

A Digital Library of Costumes Through Time:
The Singapore Story

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1. Introduction

Digital Library Technologies in the Context of Globalisation for the Understanding of

Lifestyles and Cultures

Digital libraries (DLs), one of the recent developments in ICT, are interactive systems with organised collections of information. The history of DLs is rich and varied because the “digital library” is not so much a new idea as an evolving conception of contributions from many disciplines (Theng, Mohd-Nasir, Buchanan, Fields, Thimble by and Cassidy, 2001). In recent years, there has been an emergence of subject-based DLs on the Web. Because DLs mean different things to different people, the design of the DLs is, therefore, dependent on the perceptions of the purpose/functionality of DLs. The design of systems, including DLs, is often inspired by what technology makes possible. In user-centered design, design emphasizes users, their tasks and needs.

So, while nations and cultures adjust to the simultaneous processes and effects of localization, communities become established, redefined, and transformed in new and unique ways.

Although historical and cultural research is pertinent to a better understanding of the peoples in the South-East Asian region, few studies have been carried out to understand the people' s lifestyles

and cultures (Khoo, Kraal, Toh and Quek, 1993). It is of importance, therefore, that some effort be made to update our understanding of lifestyles and cultures and document their manifestations in the areas of fashion, art, dance, music, archaeology, etc. using modern tools in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), thus contributing to better internationalization and globalization efforts, and encouraging a closer symbiotic working partnership between developed and developing nations.

2. Methods

Case Study “Costumes Through Time” Project: From Text to Digital Library
The “Costumes Through Time” project undertaken by the National Heritage Board in 1993, jointly with the Fashion Designers’ Society, attempted to open a window to one facet of Singapore’s past reminiscing the way our forefathers clad themselves, explaining how historical background and social lifestyles are manifested through fashion (Khoo, Kraal, Toh and Quek, 1993). The 1993 exhibition, in appreciation of rich and multi-ethnic heritage derived from ancestral cultures in the region, portrayed a rich and colourful mix of attires was also published as a permanent record of the project, in the form of a book edited by Khoo, Kraal, Toh and Quek (1993).

This paper describes pioneering research in the design and building of a DL prototype focusing on the evolution of costumes, capturing the lifestyles of Singaporeans through time. As a pilot, we illustrate a collection of “costumes of people in celebration” taken from the book (Khoo, Kraal, Toh and Quek, 1993). This CostumeDL prototype, using Greenstone powerful search and retrieval system, also provides a platform to support information sharing/publishing by capturing and preserving culture and fashion artifacts. Greenstone is a suite of open-source software for building and distributing digital library collections (see <http://www.greenstone.org/cgi-bin/library>). Figure 1 shows screen shots from the CostumeDL prototype.

Figure 1. CostumeDL prototype

3. Conclusion and On-Going Work

On-going work involves populating the Costume DL prototype and evaluating it with different user groups. We believe DLs capturing costume digital resources reflecting the history and lifestyles can have a major organizational, national and international impact, and would be of interest to universities, public libraries, museums, etc. which have large user populations, in tens and hundreds of thousands of users.

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