A Showing Method for Large Amount of Photographs Having Temporal and Spatial Information

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Museums have collections of materials that are grouped by certain criteria. Some collections consist of thousands to tens of thousands of materials. In the case of written materials, the number may even reach hundreds of thousands. The exhibition of such a large collection of material images always faces a difficult problem of how to present them to help visitors find what they are looking for.

The National Museum of Japanese History held a special exhibition “Recording Landscapes,” which featured photography collections including Minoru Ishii Photo Library donated to the Museum. The collection contains more than 300,000 photos of landscapes all over Japan taken by geographer Minoru Ishii after World War II. By taking this opportunity, we created an exhibiting system for 34,000 digitalized photos from the collection and evaluated the system based on the record of use of the digital content displayed at the exhibition in order to gain insights on how to effectively exhibit a large collection of images. The collection had information about the date and location of each shooting, by which the photographs were categorized into sub films. Then, referring to the temporal or spatial information, we selected sub films for the exhibition and set up the exhibiting system in a way to enable visitors to view the photos they would want to see.

The analysis of the record of use reveals the following points. First, although it was afraid that thumbnails would be too small to help users select photos when they display as many thumbnails as possible on the screen looking for photos they like, it proves no problem if the number of thumbnails displayed is limited to 40. If this limit is set higher, users can find spatial information with fewer clicks on average, leading to a higher access rate as a whole. The number of people who search photos by location is approximately three times more than the number of people who search by time. People usually view the locations related to their own place to live, which indicates that they select photos from their own point of view. About half the users select photos one by one from the list of thumbnails and half browse the display screen. The latter view more photos than the former does.

Key words: image viewing, exhibiting system, museum materials, landscape photographs, log analysis