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Editor's Introduction

The United Nations declared 2015 to be the Year of Light and Light-Based Technologies and, as we come to the end of the year, it might be useful to reflect upon how light can assist our society as we move towards the era of the Sustainable Development Goals. Light is so important to our ability to live useful, productive and enjoyable lives that we have a tendency to take it for granted, so that when a power cut comes along, it can feel like a very burdensome interruption to life. It is much more serious in those parts of the developing world that are not connected to electricity grids and where production of all types is hindered by the lack of light. Electricity, of course, requires power. Here in Thailand, most of our light is still powered by fossil fuels, despite the abundance of solar energy, most of which goes to waste. With a few notable and noble exceptions, renewable energy is not utilized in the country to the extent that it might be. Some institutions are promoting low carbon issues well (as, for example, in our own research for DASTA – Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration attests). The Department of Alternative Energy Development and Efficiency has noted that the first quarter of 2014 (the most recent date for which figures are available), alternative energy consumption in Thailand increased by 10.9% year-on-year. This is attributed to increases in biofuels and biomass, as well as solar energy. Biofuels and biomass are problematic for a number of reasons but solar energy production is an industrial sector firms and institutions should be investing in heavily in this country.

In this issue of the *Journal of Shinawatra University*, we have four double-blind peer-reviewed papers in a variety of fields of inquiry. In the first paper, Sooksawaddee Nattawuttisit presents a model for semantic content-based image retrieval in cloud computing. This paper offers an important contribution to the nuts and bolts efforts to make interactions between user demand and cloud computing more effective. This is one aspect of what used to be known as 'industrial magic,' which is the kind of innovation that helps make daily life better but takes place in a way that is not just quite invisible to the general public but is completely beyond their awareness. In the second paper, Sona vikas, Anu Lather Singh and Shalini Garg investigate the use of skills training, which they consider to be an imperative for India's burgeoning tourism and travel industry and highlight the gap between what is required and what is currently being offered within their quantitative sample. In the third paper, Dhruva Kumar Gautam analyses a household survey of the Nawalprasi district of Nepal, with a view to understanding how many households receive remittances from overseas, how much they receive and the purposes to which they put them to use. He concludes that only a small proportion of such resources are put to productive uses such as investing in new businesses, since the majority of

remittances are used for consumption or for reducing existing debts. Finally, in the fourth paper, Amarjeet Mastana Singh considers the issue of cluster formation among Thai small and medium-sized enterprises and the difficulties attendant upon this process.

The issue is completed by three book reviews. It is once again gratifying to be able to include such a geographically and epistemologically diverse set of papers and reviews within this journal.

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John Walsh, Editor

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Peer Reviewed Papers

A Model for Semantic Content-Based Image Retrieval in Cloud Computing

Sooksawaddee Nattawuttisit

Abstract

Cloud computing represents a technological revolution when in combination with several other fields. The major benefit of cloud computing is to provide reliable, available and scalable content through the internet. However, one of the remaining challenges concerns how to retrieve a large number of multimedia objects from huge storage areas in the cloud effectively. Based on the literature reviewed, recently researchers have continued to develop effective retrieval approaches. In this paper, we propose a content-based approach using semantic frameworks and with a focus on a large number of image objects. We used Simple Protocol and RDF (Resource Description Framework) Query Language (SPARQL) and Web Ontology Language (OWL) to reduce the occurrence of human error and to recommend the most relevant image objects corresponding to users' keyword searches. Experimentally, our model obtained high precision and recall rates at 95.2% and 88.2% respectively.

Keywords: cloud computing, semantic-based image retrieval, SPARQL query optimizer, ontology web language (OWL)

Dr. Sooksawaddee Nattawuttisit currently works on the Ph.D programme and BPM Research and Development Project for education supported by the School of Liberal Arts, Shinawatra University, Thailand.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, most digital images are kept in high resolution states and complex formats. However, they need large storage volumes, including well designed retrieval systems for these objects. Currently, the emergence of advanced technology cloud computing systems has managed to overcome such problems. Cloud providers also offer costs for cloud services that are affordable based on pay-per-use concepts (Mell & Grance, 2009). With powerful cloud features, they provide system performance, high processing capacity and mobility and scalability and agility in the storage used. Users can manage and store mass data without any hassle in terms of hardware configuration. Additionally, cloud hosting can relieve the risk of losing important data because of the system crashing, through hardware malfunctioning or even a virus attack (Despotovi-Zraki, Belic & Milutinović, 2014).

