<For Press Release>

<div align="right">

April 21, 2003

National Institute of Informatics

</div>

Launch of Prototype "Bamiyan Virtual Museum"
As Part of the "Digital Silk Roads" Project

Conclusion of the Memorandum of Understanding
Between NII and UNESCO
To Promote the DSR Project

1. Memorandum Exchanged between NII and UNESCO

The National Institute of Informatics(NII) in Japan and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization(UNESCO) exchanged a memorandum of understanding on March 20, 2003 to jointly promote an international collaborative project called "Digital Silk Roads".

The project, set up by NII in May 2001, aims to establish an innovative joint research system based on network collaboration and create a digital archive of the Silk Roads heritage by linking advanced information technology and the latest knowledge of cultural studies.

The Tokyo Symposium of Digital Silk Roads was held in December 2001 to map out the basic course of the project and adopted the Tokyo Declaration on Digital Silk Roads. It acknowledges the need to conserve and pass on to future generations the invaluable cultural and natural heritage in the Silk Roads region and advocates establishing a new framework of Silk Roads studies utilizing cutting-edge information technologies.

With the conclusion of the memorandum, which is based on the Tokyo Declaration, full-fledged attempts to create a new communication channel between the East and the West, comparable to the historic Silk Roads, have begun.

1) Contents of the Memorandum

The centerpiece of the memorandum is the establishment of an interdisciplinary joint "Digital Silk Roads Initiative Framework" as a follow-up to the Tokyo Declaration on Digital Silk Roads. DSRIF is to be headed by NII's Executive Director for Research Prof. Kinji Ono and UNESCO's CI/INF project coordinator Dr. Yong-Nam Kim.

The memorandum stipulates the roles of both parties in the project: NII is to take the initiative and provide technological expertise required to put the project on track while UNESCO is to allow access to the collection of materials and data it has accumulated over the past decade through a series of investigations and expeditions. The agreement also refers to handling of intellectual property rights concerning the project and provision of training for local staff in the Silk Roads countries.

2) Participants

More than 50 researchers and experts from various prestigious organizations across the world are to join in. Among them are Hitachi Corporation, Kashiwara Archaeological Institute in Nara, University of Tokyo University Museum, University of Michigan, University of California, University of Hawaii, China's Tsinghua University, and Ecole d'Architecture Paris. Prof. Kinji Ono at NII is to oversee the entire project.

3) Specific Programs Underway

Construction of a prototype virtual museum of the Bamiyan Temple in Afghanistan, upon which serious damages have been inflicted owing to civil wars and religious oppression. A similar plan is being considered for the Kabul Museum also in Afghanistan.

Organizing a 2nd International Symposium for Digital Silk Roads in Nara within this fiscal year (Supported by Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan).

Construction of a scientific portal on an NII server upon which the participants scattered across the globe can jointly carry out research for the development of the Silk Roads digital archive through network collaboration.

Provision of education and training for local staff in the Central Asian countries.

Supervising Iranian Ph.D graduate students at NII for the digital archiving of caravanserais for a UNESCO project.

Creation of so-called Time Space Map covering the period between 500 and 1500 A.D. by applying GIS technology for geographical analysis of the ocean route of the Silk Roads.

Digital archiving of maps, historic documents, and other materials related to the Silk Roads in the possession of the Oriental Library(Toyo Bunko) in Tokyo.

2. Launch of the Prototype "Bamiyan Virtual Museum"

NII has successfully constructed a prototype virtual museum of the Bamiyan Temple in Afghanistan as part of the Digital Silk Roads project.

Hitachi Corporation, a partner of the project, provided its Digital Image System(DIS) technology for image processing while Kyoto University Professor Emeritus and Director of Kashiwara Archaeological Institute Takayasu Higuchi and photographer Takashi Echizen kindly offered for use for the contents photographs taken before the recent massive destruction of the temple.

Some of the features of the prototype virtual museum are:

it is based on the innovative concept called GMR(Global Multimedia Repository), which has been proposed in the project;

it allows experts on archaeology to verify and add new discoveries to the existing contents;

it can be a valuable source of reference when restoring the great Buddha statutes destroyed by the Taliban regime;

it can be utilized for various aspects of research on the Silk Roads heritage

it presents an example of network collaboration by experts from various parts of the world to jointly develop a digital archive

3. Future Prospect

With the conclusion of the memorandum and the launch of the prototype virtual museum, the implementation of the project has gained further momentum.

Through international partnership, we aim to present the concept of GMR in a specific form and integrate state-of-the-art IT technologies with the knowledge of cultural studies in a cultural GRID network.

Once the Digital Silk Roads is successfully constructed, its expertise will be applied for preserving other cultural assets such as the World Heritage sites. It is also hoped that this initiative can play a part in international cooperation by contributing to narrowing the digital divide and enhancing information literacy in the Silk Roads region.

For further information   ono@nii.ac.jp