

*Collaboration in digital Han Nom collections: A solution to improve the effectiveness of managing and exploiting ancient Han Nom documents at libraries in Vietnam*

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**INTRODUCTION**

Over the course of establishment and evolution, libraries in Vietnam have been collecting and providing access to both local and foreign resources, including ancient documents, which bear unique historical values, with an aim to preserve and uphold the values of written heritages being kept in the libraries. The most noteworthy of these is Han-Nom document heritage - an invaluable "warehouse of memories", covering all Vietnamese historical and cultural aspects over thousands of years. Han-Nom documents are either in hand-written or woodblock print of Han script (classical Chinese) and Nom script (a writing system created by Vietnamese people based on classical Chinese characters).

In recent years, libraries in Vietnam have been paying more attention to the application of ITCs into the preservation and exploitation of ancient Han-Nom documents. Many digitization projects have been implemented, which resulted in many digital collections of ancient Han-Nom documents at these libraries. Nevertheless, most of these collections of ancient Han-Nom documents are facing with a common situation: they exist scatteredly at various libraries, while there is a lack of linkages among these libraries, library users and the general public has little or insufficient awareness about the values of the available collections and still faces with difficult access.

In such context, it is of great significance and practicality to conduct a research into theoretical and practical issues in library collaboration in exploiting ancient documents in the world, and to investigate collections of digital Han-Nom collections at Vietnamese libraries so as to make available judgments and solutions to promote the collaboration among libraries in management and exploitation of ancient Han-Nom documents.

**OVERVIEW OF DIGITAL LIBRARY COLLABORATION IN SPECIAL COLLECTIONS**

**Collaboration and its benefits**

Many viewpoints currently exist with regards to "collaboration". As defined by the Oxford dictionary, collaboration means "*the action of working with someone to produce something*". Shepherd (2004) clarified the difference between coordination and collaboration and stated that a collaborative relationship includes a commitment to a mission, a jointly developed organizational structure with clearly defined roles and responsibility to manage collaborative enterprises. Based on a viewpoint proposed by Zorich (2008), collaboration activities are examined in a continuum which includes various steps. The first of these would be the contact stage among parties (dialog, relation establishment and confidence setup); next is cooperation stage (information sharing, experience sharing); then coordination stage (working



together with specific structure and plan); followed by collaboration stage (shared information is utilized to create new things, which, without collaboration, cannot be made available); and the final would be convergence stage (services, functions and infrastructure are shared among organizations). Gunter Waibel (2010) emphasized the three first stages are the prerequisites for collaboration and convergence stages. Collaboration could take place in different contexts such as local (common administration), group (common interest), or global (common values).

In general, collaboration is understood as a process where two or more parties jointly work to achieve their common objectives through the sharing of knowledge and resources. Among organizations, collaboration will help them with better awareness about commonly existing matters in order to undertake their respective activities based on the exchanging and sharing experience, efficient use of resources and eventually to create breakthroughs in their course of development.

Nowadays, thanks to the availability of various solutions that allow easy connections and sharing among organizations. However, the collaboration among organizations always poses many subject matters that need to be addressed such as source of budget, planning, benefits of parties and commitment to duties. Among these, identifying specific collaboration objectives and reaching an understanding, agreement and consensus among parties would be the biggest obstacle against pushing forward the collaboration.

#### **Library collaboration and digital library collaboration in special collections**

Throughout the history, libraries have long-established tradition of collaboration for mutual development and improved operational performance. By nature, libraries all have a shared objective of making available favorable conditions for users to have access to their collections through library services. Many collaboration activities in a series of professional processes such as collection development, cataloging, union catalogs, interlibrary loan, etc. have been properly implemented by libraries.

Digital library has been established and evolved under strong influence of digital technologies. These new technologies have also efficiently facilitating the collaboration process, helping libraries with not only new solutions in providing products and services but also with the removal of physical boundaries and better quality of services provided for users.

Library collaboration in general and digital library collaboration in particular is understood as the collaboration among libraries rendered for achieving benefits for respective parties. Collaboration in establishing federated search tools and centralized access platforms has become a new trend in the field – particular at the libraries have special collections. Such collaborated digital libraries are understood as new spaces, which include infrastructure and digital services where users are provided with access to digital resources from various contributors.

