Digital orientalism in Russia

I. V. Aladyshkin*, S. B. Ulyanova¹, N.E. Anosova³, Wang Qi⁴

¹²³Peter the Great St.Petersburg Polytechnic University, St.Petersburg, Russian Federation
⁴ Tsinghua university, Beijing Hradecká, People's Republic of China

*E-mail: i-bez@yandex.ru

Abstract. The authors analyze the digital component in the Oriental studies in Russia in the context of key trends and parameters of the growing digitalization of the humanities. The analysis of digitalization in the Oriental studies in Russia is based on the observation of more than 30 Internet resources of the last 10 years. The methodological basis of the work is the analytical and systematic approach to the study using the methods of logical and causal analysis, as well as expert estimates and systematized data. The classification of electronic resources in the relevant field of scientific research is given. Internet resources with a relatively rich database of digitized materials have been analyzed. At the same time, the short period of activity of many Internet resources and the lack of their updating result in a decreased scientific value of these resources. Considering the digital component of the Russian Oriental studies, the development of digital materials complexes takes place, however the digital studies are not conducted. The array of information is fragmented and lacks systematization. The authors conclude that a generalizing system should be created that would activate the available resources and make them work for the development of science.

1. Introduction

In the first decades of the XXI century digitalization penetrated the humanities [1-2]. Digital humanities is a new field that has won its place in the humanitarian interdisciplinary computerized studies over the past decade. However, computerization started in the humanities much earlier: the advent of large computers in the 50s and 60s of the last century triggered the use of computer technology in humanitarian research, but the digital era came to the humanities after the microcomputer revolution at the turn of the 80-90s. It was then that, thanks to the development of computing power and personalization of computer systems, it became possible not only to create complex virtual reconstructions, but also to represent them in an electronic environment using the World Wide Web [3-4].

Today, the process of total digitalization of the humanities is commonly accepted. Indeed, any humanitarian research today is based on spontaneous or systematic, selective or continuous digitization of the documents and objects of historical and cultural heritage. Digitization has become one of the key daily practices of the humanities researcher.

Many humanitarian disciplines have been very successfully involved in the process of using computer technology to solve scientific problems [5-6], especially in the field of history and philology. Historians have focused on studying historical sources, presenting historical information in a database format, digitizing and electronic publication of the historical evidence. Philologists have made significant advances in the computerized study of texts, creation of linguistic corpus, and computerization of textual analysis. In general, the turning point for the digitalization of the
humanities was the historiographic transition that took shape in the mid-2000s. This transition was reflected in the terminological change: from historical or humanitarian computing (humanities computing, history and computing) to digital humanities or digital history (digital humanities, digital history). The terminological change meant a gradual change in status - from technical support to new professional practices with their own scientific standards and theoretical constructs.

DH is a project approach to solving scientific problems, assuming that the research work will result in a specific informational digital product, for example, an electronic online resource [7-9]. In a sense, the possibilities of electronic publications and Internet accessibility play the role of «augmented reality», in which the classical forms of research creativity (articles, monographs) are supplemented by electronic resources containing digital applications, often of independent scientific value. It should be noted that the researchers have come to some consensus that digital humanities not only involve the use of a computer as a research tool, but also expand the digital historical and cultural heritage through the publication of electronic resources and visualizations.

And finally, DH is a brand that is useful to the professional community, as it implies funding and administrative support and offers innovative solutions for the classical humanitarian disciplines. There is considerable public interest in the results of the implementation of DH projects, primarily because such projects are available on the Internet, which makes them more accessible to the intellectual society. The online publication of research results contributes to widespread international discussion. These changes are indicative of the practical benefits of the digital transition. Thus, it is not surprising that digital humanitarianism involves more and more researchers in Russia, which is also reflected in the historiography of this subject.

The increased digitization of the research has been studied by the Russian and Western authors. In the era of information, texts are on a par with graphic, audiovisual and other multimedia sources. Despite the strong resistance of the original format for publishing the results of scientific research in the form of a printed monograph, current situation requires the expansion of book pages through online resources [10]. Digital technologies also facilitate the cooperation of scientists working in the same field and lead to the formation of so called «invisible colleges» [11]. As modern studies show, the network structure and the global scope of scientific communication today transform the organization of research, from the formation of widely distributed research teams to large-scale interdisciplinary projects [12].

