

Two Weeks in Vietnam

Vinh-The Lam

I made a trip to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in March 1998. The primary intention was to present a paper at the NIT '98: 10th International Conference on New Information Technology, to be held March 24-26, in Hanoi. During the two months before the conference time I made other commitments with a number of universities in both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. My plan was to leave Saskatoon on March 21st in order to be in Hanoi in the afternoon of Monday March 23rd.

Upon my return to Saskatoon on March 19th from Dublin, Ohio, where I had attended the two-and-half-day seminar on "Knowledge Access Management: Tools and Concepts for Next-Generation Catalogers" by the OCLC Institute, I found out, through an e-mail by Dr. Patricia G. Oyler of Simmons College, that the Government of Vietnam has decided unilaterally to postpone the NIT '98. The reason cited for that postponement was that "because a new Director of the National Library has been appointed effective March 16, 1998 that the National Library has been unable to handle all the details of the Conference" ^[1]. Instead a study tour of Vietnamese libraries and a meeting with some of the Vietnamese librarians in Hanoi would be possible.

The National Library of Vietnam has suggested the following schedule:

- March 24, 1998
 - o 9:00 AM to 11:30 AM: Meeting of foreign guests and staff of National Library and do some of the paper presentations.
 - o 2:00 PM to 4:30 PM: National Library will present its automation plan and have a tour of the library
- March 25, 1998
 - o 9:00 AM to 11:30 AM: Meeting at National Centre for Science and Technology
 - o 2:00 PM to 4:30 PM: Meeting at Vietnam National University, Hanoi Library and Information Centre ^[2]

I sent an e-mail to Dr. Oyler, enquiring about the possibility of my paper to be among those that would be presented at the Meeting at the National Library of Vietnam. And she said in her reply that ***"I do not know what papers will be presented. That is to be negotiated between the National Library and Dr. Chen (the Conference Principal Organizer). I have sent Dr. Chen a copy of your email so she knows that you would like to know. However, I suspect it will not be until Monday that she will be able to speak with the National Library about the papers"*** ^[3] After discussion with my Director about these new developments and about the fact that my paper still

had a chance to be presented at the Meeting at the National Library in Hanoi, and with his permission, I decided to go to Hanoi anyway. Other factors were also considered during this discussion: my other commitments with the universities in Hanoi and in Ho Chi Minh City.

ACTIVITIES IN HANOI

I left Saskatoon in the afternoon of Saturday March 21st as planned. After two stop-overs in Vancouver and Hongkong, I arrived at Nội Bài International Airport, about 40 km northwest of Hanoi, in the afternoon of Monday March 23rd. I was met there by a representative of the Hanoi Polytechnical University (Đại Học Bách Khoa Hà Nội) and Mrs. Trương Thị Nhân, the older sister of Dr. Trương Trí Vũ, President of the Foundation for Sustainable Development in Vietnam, a Montreal-based non-profit organization that I helped founded in 1995 and of which I am Director for Information and Training. (The Foundation's Home Page is at: <http://www.accent.net/levansy/>). Dr. Vũ had made arrangement with Hanoi Polytechnical University so that I would come and give a presentation to the faculty members of its Faculty of Economics and Management. The third person at the airport to meet me was Mr. Nguyễn Uyên, Senior Lecturer of the Ha Noi University of Water Resources (Đại Học Thủy Lợi Hà Nội), whom I had known in Saskatoon when he was there for a 6-month fellowship at the School of Civil Engineering of the University of Saskatchewan. Together we drove back to Hanoi in a car sent by the Hanoi Polytechnical University. This was my first trip back to Hanoi since 1980 and I could see how things had changed since then. The trip took only 45 minutes, instead of two hours in 1980, thanks to the Russian-built Thăng Long Bridge that really reminded me of the Burlington Skyway in Ontario. Once in Hanoi, I was put in Phú Long Hotel, a medium-size 40-room hotel just a short walk from the Lake of the Returned Sword (Hồ Gươm or Hồ Hoàn Kiếm), one of the most famous landmark in Hanoi.

