

# ASIA PACIFIC REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR MEMORY OF THE WORLD (MOWCAP)

## REGISTER SUBCOMMITTEE'S REPORT TO THE 5th MOWCAP GENERAL MEETING, 14-16 May 2012 Bangkok, Thailand

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### BACKGROUND

The MOWCAP Register Subcommittee with Dr. M.R.Rujaya Abhakorn as the Chair and Dr. Alla Aslitdinova, Mr. Ralph Regenvanu, Prof. Kyung-ho Suh, Mr. Setareki Tale, and Mrs. Hongmin Wang. as members, continued its work after the Fourth MOWCAP General Meeting in Macau in March 2010, under the terms of the Regional Register Guidelines and Terms of Reference for the MOWCAP Register Subcommittee adopted at the 2<sup>nd</sup> MOWCAP General Meeting in Manila in November 2005. The members were selected on the basis of their academic background, experience in the MOW Programme, archives or libraries, and to represent Asia/Pacific subregions as far as possible.

### The 2012 Memory of the World Asia/Pacific Regional Register

In August 2011 MOWCAP issued invitations sent to the MOW National Committees and the National Commissions with 30 November 2012 as the closing date for nominations for inscription on UNESCO's Asia Pacific Memory of the World Register. The Register lists and promotes outstanding documentary heritage which has been influential in the Asia Pacific region and satisfies UNESCO's criteria. Inscription offers recognition and benefits to the libraries, archives and other institutions who are the custodians of significant documents and collections. Five nominations were received by the deadline, seven fewer than in 2010.

#### List of Nominations for Regional MOW Register for Asia/Pacific (2012)

COUNTRIES	TITLES	NOMINATORS
1. Australia and Papua New Guinea  <b>Nomination N°: 2012-1</b>	<i>FE Williams Collection</i>	The National Archives of Australia; National Archives and Public Records Services of Papua New Guinea, Office of Libraries and Archives; and South Australian Museum

2. China 1 <b>Nomination N°: 2012-2</b>	<i>Official Records of Tibet from the Yuan Dynasty China, 1304-1367</i>	Archives of Tibet Autonomous Region of China
3. China 2 <b>Nomination N°: 2012-3</b>	<i>Qiao Pi and Yinxin: Correspondence and Remittance Documents from Overseas Chinese</i>	Guangdong Provincial Archives and Fujian Provincial Archives, PRC
4. Vietnam 1 <b>Nomination N°: 2012-4</b>	<i>The only book "Poems on Hoa Lu Ancient Capital"</i>	Vietnam National Commission for UNESCO
5. Vietnam 2 <b>Nomination N°: 2012-5</b>	<i>Woodblocks at Vinh Nghiem Pagoda, Bac Giang Province</i>	Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Bac Giang Province, Vietnam

### Assessments

Assessments were carried out by email and at the 5<sup>th</sup> MOWCAP General Meeting.

#### **Results of MOWCAP Register Subcommittee Assessments for Memory of the World Asia/Pacific Regional Register 2012**

Summary of the results of the RSC's Assessments against criteria listed in the General Guidelines (Section 4.2):

**Title:** *FE Williams Collection*

**Country:** Australia and Papua New Guinea

1. In relation to authenticity, uniqueness and irreplaceability.

- These documents were transferred to the National Archives of Australia according to retention schedule and kept in original order. For the part in Papua New Guinea, the authenticity is verified by the recognized custodial institution: the National Archives of Papua New Guinea. Therefore the authenticity is without doubt.

2. In relation to world and regional significance

- The Williams' collection is a record of first contact with Papua New Guinea, a world hardly known to the outside world at the time. They reveal the customs, behaviors and lifestyles of their Papuan subjects, and they are also of great significance for the depiction of Australia's administering role in Papua in the 1920s and 1930s. The breadth and duration of Williams' work make his photographs unique in their coverage of the inhabitants of Papua New Guinea.

- The collection is also a source for comparative study of the lifestyle, custom and tradition of the Papuan people and those of other Pacific Islanders and peoples of the Southeast Asian countries.

