A Study on the Application of the Collection-Level Description to Taiwan’s Digital Archives

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With the objective of digitizing Taiwan’s valuable cultural heritages, the Taiwan e-Learning and Digital Archives Program (TELDAP) has produced over three million records of metadata up to now. However, as the number of data grows all the more immense, it becomes difficult for users to easily retrieve and utilize these information, while data managers also find it hard to fully grasp the resources as a whole. This study thus attempts to create a collection-level description model for Taiwan’s digital archives. It is hoped that the process will be able to act as a reference for other similar endeavors, and that the results will become a basis for the future creation of collection-level descriptions for digital archives.

The research scope of this study includes the digitized resources produced by the National Palace Museum, the National Science Museum, National Taiwan University and Academia Historica. The goal is to create collection-level descriptions for TELDAP’s archives, in order to facilitate information retrieval for users and to improve resource management for managers. First, to determine the definition of collection-level description, relevant literature was thoroughly reviewed. Next, the principal internationally adopted description standards were analyzed by investigating related studies on the creation of collection-level descriptions both at home and abroad, from which the Dublin Core Collection Application Profile (DCCAP) was selected as the most suitable description standard for TELDAP to base its own methods of description on. In order to grasp the nature of the digitized results and the overall framework of the archives, semi-structure interviews were then conducted with 34 members of the project team, all of whom have in-depth understanding of respective collections and were familiar with the actual operation procedures. 73 collections were derived from these interviews, while the DCCAP description standard was revised according to the respective situation and collection characteristics of each institution. Finally, the research results were presented according to faceted classification on TELDAP’s portal website to assist users with browsing and exploring through resources.

After conducting the creation of TELDAP’s collection-level descriptions, the process has been summarized into five steps: 1) defining the collections by determining the scope and depth and going through TELDAP’s digitization results; 2) selecting the appropriate description standard; 3) understanding the contents of collections through interviews in order to create collection-level metadata; 4) organizing and presenting the results by the method of faceted classification to improve the quality of browsing through resources; 5) final evaluation of operation outcome.

It has been discovered, from the interview results and the previous experiences of researchers in creating collection-level descriptions, that the collection-level description of TELDAP has several characteristics: the TELDAP collections are highly heterogeneous and constantly changing; the creation of collection-level description requires a certain level of knowledge in the particular field; DCCAP is more suitable for the description of culture-related collections. The descriptions of 16 of the 30 DCCAP elements were revised in order to make it even more suitable for the
describing of TELDAP collections.

In the future, the creating and maintaining of collection-level metadata will be continued. In addition, the new facets of geographical coverage and collection genre will be added to the portal website to assist users in discovering resources from a variety of new perspectives. It is also recommended that the relationships between the item-level and collection-level metadata be constructed for more well-rounded and efficient information retrieval. The similarities and differences between the suitability of the fields of science and the humanities for the application of collection level-descriptions should also be explored.