NIT '98

Dr Ching-chih Chen, principal organizer of the Conference, called a meeting for all foreign delegates in her suite at the Golden Key Hotel in Hanoi in the evening of Monday March 23rd. She reported that she had been successful in working out some arrangements with the National Library of Vietnam and a Meeting would be held at the National Library the next day and a number of papers would be presented.

Present at the Meeting at the National Library of Vietnam, Tuesday, March 24th were:

- From the Vietnamese side:
 - Mr. Trần Anh Dũng, former Vice-Director and newly-appointed Acting Director, National Library of Vietnam
 - Mr. Kiều Văn Hốt, Vice-Director, National Library of Vietnam

- o Mr. Nguyen Huy Chuong, Director, Library and Information Centre, National University of Hà Nội
- o Ms. Nguyễn Thị Huyền Đan, Head of Informatic Section, National Library of Vietnam
- o Ms. Nguyễn Thị Bắc, Vice-Director, General Science Library of Ho Chi Minh City
- o Ms. Chu Tuyết Lan, Sino-Viet Institute (Viện Hán Nôm)
- o All Division, Section Heads of National Library of Vietnam
- Foreign Delegates:
 - o Dr. Ching-chih Chen, Professor, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, Simmons College, Boston, Mass., USA
 - o Dr. Em Claire Knowles, Assistant Dean, Simmons College, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, Simmons College, Boston, Mass., USA
 - o Dr. Hwa-Wei Lee, Professor, Ohio University, Columbus, Ohio, USA
 - o Dr. Wallace Koehler, Internet Consultant, Maryville, Tennessee, USA
 - o Mr. Patrick McGlamery, Map Librarian, University of Connecticut, USA
 - o Dr. Eisuko Naito, Professor & Director of Science Information Research, National Center for Science Information Systems (NACSIS), Tokyo, Japan
 - o Dr. Jacques Lajoie, Head, Department of Psychology, University of Quebec, Montreal, Quebec, Canada
 - o Ms. Nereida Cross, Australia
 - o Mr. Karl Min Ku, Librarian of the National Assembly, Taiwan
 - o Mr. Vinh-The Lam, Head, Cataloguing Department, University of Saskatchewan, Canada

The following papers were presented at the Meeting:

1. Dr. Chen gives an opening remark, and then talked about: The Alexandria Declaration of Principles: A Baseline Document for Planning Global Information Infrastructure (GII).
2. Vinh-The Lam: Library Development in Vietnam: Urgent Needs for Standardization. (This paper is now available at: http://reality.sgi.com/mrhhu_corp/leaf.html)
3. Karl Min Ku: New Information Technology Application on Legislatures and Its Libraries Among Asia and Pacific Countries.
4. Dr. Jacques Lajoie: What People Write as Queries in the Web's Search.
5. Dr. Hwa-Wei Lee: Maximizing Information Access and Resource Sharing: The OhioLINK Experience.

6. Dr. Eisuko Naito: Multi-Lingual IT Standardization.

7. M. Nereida Cross: New Information Technology Applied to Genocide Research (CD-ROM on Genocide in Cambodia).

8. Dr. Wallace Koehler: The Librarianship of the Web: Options and Opportunities: Managing Transitory Materials.

9. Mr. Patrick McGlamery: Handheld Computers: Freeing Spatial Information from the Desktop.

10. Dr. Em Claire Knowles: Educating and Training Students from Developing Countries to Use New Technologies.

After the opening remark by Dr. Chen, my paper was the first one to be presented. I spoke first in English for the foreign delegates and then in Vietnamese for the Vietnamese participants.

The proceedings of NIT '98 was already published and distributed at the Meeting. Therefore, in the eyes of NIT '98 sponsors, it was over now. NIT '98 was considered as already held and proceedings as published.

The Conference Proceedings' bibliographic data:

NIT'98 : 10th International Conference [on] New Information Technology:

for library & information professionals, educational media

specialists & technologists : March 24-26, 1998, Hanoi, Vietnam :

proceedings / edited by Ching-chih Chen. West Newton, Mass.:

MicroUse Information, 1998.

xiv, 288 p.: ill., map, ports.; 25 cm.

(ISBN 0-931555-12-4; ISSN 1053-6973)

It contains 30 papers (Full text + Abstract) and 2 Abstracts.