### 3. In relation to other criteria

- Subject/ theme: The pictures are representative of two completely different cultures, customs, habits and lifestyles, and also a source for comparative observations of other Polynesian, Micronesia, and Southeast Asian cultures.
- Rarity: The long duration of Williams' career in Papua, combined with the extent of his fieldwork and coverage of the region, makes the collection a rare body of work.
- Integrity: the collection is complete. No damage or alteration has ever occurred.

### 4. In relation to threat and management

- There is no immediate threat.
- The three custodial institutions all have made management plans for better preserving the collection.

### **Register Subcommittee Recommendation:**

This nomination meets the MOW criteria. It is recommended that it be accepted for inscription on the Asia/Pacific MOW Register of 2012.

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## **2. Nomination N°: 2012-2**

**Title:** *Official records of Tibet from the Yuan Dynasty, 1304-1367*

**Country:** China

### 1. In relation to authenticity, uniqueness and irreplaceability.

- These official records of Tibet from the Yuan Dynasty, 1304-1367 comprise a collection of 22 original documents including imperial edicts issued by the Yuan Emperors, religious edicts issued by the Imperial Preceptors and orders from Tibetan political rulers written in Tibetan language and in the rare Phags-pa script. As far as we know, there seems to be no doubt about their authenticity, uniqueness, and irreplaceability. However, there is a question as to how they were picked out from a large collection of documents related to Tibet in this period. There are possibly other *Phags-pa* script documents in existence in Mongolia and Russia related to Mongolian history but not of administrative nature. Regarding the statement that they are the oldest Chinese records, the possible existence of some Tang dynasty record should be compared and clarified.

## 2. In relation to world and regional significance

- It is encouraging that documents from Tibet are brought to the MOW Programme. As it is stated by the Nominator, they belong to a period some 700 years ago. The RSC is of the opinion that their significance is best reviewed in connection with that particular period without linking to subsequent historical periods as there are no other documents of those periods being nominated.
- The documents are not only related to Tibetan history; they are also, and even more deeply, related to some characteristic features of the Mongolian Empire that once dominated one half of the civilized world. This part of history, it must be noted, has been less studied when compared to other dynastic entities in China.
- The use of the rare Phags-pa script, an artificially invented writing system, signifies the multi-cultural orientation, or mentality in other words, of the Mongolian regime.

## 3. In relation to other criteria

- Time and Place: The documents throw a new light to the rarely studied, thus barely known to the outside world, history of this remote region on the Himalayan plateau. They also inform us how this remote community became to be in contact with outside world under the political patronage of the Mongolian empire.
- People: The documents reveal the names and roles of important political and religious leaders recognized in Tibetan history and Tibetan Buddhism.
- Subject and theme: These documents attest that Mongolian empire had been religiously oriented to the contrast of ideological orientation in other dynastic period. Moreover the documents reveal that complex cultural and political interactions were taking place in the Central Asian region during the period of Mongolian rule over China. It is felt that their contents should be analyzed more to reveal the details of economic and social relations.
- Rarity: Documents in Phags-pa script are rare.

## 4. In relation to threat and management

- Threat: Damage is found in some papers which must be properly repaired before they further deteriorate. The recent global warming has resulted in more frequent hot summer and warm winter. To preserve these invaluable documents, there is an urgent need to provide better storage facilities.
- Management plan: The construction of a new Archives building is planned and these records have been placed on the national priority list for protection.

### **Register Subcommittee Final Recommendation:**

The RSC recognizes the importance of this set of documents. They are authentic and rare documents, and their world significance is not to be contested in the light of significant influences Mongols exerted in the history of mankind.

It is recommended that this nomination be accepted for inscription on the Asia/Pacific MOW Register of 2012.

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### **3. Nomination N°: 2012-3**

**Title:** *Qiao Pi and Yinxin: Correspondence and Remittance Documents from Overseas Chinese*

**Country:** China

#### 1. In relation to authenticity, uniqueness and irreplaceability

- Qiaopi, an archive consisting in around 160,000 pieces of correspondences and remittance receipts exchanged between Overseas Chinese people and their hometown families, is a unique collection that provides a vast array of information pertaining to the history of human migration. Their authenticity is not in question. The Qiaopi collection is rare in its nature, a unique and authentic archive.

#### 2. In relation to world and regional significance

- Even though each document contains letter and/or remittance on personal level, the collection in its entirety is a historical document that testifies the formation and development of overseas Chinese communities in Asia, North America, and Oceania. It also reveals the characteristic features of Chinese migration which was unparalleled and unprecedented in the history of world.

