The New Road:
A History of Vietnamese Society and French Colonialism in the Early 20th Century

by

Jack R. Merchant

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(History)
in the University of Michigan
2014

Doctoral Committee:

Professor Victor Lieberman, Co-Chair
Professor Rudolf Mrazek, Co-Chair
Professor Joshua Cole
Assistant Professor Deirdre de la Cruz


TONGKING
HANOI
Haifong
GULF OF
TONGKING
HAINAN
KIUNG-CHOU
FRENCH
INDO-
CHINA
ANNAM
SIAM
Luang Prabang
Thanhhoa
Vinh
Hue
C. Turan
Binh-dinh
Cape San-ho
Phu-yen
Cape Varela
Khanh Hoa
Binh-Thuan
Cape Padaran
SAIGON
Mytho
Ben-tre
Tra-vinh
Soktrang
Bak-lieu
CAMBODIA
PNOMPENH
Battambang
Kampot
Ha-tien
Long-xuyen
Fukwok I.
COCHIN-CHINA
Cambodia Cape
Pulo Condor I.
Paracel Isl
Ubon
Khorat
Mun R.
Mekong
Bassak
Kratie
Stung-treng
Sambor
Tonle Sap
Nanning
Langson
Thaihguyen
Du Tains Pt.
C. Bastion
Galong
2
105°
3
110°


CARTE DES CHEMINS DE FER
DE L'INDOCHINE
figurant l'état d'avancement des travaux en 1927
Echelle 1: 7.000.000
LEGENDE
Chemins de fer
En exploitation
En construction
Dont la construction doit être entreprise incessamment
A l'étude
Projetées
110°
115°
120°
25°
20°
15°
10°
C H I N E
BIRMANIE
TONKIN
GOLFE DU TONKIN
HAINAN
SIAM
CAMBODGE
YUNNANFOU
FLEUVE ROUGE
LAOKAY
HAGIANG
CAOBANG
LAICHAU
YENBAY
BACKAN
TUYENQUANG
LANGSON
THAINGUYEN
PHU L. THUONG
BACNINH
SONLA
SONTAY
HANOI
HAIDUONG
HAIPHONG
NAMDINH
Rivière Noire
X. KHOUANG
BAN HOUEISAI
LUANGPRABANG
THANH-HOA
VINH
HATINH
VIENTIANE
Nong Khai
BANSOT
TANAP
DONGHOI
THAKHEK
SAVANNAKHET
QUANGTRI
HUE
TOURANE
FAIFOO
SARAVANE
QUANGNGAI
PAKSE
ATTOPEU
KONTUM
KHONG
PLEIKU
QUINHON
BANGKOK
Korat
Siem Reap
BATTAMBANG
STUNG TRENG
PURSAT
KG. THOM
KRATIE
KG. CHNANG
KG. TACHES
KG. CHAM
PHNOMPENH
DALAT
KG. SPEU
TAYNINH
TAKEO
BIENHOA
KAMPOT
CHAUDOC
GIADINH
SAIGON
PHANTHIET
BARIA
MYTHO
HATIEN
LONGXUYEN
GOCONG
CANTHO
RACHGIA
TRAVINH
SOCTRANG
BACLIEU

DEDICATION

To Huyền, and to my mother and father

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The fruition of this project would not have been possible without the guidance and assistance of many. These few pithy remarks do little justice to the gratitude and appreciation I feel for them. First and foremost, I am forever indebted to Professors Victor Lieberman, Rudolf Mrazek, and John Whitmore, who guided and inspired my graduate studies. Their mentorship and friendship of have been among the great privileges of my life. The intellectual freedom and the professional acumen provided by Professors Lieberman, Mrazek, and Whitmore made this project possible. I ardently hope my work reflects the excellence of their training and tutelage.

