

International cooperation for preserving and disseminating old archives in the Library of Social Sciences - Issues and prospect

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Abstract: *Preservation and dissemination of valuable archives in Library of Social Sciences are of great concerns by Institute of Social Sciences Information. The paper takes international cooperation as an approach of the Institute to deal with these issues by outlining some major international cooperative projects between the Institute and foreign partners in the last decade. It then discusses the outcomes of the projects and proposes measures to foster the effectiveness of such cooperation in the Institute information - library activities.*

Keywords: International cooperation, Old archives preservation, Information dissemination, Library of Social Sciences.

1. Introduction

The Library of Social Sciences (LSS) was established in 1968 and has been managed by the Institute of Social Sciences Information since 1975. However, the Library has a long history of more than 100 years of operation, inheriting most heritages of the Library of the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient* (in French - EFEO) or the French Academy of the Far East. Since its establishment until being handed over to Vietnamese government in

1957, the EFEO Library had collected, gathered many kinds of documentation, including publications, unpublished documents, manuscripts, maps, pictures, newspapers, magazines, etc. in the fields of social sciences and humanities in the Far East and Indochina. With such rich information resources, LSS has become a notable research centre in social sciences, history and culture of Vietnam, Indochina as well as parts of Asia.

International cooperation is one of the main functions and tasks of the Institute of Social Sciences Information (ISSI) as listed in Decision No. 54/KHXH-QĐ of the Vietnam Committee of Social Sciences (Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences - VASS nowadays) in 1976. In ISSI, such international cooperation activities could be divided into information resource donation and exchange, provision of professional training programs and other activities to foster research capabilities, and cooperation to preserve and disseminate information. The paper focuses on the third category, which could be considered an approach for the Library to overcome such problems as lack of budget and limited access to advanced methods of preservation and dissemination. It will discuss some major cooperative activities with foreign organizations and universities in digitalization and cataloguing of the collections in the last decade. From the lessons drawn, it will provide recommendations for similar international cooperative activities to be successful.

2. International cooperative projects in digitalization of old archives

a. The Valorisation de l'Écrit en Asie du Sud-Est (VALEASE) project:

This is a project funded by Embassy of France in Vietnam and Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, France from 2004 to 2008 to digitize old archives in French in different libraries in Vietnam. The main objectives of the project are to preserve the content and physical conditions of the archives as well as to facilitate their digital content dissemination. The selected archives include: administrative

documents, monographs, books, magazines, journals in social sciences (culture, education and politics) and foreign affairs of France and Indochina up to 1954. Main beneficiaries of the project were the National Library of Vietnam, General Sciences Library of Hồ Chí Minh City, National Archives of Vietnam, Library of Social Sciences, which inherit lots of valuable archives from France under the colonial period. One French expert from the project management unit was assigned to select archives compatible with the criteria of the digitalization project. The digitalization and follow-up processing were done by Dirox, one French software company in Vietnam with strict conditions to preserve the current physical condition of the archives. Documents were digitized by i2S scanners, restoration software was used to enhance the quality of images before being optical character recognized and packed in PDF files. Upon the completion of the project, dozens of thousand documents, equivalent to more than 540,000 pages, were digitized (Nguyễn Thị Bắc, 2015).

As one beneficiary of the project, ISSI sent about 300 books and journals to Hồ Chí Minh City for digitalization in 2008. These documents were then sent back to Library of Social Sciences together with one Dell workstation storing PDF files of these documents. Their contents are of great value for studies in historical, cultural, diplomatic issues of Vietnam and Indochina under the French colony. Some of them could be listed as follows: *Les origines de la question du Tong-kin* (OCTO 004732), 1896, 266 pages; *Les commencements de L'Indo-*

