Gleanings from Pacific Asia

by Steve McCarty

Invited contributions to the Humanist Discussion Group

Centre for Computing in the Humanities, King's College London

2019 compilation of the 1997-1998 series with outdated information omitted

Humanist Discussion Group, Vol. 11, No. 456 (11 Dec 1997)

From: Willard McCarty

Subject: gleanings from Pacific Asia

Dear Colleagues:

By one of life's coincidences a fellow Humanist I met recently in the virtual way, Steven McCarty, has the same surname and much of the same kind of experience in moving to a new culture. In his case, the move (to Japan) was rather more radical than mine, but in any case the coincidence was sufficient to start a conversation about perspectives on humanities computing from Pacific Asia. We agreed that Humanist would benefit from occasional if not regular contributions on the topic, and he agreed to make them. So we can all look forward to these "gleanings", as I have called my own regular commentary on items from local sources. … Steven McCarty is full Professor, General Education, Kagawa Junior College, Japan; staff member of several electronic journals; founder of the East-West Discourse List (Hawaii); and among many other things, Web developer in Japanese and English, including the Bilingualism and Japanology Intersection, an Asian Studies www Virtual Library 4-star site http://www.waoe.org/steve/epublist.html.

Yours,

WM

Dr. Willard McCarty, Senior Lecturer, King's College London

Humanist Discussion Group, Vol. 11, No. 433 (01 Dec 1997)

From: Steve McCarty

Subject: Academic Websites subject to Attribution Ethics

The struggle continues to reconstitute Academia in cyberspace, and certain academic standards evidently need to be reaffirmed or renegotiated. Here my concern is that source files such as those on Web servers be recognized as intellectual property in academic if not
legalistic discourse. There have been cases in Academic of wholesale copying of Web pages from source files without permission or attribution. The practice is most common with alphabetical lists of links which have a weak claim to copyright in terms of content. Yet if the plagiarizing of source files is condoned, those working on e-texts and so forth could also find their files copied with the rationalization that copyright has expired on the literature. So awareness needs to be raised of how academic ethics of attribution apply to the processing as well the creation of online content by scholars, while institutions maintaining servers can assert their rights over computer files as original sources and condemn any form of plagiarism.

As these cases can arise from inexperience with Web publishing, the goal here is prevention of either inadvertent or rationalized plagiarism by encouraging action along with further clarification of academic ethics in this new medium. Although illicit copying will increase with worldwide Internet access, infringements are not only from the periphery of Academia. My presentation at an online academic conference was copied onto a server of one of the University of California campuses. In response to my query asking why there was not simply a link to the original source, I received an apology and the site was rectified. Among the rationalizations by an inexperienced graduate student was one that will be heard more often from people on distant continents trying to save money: others in or near their institutions can supposedly load the Web pages faster.

Now recently I discovered that a South Korean PhD professor has copied source files from universities in Japan and the U.S. Prof. Hitoshi Goto of Tohoku University maintains lists of humanities and linguistics Websites in Japan, and about 650 links have been made to his pages in Japanese and English. This shows that the one who copied his page and removed his name and copyright notice was an aberration from the norm even here in East Asian Academia. Furthermore, Prof. Goto also knew about the infringement and considered it plagiarism, but had e-mailed the Korean professor to no avail. The historical enmity between their two countries is not ostensibly the issue here, as I have already heard from another Korean condemning the widespread copying of software in his country along with this WWW case.

First I discovered that the Korean page … [details omitted]

was an unauthorized and unattributed copy of:

http://www.sal.tohoku.ac.jp/~gothit/kanren-en.html

Then by checking the index …

I found other pages similarly copied without attribution, viz …

are apparently copied from the source at the U of Rochester …

… has the title changed to Korean, but I found the original at Indiana University …

by the following Alta Vista search on consecutive items listed:

+MIT +"Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences" …
How much easier, then, would it be to catch student plagiarism by putting eloquent passages in quotes and running Web searches!

Link searches can also uncover information routes, e.g., with Alta Vista tracing links to Prof. Goto's "Humanities Web Sites in Japan" …

… is a copy with some changes and the copyright notice cut from [an MIT site]

As a longtime expatriate Japanologist in Japan, what gives me reverse culture shock is that I e-mailed the administrators of the Rochester, Indiana and MIT Web sites, offering assistance and more information, yet none have responded. Whereas I fully understand Prof. Goto's indignation and he fully backs what I'm trying to do here to further establish Academia in cyberspace.

