

1.3 Technology Enabling Universal Access to World Heritage: Implications for Libraries¹

Ching-chih Chen

Introduction

From 2002–2006, the NSF/International Digital Library Program (IDLDP) supported a major global digital library of cultural, historical, and heritage image collections, called *Global Memory Net (GMNet)*, directed by Dr. Ching-chih Chen. It was launched for universal access in late 2006 at <http://memorynet.org>. This gateway to world culture and heritage was and continues to be very well received and with very little marketing effort and banking on the power of the Internet, members of the general public and scholars from over 4,192 cities in 142 countries have used the site (see Figure 1 for the homepage of GMNet) in the past five years.

The success of *GMNet* with its flexible and powerful Linux-PHP-MySQL i-M-C-S (integrated Multimedia Content-based System) prompted a partnership with UNESCO's World Heritage Center (WHC). This partnership, under the leadership of Dr. Chen, with a multi-year Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), was signed between WHC and Simmons College, Boston, Massachusetts, USA in November 2006.

This MoU is a fitting display of WHC's interest and enthusiasm in the research and development activities of Dr. Chen. It has led to the development of *World Heritage Memory Net (WHMNet)* since 2007, which provides universal access to the World Heritage Sites in a way not possible before. "The World Heritage Center considers this an important project with great potential to enhance the humanities for universal access and enrichment through the use of emerging technologies," commented Francesco Bandarin, Director of the WHC in 2007.

¹ The World Heritage Memory Net is a mega-project in partnership with UNESCO's World Heritage Center started in 2007. It has been a topic of numerous keynote and invited speeches given by the author in various parts of the world. This article covers much of the basic background information from these talks given by the author in the last two years. Several of the most recent ones are listed in footnote 4.