#### 3. In relation to other criteria

- People: A distinctive feature of Chinese migration history is that the immigrants were scarcely assimilated, racially and culturally, to the local communities they settled down. They opted to live in the communities of their own, maintaining their life-style and social practices. They also tried to maintain contacts with their families living in China. Qiaopi demonstrates that their minds were lingering on the welfare of families even though they themselves were living in foreign lands physically. The remittance receipts testifies that the economic status of families in the home land was one of the major concerns in the minds of the immigrants. In this sense, Qiaopi may be interpreted as a testimony of realities in ordinary lives of ordinary people in China who had to live an age of hardship and confusion from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century down to the middle of painful Cultural Revolution.
- Subject and theme: It is also a living history of overseas Chinese communities, covering from their birth to the present, that remain as powerful economic entities throughout the world. Therefore, its world significance is beyond doubt.
- Rarity: the documents were scattered in different hands in different parts of the world. The efforts at collecting them should be highly commended.

#### 4. In relation to threat and management

- Threat: The nominated documents have been classified, catalogued, professionally cleaned, disinfected and in some cases mounted before transferring to storages and repositories with temperature and humidity control specifically designed for paper documents. So there is no immediate threat to the documentary heritage.
- Management plan: The nominated documents are in the custody of Guangdong Provincial Archives and Fujian Provincial Archives which are officially under the documentary heritage protection plan of the national government. Their buildings were designed and built according to the national “Design Code for Archives building”. Since all qiaopi documents have been digitalized and made accessible for public use, there is less need to use the original documents.

#### **Register Subcommittee Final Recommendation:**

The RSC recognizes the importance of this set of documents. It is recommended that this nomination be accepted for inscription on the Asia/Pacific MOW Register of 2012.

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#### **4. Nomination N°: 2012-4**

**Title:** *The only book “Poems on Hoa Lu Ancient Capital”*

**Country:** Vietnam

##### 1. In relation to authenticity, uniqueness and irreplaceability.

This book was made in September 2010, and contains 121 poems composed by Prof. Dr. Hoang Quang Thuan on May 17, 2010, on the history of the Ancient Capital of Hoa Lu of three dynasties in Vietnam (968-1010). The physical material of the book may be authentic and only one of its kind, but how the “ historical” content came to be revealed to the author is not clear and the information is not verified or authenticated by other archival or epigraphic evidence or primary historical records. Even if there were similar historical information in existence, they would have existed before 2010 and the author may have obtained the information from these sources. In that case, the content of the book would not be unique.

##### 2. In relation to world and regional significance

It is a very recent document that has not demonstrated any impact on world development or even the development of Vietnam.

##### 3. In relation to other criteria

- Time: This book refers to the period 968-1010 in Vietnamese history, but it is not of that period but a 21<sup>st</sup> century account whose historical sources are unclear, although there is an implication that the historical account was based on an extra-sensory communication with people of that period.
- Place and People: The poems were composed in Hoa Lu the ancient capital of Vietnam and about its history and landmarks and recall prominent people like Vietnamese emperors. Again there is an implication that the account about the place was based on a communication by the author with Hoa Lu people of the ancient period.

**The Register Subcommittee Recommendation:**

This nomination does not meet the MOW criteria in relation to authenticity and world significance. The Register Subcommittee recommends that it is not accepted for inscription on the Asia/Pacific MOW Register of 2012.

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**5. Nomination N°: 2012-5**