My final reason for appealing to this discussion group is therefore to ask those willing to work on this problem to kindly contact me.

Collegially,

Steve McCarty

Humanist Discussion Group, Vol. 11, No. 467 (16 Dec 1997)

Subject: Korea-Japan-U.S. Website copying case closed

In "Academic Websites subject to Attribution Ethics" (Humanist Discussion Group, Vol. 11, No. 433, 1 December 1997) I reported on a case where U.S. and Japanese Websites were copied to an academic Website in Korea. In an e-mail message to Seoul, I identified exactly what was copied from where, and seconded the earlier request by Prof. Hitoshi Goto, who agreed I should make the case public for the sake of academic ethics internationally.

Today I'm happy to report that, without recourse to legalities, academic peer pressure has worked to close the case, as per the forwarded message below:

> Date: Tue, 16 Dec 1997 13:32:19 +0900 (JST)
> From: GOTOO Hitosi
> To: steve_mc
>
> Dear Steve,
>
> >> Kindly take all illicitly copied sites off the Web
>
Ambulances were wailing all over urban Japan last night as about 550 children simultaneously went into convulsions. They had been watching an animated TV program where the cute Pocket Monsters (loanwords turned into "Pokemon") entered a computer and fought a virus with a vaccine. Apparently a strobe effect of the bright flashing colors at a certain frequency disturbed the children's brain waves, or so I gleaned from initial TV interviews with professors.

I had asked [my wife] (in Japanese) what the computer story might indicate about cultural attitudes towards the new technology. Her reply, translated, was: "You can't generalize. Ask 100 people and you'll get 100 answers. It may not be known scientifically, but anyway they'll interview experts on TV." So much for stereotypes about Japanese women.

Our younger son has been playing CD-ROM games by himself since age 3, and the kids chant a song that I would liberally translate as: "Kon kon computer, gone gone haywire" (they know computers well).

The government has actively encouraged the public to be receptive to new technologies, and in a nearly full employment society there has been little fear of automation. The article below reviews the University of Hong Kong Knowledge and Discourse Conference, touching upon what sociologist of knowledge Steve Fuller had to say about how Japan disproved modernization theory in the history of science:

"East meets West and South in Hong Kong" (June 1996)  
*Asia-Pacific Exchange Electronic Journal, 3* (2) [now available at:]  
https://www.academia.edu/40057550/East_meets_West_and_South_in_Hong_Kong
Subject: A matter more of expressiveness than infrastructure

Asia-Pacific as a geographical region spans nearly half the world and houses over half of humanity in its bewildering variegation. As the worldwide community of scholars can now become an organized reality via the Internet, this series aims to provide a Pacific Asian perspective for computing Humanists, with a view to facilitating academic exchanges across the East-West divide.

Japan is the first large non-Western nation to achieve a vast Internet infrastructure, as can be seen for example by using Japanese language search engines and directories. In research as elsewhere, Japan's wealthy economy draws the lion's share of attention, yet this series does intend to introduce the Net presence of places like Fiji and Argentina. The "Lion City" of Singapore arguably surpasses Japan in effective use of the Internet, but its entire population of 4 million is roughly half the Internet users in Japan. Up to 30 million of 125 million people in Japan could be online in the foreseeable future, including nearly all the youth in education, so communicating with them will be an important issue.

As to the current state of Internet use in Japan, a 1995 survey, although statistically unreliable, showed that browsers of a domestic site were 96% male, 80% under 35 years old, and mostly with technical or scientific backgrounds. I translate the gist of a vernacular daily newspaper article as follows:

Young women, who like to write and chat, hold the key to mass acceptance of the electronic media. The Internet calls for a youthful sense of play, a connectivity culture, freedom and self-expression. For this to happen, the Japanese must go beyond materialism and break the mental habit that forces everyone to be the same. Pessimists argue that Japan could be isolated by its organizational ways even on the Internet. Inability to express themselves in written English will leave the Japanese as passive recipients of the world network.

The title of this definitive editorial could be rendered as "Japan is weak in both infrastructure and expressiveness." The technological hurdles will be surmounted, but Japan's voice in cyberspace will still be diminutive, so the challenge will be how to reach them.

