

Welcome Message from Director, Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre (SAC)

I have great pleasure in welcoming you all to Thailand and to the Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre. The centre is a public organization, a new government agency that promotes the understanding of the diversity of indigenous cultures in Thailand and the Southeast Asian region. We maintain a library and archives, conduct research, organize annual conference of anthropologists, offer public lectures, and provide educational and research opportunities.

It is an honour as well as a challenge for us to host a conference on digital technology, and try to create a fruitful dialogue between researchers in the fields of human sciences, and those in information technology. Anthropology, from its beginning, is a study of other cultures, particularly those of low-technology societies. Our classic stock of knowledge consists of hunters and gatherers, nomads, peasants, or urban slum dwellers. But we also realize that, as the world is moving into the age of information, no aspect of social life is left untouched by advanced technology. Therefore we have to turn our attention to it, and enter a new terrain.

Globalization has meant that communities around the world are fast changing, becoming fluid and culturally diverse. The gaps between the past and the present, and the haves and havenots are increasingly widening. How do we put technology to the service of mankind in these circumstances?

A great many thinkers have cautioned us against abuse of technology. We hear a comment attributed to Albert Einstein that “It has become appallingly obvious that our technology has exceeded our humanity.” With this in mind, the question that we should be asking during and beyond this conference, is to what extent the application of advanced digital technology will help dismantling the divide between those who have more access to information and knowledge, and those who have less.

Let us hope that this conference will be a step towards collaborative efforts to make digital technology serve as a tool for scholars to pose new questions, leading to new directions of research and more discoveries that enrich our mind and heart, as well as to an equitable exchange and peaceful coexistence between communities of economic and cultural differences.

Paritta Chalermpong Koanantakool, PhD.
Director
Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre

Welcome Message from National Electronics and Computer Technology Center (NECTEC)

As a local host, it is an honor for me to have this chance to serve all of you, the members of PNC, ECAI, UNESCO, SEAMEO, SAC, and all local and foreign participants.

As a Thai citizen, I have an idea that I like to share with you in this occasion. Thailand is a developing country. We have been doing many things for the future of our country. So far, the development of our economics is put to one of the highest priority. Doing so, Information technology, Biotechnology, Nanotechnology, Knowledge, Innovation and Converging Science are identified as primary areas to ensure our good future. Is that really enough? I believe “our past” does have its equal share, perhaps even greater, in defining “us” and “our future”. We should learn to make use of all this technologies to understand our past and our neighbors’ for the better and larger community.

We can use Information Technology or IT as assisting tools for scholars to collect and integrate data, information and knowledge in our history, anthropology, archeology and culture. By this way, I do expect that we would understand our past, our evolution and revolution in both society and technology. There is one good example that I learnt from a Thai scholar. Sukhothai province in the present day has floods almost every year, but Sukhothai in its period was recorded as rich in agriculture and society. That was nearly a thousand years ago. The people in those days did not have the technology we have today, yet they know how to manage flood and agriculture. They did not have any idea to control the nature, but they did try and learn to live with the nature. How did they do it? This is the case.

With this conference, people who are working in future technology and future development, and people who are working about data and information of the past would have a chance to listen and discuss. Perhaps, this would bring to some conclusion to work together. Understanding the past will pave the way to have better future development in our society, not just the countries.

I like to take this opportunity to welcome you all, and hope that you would have nice time here in Thailand, and please consider spending some time to develop collaboration.

Royol Chitradon
National Electronics and Computer Technology Center

Welcome Message from Chairman, Pacific Neighborhood Consortium

On behalf of the Pacific Neighborhood Consortium, may I express our pleasure at welcoming you all to this, our tenth anniversary conference, and our gratitude to our hosts here in Thailand. NECTEC, the National Electronics and Computer Technology Centre. NECTEC has generously hosted this event, together with the Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre, which we thank for our beautiful conference venue. In addition, we gratefully recognize the contributions of our co-hosts ECAI, the Electronic Cultural Atlas Initiative; UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization; and SEAMEO, the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization, and the sustaining support of Academia Sinica in Taiwan.

Ten years ago the vision of the Pacific Neighborhood Consortium called for creating through technology a “virtual neighborhood” of the Pacific Rim. It has been a decade that has seen dramatic changes in the IT landscape. Ten years ago, email was just coming into its own. Here in Bangkok, at the third PNC conference, we offered presentations demonstrating to our scholarly community the benefits of new ideas and technologies, introduced such novelties as Netscape, and debated the possibilities of large-scale distribution of digital images over this new phenomenon called the world wide web.

Today it is often the scholars themselves who come back to our PNC conferences to show us the pioneering work in which they are engaged. Our theme for PNC 2003, “Cultural Heritage and Collaboration in the Digital Age,” has drawn an extraordinary range of individuals, from Helsinki to Melbourne, Buryatia to Berkeley. All share a belief in the vital importance of cultural heritage, and in the potential of digital technology for preservation and access. It is especially fitting that we return to Southeast Asia to address this theme, a region as rich in its cultural legacy as it is challenged in sustainable development efforts.

Cultural heritage is strengthening. It speaks to what is finest in ourselves. But cultural heritage is also fragile. Those of us committed to its preservation see the importance of maintaining that tenuous link with the past. Cultural heritage is timeless, yet at the same time, reminds us of the inexorability of time. Lost cities, ancient monuments, recovered artifacts, all remind us of what has passed, of what we have lost.

Our community has rallied to the cause of cultural heritage. We have at this conference an impressive range of work brought together here in the name of cultural heritage. Virtual reality re-imagines for us the greatest works of man. The growing volume of digital text, image, sound, and motion picture promise us resources available at a scale never before conceived. Geographic Information System integrates work, bringing together and revealing connections in the work of scholars whose paths may rarely cross in life. We see in this conference ground-breaking work by major institutions alongside remarkable examples of what individuals armed with a modicum of resources and expertise can achieve. The awesome reach of the global grid reminds us of how far we have come in making of our world a networked neighborhood.

This web of connections is what this conference is all about. We live in an increasingly interconnected world. What those of us who work with digital cultural heritage conclude, time and again, is that we cannot act alone. From the solitary scholar seeking best practices and consulting expert guidance, to major institutional collaboration, we find we must work together to achieve. The annual PNC conference offers an opportunity to make these connections, to seek advice, to explore partnerships in an atmosphere of support and understanding.

Today we find ourselves in a time when cultural heritage preservation is severely tested. The loss of cultural heritage in any nation is a loss for all of us, and with that lost we are diminished. Those engaged in digital cultural heritage do not stand idly by. They enlarge the reach of the power of that which we deem our cultural patrimony, and ensure that it will be sustained in memory. It is an honor to welcome you all in Bangkok.



Ovid J.L. Tzeng
Chairman of PNC

PNC 2003