Studies. At the 1997 ICANAS meeting in Budapest it was decided to try out an electronic newsletter. Three issues of the newsletter have come out thus far (March 1998, June 1998, October 1998). AsianDOC supports the work of Scholars Engaged in Electronic Resources, an organization that was formed at the 1997 ICANAS meeting. In addition, it serves as an announcement board for various digital projects of all kinds related to Asian Studies.

Summary of Infrastructure. The issues circulating thus far are experimental in nature. Whether AsianDOC is needed remains unclear. It was started to be a piece of the infrastructure itself, but what role (if any) it can play in that regard remains unclear.

Conclusions

As scholarly discourse and intellectual culture change, the infrastructure which supports them is evolving. New levels of knowledge integration, information flow, and interactivity are being reached among people, organizations and communities. While having access to computers, server space, and other physical infrastructure is essential, those arrangements can be made individually -- and do not have to be centrally developed for a collaborative project to be successful. Relying on asynchronous communication technologies which fit the work patterns of most academic researchers works well.

Larry Downes and Chunka Mui, writing in Unleashing the Killer App (Harvard Business School Press, 1998) emphasize the importance of “creating communities of value” by valuing community. The infrastructure most essential to the successful collaborative digital projects appears to be the communities of participants and users. This intangible network must be taken as seriously as the physical network supporting telecommunications.