

CONCERNING THE BUILDING A REGIONAL-LEVEL SOCIAL SCIENCES LIBRARY

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In comparison with regional countries, both in Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia, when talking about Vietnamese Social Sciences, many often mention to shortcomings, weaknesses of the country's Social Sciences; it seems that Vietnamese Social Sciences and Social Sciences activities in Vietnam have not any achievement to compete with other countries.

Not totally agreeing with this prejudice, on January 11 – 2010, at the 2009 Performance Summation Conference of Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences attended by Vice Prime Minister Nguyễn Thiện Nhân and many leaders from various ministries and sectors, the Institute of Social Sciences Information has delivered a speech to reevaluate the role of Social Sciences to the development of Vietnamese society over the past twenty years, including reevaluating the capacity and position of the Social Sciences Library and suggesting the Government formulate a plan on building a regional-level Social Sciences Library.

The speech emphasizes that it is very difficult for Vietnamese Social Sciences and Human Sciences to compete or stand in the same rank with that of other strong countries in the region by the next twenty years. However, if there is a project on building a Social Science Library adequate to its precious materials, in a short time, the country surely has a considerable Information Library Center on Social Sciences which all paying attention to the Orient and Vietnam cannot help recognizing.

With many fields, Vietnamese is likely to be only followers because they are the fields in which we must learn what the world has created. If we do not know how to exploit heritages of our ancestors contained in the documents in the Social Sciences Library at 26 Lý Thường Kiệt (Hanoi), it is highly likely that Vietnamese Sciences has contributions as leading researches, at least on characteristic cultures of Vietnam and the Orient.

It is our pleasure of introducing you readers a part of the speech.

The Social Sciences Library at 26 Lý Thường Kiệt is often called “Social Sciences Information Library”. In fact, it is the Social Sciences Library belonged to Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences. The Institute of Social

Sciences Information manages it and takes responsibility for organizing its performance. The Library was officially

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established in 1968, but has a history of more than 100 years thanks to inheriting the heritage of *Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient - EFEO (French School of the Far East, established in 1901. France handed over EFEO to Vietnam in 1957).*

At present, the library has more than 160,000 volumes of Gods' stories and Royal proclamations of about 9,000 Vietnamese villages (with about 230,000 pages of hand-writing documents^(*)); 1,125 village regulation documents written in Han script and Ancient Vietnamese script, with quill on Dó paper, in which there are about 50 documents written in the 18th – 19th century; more than 5,000 hand-writing documents of village regulations in Vietnamese script; more than 3,000 documents in Han and Nom scripts on kinds of village and commune culture such as royal proclamations, epitaphs, land registers, rules of fine, and the list of place-names of villages/communes in 1923 of most of provinces and cities nationwide.

The map store stores 1,370 maps of different kinds, including 986 maps on Vietnam and Indochina which were very early drawn and printed – from 1584 to 1942. Many maps are considered precious, such as the Hanoi map of 1831, 1873; Saigon map of 1902^(**). At the library, EFEO scholars have collected more than 400 royal proclamations by Nguyen dynasty and

previous monarchies dynasties. The most ancient document in the library is the document of the 16th century.

Picture store of the library consists of about 40,000 pictures of Vietnam and Indochina. Roughly 10,000 pictures were brought back to Paris by the French before the hand-over in 1957. The picture store is formed mainly from studies of Vietnamese and French historians, architects, archaeologists, ethnologists, etc. Another part is pictures provided by officers of colonial administrative bodies. The content of the pictures is diversified, describing Vietnamese of the past time, unique cultures – customs – practices, beautiful and impressive landscapes, daily life and production activities of ethnic nationwide. UNESCO has suggested the Institute of Social Science Information build a file in order for the picture collection to be recognized as Memory of the World and we are preparing at present.

