

## Information on 4 new things in social sciences

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**Abstract:** *It is important to re-recognize the theoretical basis of scientific information and its roles in the development of modern sciences including natural sciences, technological sciences, social sciences and humanities. Information on 4 new things in social sciences, including new achievements, new arguments, new direction and new method, has been identified as the basic task of social sciences information in our country as well as the task of Institute of Social Sciences Information (ISSI).*

**Key words:** Social sciences, Scientific information, Summary, Overview

Institute of Social Sciences Information was launched during a special time. On 08/05/1965, exactly one week after ending the war and restoring the peace, the Prime Minister Phạm Văn Đồng signed the Decision on establishing the Institute on the basis of joining the Social Sciences Library and Board of Social Sciences Information. The Decision clearly

stated: “The functions of the Institute are to research, notify, and provide information and documentation on social sciences to the Party, the State’s agencies and public organizations responsible for social sciences”.

Ever since its establishment, the Institute has focused on studying information users’s needs of and methods to meet such needs. Information users in Vietnam are divided into 3 main groups: Leaders and managers; Scientific researchers and teachers; Organizations, individuals in need and “have

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responsibilities for social sciences work”. Each of mentioned user groups has specific and different requirements. However, all 3 groups have high demands and requirements for social sciences information. Due to long period of war in our country and our extreme weakness in scientific research, we were in a serious shortage of new knowledge to rebuild the country. In that situation, in order to offset this shortage, we had to “import” knowledge from overseas. The mission of ISSI was determined mainly to inform on new knowledge, new scientific publications from overseas. Scientific information must stay one step ahead, contribute to “orientate research activities”, promote scientific research in Vietnam.

Late Professor, Academician Nguyễn Khánh Toàn (1905-1993), the first chairman of Vietnam Committee for Social Sciences and the founder of ISSI, set out directions and strategies to develop social sciences information in our country as follows:

“Today *scientific information* is not only the *most important tool* but also the *prerequisite*, the *leverage* of scientific research, of the construction of socialism... I would like to emphasize: Scientific information is the *most comprehensive*, *most*

*profound* and *most effective* work. Scientific information does not only play a passive role, only provide information and documentation, but also has the role of providing *conscious, systemic and oriented guidance* to scientists - a creative, serious and demanding workforce - by accurate and timely information” (Nguyễn Khánh Toàn, 1995, pp.6-7).

The mentioned daunting tasks can only be done when knowing how to promote advantages of scientific information, know how to “organize and develop secondary scientific information system” as said by Academician V.A. Vinogradov. As the first Director of Institute of Social Sciences Information under Russian Academy of Sciences, Academician V.A. Vinogradov understood profoundly characteristic of scientific information. He wrote: If we consider sciences can develop new theories, establish new objective events with meanings like primary information system, then secondary scientific information is a superstructure, a special system supplementing “knowledge about knowledge” (Vinogradov, 1980).

The organization and development of secondary scientific information system is a very new, difficult and complex issue. For 40 years since the establishment of ISSI, the fundamental

problem of this theory has not had common understanding, both in terms of concept and implementation.

In the first 10 years, ISSI was acknowledged not as a scientific agency but just an agency “serving sciences”, providing documentation for scientific research. This concept was dismissed in practice. The report in Celebration of 20 years of establishment and development of ISSI confirmed: “Practices in the past 20 years shows that the combination of research and information is the strategic direction for the development of social sciences information. It satisfies the urgent needs of scientific information as well as scientific research in the process of developing “Big Science” in our country, improving the quality and efficiency of all scientific activities in the renewal process of the country. Only the organic combination of research and information, the development of the Institute to be the a real scientific agency, full implementation of “research function” which the State of Vietnam had identified for the Institute right from its establishment, can make the Institute strive to meet increasingly high demands of modern society. This has not been fully aware and thoroughly understood in the direction and organization, in the implementation of the regime and

policy in order to actively facilitate people working in social sciences information to participate in big scientific programs and projects, in national and international scientific conferences. Essentially, the conception of considering ISSI only purely as an agency providing documentation lowers the role of information in scientific life of the country” (Institute of Social Sciences Information, 1995).