As members of my dissertation committee, Professors Joshua Cole and Deirdre de la Cruz conscientiously read my work and provided invaluable feedback. The profound depth of Professor Cole's intellect, reflected in his suggestions and analysis, will guide me into the future. I would also like to thank Professor Nhung Trần of the University of Toronto for her constant support.

Nguyễn Thị Nga, formerly of the University of Michigan (UM), and Nguyễn Thị Phương Chi, formerly of the Institute of Linguistics in Hà Nội, polished my Vietnamese language skills. They also taught me much about Vietnamese culture and society. Their words rang in my ears throughout my work on this project.

Like all other historians of Việt Nam, I am indebted to scholars like David Marr, Alexander Woodside, John Whitmore, Hue-Tam Ho Tai, and Keith Taylor without whose excellent work the field of Vietnamese Studies would scarcely exist. My ability to reach the conclusions in the pages below is a tribute to their endeavors.

The Department of History, University of Michigan provided world-class support throughout my graduate studies. The graduate program would not function without the professionalism and patience of Lorna Altstetter, Kathleen King, and Diana Denney. Thank you. In addition to the Department of History, the Rackham School of Graduate Studies also provided

generous financial support. I was able to undertake extensive research in Việt Nam thanks to a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship, granted by the United States Department of Education. My gratitude also to Beni, the administrator of that fellowship at the UM, whose uniquely efficient style made him a pleasure to work with.

In Hà Nội, I received gracious support from the Institute of Vietnamese Studies at the University of the Humanities and Social Sciences. In particular I would like to thank Professor Trần Ngọc Vương and Đỗ Kiên for their time and counsel. The excellent staff at the National Archives I made much of my research possible. I also received valuable guidance and support from the Institute of Linguistics, the Institute of Literature, the Institute of History, and the Hán-Nôm Institute. Ngô Thế Oanh of the Association of Writers also gave generously of his time and expertise.

Over the past twelve years I have enjoyed the support and friendship of many throughout Việt Nam, from Long Xuyên and Sài Gòn to Hà Nội and Hồn Gai. I am particularly indebted to my mother-in-law, Ngô Thị Lợi, and to my father-in-law, the late Nguyễn Văn Thảo, who welcomed me into their family as a son.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to those whom this volume is dedicated. The unfailing love and support of my mother and my father are the foundation of my life and being. The arduous undertaking that was this project would never have been possible without Huyền, my wife and constant companion, who has taught me the true meaning of patience and strength and love. I wake each morning grateful for the privilege of dancing through life by her side.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

LIST OF MAPS

MAP

INTRODUCTION

This project began with a young group of poets in the 1930s. The poetry they composed was called 'New Poetry'. It had been designated 'new' during the era because it did not obey the stylistic conventions and rhyme schemes poets had used for centuries, such as Tang-style verse. It was also 'new' because many of the compositions were deeply influenced by Western, especially French, verse. It soon became clear that the term 'new' was quite complex, like some of the poetry, and all of the young people that composed it. The poets were predominately from the generation that came of age during the 1920s and 1930s. Some of their verse did indeed differ from Vietnamese antecedents in terms of subject matter and style of composition. In some cases it seemed that French Symbolists like Verlaine and Mallarme had relocated to the colony or that the mid 19th century Parisian apparition of Baudelaire was prowling the streets of Hà Nội. Other Western-influenced compositions seemed even more out of place – the young Vietnamese poets of the 1930s were influenced by Romantics like Lamartine and Musset, who lived a century before. At the same time, the 'New Poets' composed in the 'old styles' etched in the historical record of Vietnamese literature. Nineteenth century Vietnamese poets like Nguyễn Du and Nguyễn Công Trữ heavily influenced them. They also took inspiration from verse composed a millennia before in Tang China.

Photograph 1. Vũ Bằng, 1930s.