**Title:** *Woodblocks at Vinh Nghiem Pagoda, Bac Giang Province*

**Country:** Vietnam

1. In relation to authenticity, uniqueness and irreplaceability.

- The nominated woodblocks are 19<sup>th</sup> century reproduction of 13<sup>th</sup> century woodblocks made from the books published in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The Truc Lam Zen Buddhist sect was founded by Emperor Trần Nhân Tông, of the Tran dynasty in the 13<sup>th</sup> century who abdicated the throne in favour of his son Trần Anh Tông to become a Buddhist monk. He had incorporated the three sects of Zen that had come to Vietnam from China, into a new Vietnamese Zen tradition, known as Trúc Lâm. The Trúc Lâm Zen tradition emphasizes the habit of applying Buddhist practice in whatever surroundings and self-reliance.
- Buddhist-sutras have been printed at the Vinh Nghiem Pagoda since the 13th century, a fact verified in the following historical texts: a) Đại Việt sử kí toàn thư (Complete Annals of Đại Việt), b) the book Truyền đăng (The Transmission of Lamp), and c) Thực lục (Chronicles) of Truc Lam Zen Buddhism (Tam tổ thực lục, Tam tổ truyền đăng, Đại Nam thiên uyển kế đăng lục).
- After a decline in Vietnamese Buddhism, woodblock printing was revived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Since each woodblock contains the date when it was created it has been determined that this collection of woodblocks was produced between 1873 and 1935. The Sino-Nom archive at the Institute of Sino-Nom Studies, which was formerly the library of l'Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient, contains seven Buddhist sutras produced from these very woodblocks. According to them the specific woodblocks used to print them were made between 1881 and 1932. The woodblocks have been

very carefully preserved ever since, therefore there seems to be no doubt as to their authenticity.

- At the present stage of knowledge, the woodblocks are therefore unique and although there are already some texts published using these woodblocks, they are not complete. The woodblocks are the original pages that still have to be preserved as reference.

## 2. In relation to world and regional significance

- The surviving woodblocks are very helpful in the study of the introduction and development of Buddhism in Vietnam. Their presence is a testimony to the richness of Zen Buddhism in Asia and the importance of the Truc Lam Zen sect in Vietnamese history. It is also the turning point for the revival of Buddhism in Vietnam. Zen school of thought became very popular and attracted many in Vietnam and as a result Buddhist temples were constructed throughout the country. However when Ming China invaded Vietnam in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, the sect and Buddhism began to decline only to be revived during the French colonial period of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The woodblocks are historical evidence of the search for alternative life philosophy and moral practices and can be said to be the turning point in the revival of Buddhism in Vietnam while under foreign domination.
- While this sect had a great influence on the culture, ideology and the lifestyle of many generations of Vietnamese people, including political leaders in the past, its internationally well-known Zen Vietnamese monk of the present era, Thich Nhat Hanh, is part of this general Vietnamese Zen tradition that stands for peace, individual self-improvement and harmony with nature.
- The woodblocks can also help to study the development of Nom scripts which were influenced by Chinese writing tradition and used until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is claimed by the Nominator that Nom scripts have been used to create Unicode font which can be used worldwide.

## 3. In relation to other criteria

- Time, Place and People: The Vinh Nghiem pagoda is closely associated with the three Patriarchs of the Truc Lam Zen sect, including the Vietnamese Emperor Tran Nhan Tong In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Buddhism was revived and reunited, the Vinh Nghiem Pagoda became the Head office of the Buddhist Association of Northern Vietnam, and an important Buddhist publishing house. At present its is a typical Mahayana Buddhist museum in the North of Vietnam, where there are many relics and antiques of special value.
- Form/style: According to the Nominator, the woodblocks were carved by the craftsmen from Lieu Trang Wood carving wards in Hai Duong Province, a wood carving craft village of long tradition. It is generally understood that woodblocks were no longer produced and the skill to produce them was lost after 1935.

## 2. In relation to threat and management

- The woodblocks are facing the risk of degradation by time and climate as the Yen Dung district stands in a low and humid area.
- The woodblocks have been registered, classified and digitized. A management plan is said to be in place but still in the planning stages.

### **Register Subcommittee Recommendation:**

The RSC recognizes the importance of Woodblocks at Vinh Nghiem Pagoda, Bac Giang Province in Vietnam in relation to the history of world Buddhism, religious diversity in East Asia, and the cultural and literary relations between Vietnam and China before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The woodblocks link many aspects of these traditions to the modern world and encourage by their symbolic presence the revival of this particular type of Zen Buddhist philosophy and practices in the present day.

It is recommended that this nomination be accepted for inscription on the Asia/Pacific MOW Register of 2012.

### **Concluding remarks**

The Chair would like to thank all members of the RSC for their invaluable contributions and also MOWCAP Bureau Chair and staff for their advice and strong support.

*Rujaya Abhakorn*  
*Chair*  
*MOWCAP Register Subcommittee*  
*16 May, 2012*