For the Oriental studies, which are interdisciplinary and international by definition and use a variety of sources - from the written ones, in different languages, to visual, oral, ethnographic and others, digitalization is of particular importance [13-16]. According to I. B. Annakhasanova, digitalization allows you to create electronic libraries and educational resources (textbooks, dictionaries, etc.), structure information, organize the interaction of researchers, etc [17].

The purpose of the study is to research the current state of digital Oriental studies in Russia, to identify key areas of its development, as well as to determine the urgent prospects for further development of the digital component of Russian Oriental studies. The objectives of the study are seen: in the analysis of Internet resources on Oriental studies, created by domestic authors over the past decade; in the consideration of the General level of technical support of Oriental studies in Russia; in identifying the nature of the use of the potential of Digital humanities, leading and lagging institutions in the scientific field; in assessing key trends in the use of computer technology and network capabilities in this area of research.

2. Methods

The Oriental studies in Russia have gained considerable experience in using digital facilities. We have analyzed more than thirty Internet resources created by the Russian orientalists over the past ten years. The methodological basis of the work is the analytical and systematic approach to the study using the methods of logical and causal analysis, as well as expert assessments and systematized data.
In general, the analyzed resources can be divided into four groups (it should be mentioned though that the resources combine the characteristics of several groups and it is not possible to make a clear distinction):

- official websites of organizations conducting oriental studies;
- electronic libraries containing Oriental studies;
- electronic periodicals and electronic versions of «paper» publications;
- database.

3. Results and Discussion

The first group includes the official websites of organizations conducting oriental studies, with the most prominent website of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences (http://www.orientalstudies.ru/). The «Publications» section contains the scientific works of the Institute’s researchers over the past ten years. The search system allows you to find the desired article or monograph in the alphabetical or thematic catalog (the special catalogs on Islamic studies should be paid special attention). Digitized sources (both published and archived) are available on the website. In the section «Scientific Life», the researchers find the programs of the conferences conducted by the Institute and the ongoing seminars on the Middle East, Far East, Methodology, South Asia, etc. The «Periodicals» section contains full-text versions of periodicals and continuing editions of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts (the Asian Museum), including «Written Monuments of the East», «Countries and Peoples of the East», etc. It is an interesting fact that along with modern journals, the website of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts also offers publications that can be attributed to bibliographic rarities, such as «Notes by the College of Orientalists at the Asian Museum», 1925-1930s or «East» journal, 1922-1925s. Since the Institute has a large archive, the website contains reference materials (fund register, catalogs) that are necessary for researchers. In general, the website of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts can be considered as a multi-level database that provides a well-structured catalog, as well as automatic search by various parameters.

The electronic library on the website of the Institute of the Far East of the Russian Academy of Sciences (http://www.ifes-ras.ru/) contains the monographs of the IFES RAS (mainly on Sinology), conference proceedings («China in the World and Regional Politics. History and Modernity», «China, Chinese civilization and the World», etc) and ongoing publications («Problems of the Far East», «Current problems of modern Japan», «Vietnam Studies», etc). Noteworthy is the almanac «Man and Culture of the East. Research and translations» (published since 2008), whose articles, reviews and translations touch upon a variety of topics, mainly in the fields of cultural studies, philosophy, philology and literature of East Asia in the past and present. An important component of the collection is the reviewed and experimental scientific translations of the traditional texts of East Asian countries.

This category of resources also includes the websites of the Oriental faculty of St. Petersburg State University (http://orient.spbu.ru/ru/), the Institute of Asian and African Countries of Moscow State University named after M.V. Lomonosov (www.iaas.msu.ru) and Eastern Institute of the Far Eastern Federal University (https://www.dvfu.ru/schools/school_of_regional_and_international_studies/). However, they are more focused on academic rather than research activities, contain educational materials, information for students and teachers. At the same time, the structure of the Institute of Asian and African Countries of MSU comprises scientific centers of Korean studies, centers on the problems of religion in Asia and Africa, centers of Indological and Buddhist studies, centers of modern studies in Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific region, etc. However, the information about their research activity is too brief and can be used for reference only (some ISAA research centers have their own websites).