Chine française: D'après les archives du ministère de la marine et des colonies, les mémoires ou relations du temps (OCTO 004738), 1897, 217 pages; *L'affaire du Tonkin: Histoire diplomatique de l'établissement de notre protectorat sur l'Annam et de notre conflit avec la Chine* (OCTO 004742), 436 pages; *Le redoutable drame d'Extrême - Asie: Editions de la Volonté Indochinoise. Numéro spécial du 8, Juillet 1938* (OCTO 22247), 87 pages; *France - Asie: Revue mensuelle de culture Franco - Asiatique* (OCTO 18293), 1947, 867 pages; etc. All of these documents were then catalogued in Greenstone digital management software by ISSI staff. Users to the Library of Social Sciences can get access to their content via Local Area Network (LAN).

b. The "Assessment and preservation of the old Vietnamese École française d'Extrême-Orient archives in ancient ideographic Nom script - EAP 219" project:

This is a project collaborated between the Center for Vietnamese Philosophy, Culture, and Society at Temple University (USA) and ISSI to preserve Sino-Nom archives in ISSI covering the period of 2008 - 2010. Being funded by the British Library under the Endangered Archives Program No. 219, the aims and objectives of the project are to "conduct a thorough inventory of the collection in international standard protocol, post the inventory online for further classification by librarians, digitise volumes in the most vulnerable section of the archive and post these online..." (The British Library, 2017). The inventory of the collection helped to know the number of books, their

current physical and storing conditions. The Center then worked with ISSI to digitalize and catalogue of the Sino-Nom collection of LSS in Dublin core standard. Experts of the University studied the workflows for digitalization and digital content dissemination as well as offered the suitable digital library model for the collection. Consecutive seminars were held in 2007 - 2008 to introduce the process of digitalization, image processing and document cataloguing by PhD. Ngô Thanh Nhàn (Ngô Thanh Nhàn, 2007). ISSI was sponsored 2 high image quality digital cameras, one V-shaped book cradle and necessary accessories to capture images. A strict regulation of digitalization process, image processing and file storing was followed by ISSI staff. All of the collection was digitized from 3 to 5 pages for reference together with the bibliographic records. Especially, 105 books in endangered conditions were full-text digitalized to preserve their physical conditions. Detail information about the collection and items are available online at the Endangered Archives Program of British Library and the Center websites.

c. The collaborative digitalization program with Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University

This is a collaborative program ordered by the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University (CSEAS) in 2014 to digitize specific issues of 6 titles of Vietnamese newspapers and journals in ISSI. The program objective is to enhance the information access of publications in Vietnam prior to 1954 of researchers in the University. As stated by the Director of

CSEAS Library, these were missing issues of libraries in Kyoto University that need filling up. CSEAS Library was in charge of fund and equipment provision while ISSI assigned a team to do the work. One Fujitsu Image Scanner ScanSnap SV600 was sent to ISSI to capture images of the documents up to A3 size. Upon completion of the program, 110 bound items of 6 titles, including *Việt Nam Dân quốc Công báo*, *Giáo dục Nguyệt san bậc Tiểu học*, *Giáo dục Nguyệt san bậc Trung học*, *Dạy trẻ - Phụ trương Giáo dục Nguyệt san*, *An Hà Nhật báo*, *Trung Bắc tân văn* were digitized with nearly 40.000 pages in total (Nguyễn Thị Minh Trung, Nguyễn Duy Thỏ, 2014). The raw images were sent to the Library of CSEAS for processing and upload into its website. They were also processed and put into PDF files and stored in the Network Attached Storage of ISSI.

3. International cooperative project for cataloguing the Old Japanese Collection

This is a joint project between ISSI and a group of Japanese experts to study the content and complete the bibliographic database of the Old Japanese Collection. It stemmed from the research concern of Prof. Wada Atsuhiko, Waseda University (Japan) in 2012 of how Japanese documents were delivered within Japan and abroad. After his discussion with the managerial board of ISSI in 2013, a group of researchers in different universities in Japan sharing the same concern was led by Prof. Wada Atsuhiko to conduct research into the collection. The first collaborating visit was made in 2014. In this visit, ISSI provided the excel files of the collection

