

RENEWALS OF INFORMATION AND LIBRARY ACTIVITIES AT INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES INFORMATION SINCE 2011

LÊ THỊ LAN^()*

In Decision no. 581/QĐ-TTĐ dated 06/05/2009 of the Prime Minister approving the Strategy for cultural development by 2020, library is one of the key development priorities under the direction of maintaining traditional library as well as building modern world-class level electronic and digital libraries. This strategic thinking about building modern library derives from the perception of the Party and State on increasingly important role of information and library sector in building the knowledge society, knowledge-based economy. This is also the major breakthrough step and foundation for social development towards industrialization and modernization in the expanding globalization and international integration process in Vietnam nowadays. This thinking is reflected in specific criteria and norms which the library sector must strive to achieve.

In the past four years, under the direction and priorities to invest in renewing information-library of the

Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (VASS), Institute of Social Sciences Information (ISSI) has attempted to gradually implement this renewal process. Renewal of information-document-library activities is a continuous process with many aspects, from renewal of library management which the breakthrough is building electronic and digital libraries, to renewal of training policies, remuneration for library staffs, and promotion of socialization process in some library activities etc.

In this article, we present some important results which ISSI has achieved during the renewal of information and library recently, difficulties which ISSI has overcome, as well as some recommendations for continued renewals of information and library activities at ISSI in the coming time.

^(*) Assoc. Prof. and Dr., Director of the Institute of Social Sciences Information.

I. Building electronic library, digital library at VASS to meet the objectives of Strategy for cultural development by 2020 of the Government on model combining tradition library with electronic and digital libraries

1. Achievements

Project on “Strengthening quality of management and serving exploitation of archives at Social Sciences Library – Institute of Social Sciences Information” has been officially approved and funded by VASS in July 2011. This is the most important and the breakthrough kick for the transformation and change in the quality of information-library activities at Social Sciences Library, the lead agency in information-library activities of the entire VASS. The duration of the project is 2 years with massive workload including equipping the most basic IT equipments as the infrastructure foundation for building electronic and digital libraries. The results of the project are:

- The library has been equipped with the most modern Scan robot in Vietnam for digitalization documents, preparation of building digital resources of digital library.
- The library has had 3 servers with modern desktop system by 2011 for management of all activities related to operational chain of the library, full preparation of facilities for electronic library.
- The library has had modern integrated electronic library management software with features satisfying management of all activities of an integrated electronic

library including a central library and member libraries.

- The entire repository of ancient Chinese, ancient Japanese, Russian which was only managed by individual registers and could not be tracked online, has been made into electronic bibliographic database including nearly 120,000 records and entered into shared electronic bibliographic database resource of the Library.

- The entire bibliographic database of Social Sciences Library which was built, inherited and developed since period of Bibliothèque de l’EFEO) including over 600,000 records, has been successfully converted into Millennium library management software, helping readers to access the website **opac.issi.gov.vn** to lookup and search documents in Social Sciences Library at anytime and from anywhere.

- More importantly, with the introduction of modern management software in management of the entire library line towards fully automated, the library’s operation and exploitation of information and library have been changed radically towards increasing specialization and standardization according to international standards. Three training courses on Millennium software by American experts have provided basic, essential skills for library staffs to apply software features in professional works assigned. It can be said, initially, modern working facilities have promoted new working methods and created increasingly professional,

modern working styles in Social Sciences Library.

2. Difficulties

- The first difficulty which ISSI has to face and overcome during the renewal of information-library activities is the obsolescence of librarianship and inertia of old working style. The renewal of library activities to be modern and professional requires library staffs to have relatively good English and IT proficiency; to update professional knowledge with international standards (Anglo-American standards) which are applied in the software; especially, to have teamwork skills, desire for learning, sharing information, and passion for renewal and creativity.