Since 1995, especially since 2005, scientific research of the Institute has been strengthened. Scientific topics and tasks at various levels chaired by the Institute have been implemented and succeeded. Especially, in late 2007, for the first time, an officer of the Institute has chaired a State-level scientific research project: *The fundamental factors affecting the transformation of Vietnamese people and culture during the renewal and international integration*. Since 2005 to date, the Institute has published important research results as monograph works with high scientific values such as: *Value and Asian value* (2005, 2007), *Culture and development amid globalization* (2006); *Vietnamese private economy after two decades of renewal - current situation and issues* (2006); *Vietnamese linguistics in the light of modern theories* (2006); *Human and human development in*

*Hòa Bình* (2007); *Some African markets: Opportunities and challenges for Vietnam* (2007); *Linguistics: Some aspects of interdisciplinary study* (2008); *Appearance and prospect of the knowledge society* (2008); *Vietnamese people and culture during the renewal and integration* (2000); *French School of the Far East - period 1898-1957* (2009);... (Institute of Social Sciences Information, 2010, pp.28-29).

We have been very glad and appreciated these achievements of ISSI. However, a problem arises: Are the mentioned treatises with high scientific value different from treatises (monographs) of other institutes or scientific agencies. It can be confirmed that, there is no difference basically because most of these works are primary scientific information, while what ISSI has to do first and foremost is secondary scientific information. This is the reason for existence of ISSI. Does the Institute “play on the wrong pitch” when putting their entire scientific research capacity on creating primary scientific information products - what other scientific institutes and agencies can do better or at least the same as ISSI due to their functions and duties as well as their actual capacity? While its irreplaceable missions and responsibilities are to provide “a superstructure, a special system

supplementing ‘knowledge about knowledge’”.

Today, science attracts thousands of participants. In such condition, it is very likely to have duplications and to handle inventions discovered previously repeatedly. Secondary scientific information is the mean to redress such situation.

Science develops very fast, the amount of scientific products increases rapidly. Therefore, it is increasingly difficult for scientists to orient in such huge amount of documents or to find necessary specific information. Just reading all documents of a narrow specialization is impossible, let alone understanding all relevant knowledge specializations - a must for interdisciplinary study. No scientist in nature sciences, technological sciences or social sciences and humanities can solve their task by normal means, reading all primary publications.

On the other hand, science requires big investment. Expenses for science increase very fast and the efficiency of such expenses, of the economical use of resources are increasingly important. Hence, it is needed to strengthen scientific management. The regular improvement of scientific management forms can only be done when organizing scientific information well.

In order for ISSI to contribute greatly to scientific development of our country, in my opinion, we should study to clarify 3 important issues:

### **1. Development and completion of automatic information retrieval system**

ISSI has continuously tried to improve to meet this requirement. It is clearly shown in the article “Electronic information resource - digital data and requirements for the implementation of digital library at Social Sciences Library” recently published in *Social Sciences Information Review* (See: Phan Tân, Nguyễn Văn Hội, Nguyễn Duy Thoả, 2014). The article assets achievements in providing information, improving quality of information services, introducing resources, facilitating domestic and foreign scholars to access faster, more easily and comprehensive to rich information resources of Library of Social Sciences. At the same time, the article clarifies requirements for the implementation of digital library in current condition.

### **2. Strengthening abstract information, especially abstract of monographs with high scientific value**

Scientific information is not only a primary mean to retrieve information, but also a reliable method to orientate to urgent scientific problems. In order to do that, contents of scientific

publications should be informed by abstracts and overviews.

*Abstract* is the main information in social sciences, moreover, “is a creative scientific research activity requiring training at a high level of ideology, reasoning and profession for those involved in that scientific information process. An abstract is a scientific product. In order to construct it, the person who makes abstract must have great skill and talent; also know how to use scientific-based methods. The purpose here is to deliver the maximum amount of useful information from the minimum amount of an abstract” (Vinogradov, 1980).

Currently, we have underestimated the scientific value of abstract and not considered abstract a scientific product. It is confirmed that, person who makes abstract is a highly qualified expert in selecting documents, reviewing documents in their view of scientific value, knowing the newest, most precious, most meaningful in terms of social, ideology from enormous primary information resource to abstract. Therefore, we are lacking of high quality abstracts, especially abstracts of monographs. Meanwhile, monograph plays a very important role in social sciences. While in natural sciences and technology, they focus primarily on analyzing, evaluating, selecting

annotations and abstracting articles, disseminating printed documents and reports quickly, it is quite different from social sciences. Major theoretical studies contributing to the development of social sciences often appear in form of monographs as carriers of new ideas. In this regard, the role of book in social sciences is greater than in natural sciences and science and technology. Unfortunately, for decades, the number of abstracts of books, monographs with high scientific value in *Social Sciences Information Review* and other publications of ISSI has been very low.