The Meeting at the National Library of Vietnam lasted all day, with a one-and-half-hour tour of the Library in the afternoon by Mr. Kiều Văn Hốt. Although the Library has some computer equipment, its general conditions were very poor. Most

shelving units were made of wood and very old, the working areas were very crowded, and dusty. There was some talk about a new building to be built soon.

Visit at Hanoi University of Water Resources

I spent the morning of Wednesday March 25th to visit the Hanoi University of Water Resources (HUWR – Đại Học Thủy Lợi). The University sent a car to Phú Long Hotel to pick me up at 8:30. Mr. Nguyễn Uyên accompanied me during the whole visit.

I was met at HUWR by the Assistant Dean, Professor Nguyễn Công Mẫn, Head of International Relations Department, and the Director of the Library. (This University has sent a few faculty members and graduate students to study at the University of Saskatchewan. I met Mr. Nguyễn Uyên when he was doing his 6-month fellowship at University of Saskatchewan last year. There were currently 3 students from HUWR doing their Masters of Science at the School of Civil Engineering, University of Saskatchewan). We discussed about prospects of the University of Saskatchewan Libraries helping HUWR Library. Professor Man would be visiting University of Saskatchewan campus this Summer. After the talk in the Assistant Dean's office, I was given a tour of the Library. The Main Library was located on the fifth floor, quite spacious, but with very old equipment, wooden shelves, a catalogue with handwritten cards, and closed stacks. Its collection of Russian and Chinese books was totally outdated and so not heavily used. It had a very large room just for textbooks (with, in most cases, hundred copies for each title). The Library just started an OPAC with very limited search options. We also visited the Technical Services of the Library, where two cataloguers still catalogued materials on worksheets. They still used a very old copy of the BBK, the Russian-based classification system, and I heard the Director complain on the inadequacy of this classification system for his Library's highly specialized collection. After the tour of the Main Library, we came to the office of the Director, and there I saw one brand new PC and a new photocopier, not in use yet. After further talk about possible help from the University of Saskatchewan in his office, the Director walked me and Mr. Uyên down to a new Reading Room on the ground. This Reading Room was just opened about two months ago. It had been used as a cafeteria for students, now renovated and capable of sitting about 200 students. They have moved down here current issues of periodicals and a small part of the book collection, consisting of titles which are being heavily used by students. The visit ended around noon.

Meeting at National University of Hanoi

The next day, Thursday March 26th, in the morning, there was a meeting at the Conference Room of the National University of Hanoi.

There was a large gathering of people. All foreign delegates were present, together with a large number of Vietnamese people coming from the National Library, the Scientific and Technical Information Centre, the Ministry of Information & Culture (Bộ Thông Tin Văn Hóa), and the Ministry of Education and Training (Bộ Giáo Dục và Đào Tạo).

Mr. Nguyễn Huy Chương, a former graduate student from Simmons College, gave a presentation on new developments of his Library and Information Centre, a component of the National University of Hanoi. He used multimedia equipment (Power Point, large color monitor, etc.) in his presentation to introduce to the audience his Centre's Web-based OPAC. At one point we could even hear "Hò Huế" (Huế Folk Songs – Huế is the Old Imperial City, during the Nguyễn Dynasty, just north of Đà Nẵng) when he introduced the CD-ROM version of the book about the 300 old pagodas in Vietnam. After his presentation, we broke for coffee, and when the Meeting resumed, one of his staff presented the Centre's plan to implement a bar coding program for their collection. I have to admit that I was very impressed by these new developments at this University. Later I found out that they could have achieved these things because the Ministry of Education and Training had given them a lot of money, 300,000 USD last year, and 400,000 USD this year (100,000 USD = 1,3 Billion VN Dong). It was pretty obvious that the Ministry had intention to have this University's Library and Information Centre as a show case.

I skipped the afternoon session of this Meeting because of my commitment at the Hanoi Polytechnical University (Đại Học Bách Khoa), Faculty of Economics and Management (Khoa Kinh Tế và Quản Lý).