plus the PDF files of their title pages and the Japanese researchers set out a detailed plan for research. In order to save time and ensure the quality of the research and catalogue, the workflow would be as follows: (1) From the provided data of ISSI, the Japanese researchers create raw data of the items in Japan in excel format, identifying information to be supplemented and corrected; (2) Double check the information with the original items, correct the data in each visit, taking photos of the title and last pages of the documents when necessary; (3) Continue to complete the data from 1 to 3 months after being back to Japan. In total, there would be 5 annual visits to ISSI from 2014 to 2018, with the first four are for doing research and the last one is for reporting the project outcomes. Also in the year 2015 visit, a Memorandum of Cooperation with detailed information about the provision of data for research, the construction and usage of documents, and budget was signed between the two. After the 1st visit in 2014, a bibliographic data for 1157 items bound in the Japanese traditional style was created. Another 2126 items were catalogued after the year 2015 visit. By the end of 2016, the last 801 items of this type together with 434 Western style bound items were processed. All of the data has been sent back to ISSI after completion. The rest of the complete data would be finished in Japan by the end of 2017 and sent back to ISSI by early 2018. It is expected that a bibliographical database will be published both in Japan and Vietnam when the project finishes by mid-2018 (Wada Atsuhiko, 2017).

4. Discussions of the projects' outcomes

The above-mentioned projects are notable ones that ISSI has cooperated with foreign partners in the last decade to preserve and dissemination of valuable collections in LSS. From these ones, there are several lessons to be drawn. Firstly, all of them have helped ISSI to preserve and facilitate the access of the old archives. Users can use the digital format of the documents instead of original ones, which reduce the risk of their physical degradation. More users can access to the same digitized documents at one time, increasing their usage frequency. Secondly, the digitalization projects have created opportunities for ISSI staff to gain essential standardized knowledge and skills in document digitalization. Especially, the one with the Center for Vietnamese Philosophy, Culture, and Society of Temple University has shown a major change of ISSI from a merely beneficiary in the VALEASE project to an active partner in cooperative activities in which the digitalization and processing have been done by ISSI's staff themselves. So far, the image capturing techniques, file naming regulation and data management structure set from the project have been using as regulated standards in other digitalization projects. Thirdly, the cooperative project for cataloguing the Old Japanese Collection is a good opportunity for ISSI to update correct information about the collection and disseminate its contents to users. The completed data include all necessary information about the documents will allow users to produce the accurate and in-dept studies on the

collection itself, the characteristics and the roles of the collection from the past and in the future. It is expected that by the end of the project, the completed database of the collection would be accessed via opac.vass.gov.vn.

The results of these projects have proven how the Library has dealt with the issues of implementing proper technologies to digitize and process documents, finding experts of old languages to study specific collections and get funded for the work. However, ISSI should create more conditions for the dissemination of what it has from such projects' outcomes. It is recommended that more briefings about how to access the digitized collections within the ISSI premise and via the website of the foreign partners. Information of these collaborated projects as well as the content of the collections should be introduced in the ISSI website and other media to attract more users. Most importantly, one digital content management software platform should be used to manage and disseminate all digitized collections.

5. Conclusions

The paper has discussed different international cooperative projects of LSS to preserve and promote its archival heritage and how to promote their outcomes. International cooperation creates good conditions for the Library and its staff to update new technologies, professional knowledge and skills to modernize its activities. In the meantime, preserving and promoting old rare archives via international cooperation projects will make the Library known to the world. In the latest

decision of Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences dated 8th November, 2017 on functions and tasks of ISSI, international cooperation and collaboration is admitted one major task of the Institute. Therefore, there are various measures that ISSI could take in its international cooperation activities in general and in library - information in particular. Some of them could be:

- Review all current relationships with foreign information centers, libraries and universities; develop the relationships to a higher level of cooperation.
- Actively propose to add information - library international cooperation plans in collaborative agreements between Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences and its foreign partners.
- Search for cooperative opportunities from foreign counterparts and from institutions/organizations/persons having the same concerns with the Institute.

Successfully implementing these above - mentioned measures will contribute to foster the Library's international cooperative activities, enhancing its image as a major research and reference center for social sciences □

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