Sources for the above paragraph are cited in the presentation below, which also shows the impact of the Aum cult incidents on the debate over vocationalization of universities in Japan, and sees a worldwide convergence of specialist and generalist knowledge as within the purview of educators:

"Revalorizing General Education and TEFL in Japan"
First Annual TCC-L Online Conference (Honololulu, 1-3 April, 1996)
For the first time, and from a reliable source based in Asia, the 50 best universities in Asia have been reported on by Cesar Bacani et al., "Asia's Search for Excellence," in a December 1997 Asiaweek special edition "Asia's Biggest and Best 1997." The universities are listed with little commentary, and the results should be viewed as a first attempt. They surveyed peer reputation, quantifiable faculty resources and the value undergraduates receive for their tuition. Although they factored out relative wealth, they did concede that money buys quality to some extent, affecting the representation of countries listed. I would add the caution that, although it is remarkable that most countries have adopted aspects of Western university institutional culture, the people of countries not listed must not be considered backward for maintaining their indigenous languages and approaches to knowledge.

Asiaweek itself is published in English in Hong Kong. … it is not evident that Asiaweek attempted to survey Central Asian, Siberian or Middle Eastern universities, as they are not represented among the 50. The scope of the survey may thus be confined to universities in South Asia, East Asia, Australia and New Zealand.

… the Asiaweek survey will be of reference, e.g., to academics seeking contact with the more reputable Asian universities or needing to evaluate the educational credentials of Asian scholars. … Rather than listing the 50 in order, I think it will be easier to follow if I go by country in rough order as to their number and relative quality. It will be seen thereby that the first tier of countries includes Japan, Australia and China, if Hong Kong is included (the survey treats them as separate entities). Now here are the results of the Asiaweek survey:

Among the anomalies were that some universities did not respond to the survey, yet were included on their academic reputations (44-50). Others were in effect docked for withholding sensitive financial or personnel information. So it is possible to rank the 50 differently by looking more closely at the results, but comparisons like this are relative. Nonetheless, the survey represents a useful first attempt to compare the quality of many Asian and Australasian universities. This and more refined future surveys will afford more discernment in networking decisions with respect to Asia.

Humanist Discussion Group, Vol. 11, No. 526 (19 Jan 1998)

Subject: Computing in Japanese

This installment aims to provide a brief overview [of] Chinese characters used in Japan. The way East Asian languages are encoded and decoded may also offer some insight into how the Internet works.

Because Chinese characters can exceed 20 strokes, they each require twice as many bytes as plain ASCII text. Therefore, from the viewpoint of Japanese word-processing, where English is a subset of Japanese, ASCII letters take half a space. Web servers in Japan do use ASCII such as in UNIX code …

Let us try a quick experiment where you can see some Chinese characters [it did not work, as 2-bit/16-byte characters were turned into gibberish, since this was in the era before Unicode].

Humanist Discussion Group, Vol. 11, No. 549 (30 Jan 1998)
From: Steve McCarty
Subject: The Net Facing Chinese Humanists

I could read the Japanese Text Initiative by the universities of Virginia and Pittsburg at my terminal, but to view the Chinese-English one I had to run upstairs to the terminal of my colleague Prof. Mao … The translation of Chinese documents into other languages will provide some opening for collaboration with non-Chinese.

Languages that are codified in cyberspace and read by software are more likely to survive than the ones that are not, another reason that cyberspace is not unreal. Be that as it may, Chinese is not in any danger, and will be asserted in cyberspace, just as the French and Japanese governments have actively promoted their national standard languages.
The problem seems to be that Chinese scholars are afraid to go too far out on a limb and be tattled on as too chummy with Westerners. They are justified in not risking their careers or attempting the politically impossible. Much as China has been the butt of jokes over its Internet policies, its government has consistently gotten its way without compromise towards Western values. My colleague Mr. Mao has not received an answer by e-mail to his acquaintances in China, and I have hardly heard from the Chinese scholars who were so friendly at the University of Hong Kong in 1996. There are Chinese addresses on mailing lists, but obscenities or discussions of independence for Tibet, Taiwan, and so forth render the list mail illegal in China. Mr. Mao agrees that computing is an ostensibly harmless area where some Sino-Western rapprochement is possible, but rosy expectations will continue to be thwarted by the Chinese government.

As the Asia-Pacific Chapter of AACE conducts the "Global Education on the Net" conference in Beijing, 14-17 October 1998, there may be another sort of Net restraining Chinese scholars. Mr. Mao also agreed that there is a disadvantage facing Westerners in the Humanities seeking to reach their Asian counterparts. While there are Humanities divisions at major Asian universities, the users of Western languages such as English are more likely to be affiliated with other divisions. Considering also the need for intercultural sensitivity, it may be more effective to take a bilingual approach.

Collegially,

Steve McCarty