Skills Training: An Imperative for the Travel and Tourism Industry

Sona Vikas, Anu Lather Singh and Shalini Garg

Abstract

Travel and tourism are people industries which are challenged by a growing demand for customer orientation, increasing international competition, volatile markets in an insecure environment, changing customer demands in favour of individualization in the light of significant potential in various market segments. As a result, there is an ever-growing need for skilled and trained professionals to do the work necessary. However, several human resource problems exist in the tourism sector; including low wages, high demand for staff flexibility, little training provision, high staff turnover and skill shortages. Qualifications from the tourism sector are much appreciated by other members of other sectors (e.g. customer service in banking, business process outsourcing and knowledge processing outsourcing) and qualifications from other sectors are useful within tourism. Many qualified employees leave the sector and many trained tourism school graduates do not enter it at all, leading to a sheer waste of resources and skills. Forecasting which skills will be needed in future under conditions of sector volatility and vulnerability is another critical issue. Multi-skilling, newly emerging and hybrid occupations reflect the trends for new types of services and the growing demand for flexibility. This paper is based on empirical research with a study conducted with a sample of 500 travel professionals so as to develop a training manual that may be used by top management when determining what kind of skill training their employees require. The skill training sessions proposed in the manual are those which the travel agency employees and their top management perceive to be critical for their work.

Keywords: behavioural training, product training, skills training, travel and tourism

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Remittances and Their Uses: A Study of Nawalprasi District of Nepal

Dhruba Gautam Gambir

Abstract

Remittances represent a significant proportion of the Nepalese economy. This paper endeavors to analyse remittances in the Nepalese context through a survey of 300 households conducted in the Ramnagar Village Development Committee of Nawalprasi district. The study considers the trends in and means of sending remittances, along with their use in aggregate forms and from the perspectives of both region and country. The empirical results reveal that remittances are mainly used for household purposes.

Key Words: households, migrants, Nepal, remittances, workers

Dr. Dhruba Kumar Gautam is Executive Director, Nepalese Academy of Management and member of the Faculty of Management, Tribhuvan University, Nepal.

1. Introduction

Remittances have been defined by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (2009) as cash or goods in kind received in the form of compensation and transferred by migrants to resident households in the country of origin. The concept covers the flow of remittances from international migrants who work in different countries beyond their country of origin. It is the portion of international migrant workers' earnings sent back from the country of employment to the country of origin (Puri & Ritzema, 1999). However, the IMF (2009) classifies remittances into three categories: workers' remittances; compensation of employees and migrants transferring capital. This study follows the concept of labour remittances as transfers from migrant workers who are considered workers of the host country to recipients in the workers' country of origin.

Remittances have become a crucial element in the socio-economic life of Nepalese people. According to the Living Standards Survey, 2010/11 (NLSS) (World Bank, 2011), about 56% of all households receive remittances in Nepal and the average income transfer in the form of remittances is NRs. 80,436² (in nominal terms) per recipient household. Per capita nominal remittance when the whole population is considered stands at NRs. 9,245. About two in three households in the rural,

² US\$1 = 107.9 Nepalese Rupees, approximately.