Internet resources belonging to the second group, i.e. electronic libraries contain the sources on Oriental studies and some specialized information. As an example, let us consider the resource «Sinology.ru: History and Culture of China» (http://www.synologia.ru/) developed at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences. It is the collection of scientific and popular science publications, videos and other materials on the history and culture of China, prepared by the
leading Russian Sinologists. Unlike many others, this resource is thoroughly organized: the thematic section reflects the main Sinology issues and topics, includes theoretical and analytical articles and historical excursions, translations and reviews, as well as the lectures of Sinologists in the media. The alphabetical section highlights the content of the thematic section and contains the information about basic concepts and categories, schools and directions, works and personalities. The reference section includes indices of terms, names, works and geographical locations with their equivalents in the original language, as well as maps, tables and bibliographies.

The resource contains both scientific (monographs) and popular science works of Sinologists, textbooks and lecture courses, and thematic collections of illustrations with commentaries (for example, «Terracotta Army of Qin Shi-huang», «Qing style in ritual utensils», «Chinese in Europe and Europeanism in China» and others), video materials and others. «Sinology.ru» provides the opportunity to read the articles on a variety of Sinology topics (art, economics, science, education, architecture, philology, anthropology, etc.), translations of classical Chinese texts, reviews of the latest scientific works on Sinology. In addition, here you can find classified links to the Chinese websites.

Considering the third group - electronic periodicals and electronic versions of «paper» editions, it should be noted that today almost all periodicals of oriental studies («Collection of Turkology», «Oriental manuscripts», «Petersburg Oriental studies», «Problems of Turkology», etc.) have switched to an online system. This gives most researchers the opportunity to express their attitude to research over long distances.

Finally, some specialized databases that we have placed in the fourth group of Internet resources on Oriental studies are freely available on the Internet. So, the database “Oriental literature” (http://www.vostlit.info/) is devoted to medieval historical sources of East and West. It contains bibliographic indices, translations of literary works and individual documents, maps, etc. As indicated on the website, the resource was created by a group of enthusiasts, and therefore, no research task can be seen in the collected materials.

As an example of a prosopographic database, let us consider the resource “People and Fates: A Bibliographic Dictionary of Orientalists - Victims of Political Terror in the Soviet Period (1917-1991)” (http://memory.pvost.org/pages/index2.html). It contains information about 750 scientists and more than 200 photographs from mainly archival data. The main tasks of the database are the following: to pay the tribute to the perished and wounded Russian orientalists, to collect facts for the analysis and generalization, to offer the material for outlining an unbiased social history of oriental studies in Soviet times. In fact, this is a full-text database. However, its main drawback is the lack of the ability to analyze biographical data for various given parameters, which significantly reduces the possibility of any research and depreciates this resource.

4. Conclusion
The analysis of the digital component in the Oriental studies in Russia reveals a controversial situation. On the one hand, notable efforts are being made to digitize various materials devoted to Oriental studies. A huge amount of materials on various topics is posted on the Internet. However, this array of information is fragmented and chaotic. The active life span of many Oriental electronic resources (with regular additions of material, forums, technical updates, etc.) is often surprisingly short. Of the 30 electronic resources considered, more than 30% have almost ceased to be replenished with new materials, turning into a kind of online archives with a noticeably outdated interface and technical capabilities. Accordingly, the scientific value of such online resources is steadily declining. There is an obvious need to create some kind of the generalizing system that would activate the available resources and make them work for the development of science.

As the study shows, the leaders in the field of domestic digital Oriental studies are today the Institute of Oriental manuscripts of the RAS and the Institute of Oriental studies of the RAS. However, even considering the most developed resources in the technical and content plans, we have to state that in the field of digital Oriental studies in Russia we can talk about the formation of complexes of digital materials, but not about the conduct of digital research.
It can be said that the Oriental studies in Russia are at the initial stages of the digital transition taking place in the humanities. So far, the digital component maintains the technical support for the research and supplements it with electronic-virtual materials. It is too early to speak about new digital research practices in the Oriental studies in Russia. Meanwhile, researchers are using technical facilities for historical reconstructions, visualizations and other digital studies, which currently remain the immediate prospect.

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