Currently, the resource of books and newspapers consists of about 1,000,000 copies with nearly 500,000 books, more than 2,000 newspapers and magazines in Vietnamese and foreign languages of various fields, in which there are more than 400 newspapers and magazines “alive” (fully and regularly supplemented^(*)). The collection of ancient Japanese books includes 11,000 copies, ancient Chinese books 31,000 copies^(**), modern Chinese books

(*) Printed in “Story of the Gods, conferring title from Gods and village regulation catalogues” by Institute of Social Sciences Information, published in 1996.

(**) For the 1000th Thăng Long – Hanoi anniversary, this year, as scheduled, Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences will publicize Hanoi map of the year 1831 (The map's figures based on the database from the index cabinet).

(*) About 1,500 kinds were not fully and regularly supplemented because they were irregularly presented, because the magazines themselves suspended their publications, because orders for these magazines were impossible and because of other objective reasons.

(**) The project “Digitalization of the world Chinese ancient documents” has expressed its intention of

11,000 copies, Latin books 40,000 copies, etc. The most ancient copy in the library dated at the 14th century. The most unique copy of the library has the seal “Royal” of Chinese Qing Dynasty (the 18th century). A part of Yongle Encyclopedia and a part of ‘The great Encyclopedia of China’ are precious heritages. Even China where the two documents originated does not have the full versions but Vietnam has collected and is preserving them.

By introducing the things above, we want to affirm that the Social Sciences Library at 26 Lý Thường Kiệt is a celebrated library *not only on Vietnam scale*. The library is well-known among home and foreign science circle not only because it is a collective leading library on social sciences, but also because it is preserving diversified and noblest documents in Southeast Asia on Oriental studies which is collected and compiled at the end of the 19th century – the beginning of 20th century. We can say for sure that in Vietnam, at present, if readers want to find the most confident and precise bases of Gods’ stories, Gods’ proclamations, village regulations, on ancient Han and Japanese documents, on pictures and maps of the end of 19th century and beginning of 20th century, on publications of EFEO, on world social sciences magazines (in English, French, Russian, Chinese) as well as Russian books and magazines and Soviet culture, online magazines and science documents

inviting Institute of Social Sciences Information to join it. Among 600,000 ancient Chinese documents, Social Sciences Library has 31,000 document units, ranking fourth after Beijing National Library, University of Tokyo Library, Taiwan National Library.

(allowed to access by world science organizations), the Social Sciences Library is the most trustworthy place.

In fact, this is the only library in Vietnamese *history of science* and Vietnamese *history of culture and science*, deserving to be the pride of Vietnamese Social Sciences in particular and of Vietnam in general. Home and foreign scholars more or less know Social Sciences Library. Nearly all intellectuals living and working in Hanoi over the past 50 years at least once were readers of the library. In many research publications, on the Websites of EFEO in Paris as well as Hongkong and Hanoi, Social Sciences Library at 26 Lý Thường Kiệt is a place they can not help mentioning, because it is a part of history and pride of EFEO. In documents of International Federation of Library Association (IFLA), and a few of Social Sciences dictionaries, even in some documents on tourism, Social Sciences Library at 26 Lý Thường Kiệt is respectfully introduced. Its collections alone, such as Maps, Gods’ stories – proclamations, village regulations, Pictures, Films or ancient Han, Japanese, Han Nom, Russian books, etc. deserve to be *Specialist Archives Centers* or other collections deserve consideration to be registered as mankind’s cultural heritages. According to the assessment of some specialists, including Prof. Tu Weiming – Former Director of Harvard Yenching University, Social Sciences Library at 26 Lý Thường Kiệt is in no way inferior to prestigious libraries in the region.

It is to be regreted that due to various reasons, including the reasons that the country experienced many years of war,

its economy is weak, management and exploitation capacity of the library itself is low, etc., up to now Social Sciences Library has been *ignored* with weak infrastructure (*).