- The second difficulty is the lack of experience in building list of works to be done to satisfy modern electronic library model. This leads to inconsistent estimates compared to actual requirements, asynchronous and unsystematic renewals. One of the most important lessons learnt here is: Building infrastructure for library renewal is only the initial investment step, the next essential step is planning to maintain, promote renewal process continuously so those investments will promote efficiency and not be wasted.

- The third difficulty is the historical existence of the traditional library which cannot be overcome easily and requires much time, effort and financial resources. The larger the library, the larger the information resources, the more adequate resource investment it requires to convert the entire range of

available documents to digital and electronic documents. The earlier and more persistently this process is conducted, the more economical and effective it is.

3. Recommendations

- Training and fostering on professional skills for library staffs should be held regularly.

- Plan to build electronic library, digital library should be continued with works which are not recommended in phase 1 of the project, such as: equipping digital library management software; building and developing preservation of documents on scientific achievements, rare documents which are at risk of being damaged by time and environment modernly and in accordance to technical standards; continue to build codes, barcodes for the entire documents in book format; continue to build electronic bibliographic database for non-book, non-magazine formats available in the library such as microfilms, transparency films, paintings, records etc. to manage on integrated library management software; continue to build digital resources...

- Financial resources for building electronic and digital libraries should be recorded in annual expenses, similar to the expenses for wage reform or in the form of basic project. Thus, the results obtained from building electronic and digital libraries will be maintained and promote efficiency for development of social sciences and intellectual standard of the people.

II. Renewing library staff training and fostering at Social Science Library

1. Achievements

Library staffs of ISSI are 45 people, in which 02 staffs have vocational degrees, 23 staffs have university degrees, and 20 staffs have master degrees. Amongst staffs working in the library, only nearly half of them were properly trained for librarianship, the remaining staffs were recruited from different professions such as foreign language, culture, education etc.

Staffs formally trained for librarianship were supported by the Leadership of ISSI to fully develop their professional capacity in professional work. Library line is implemented methodically, scientifically, helping organization, management of increasing resources reasonably and safely, as well as ensuring quick, efficient, quality service which meets the requirements of readers. For staffs from different professions, we have re-training plan in order to ensure that quality of personnel satisfies and is suitable with assigned works and positions. Librarianship training for staffs from different professions is conducted in 2 methods: on-site training by core library staffs who are highly professional and sending on short-term training courses. In which, on-site training is the main method.

Facing the increasingly rapid development of librarianship in the country and the world, facing the requirements of standardizing library activities to meet modern library, ISSI always search and encourage library

staffs to participate in professional training classes, especially classes on improving application of computing skills in library, training classes on using, operating features of electronic library management software in management of library resources, training classes on unique document digitalization, training classes on the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules AACR2, application of Dewey Decimal Classification (Abridged Edition DDC 14)... Thus, library staffs have more opportunities to work, learn, integrate with operating trends of modern libraries, helping Social Sciences Library to gradually operate under international library standards.

Currently, the most important strategy which the Leadership of ISSI focuses on is training and fostering library staffs according to international library standards. The Leadership has invited many experts on digitalization, library management software and Anglo-American Cataloguing to directly train and foster library staffs at the office. It can be said that, these modern librarianship training classes has changed the perception of library staffs on how to operate the traditional and modern libraries, thereby, helped library staffs to identify targeted modern library skills and profession for training clearly, specifically and these are essential tasks to complete. In addition, the Leadership of ISSI also boldly appoints young library staffs who have foreign language proficiency and profession to attend international conferences on library

digitalization and modernization etc., helping staffs to have new perspectives on the importance and development trends of information-library activities in the world nowadays.

2. Shortcomings in training and fostering library staffs at ISSI

Despite many attempts and efforts of both Leadership and staffs at the Institute, there are still some shortcomings in professional training and fostering as follows:

- Due to expenses on retraining and new professional fostering are not listed in regular budget expenditures, the Institute usually cannot be proactive in planning classes, inviting training experts for staffs.
- Access to modern librarianship requires library staffs to have relatively good computer and foreign language proficiency to acquire new knowledge in a limited duration of short-term classes. As library staffs are very weak in these two skills, the effect of short-term classes is very limited.
- On one hand, reform towards modern library requires maintaining traditional operation in some respects. On the other hand, it requires replacing with modern operation under international standards. This is a very difficult process which requires managers to carefully prepare on two aspects: stable human and financial resources. Both of these aspects are major problems of the Institute.
- Occupational inertia of library staffs is actually a shortcoming obstructing quite significantly, reducing the effectiveness

of librarianship training and fostering towards modernity and international standards.