Issues in Cluster Development for SMEs in Thailand

Amarjeet Mastana Singh

Abstract

Despite consistent and coherent policy positions from the government concerning small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as a means of stimulating economic development, Thailand continues to suffer from a medium-sized company deficit. One of the means by which it is possible to tackle this issue is through encouragement of cluster formation. This can be successful only when commercial logic already exists and top-down imposition of a cluster where there is no such logic is doomed to failure. In this paper, qualitative research has been used to interview SME business leaders and other relevant stakeholders (with a total sample size of 65) to identify issues related to cluster formation in contemporary Thailand and the means by which they have sought to overcome challenges. These have included low purchasing power, unclear information and uncertainty with respect to the direction of government policy, which has varied wildly over the past two decades, as well as unrealistic loan arrangements. More positively, entrepreneurs detect improvements in the quality and quantity of knowledge workers in the local economy and, when clusters have been able to flourish, reduced transaction costs and better provision of information have helped to create some sustainable forms of competitive advantage. Nevertheless, the perennial complaints of SME owners (i.e. lack of access to capital and markets, government regulations) were also well-represented here. The implications of this research are presented and recommendations made at various scales.

Keywords: clusters, competitiveness, SMEs, Thailand

Amarjeet Mastana Singh is a doctoral candidate at the School of Management, Shinawatra University.

1. Introduction

In common with the situation in most other East Asian countries, the government of Thailand has consistently taken an active role in promoting rapid economic development through the use of industrial policy. The selection of the particular tools of industrial policy (i.e. 'government efforts to alter economic structure to promote productivity-based growth (World Bank, 1993)') have changed over time and the short- and medium-term goals they were intended to reach have also varied and it would be difficult to argue that success has been regularly achieved. Nevertheless, the dedication to government-influenced development has remained. It has been shaped by the persistent nature of several long-term developmental goals: decentralization; escape from the Middle Income Trap and developing

Book Reviews

Beyond Fair Trade: How One Small Coffee Company Helped Transform a Hillside Village in Thailand

Mark Pendergrast

Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2015

XV + 270 pp.

ISBN: 9781771-640474

Mark Pendergrast is an independent scholar who counts among his publishing credits a global history of coffee and its drinking entitled Uncommon Grounds. He has drawn upon some of the research conducted for that book for this case study on the Doi Chaang Coffee Company, which has become one of the most well-known Thai brands, albeit one which has only limited competition in this regard. The company is a joint venture between the British-born Canadian investor John Darch, who markets and distributes the coffee in his home country, with the Akha coffee growing community in northern Thailand.

Coffee growing in Thailand is a comparatively recent phenomenon as compared to its neighbours and has become associated with opium eradication. The Akha people are among the many ethnic groups living in the northern Mekong region and have migrated there in the past. As ethnic people who do not speak a Tai-based language, they have faced marginalization and poverty. One of the few ways available to them to generate income was to grow opium, which has a ready market in western countries in the form of heroin, as well as domestically. The demand for opium flourished during the period of the Second Indochinese War (known in western countries as the Vietnam War), when the recreational use of heroin among US troops and others helped them overcome the trauma and alienation caused by the conditions. Partly as a consequence, it has been American support and airpower that has been used to eradicate poppy growing. Demand for drugs in the local and regional market has switched to methamphetamines, which can be manufactured in small factories but the chemicals involved have a characteristic and telltale odour that means they tend to be secreted in remote, probably forested areas.

People who used to grow opium have to grow something else but they often do not have the knowledge to do so, the capital required to buy inputs (e.g. seeds, fertilisers and equipment) or access to a market in which to sell their products. Various attempts have been made by government agencies and non-government organizations (NGOs), including missionary groups, to try to solve this problem across the region. Most of these attempts have been failures because, even when

saleable products are grown, rural infrastructure is often so poor that it is too difficult and expensive to get the goods to market and still make a profit. There are also issues surrounding the ability of small farmers to engage with distant markets on an equitable basis. Buyers, after all, can simply refuse to buy products and agricultural commodities are notoriously volatile in terms of price. Farmers who do seek to abandon subsistence agriculture in favour of market-based production also face the risk of food insecurity, since they are no longer growing the rice and other staples they and their families would normally eat. This risk is to be balanced against the prospects of a better lifestyle and acquisition of consumer goods available from a successful switch to market-based production.