Presentation at the Hanoi Polytechnical University

The University sent a taxi cab with one staff and Mrs Trương Thị Nhàn to pick me up at Phú Long Hotel at 2:30 PM. We came to the University campus around 3:00 PM. My presentation was scheduled to begin at 4:00 PM, so we paid a visit to the Centre for Environmental Science and Technology (CEST) of the University. I was met there by Dr. Đinh Văn Sâm, Professor and Director of the Centre.

A few minutes before 4:00 PM, Dr. Sâm walked me and Mrs. Nhàn to the Conference Room of the Faculty of Economics and Management. I was met there by the Dean, Dr. Trần Văn Bình, the Assistant Dean, Dr. Nguyễn Đại Thắng, and the former Dean, Dr. Lã Văn Bật.

My presentation was titled ***"Information Technology in the Market Economy."*** It started at 4:30 PM. Although I had insisted that the audience should include fourth-year students, only faculty members were present, a total of 7. The presentation went well and ended around 6:30 PM. I had given a copy of my paper to the representative of the University at Nội Bài Airport so that they would have enough time

to make copies for all participants, but, somehow, no copy was made for the faculty members attending my presentation. I clearly saw that the Dean had that copy with him during my presentation.

ACTIVITIES IN HO CHI MINH CITY

I left Nội Bài Airport at 2:40 PM, Saturday March 28th, and arrived at Tân Sơn Nhứt Airport in Ho Chi Minh City at 4:40 PM. I was met there, in addition to my family members and old friends, by Mr. Lê Ngọc Oánh, Director of the Open University Library, Mr. Nguyễn Nhã, Vice-Rector of Hùng Vương University, Responsible for Student Affairs and the Library, and Mr. Nguyễn Tuyên, representing Mr. Nguyễn Minh Hiệp, Director of the Graduate Library, National University of Ho Chi Minh City (not yet returned from the United Kingdom).

Presentation at the Headquarters of the Federation of Scientific and Technological Associations of Ho Chi Minh City

My first official activity in Ho Chi Minh City was at the Federation of Scientific and Technological Associations of Ho Chi Minh City (Liên Hiệp Các Hội Khoa Học Kỹ Thuật Thành Phố Hồ Chí Minh) at 43 Nguyễn Thông Street, District 3, Ho Chi Minh City. My visit took place at 2:00 PM, Tuesday March 31st. This Federation had given their assistance in the distribution of the ***ALA Glossary of Library and Information Science***, First English-Vietnamese edition, in the Summer of 1996 (I was one of the 3 translators for this reference tool).

I was met there by Dr. Huỳnh Văn Hoàng, Vice-President and Secretary-General, and Mr. Võ Khắc Đệ, Secretary, of the Federation.

The Federation invited about 40 people from various libraries in the City. I had not been really prepared to present any paper at this institution. But the night before, both my friends, Mr. Nguyễn Nhã and Mr. Lê Ngọc Oánh insisted that I talk about something. So, at the Meeting at the Federation I gave a presentation which consisted of the following topics:

- Summary of my paper on standardization presented at the NIT '98 in Hanoi
- Keywords vs subject headings
- Ownership vs accessibility within North American academic libraries

Visits at Hùng Vương University and Open University

The next day, Wednesday April 1, 1998, in the morning, I visited Hùng Vương University and The Open University.

Hùng Vương University, with a student population of 3,113, was located in a 5-story building at 736 Nguyễn Trãi Street, District 5, Ho Chi Minh City. It also had classrooms in other locations in the City. Its Library had a book collection of about

4,000 titles in Information Science, Management, Foreign Languages (English, French, Chinese, Japanese), Economics, Tourism, and Hospital Administration. The serials collection includes only 30 titles. It had a staff of 2, 6 PCs, and a photocopier. Its stacks were semi-open, i.e., students are allowed to go into the stacks and browse the collection, but they will have to sign out materials before bringing them into the Reading Room. The Library, in close cooperation with staff of the Information Science Department, had just started an OPAC. The OPAC was down during my visit so I did not have a chance to see how it operated. At Hùng Vương University I also had a meeting with the Rector, Dr. Ngô Gia Hy and the Vice-Rector, Dr. Nguyễn Thông Minh.