According to Buchanan S., Gibb F., Simmons S. & McMenemy D. (2012), the benefits of digital library collaboration is improved access to services and better quality of services provided, making library resources better known to the public, strengthening the relationship among organizations through making available and sharing professional experience, saving costs while increasing ROI by means of shared use of infrastructure. Sharing this viewpoint, Ayris (2012) also stated that collaboration among digital libraries will be a very promising driver of future development for libraries. Researches by the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC)



show that collaboration among libraries in making digital special collections accessible to general users will help to tackle commonly faced issues in relation to financial sources and human resources.

In order to establish linked digital libraries, the most important prerequisite will be the collaboration among libraries which aims at connecting resources and developing an appropriate platform. Many prevailing collaboration projects in digitization and digital library development, making available a centralized access platform among libraries and cultural organizations in the world have been successfully implemented. In particular, at those libraries that have special collections of ancient and rare materials, initiatives on sustainable collaboration in digital libraries have enabled the connection of heritage treasures through a shared gateway and made them accessible to general users in a renovated, convenient and appealing manner.

#### *Some regional and international collaboration projects*

##### Manuscriptorium (1993)

Manuscriptorium Digital Library is considered as one of the most comprehensive digital library project on special literature. Users of Manuscriptorium are provided with access to not only ancient and valuable materials of Czech National Library but also to special collections supplied by over 100 content contributors (libraries, museums, archives, private collections and other cultural organizations) from more than 20 countries.

##### Europeana (2008)

As an European digital cultural platform, Europeana connects more than 3,000 organizations in the Europe, including UK library, Rijkmuseum Dutch National Museum in Amsterdam and Louvre Museum and other libraries, archives and museums of member countries. Europeana is mainly tasked with metadata aggregation that provides access to the collections of heritage institutions where such contents are archived.

##### DPLA – Digital Public Library of America (2013)

DPLA connects service centers and functions as a union catalog of contents provided by archives, libraries, museums and other heritage institutions across the US. A diversified sources of digital materials provided on DPLA is freely accessible. DPLA is designed to provide a consolidation of various collections from Library of Congress, Internet Archive, research and other collections for the Americans to have access to digitalized information and knowledge.

##### FRDA - French Revolution Digital Archive (2013)

The project, which was jointly implemented by Stanford University Libraries and Bibliothèque nationale de France, has established a digital version of important research sources on French Revolution and made it accessible to international researchers. French Revolution Digital Archive includes two main resources namely the Archives parlementaires and the Images de la Revolution francaise.

##### ADL - ASEAN Digital Library (2016)

As a regional project, which gathers resources from libraries in ASEAN countries, ADL seeks to make all these resources accessible via single access platform. Led by the National Library Board of Singapore and supported by the ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information, ADL helps users and global researchers with an understanding of culture and

heritages of ASEAN countries as well as promotes the sharing and learning among member countries.

*Some national collaboration projects*

India: NANAMI – National Mission for Manuscripts (2003)

NANAMI, an entity under the Indian Ministry of Tourism and Culture, establishes a network of 32 manuscript preservation organizations in India (preservation centers, arts centers, languages, culture, heritages, libraries, museums, archives, universities and research institutes, etc.). Indian national database on manuscripts, Kritisampada, obtains information about approximately 4 million manuscripts.

United States: PALMM – Publication of Archival Library & Museum Materials

PALMM is a centralized access point that provides access to cultural, scientific, arts and historical materials of the US state of Florida. PLAMM is a collaboration initiative of public universities in Florida, designed to provide connection of digital data from libraries, museums and archives for uses by students, researchers and general public.

Switzerland: E-codices (2008)

The project began in 2005 with the digitization of manuscripts from different parts of Switzerland. E-codices library contains 2,249 manuscripts, of which 1,700 are available online, falling under 79 libraries and private collections across Switzerland. Full-text digitalized copies of manuscripts are made available on the E-codices website.

**Experience in digital library collaboration in special collections**

From the implemented projects, lots of experience in digital library collaboration in special collections has been discussed.

According to Waibel (2010), to make collaboration a success, it is important to determine collaboration contexts, establish relations and identify potential gaps in order to achieve the best benefits.

Shepherd (2004) listed 6 factors that help collaboration, including: need and benefits; attitude; communication; vision, mission, goals; resources, financial, human and leadership; and community development.