### 3. Special role of overview

*Overview* is an advanced form of information product, focusing on analyzing pressing issues. “The scientific analysis overview of publication is a type of summary information and the most complicated type of social sciences information”. People often use hundreds of information resources (books, articles) in each overview. Its purpose is to report main trends of the development of scientific ideologies in social sciences, such as research situation of fundamental issues of different knowledge fields, scientific schools, views of key representatives of those schools etc. Analysis overviews often sum up development results of certain knowledge field. Such summarization

will discover gaps in researches and unsolved problems, as well as upcoming scientific research directions (Vinogradov, 1980).

Thus, abstract and overview are reliable methods to select and evaluate new things in social sciences including new achievements, new arguments, new methods and new directions.

The mentioned conceptions on abstract and overview are not new.

Reports of 30 years and 35 years of establishment and development of ISSI have stated that the Institute has conducted a study on “information processing, including activities such as making annotations, identifying keywords, writing abstracts and overviews”, study on method of writing abstract of scientific documents (accounting for about 70-80% of documents being processed) and “mentioned studies have been applied in the practice of information processing of the Institute during the past” (Institute of Social Sciences Information, 2005; Institute of Social Sciences Information, 2010).

However, if abstract and overview have been handled both theoretically and practically, why is it not confirmed in practice? If abstracts account for 70-80% of documents being processed, in which publication of the Institute is such enormous number published? It

should be noted that, Journal of Social Sciences Information specializing in *New things in Social Sciences* has ceased to existence in 1994 after publishing 65 issues. *Collections of thematic social sciences information* has also ceased to publication in 2003. For decades, which valuable abstract and overview works has the Institute published? Is *Social Sciences Information Review* a journal on abstracts?

To answer this question, I would like to point some examples. Institute of Scientific Information on Social Sciences (INION) of the former Soviet Union Academy of Sciences and the current Russian Academy of Sciences confirm that journals of abstracts are the basic stage of information publication system. Hence, since 1973 until now, INION has continuously published *Journal of Abstract (Referativnyj zhurnal)* comprising 16 series (serija), and now 9 series.

*Series 2 on Economics*, issue no. 3 in 2014, had 65 articles under 6 categories: Economic theories; World economics and international economic relations; Monetary, finance, credit; Management issues; Advanced science-technology and innovative economics; the issues of social development and population.

*Series 3 on Philosophy*, issue no. 4 in 2017, had 17 articles under 5

categories: General issues of Philosophy; Philosophy of science and engineering; Social philosophy; History of philosophy; Philosophy of history. Of which, there are 2 analytical overviews; 5 abstract; 5 monographs of Russia and overseas; 1 introduction of International conference in Roma on Signal, Language and Interpretation; 9 abstracts and chain abstracts (svobodnyj referat) on works of UK, France and USA.

The mentioned abstracts and journals of abstracts help us to understand achievements of social sciences in Russia and many countries around the world.

Functions of ISSI are to inform “about fundamental issues and development trends of the world, the region and Vietnam, about social sciences in the world and in Vietnam” (Decision No. 352/2005/QĐ-KHXX dated 25/4/2005 of President of Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences).

The Institute will not be able to perform its function if not paying all efforts on scientific researches and information about new achievements, new arguments, new directions, new methods of social sciences in the world and in Vietnam.

Understanding the world of social sciences is extremely necessary. However, this is a vast field. It is necessary to select and evaluation documents by professional eyes and bravery of those working in scientific information. For over 10 years, we have established *Social Sciences and Humanities Information Translation Program*, under Vietnam Federation of UNESCO Associations specializing in translating and introducing essential social sciences achievements in the world. We have translated and published 12 books. The typical book is "*Social sciences in the world*" (*Les sciences sociales dans le monde*) of UNESCO which provides an overview of social sciences in the world in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and its development trend in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The books in our program is collected under 4 subjects: I. Characteristics and development trends of social sciences in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century - the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century; II. The new study of thinking, systemic thinking, complex thinking; III. "Method" collection of Edgar Morin; IV. Educational philosophy (Phạm Khiêm Ích, 2013).

We also choose select to translate and introduce social sciences in the world according to the criteria of 4 new things. Each book contains an

elaborate introduction which can be considered its abstract.

During international integration, extensive knowledge about social sciences in the world and its relationship with social sciences in Vietnam is more necessary than ever. But it is more necessary to know how to select, evaluate and bring truly new, precious things to the country to help us not being outdated and out of tune. In order to do it, there should be right information strategy, people working in social sciences with vision, bravery and sometimes even courage. It is also to execute the idea of the founder of ISSI: Scientific information "has the role of providing conscious, systemic and oriented guidance to scientists - a creative, serious and demanding workforce - by accurate and timely information □

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