3. Recommendations

- There should be satisfactory remuneration policies for library staffs. Although there have been many reforms on salary and remuneration regime for library staffs, in our opinion, current salary of library staffs is too low compared to other professions. Allowances and toxicity compensation for library staffs are only about 3% of basic salary which is only a small amount. Furthermore, salary of library staffs at VASS includes only the basic salary. Such income is not enough to compensate for the effort of library staffs. For Social Sciences Library, the Leadership of the Institute were aware of the difficulties of library staffs as well as understands the importance of using economic levers to stimulate learning, cultivate new professional knowledge. Hence, we have proposed and received approval from the Leadership of VASS allowing library staffs to implement library tasks under the regime of scientific research. Through the implementation of library tasks, on one hand, library staffs have enhanced their professional careers, accessed to the advanced professional techniques. On the other hand, they have more income, improve their lives, at the same time passion for job of library staffs is increased. It can be said that, this is a success in terms of employment and remuneration policies of the Leadership of ISSI and VASS. As the result, Social

Sciences Library has well prospered in the recent 4 years.

However, with the requirements set out for the modernization of the library and increasing workload, the abovementioned remuneration policies are still modest and unstable. The Leadership of the Institute always has in mind “hand-to-mouth” thinking because this funding completely depends on annual budgets funded. Therefore, a stable and relatively suitable policy on training and fostering librarianship and remunerations for library staffs are essential and urgent requirements at the moment in the new development stage of library sector.

- In order to renew, integrate rapidly efficiently in library activities in the world, meet the requirements of the library in the process of industrialization and modernization of the country, the Leadership of VASS should have a long-term, unified program on professional training in modern librarianship methodically and systematically according to international standards for all library staffs of VASS. At the same time, it is necessary to pay attention to exploring and expanding support in terms of international cooperation, search and appointment of officials to participate in short- and long-term professional training courses in overseas.

III. Renewal of information-library activities towards socialization

International integration, participation in the globalization of economic, culture, society require intensive reform and

change in management mechanism from bureaucratic, subsidy mechanism to management under market-oriented mechanism.

Information-library management under market-oriented mechanism means increasing promotion of libraries on searching, connecting and mobilizing all social resources involved in modernization of information-library activities in all aspects. It is socialization process of information-library activities. This process is not new, however, it is only increasingly boosted and strongly promotes efficiency when there is renewal of library management, promoting development of library modernization according to international standards.

During the renewal and modernization of information-library activities, Social Sciences Library has been awarded that the importance of socialization of library activities is not only the development of library resources in particularly but also improvement of efficiency in providing information to meet the needs of users, aiming at developing social sciences to serve the overall development of the society.

1. Some results of socialization of library activities at Social Sciences Library

Socialization of library activities at Social Sciences Library is shown in the following aspects:

Supplementary of information:

Actively seek assistance, support and contributions from individuals and organizations at home and abroad to enrich the information resources of the Library.

Currently, users' needs of social science information in economics, politics, culture, society etc. are very high. The preparation of updated, complete, essential, accurate and important information on interests, goals, values, resources, power and general rules of international institutions, organizations who are also involved on the global stage is a crucial issue for social science researchers to achieve valuable products, meeting the knowledge requirements of the society. However, due to limited funding from the State budget at present, Social Sciences Library can only supplement a very small number of documents and cannot meet the demands for information. The "hunger for information" from social science information system has lasted for many years and significantly impacted on the quality of social science researches.