These issues are at the heart of the Akha coffee growing story because it has only been with substantial outside support that it has been possible for the coffee growers to survive until the time of writing the book and, even so, it is far from clear that the business is really sustainable in the long-term. Outside support has come from technical experts in Thailand, who have helped the farmers learn how to harvest high quality coffee beans on a consistent basis and to deal with any pests that might be encountered. There has also been the extraordinary role played by Wicha Promyong, who is a world-roaming guitar-playing guru with an urgent desire to help the poor Akha, whom he views (and this is also the voice of the author) as people not interested in handouts or transfer payments but willing to do whatever is necessary to help themselves. However, the most important role has been played by Darch, who has invested a great deal of effort, time and money to try to make Doi Chaang popular throughout North America. In doing so, he has borne a great deal of the financial risk himself because of the agreement he has made with the Akha growers, which in effect has shielded them from any losses by guaranteeing purchase of coffee beans at a fixed and agreed price reached quite independently of the international brokered price. It is this guaranteed price that has inspired the book's title, since the treatment of the growers goes far beyond what would be required to attain fair trade status. Indeed, the arrangement is so generous it would be interesting to discover quite what has motivated the banker and investor Darch to act in such a way. However, the reader is left only to conclude that it is because of his personal virtue.

The book tells the story of this partnership and the problems that have been overcome on the way. The sections that deal with the Akha and their lifestyle are quite interesting and rather more entertaining than the lengthy sections set in Canada detailing organizational development and marketing issues. As a business case study, it lacks a relationship with existing theory and is slightly too unwilling to be critical of the principal players. It is also describing a business that has yet to come to a definitive conclusion or resolution. The fact that the author feels the need to shift to a first person perspective for the concluding chapters suggests that he too feels somewhat unconvinced by how the book was likely to end.

Pendergrast takes a simple, almost simplistic reading of contemporary Thai history, repeating the usual lies about the Pheu Thai government and suggesting the 2014 coup was an attempt to resolve political difficulties (the usual disclosure about working for Shinawatra University of course applies here). This is perhaps a safe approach but it indicates a superficiality of thought and causes the reader, this reader anyway, to wonder what else about the story would be subject to reinterpretation. In all, then, this is a flawed attempt to tell an interesting story at perhaps too great a length – 200 pages would have been more than enough to include everything that would have been required, although it is possible that the publisher was influential in this regard.

John Walsh, Shinawatra University

Representing Capital: A Reading of Volume One

Fredric Jameson

London and New York, NY: Verso

158 pp.

ISBN: 9-781781-681572

Fredric Jameson justifies, as if that were really needed, the writing of this new exposition of the first volume of *Capital* by explaining that a new form of capitalism has come into being:

“In particular the mutation of a capitalism of imperialism and the monopoly stage into the latest globalized moment and structure might have been expected to turn our attention to unremarked features of his laborious explorations; and if not that newly expanded system itself then certainly its crises and the catastrophes appropriate to this present of time, which like those of the past are both the same as what preceded them, but also different and historically unique (p.1).”

It is certainly true that the more intense form of finance capitalism that has been reached has brought about more possibilities for crises and different manifestations of existing crises. It is also true that it is important that explorations and explanations are provided by writers with not just the skill and sensibility of Jameson but, also, his extensive knowledge of the works of Marx, ranging beyond not just the three extant volumes of *Capital* to the *Grundrisse*, journalism and correspondence. Marx is most commonly known for the first volume of *Capital* (I doubt many people actually make it beyond the first few rather daunting chapters), which is unfortunate because that lends too much on the production of goods and not enough on all the other elements of the framework he outlined elsewhere. Consequently, to understand the first volume properly, it is necessary to know something about the rest of the work. Fortunately, we do know the basic structure of his thought and of his methods. This, as Jameson correctly explains, is significantly interlinked with the dialectical approach. Indeed, the first section of *Capital* acts as an introductory lesson to the dialectical method and helps readers to understand how they should try to understand the rest of the work.

The first three chapters from this introductory work also contain within themselves a version of the thesis of the book as a whole or “... a related yet semi-autonomous discussion in its own right, one which lays the ground and frees the terrain for the principal task to come (p.13).” As Hegel did, Marx shows how phenomena oscillate between identity and non-identity which is “... the dialectic of identity

and difference (which ceaselessly turn into each other) (p.18)” and contrasts, in the first section, the pre-capitalist forms of societies with the current system of exchange (or circulation) as, it is concluded, an initial critique on the market (than which, we are regularly told, there is no alternative) which is then developed further and in different dimensions in the rest of the book.

