

Lee Kong Chian Research Fellowship

Curious about the National Library's Lee Kong Chian Fellowship? Find out what our fellow, Ms Vo Hong Hanh, has to say about the fellowship and how her research has benefitted from this opportunity.

NL: What motivated you to apply for the Fellowship with the National Library, Singapore?

Vo Hong Hanh: When I read about the Lee Kong Chian fellowship, I got really interested in the category "Colonial life in early Singapore/Colonial administrators in Research Area". Finally, I decided to undertake the topic "The role and status of women in colonial Singapore (from 1824 to 1942) in comparison with colonial Vietnam". Through the huge collection available at the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library at the National Library, Singapore, I hope my work will add to the existing research about the culture, society, and history of Singapore and Southeast Asia as well as provide an opportunity to strengthen the relationship and mutual understanding between Singapore and Vietnam.

As a librarian, I wanted the opportunity to enhance my skills and knowledge by experiencing the working environment at a prestigious library such as the National Library, Singapore.

NL: Could you tell us about your current research?

Vo Hong Hanh: My current research examines the development of classes in colonial society, particularly the role of women. In many Southeast Asian countries, women play an important role in society, particularly for wet rice civilisation. However, their standards of living and social statuses vary from country to country due to geographical and socio-historical factors as well as traditional customs. I am researching Singaporean women's quality of life, social roles and statuses during the colonial period (1867–1941) and then to some extent making comparisons between Singapore and Vietnam.

NL: How has the National Library, Singapore's collection helped you in your research?

Vo Hong Hanh: The diverse resources of the National Library, Singapore meets the information demand for my research excellently. Before starting my research, I worried that I would face difficulties in finding documents related to Vietnam in such a huge Singaporean resource. But I was surprised by the number of documents about Vietnam there. I know that one of the aims of the Fellowship is to establish the National Library, Singapore as the preferred stop for Asian content scholarship. Being an experienced librarian specialising in collection development, I really acknowledge that. By providing access to the databases of valuable specialised and multidisciplinary collections and via the modern means of searching, the National Library, Singapore has enabled researchers like me to easily unearth material.

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NL: Would you recommend this fellowship to your peers and why?

Vo Hong Hanh: I would recommend the fellowship to my colleagues, historians and faculty interested in Southeast Asian history, especially Singapore. The fellowship provides a unique opportunity to access the vast resources and collections of the National Library, Singapore as well as to gain professional experience and research skills.

NL: What kind of impact do you hope your Fellowship will have?

Vo Hong Hanh: The enormous resource not only guarantees the quality of my research but also helps to raise awareness about Southeast Asian history among readers from both Singapore and Vietnam. Being able to directly access these primary resources lends my research accuracy and authenticity, changing my perception with a comprehensive viewpoint.