The Open University Library, located at 97 Võ Văn Tần Street, HCM City, had been closed pending the construction of the new building of the University on the site of the former Ký Túc Xá Nữ Sinh Viên Trần Quý Cáp (Trần Quý Cáp Women Students' Dormitory). The building was to be finished in one year. Mr. Lê Ngọc Oánh, the Library Director, took me there to take a look at the construction site. For the time being, Mr. Oánh and his two staff worked in a very small room. All library materials were being kept in bags waiting for the new library to be opened. They had an OPAC that worked quite well with many search features. I had a chance to test these features and I was quite pleased with what I saw.

Visit at the Teachers' College

In the afternoon, I came and talked to the staff of the Teachers' College (Đại Học Sư Phạm) Library. One of my former staff (I was Head of this Library from 1975 to 1980), Mrs. Hồ Thị Minh-Tương, was now Assistant Director of this Library. I had met her at the meeting at the Federation headquarters the day before, and she insisted that I visit her library, and I just could not refuse; this meeting was, therefore, totally unplanned.

I was met at the Teachers' College by the Assistant Dean, Mr. Lê Vinh Quốc, and the Director of the Library. All Section Heads were present, a total of about 10 people. Again, I gave a summary of my presentation on standardization in Hanoi. Then I talked about the basic steps in automation. Since this was a rather small group, many questions were asked, and the discussion was really good. I was glad that I could answer all questions asked, especially those by Mr. Lê Tư Hỷ, Vice Director, Computer Center, Teachers' College. I had only one regret: no time to see the Library.

Presentation at the Graduate Library of the National University of Ho Chi Minh City

The one-day seminar at the Graduate Library, National University of Ho Chi Minh City, located at 227 Nguyễn Văn Cừ Street, District 5, Ho Chi Minh City, was held on Thursday April 2, 1998.

The seminar was held in the big room with multimedia equipment. It was a big success with more than 60 participants, with some people even coming from Hanoi, Đà Lạt, and Cần Thơ.

The topic of my presentation was: **"Current Issues in Cataloging."** The following issues were presented at the Seminar:

- Evolution of the OPAC
- Cataloger's working tools
- Cataloging of INTERNET resources
- Trend in distribution of responsibilities between librarians and library assistants
- Outsourcing of library technical services
- Problems and new developments of AACR2

Although I gave all printouts to Mr. Nguyễn Minh Hiệp, the Library Director, two days ahead, none was made for the participants, and they had to take notes of my presentation, a living proof that they were really interested. Mr. Nguyễn Minh Hiệp did not make copies of my paper probably because of too much photocopy to be done (about 50 pages for 57 participants). Besides I also donated all 28 papers (mostly journal articles + all papers presented at the Toronto Conference on AACR2) I had used to prepare my presentation. I officially asked him to make them available for anyone who may be interested to read at his Library. I did a demonstration of the Classification Plus CD-ROM donated to the Library by the Modesto Junior College Library, Modesto, California through its librarian, Ms. Phạm Thị Lệ-Hương. Lunch was provided by the Graduate Library to all participants.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

After the Seminar was over, Mr. Nguyen Nhã invited Mr. Nguyễn Minh Hiệp, Mr. Lê Ngọc Oánh and me to have dinner at his home. After dinner, I talked to them about new developments of LEAF-VN (***The Library and Education Assistance Foundation for Vietnam***, a newly-created non-profit organization founded by me and a group of Vietnamese-American Librarians; its home page is at: http://reality.sgi.com/mrhhuu_corp/leaf.html). They were all very enthusiastic about LEAF-VN and promised to provide strong support to the Foundation's future activities in Vietnam. They also provided me with information about their libraries, which will be very useful in our writing of project proposals in the future.

This official activity put an end to my two-week trip to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. I left Ho Chi Minh City in the morning of Friday April 3rd and arrived in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada at 10:40 PM the same day.

NOTES:

1. Dr. Patricia G. Oyler's email sent Tue, 17 Mar 1998 22:38:27.
2. Dr. Oyler's email sent Thu, 19 Mar 1998 22:38:38.
3. Dr. Oyler's email sent Fri, 20 Mar 1998 16:24:31.