Facing the situation, the Leadership of

ISSI has actively sought additional information in addition to the State budget through donations, exchanges of books, newspapers and magazines. This is a very effective method, helping the Library to supplement many necessary documents, books, newspapers, magazines for users when the limited budget cannot afford. This method has been used by Social Sciences Library thoroughly and developed through the bilateral relations between two agencies and through personal reputation. Specifically, in the recent 5 years, the value of documents, books, newspapers, magazines supplemented in the form of socialization have been growing and now accounted for nearly equivalent to the amount of State budget funding for the Library to supplement documents annually. The statistics from 2008 to 2013 are as follows:

* **Source of exchange:**

No.	Establishment	Language	Document format		Value	Remarks
			Book	Newspaper, magazine		
1	Washington University	English	x		120.000.000	Since 2011
2	Chinese Social Science Library	Chinese	x	x	200.000.000	Since 2008
3	Institute of Literature and Philosophy (Taiwan)	Chinese		x	75.000.000	
4	Singapore Institute of Southeast Asian Studies	English		x	1.000.000	Since 2012
5	Russian Institute of Social Sciences Information	Russian	x	x	1.200.000.000	

*** Source of donation:**

Besides printed sources which are distributed officially at home and abroad mentioned above, authors who are involved in ministerial- and state-level researches, essays, theses and have defended successfully regularly donate their works to Social Sciences Library, supplementing information resources of

the Library. In 2014, under the direction of the Leadership of VASS, Scientific Management Board and the Leadership of Graduate Academy of Social Sciences (GASS), PhD and master students' submission of essays, theses to Social Sciences Library before defending has been officially regulated at GASS, contributing to increase internal resources of VASS.

No.	Establishment	Language	Document format		Value	Remarks
			Book	Newspaper, magazine		
1	The Asia Foundation	English	x		150.000.000	2008, 2009
2	Ford Foundation	English		x	1.750.000.000	Stop in 2012
3	Association of Vietnamese-American Culture	English	x		38.000.000	Since 2012
4	Social Sciences Publishing House	Vietnamese	x		15.000.000	
5	National Political Publishing House	Vietnamese	x		9.000.000	
6	Vietnam Folk Arts Association	Vietnamese	x		24.000.000	Since 2010
7	Công an nhân dân Newspaper	Vietnamese		x	4.000.000	Stop in 2013
8	Thanh niên Newspaper	Vietnamese		x	4.500.000	Stop in 2013
9	Fine Arts Publishing House	Vietnamese	x		5.000.000	
10	News Agency Publishing House	Vietnamese	x		5.000.000	
11	Irregular organizations, individuals	Vietnamese, English	x	x	550.000.000	

- Dissemination of information:

Direct dissemination of information such as reader conference, book introduction, invitation of speakers etc. and indirect dissemination via *Quick Bulletin for research*, *Journal of Social Science Information*, and *Yearbook of Social Science Information* have been implemented successfully by ISSI in the long run. Information on social science activities, results of new researches, new and good books are disseminated to readers quickly, contributing effectively to scientific life of social science researchers and those interested. Book launch events or presentations are held by the Library with the participation and support of volunteer speakers who are reputed authors or researchers, organizations. These activities of the Library have a bilateral connection between information users and providers, helping information to reach readers quickly, accurately and interestingly. This direct information dissemination activity has been recovered as a regular activity of ISSI at the office in 1B Lieu Giai Street.

With the improvement in operation of Dissemination Department such as appointing officials to schools, educational institutions to directly introduce to students new publications of the Library, promotion of the Library via business trips of lecturers, officials of the Institute, introduction of the Institute's publications on social networking sites etc., as supply meets demand, it has helped ISSI to have extra

funds to support other activities of the Library.

- Information service:

Due to the specialized nature, reading cultural transformation in the age of internet, socialization of information activities of Social Sciences Library are now gradually, step-by-step implemented. The introduction of rare collections of the Library on multiple official and unofficial channels has helped information users to find the correct locations in the most convenient and economical manner. With reasonable service fee, enthusiastic and efficient service, the Library has attracted relatively diverse demands for information in the society. This is also a socialization way in serving information which ISSI is developing.