Zorich, Waibel and Erway (2008) also determined 9 elements in collaboration among libraries, archives and museums, namely:

- Vision: Parties need to attach close attention to an embracing vision throughout the collaboration and implementation;
- Mandate: Mandate should be clearly defined through strategic plans or high-rank directives with proper incentives in order to create driving forces and orientations for enthusiastic pool of staff during collaboration process;
- Incentives: Collaboration activities should be included as relevant criteria in making evaluations and appraisals so as to make staff feel more self-motivated in involving in collaboration;



- Change agents: An individual, a division or a prestigious program (change agents) proposes ideas, technologies and human resources when appropriate to help parties drive more focus on their embracing visions;

- Mooring: Collaboration activities should be formalized in parties' organizational structures in order for such activities to be implemented and attached to subordinating organization;

- Resources: Collaboration will be a success only if credible resources such as infrastructure, budget, human resources and experts, are available.

- Flexibility: Parties need to understand clearly matters related to types of collection and collecting institutions in order to avoid constraining themselves in "old" way of thinking by staying open-minded to other people's ideas during collaboration process;

- External catalysts such as users, peer organizations, sponsorship and professional organizations may also affect the collaboration process;

- Trust: It is the trust among parties that facilitate all relevant activities.

Collaboration in building a single access point among digital libraries on ancient documents is largely favorable, particularly when such documents are not bound with copy rights and intellectual property. Renovated technological solutions will definitely allow such documents to be processed, organized, stored and delivered to users in a more and more efficient manner. Nevertheless, it is important to get across such challenges as: successfully tackling different ways of collection organization at each library, thereby, creating a stable financial source and using an appropriate technological platform.

## **DIGITAL COLLECTIONS OF ANCIENT HAN-NOM DOCUMENTS AT LIBRARIES IN VIETNAM**

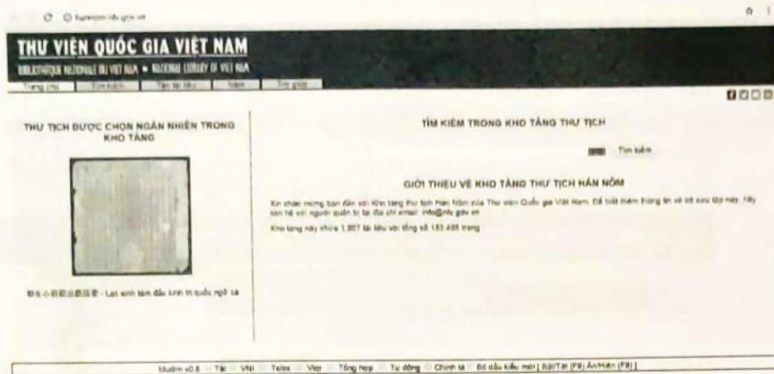
Decision No. 10/2007/QĐ-BVHTT by the Minister of Ministry of Culture - Information "Approving the Vietnamese Library Sector Development Plan by 2010, with a view to 2020" with a focus on *"Applying technological and scientific renovations in automation and modernization in all library operations. Enhancing the application of ITs in library management. Developing electronic and digital libraries; Collecting, preserving and upholding of cultural heritages at libraries based on information and technological renovations (...) digitizing 100% rare materials at libraries"* have already laid firm foundations for further developments in Vietnamese libraries with regards to building digital collections of ancient and valuable documents, with an aim to preserve and uphold the values of Vietnamese cultural heritages.

Outstanding implemented digitization projects mostly focus on sources of ancient and rare Han-Nom documents. As a result, some big libraries have successfully digitized sources of ancient Han-Nom documents. The most noteworthy of them include the followings:

### **Full-text online Han-Nom book database at the National Library of Vietnam (NLV)**

The Han-Nom collection at NLV contains 5,280 books which are manually made on Do paper. This collection includes books printed on wood-blocks, hand-written in Han, Nom or both, which is considered as a big Han-Nom collection in Vietnam.

The database on Han-Nom books is the outcome of the project Digitization of Han-Nom rare book collection at the NLV from 2007 to 2009 as a result of cooperation between NLV and Nom Foundation. The database seeks to cover all Han-Nom collection at the NLV. By now, NLV has digitized and made online accessible a Han-Nom collection of over 220,000 pages (approximately 3,000 items).