We have become familiar with the chapter by chapter close reading of at least the first two volumes (Harvey, 2010; 2013) and illuminating expositions in summary of all three volumes (e.g. Heinrich, 2012) and Jameson attempts something different from either approach. After outlining the various sections of the book, how they relate to each other and how different themes enter and re-enter the text, reaching initial and then more final conclusions at sometimes surprising moments along the way, he then explores themes of time, space and politics, together with a last return to the dialectical method. He does so while also reminding us of the historical events of the approximate time which helped shape contemporaneous thinking (e.g. the Taiping Rebellion, the Paris Commune and the American Civil War) and the emergence of new forms of technology, most of which Marx enthusiastically embraced.

In Chapter 4, “Capital in Its Time,” Jameson considers both the relationship between the book and the time at which it was written and, also, the relationship between labour in its frozen form (i.e. machinery) and the production of value in the present. The problem here is the immanence of capitalism and the necessary disappearance, therefore, of the actual means of production: “... Marx insists over and over again on the way capital effaces the traces of its own prehistory (and of the existence of modes of production that preceded it), just as surely as it extinguishes the immediate traces of production from the object produced (p.105).” Consequently, the fact that I cannot see the labour embedded in making the pen with which I first write these lines is an aspect of the same phenomenon that encourages the bourgeois economist to say there is no alternative. Only when this phenomenon is broken down and exposed can it be understood and, eventually, replaced.

Chapter 5, “Capital in Its Space,” introduces or re-introduces the physicality of the labour that is at the heart of society. The place where work takes place is a physical place and it is, of course, to be distinguished from the places where the workers live and attempt to reproduce themselves: “Space is in it replicated on many levels; from housing to individual rooms, from the housing shortage to the cities themselves which the workers are building, from the urban landscape to the agricultural one, from the increasing distances required to walk to work to emigration to the colonies, and (rather surprisingly) not excluding that other easily overlooked (spiritual rather than physical) essential of reproduction which is education (p.117).” Space is another element of everyday life that capitalism would like to efface, as proponents of globalization would demonstrate as they argue that contemporary information technology has annihilated both space and

time. It is not surprising, then, that Lenin (1987) led the way in the analysis of space and the unevenness of its development, which has become linked with imperialism.

In the final chapter, on “Political Conclusions,” Jameson addresses the seemingly contradictory way in which Capital seems not to contain political commentary, unlike most of Marx’s other work in which the political world is regularly and powerfully addressed. Drawing on insights he previously made in *Valences of the Dialectic* (2010), he maps out a globalized world of enormous inequality and argues that this is not the result of inefficiencies or market flaws but a deliberately created system resulting from the logic of capitalism. At the small scale, the value of labour is kept at a low level by the threat of unemployment and the presence of the industrial reserve army. At the large scale, refugees from Syria and Afghanistan and so forth are those members of the unemployed whose purpose is to encourage the others not to try to resist the call of the market. Since capitalism is a total system and a totalizing one, “... it must continue to absorb everything in its path, to interiorize everything that was hitherto exterior to it (p.146).” It absorbs, as a result, all that is open and seemingly unrelated to exchange and renders it, by doing so, part of the system of market relations. All forms of social and emotional relations become converted to economic exchange and so incorporated within the overall system. Resistance – a radical religious belief, for example – is punished by enforced unemployment and inability to participate.

This is a compelling reading of one of the formative books of the modern world and it is one written with subtlety and grace. It does not shy away from the complexities of the original text and the dialectical method it espouses but instead embraces them and explains them as well as could be hoped. It makes a significant contribution to the study of both Capital and capitalism.

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John Walsh, Shinawatra University

On Track: Henry Gittins – Railway Pioneer in Siam and Canada

Paul Gittins

Bangkok: River Books, 2014

151 pp.

