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SC2 comments on ISO/IEC JTC1 N5698, the Japanese National Body Recommendation to ISO/IEC JTC1 Concerning the Activities of JTC1 SC2

SC2 agrees with Japan on the importance of the standardization work of JTC 1/SC 2. The SC2, however, cannot agree with all of the conclusions drawn by Japan in JTC1 N 5698.

1. ISO/IEC 10646 is called the "Universal Character Set" for a reason: it is intended to cover all the scripts of the world. This view is widely shared by the industry and the user communities, both of which participate, both directly and indirectly, in the work of the SC2.

1a. Japan's concern seems predicated primarily on the concern for market relevance of the ongoing work in the SC2 for ISO/IEC 10646. The first point implies that working on dead or almost dead ancient character sets has no market relevance. As regards the issue of market relevance of historic scripts, or living minority scripts, for that matter, 10646, as the Universal Character Set, is in a unique position as a standard. Since ISO/IEC 10646 is intended as the one, universal international standard for characters, ISO/IEC 10646 must contain all scripts. It is then up to market forces to drive the scope of implementations of the standard. Implementers can choose to implement only those parts of the standard that are relevant to their applications and markets.

1b. There are some of living scripts in use in Southeast Asia that are not yet included in 10646. However, it is incorrect to infer that due attention and proper priority by the SC2 is lacking. It is misleading to characterize the supply of ancient scripts as "virtually inexhaustible". The SC2 has a plan, in the form of a roadmap, which provides a guideline for the prioritization of the program of work of its WG2 in the future development of ISO/IEC 10646.

2. Japan's suggestion to use distributed maintenance and ownership for registration processes is at best impractical for lack of mechanism and control. At worst, it would result in a fractured standard; something that very much goes against the idea of a unified, universal character set that is the primary market requirement. Thus the suggestion to distribute the development and maintenance of ISO/IEC 10646 outside of the SC2 is more likely to cause interoperability problems rather than avoiding them.

3. Japan's last point claims that the "basic concept of IS 10646 seems to be changing and ambiguous." This is not correct. What has been changing is the nature of the new proposals for scripts and other characters to be added to the Universal Character Set. The SC2 does not think that the scope of the project has changed..

Japan claims that "the plane assignment is given for limited number of planes in rather ad hoc manner". The development plan for ISO/IEC 10646 consists of three phases. Phase 1 focused on the development of the Basic Multilingual plane and a base architecture. Phase 1 was completed with the publication of part 1 of 10646 in May 1993. Phase 2 concentrated on the development of additional scripts for inclusion in part 1. This phase, which included 31 amendments and 2 technical corrigenda, is nearing completion with the expected publication of the next edition of part 1 of 10646 in March 2000. Phase 3 is under development and is focusing on the development of additional scripts that will be limited to 16 additional planes. Phase 3 will result in the publication of part 2 of 10646, which is expected to be published in December 2001. No plans exist beyond phase 3 as of now.

In conclusion, and in response to these concerns, the SC2, at its meeting 9 in Fukuoka, Japan, agreed on additional guidelines for the future development of ISO/IEC 10646 that are included in document SC2 N3273.

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