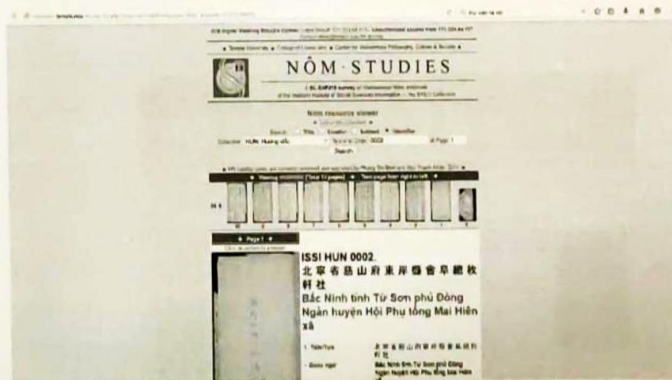


(Source: <http://hannom.nlv.gov.vn/>)

### Database on Han-Nom collection at the Social Sciences Library, Institute of Social Sciences Information (ISSI)

As a national library on Social Sciences in Vietnam, the Social Sciences Library (ISSI) possesses huge collections, most noteworthy of all is ten thousands of ancient documents and many rare collections dated back to centuries ago such as Han-Nom books (3,534 books), village conventions (1,225 pieces), stories of gods, titles of gods, genealogy of gods (160 volumes of about 9,000 ancient villages in Vietnam), over 400 titles of Nguyen dynasty and previous feudal dynasties.

The Social Science Library includes full-text databases on stories of gods, titles of gods (over 13,000 records), village conventions (nearly 6,000 records) and Han-Nom books (over 1,000 books). Most importantly, the Han-Nom book database is the outcome of cooperation between ISSI and Vietnam Center for Philosophy, Culture and Social at the US Temple University, which is designed to provide online access for global researchers.



(Source: <http://mlp.cs.nyu.edu/issi/>)

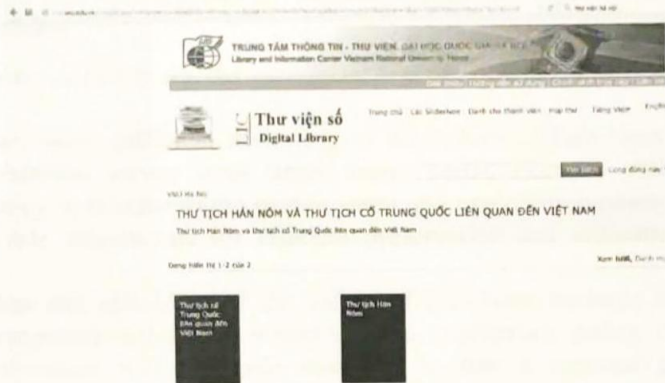




(Source: <http://www.hannom.org.vn/>)

### Ancient Han-Nom book collection at the Library and Information Center (LIC), Vietnam National University, Hanoi (VNU Hanoi)

LIC has abundant information resources and pays a lot of attention to the development of its ancient Han-Nom collection. LIC is keeping a full-text digital collection which includes hundreds of ancient Han-Nom books and 2,000 Han-Nom inscriptions. Registered users can have online access to such ancient Han-Nom books (about 216 items).



(Source: <http://www.lic.vnu.edu.vn>)

Beside the above mentioned libraries, some provincial and city libraries have established digital collections of ancient documents, include Yen Bai Provincial Library (218 ancient Han-Nom documents, 38 ancient Thai documents), Thai Nguyen Provincial Library (150 documents), Thanh Hoa Provincial Library, General Library of Thu Thien Hue province (over 119,000 pages), Ha Tinh Provincial Library (13,500 pages), etc. At these libraries, the digitization of Han-Nom documents is being done purely for purpose of preservation and storage. Users' access to such collections remains rather limited. In fact, ancient Han-Nom documents is also being stored at different provincial and city libraries and some libraries of big research institutes such as the Institute of History, Institute of Literature, etc. However, the establishment of digital collections is still receiving minimum attention.

Hence, most of libraries, currently keeping ancient Han-Nom documents in Vietnam, either due to a lack of budget, technologies or other resources, have made minimum progress in the establishment of digital libraries of Han-Nom documents. Let alone libraries that are not able to do digitization, many of the libraries with digital resources are slow in transforming into digital libraries and providing access to the users. The establishment of digital libraries is currently done by the libraries themselves through their own projects without efficient linkages and collaboration among the libraries. Therefore, the management and exploitation of ancient documents remain rather limited.