Thus, the Institute of Social Sciences Information suggests: *it is necessary to have a plan on building a Social Sciences Library of the regional stature*. The preliminary data for the suggestion are as follows:

1. Although the new head office of the library at No. 1 Liễu Giai has been set to work and is being completed and when it comes into operation in 2011, it will fulfill a part of the dream of many generations of library workers. However, with about 5,000 m² of a sixteen-storey building, theoretically it does not reach the *standard level* for a library with more than one million of books and other materials such as paintings, pictures, DVD & CD, and films. Moreover, the library in construction has no campus. This means that it has no garage, no system of green-tree garden. Hence, we can not think about technical centers such as digitalization center, restore and preservation center, printing center, etc. In addition, there is no infrastructure

serving remote readers and foreigners. We want to say that such a head office is not adequate to the stature of the library. We should only consider the head office of the Social Sciences Library at No.1 Liễu Giai an intermediate step in order for Vietnam to have a Social Sciences Library adequate to its stature.

2. In comparison with a few libraries noisily advertised nationwide and worldwide, Social Sciences Library at 26 Lý Thường Kiệt does not lack resource or standards of a valuable library, but *lacks only infrastructure*. This is the issue library workers wish the State to pay more attention to so that in five or ten years, the Social Sciences Library will have a head office adequate to its stature and value. We insist the Government and Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences pay attention to this suggestion and set up a plan on building a regional-stature Social Sciences Library.

We should think the project is not utopian and wasteful, and not too difficult compared to the current capacity of the country and Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences.

3. Our wish is that in the future, our country's science can stand in the same rank with regional countries, not too far behind the world's science. We are also investing step by step so that the dream can come true. With the current situation, it is difficult or very difficult for us to compete or to stand in the same rank with developed sciences of regional countries in about ten or twenty years. Nevertheless, if there is a plan on building a high caliber Social Sciences Library, in a short time the country surely has considerable Information –

(*) Weak infrastructure: storehouses, reading rooms, operation rooms are narrow, non-qualifying and seriously downgrading. Condition and capacity of document preservation is low, not meeting requirements of a library. There is not good condition for preserving, restoring, displaying maps, royal proclamations, paintings and pictures, etc. to serve readers. There is not enough expense to supplement traditional documents (there have been newspapers and magazines regularly in the library's document resource for dozens of years). Information infrastructure and information technology are out of date. The condition is not good enough to connect to the Internet and serving online readers. There are little resources digitalized; they do not meet the requirement of online serving, etc.

Library center on Social Sciences which all paying attention to the Orient and Vietnam cannot help recognizing.

4. For Social Sciences only, we want to say that among unexploited documents in Social Sciences Library such as royal proclamations, village regulations, maps, ancient Japanese and Chinese documents, who knows there are valuable secrets and directions of our ancestors or valuable conclusions of preceding scientists which have not been exploited so our scientists have to make great effort to understand what have been recorded in the documents. With many fields, Vietnamese scientists are always the followers because they are the fields we have to learn from other countries. However, if we know how to exploit the heritages from our ancestors contained in these precious and scarce documents, it is likely that Vietnamese Social Sciences will have contributions as leading researches, at least on characteristic cultures of Vietnam and the Orient.

In fact, in some fields belonging to human sciences, such as Vietnamese study, study on Vietnamese people, etc., if Vietnamese scientists don not have enough talent to become leading experts, no one can help us shoulder the responsibility because this is not the time of Dournes, Georges Condominas, Alexandre Yersin, Henri Maitre^(*).

With objective data mentioned above and with our enthusiasm, we Institute of Social Science Information insist your Excellency Prime Minister and President of Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences set up a project on building a regional stature library. We should think that it is late to plan a project adequate to the library. But it is reasonable if we chose this moment for investment, when the country has entered the first threshold of the middle-income lobby – 1,000 USD/person/year, this means that we relatively have enough resource and vision to build a Social Sciences Library so that the next generation does not have to rebuild.

(*) Colonial scholars with deep researches on Vietnam at the beginning of the 20th century. (See more: Henri Maitre. Source deep forest. H.: Knowledge, 2008).