ISBN: 978-616-7339-429

The decision whether or not to upgrade Thailand's rail services to incorporate high speed links, double tracks and improved connectivity with all important places of production and consumption across Asia rather tends to cause people to disregard the existing system and focus on inadequacies and lack of investment. This is rather unfair as the original act of building the system was not just a significant feat of engineering through terrain that was in many places thickly forested and mountainous, together with the difficulties posed by monsoon rains in a muddy part of the world but, also, because of the persistence needed to overcome the high rate of fatalities among the labour force resulting from numerous diseases and dangerous wild animals. Those who participated in the work needed almost certainly to be young and fit and could expect a relatively short career before the dangers of working in such an environment required cessation before permanent illness or even death would be the result. There are many examples of records kept by western travellers in their explorations of the Mekong region, even into the twentieth century, that retell in prosaic terms the stories of individuals, local or international alike, who fell ill in the afternoon and then were dead before morning. It is hard to imagine that many people today would accept such conditions without duress.

The railway system that was built may have had its limitations but it did have an important role to play in the modernization of Siam, under King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) and notables such as Prince Damrong. Transportation infrastructure is an enabling technology and, as such, enables other people to do things which they might not otherwise have been able to do or, at least, with the same level of efficiency. There is a tendency to think about economic activities when talk of enabling begins – farmers able to bring their produce to market and consequently are able to move beyond subsistence forms of agriculture – but there are benefits to be had in terms of familial and social relations and, in a more modern country, benefits to a properly functioning democracy, as the example of independent India shows. In this memoir of the work of his grandfather Henry Gittins, author Paul Gittins includes extensive extracts from the diaries of the eponymous pioneer and some of these demonstrate his opinion that the ability of provincial governors and local rulers to *kin muang* (eat the state) had been reduced since the railroad linking their provinces to Bangkok:

“The governor ... controlled the gang of thieves or if they did not control them, ‘twas their retainers, who never receiving any pay for their services, took to gang robbery to recoup themselves and the governor winked the other eye. The poor labourer in those days got little in the way of cash or anything else except stripes for his labour (p.104).”

However, in some ways, there has been precious little improvement over the course of a century: “... almost invariably it was useless for a poor man to bring an action against a rich one, as bribery and corruption was just as rife now as it was in the old days (p.109).”

A family memoir such as this relies for its interest and value almost entirely on the quality of the original memoir and exclusive access to it. Author Gittins seems to know very little about Siam or indeed Canada that is not revealed to him by his grandfather and if he has done any background reading then this is not evident in the text and there are very few citations of any other authors, whether for the purpose of comparison or triangulation. So, therefore, what is the quality of the memoir and the way it has been presented? In answering these questions, it is necessary to consider the purpose and objective of the book, the author and the publisher. The book intends, it may be deduced, to entertain and educate to a certain extent and not to outstay its welcome. The author clearly wants the chance to show the career of his grandfather to the world and not to write a serious piece of history. Everything told to him by his grandfather is presented seemingly at face value and, although the editing process might have been quite different to the way it appears, it looks like Gittins has used pretty much all the material he could reasonably hope to include. The publisher, meanwhile, is River Books from here in Bangkok is known for a range of publications on local interests, including memoirs and books based on photography. This book sits within that catalogue and it is notable how many photos are included, mostly from Henry Gittins himself but also from other sources. An uplifting story from a good family man well-rewarded by his appreciative and wise Siamese hosts and employers would seem to fit the bill and, by and large, the text delivers this. There are some examples of comments about the rival Germans that test the limit of what an exasperated English person might reasonably make but there is nothing negative to be found on individual members of the establishment. The grandfather’s prose itself is a little plodding in nature and presumably not originally intended for publication:

“This consisted of laying logs side by side the full length of the bank and putting the earth on top as a sort of floating construction. As it slowly sank, more earth was piled on and eventually a good road bed obtained. These swamps had to be crossed slowly on foot, stepping from tuft to tuft of matted grass. If you stepped between, you might go out of sight, after the manner of a Dartmoor bog (p.46).”

There are some gems of information in this book but not too many of them. It would be interesting to know what a historian would have made of the original material.

John Walsh, Shinawatra University