### COLLABORATION IN DIGITAL COLLECTIONS OF ANCIENT HAN-NOM DOCUMENTS - TOWARDS A SINGLE ACCESS POINT FOR HAN-NOM HERITAGE AT LIBRARIES IN VIETNAM



Digital library collaboration in ancient documents is a prevailing trend of the preservation and utilization of written heritages all over the world. Theoretical and practical issues in relation to digital library collaboration at national and international levels will provide valuable experience for Vietnamese libraries in establishing their digital libraries on ancient Han-Nom documents.

Within this paper, to help with improved management and exploitation of national written heritages, we would like to propose a solution which is digital library collaboration, establishment of a centralized access point for Han-Nom documents at libraries in Vietnam with the following specifications:

- *Putting into place a policy on the management and exploitation of ancient Han-Nom documents*

For the libraries, upon sufficient reviewing of the values of Han-Nom collections and conducting a comprehensive survey over target users' needs, libraries will need to make available a specific policy in relation to the management and exploitation of ancient documents. Such policy will provide orientations for efficient preservation and utilization of Han-Nom collections.

The preservation and upholding of the values of Han-Nom heritage will need further attention from the competent authorities, where a more appropriate policy on development, investment and collaboration will be made available so that a national program on the preservation of ancient Han-Nom documents will be implemented.

- *Further enhancing sources of digitized ancient Han-Nom documents*

Sources of digitized Han-Nom documents are fundamental to the establishment of digital libraries. Based on the availability of a sufficient infrastructure, libraries will need to make available a plan on the development of sources of digitized ancient documents by means of:

- Supplementing traditional collection of ancient documents: Conducting an overall stock checking of ancient document collections at libraries; establishing relations with libraries, information centers, museums and archives which are keeping both local and foreign ancient Han-Nom documents, collecting ancient document from the general population so as to make plans to develop the existing collections;

- Digitizing ancient Han-Nom collections at libraries: The digitization by libraries themselves will require significant amount of budget, human resources and time. Thus, libraries will need to work together in building a Han-Nom digitization center which will take lead in performing digitization or help others with their digitization;

- Sharing of ancient Han-Nom collections among libraries: To satisfy users' needs, libraries should consider shared use of resources as an optimum solution for diversifying their collections of ancient documents.

- *Continued establishment and finalization of digital libraries on ancient Han-Nom documents at each library*

Libraries will need to seek for appropriate sources of investment, facilities, infrastructure and human resources required for establishing digital libraries. In addition, digital Han-Nom document libraries will continue finalizing their resources and technological solutions in order to better capture their existing Han-Nom collections and help users with easy access to these libraries.



- *Promoting collaboration among libraries and relevant organizations*
  - Driving upon core value and common objective of preserving and upholding national written heritage, the libraries should find an optimum solution for cataloguing standards, technological platform used to establish digital libraries on ancient Han-Nom documents.
  - Central libraries on ancient Han-Nom documents will need to refer to the experience from successful collaboration projects between digital libraries of special collections, take lead in collaboration among libraries, work towards making available control tools that capture as many as possible existing ancient documents at both local and foreign libraries, thereby, facilitating digital library collaboration among the libraries.
  - Vietnamese libraries may consider working as content contributors to successful digital collaboration platforms in the world in order to make Vietnamese ancient documents known and better utilized.
- *Preparing a long-term plan towards making available a single access point for ancient Han-Nom documents in Vietnam*

International experience shows that establishing a single access platform cannot be done overnight as it will require various parties to take part in: Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, libraries, library experts, Han-Nom experts, and technicians who would examine in more detail the theoretical and practical issues of digital library collaboration in special collections, reaching consensus, preparing appropriate and long-term strategies that fit well with Vietnam context and eventually targeting at a single access point for ancient documents at libraries in Vietnam.

## CONCLUSION

Although many gaps need to be addressed in relation to the digitization of ancient Han-Nom documents at libraries in Vietnam, more and more digital resources concerning ancient Han-Nom documents are being established and progressively provided for users. In fact, the exploration and utilization of these digital libraries are facing with numerous difficulties. Therefore, promoted collaboration among libraries in order to aggregate metadata and establish a single access point will be critical to improving the preservation and upholding the value of this cultural heritage of Vietnam.

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