

Chapter 4

Contexts of Digital Humanities in Japan

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes the brief history and recent trends in digital humanities in Japan, which had been led within the context of IT (information technology) and recently has strongly involved humanities researchers. According to the analysis of 991 technical reports by the Special Interest Group for Computers and Humanities (SIG-CH), the fields of linguistics and literary studies have been dominant while recently the history field has been increasing its number of the presentations, and many other fields in the humanities have been treated in a small percentage. Japanese texts have some difficulties in the digital environments. Although the recent developments in IT partially solve them, other attempts to improve the DH research environment have been activated. The policy of Japanese government to promote open science and open data will make DH in Japan more fruitful in the future.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes some contexts of digital humanities (DH) in Japan. With Japanese DH being so widely proliferating nowadays, it is difficult to introduce every aspect and every project. The Special Interest Group for Computers and Humanities (SIG-CH) has played a prominent role in Japan for about three decades and the Japanese Association for Digital Humanities (JADH) has since 2011 served as a counterpart in the realm of international DH activities. Additionally, a movement in the area of digital archiving has become popular among cultural institutions such

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as libraries, museums, and industries, adapting to the Japanese environment. This movement bears relationship to activities concerning digital cultural heritage, but function much more broadly. As it worked in a complementary relation with the field of DH, its activities will be mentioned below.

A BRIEF HISTORY

As in other countries, efforts to establish digital scholarship in the humanities have been initiated starting a few decades ago by scholars in Japan who specialize in either the humanities or information technology. Activities to apply digital technologies in humanities have been carried out since establishing the Mathematical Linguistic Society of Japan¹ in 1957. According to Sugita (1982), during the age of the mainframe computer, some research institutions such as National Institute of Language and Linguistics, National Museum of Ethnology, and the National Institute of Japanese Literature installed computers to digitize their resources and to leverage digitized data.

Following upon the earliest attempts, several communities were established at the end of the 1980's based on the impetus of the proliferation of the IBM PC. One, the SIG-CH, was formed under the auspices of the Information Processing Society in Japan, the largest computer science society in Japan. (SIG-CH will be discussed below) The others were the Japan Society of Information and Knowledge and the Japan Art Documentation Society.

As the SIG-CH was founded under the auspices of an academic society of computer science, its orientation has tended to be toward the approach of computing rather than the humanities, although participants have always shown a strong interest in cultural heritage. This means that activities in the SIG-CH have been evaluated primarily from the viewpoint of computer science. On the other hand, there were fundamental difficulties facing humanities researchers who wanted to engage in the field of computer science and the related IT sector, since those areas had long-established methods of evaluation of academic achievements that differ from those in the humanities. Thus, if a humanities scholar made an IT-centric academic achievement, it was not duly evaluated in humanities academic circles. Despite these limitations, the number of humanities scholars who engage themselves with the computer science and IT communities has been gradually increasing to the extent that they have established the JADH.

Besides the activities of SIG-CH and other societies carrying out DH-like studies, several academic communities within traditional humanities including the field

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