2. Shortcomings and recommendations on perfecting policies to attract participation of individuals, organizations at home and abroad in the Library's activities

Although there have been many attempts, the socialization of the Library's activities still has many shortcomings compared to the requirements of the Library in social science development in particular and in socio-economic development in general. Some of the main shortcomings are:

- Additional information resources by exchanges, donations are normally popular but not updated; they do not meet the specific needs of social science users. In other words, Social Sciences

Library is relatively passive in receiving these resources.

- In direct dissemination of information, mobilization and persuasion of speakers to participate in information promotion do not always receive support. Although speakers are very passionate and have goodwill, delivering a speech is a high intellectual work; they still need minimum funding support. Hence, in order to make this activity become a regular activity of the Library, there should be specific policies to meet the interests of the parties involved. In indirect dissemination of information, improving the quality of information, providing costly and timely information are important issues in making information users to seek the Library's publications, enhancing socialization of information. This is a two-way interaction area and requires initial investment such as ordering articles with excessive royalties etc.

- For serving information, diversification of information forms is still limited, leading the socialization of service activities of the Social Sciences Library to be slow. The new facility of the Social Sciences Library can be equipped with reading room. It is not only a place to receive knowledge but also a place to exchange, communicate and learn in various forms such as workshops by topics, book lover club, room serving special demands for information etc. However, this is only orientation of activity to attract the attention of readers in the future. Currently, the amount of

information users who seek to the Library is not high.

Socialization of library's activities is an evitable process of each library to meet the information-library requirements of modern society. In particular, with limited budgets, in order to promote the development of the library, socialization is the mandatory and most effective solution. Based on the current situation and shortcomings in socialization of ISSI's library activities, we propose some solutions to improve policies on attracting, searching resources in addition to the budgets, and supporting further promotion of socialization process:

- About, VASS, it should allow Social Sciences Library to put name board on the fence outside the site so people can locate the address of Social Sciences Library, helping to promote, maintain the library's name which is one of the oldest libraries in Southeast Asia.

- In case of necessity, VASS should sponsor or support projects applying for funding from organizations at home and abroad for the library of VASS.

- About the libraries: leaders of libraries should be pioneers in seeking information, establishing relationships, making full use of opportunities to cooperate with organizations and individuals at home and abroad who have the potential to support the library's activities.

In specific cases, the initial investment in establishing bilateral relationships is

acceptable. Searching for benefactors in the business world is a potential method.

- Library leaders should have policies to encourage library staffs to promote their internal strength to search additional resources through personal or organizational relationships; promote initiatives to diversify services to attract information users to the library such as rewards and remunerations commensurate with the efficiency achieved from individual initiatives etc.

Conclusion

It can be said that, the policy of building unified electronic and digital libraries at VASS is established on the basis of strategic perception on the importance and the role of pioneer of information-library activities in developing knowledge economy in the extensive period of international integration. It is crucial in facilitating the success of the process of industrialization and modernization of the country. This policy has been affirmed and concretized into policy on renewal and development of information-library system by leadership generations of VASS for years. Results achieved from

renewal of information-library activities of ISSI under the direction of the Leadership of VASS in the past 4 years are very significant and breakthrough in terms of quality, creating relatively synchronous technical-computing facilities and human resources for the operation of electronic libraries and setting the first essential conditions for the formation of digital libraries. On this basis, the establishment of unified integrated electronic information-library system in the entire VASS is only the matter of technique and timing.

However, renewal is a continuous and consistent process, requiring persistence and determination of the Leadership of VASS to pursue until the end as well as consensus, synergy, effort to learn and implement renewal of all staff working in information-library area. Thus, the results achieved will be strengthened and the shortcomings, limitations existing or arising in the renewal process will be overcome and corrected to be more suitable and complete as required by the development of modern information-library system to serve the development of society □