My interest in the verse was eclipsed by a fascination with the poets themselves, who appeared to be Bohemian, French-speaking Confucian scholars who donned fedoras and wore three-piece suits. The juxtaposition of that image from the interwar period and another, from the proximate past, were stamped in my mind. The second image was of the 19th and early 20th century classical scholar and poet Nguyễn Khuyến (pictured below). Nguyễn Khuyến had been

trained in Confucian doctrine and the intricacies of Classical Chinese since boyhood. After a lifetime of preparation, he passed high-level imperial examinations just prior to the colonization of the northern and central regions of Việt Nam. Following a relatively short career in officialdom, he followed the timeless Taoist principle of withdrawal (*vô vi*), refusing to use his talents to serve an illegitimate, and in this case foreign, ruler. I imagined him in bucolic seclusion drinking wine and composing sorrowful verse lamenting his fate and caustic poems chiding the French occupiers. The clash of those images was intriguing, as was the shadowy reflection of the classical scholar in the Westernized youth.

Photograph 2.
Nguyễn Khuyến, c. 1905

It was not only that the pre-colonial classical poet and his youthful counterpart of the interwar period had different physical styles. They composed in two different written languages. The classical scholar wrote in Classical Chinese and *Nôm* (its Vietnamese language derivative), as had his forebears for over a thousand years. With a couple brief exceptions, Classical Chinese had been the official language of the Vietnamese court for the duration of that period. It also acted as the written medium of most socio-religious life in Việt Nam. The demotic script, *Nôm*, which transliterated the Vietnamese language through adapted Chinese characters, had existed since at least the 13th century. Though never standardized and developed the way the Korean or Japanese languages were, *Nôm* remained popular because it spoke to common Vietnamese experience in a way Classical Chinese could not. In contrast, young men in the 1920s and 1930s wrote and composed in *quốc ngữ*, a Latinized version of the Vietnamese language based on Portuguese phonetics pioneered by the Jesuit missionary Alexandre de Rhodes in the 17th century. *Quốc ngữ* had little impact on Vietnamese culture or society until the first decades of the 20th century. I found myself repeatedly confronted with the same seemingly simple question: *How were such profound social and cultural changes actuated in such a short period of time, scarcely thirty years?* In other words, what were the main factors that drove the socio-cultural transition that took place in Việt Nam during the late colonial period?

Vietnamese effected that transformation through legal institutions established by the colonial state. At the foundation of the socio-cultural change of the late colonial period was education. Colonial schools introduced an entire generation to novel forms of knowing and being through two 'foreign languages', *quốc ngữ* and French. The one to three years of instruction received by most students permitted a measure of *quốc ngữ* literacy. While elementary education was diffuse, students who finished primary school or studied at the secondary level often had to relocate to regional and provincial centers. Primary (grades 4-6) and secondary (grades 7-10, 11-13) education offered knowledge previously thought only available outside the colony or in clandestine spaces within it. The knowledge and experience students gained in primary and secondary schools profoundly impacted Vietnamese society. Because most students had to travel to the sites of their schools, upon returning to their hometowns during school breaks they dispersed the knowledge of the colonial school and their experiences in other Vietnamese locales across the colonial landscape. From the mid 1920s, diffuse elementary education and traveling primary and secondary school students combined to increase the spread of *quốc ngữ* literacy, a process that was also facilitated by the ease with which one could learn that medium. By the early 1930s, the increasingly literate populace was a ready audience for the explosion of *quốc ngữ* print driven by primary and secondary school graduates.

Quốc ngữ periodicals were the primary means the generation educated in colonial schools created new notions of the past and shaped culture and identity in the present. Legal Vietnamese-language periodicals commented on a wide variety of social, cultural, and political issues and exercised much greater freedom of expression than previously suspected. Indeed, it was through periodicals that new forms of knowledge and evolving socio-cultural norms penetrated society at large. In essence, colonial schools, periodicals, and infrastructure, which dramatically increased mobility, acted in concert to make diffuse knowledge and forms of socio-cultural expression often thought the privilege of the urban-based educated elite.

The claim that colonial education, periodicals, and infrastructure were the primary drivers of the transformation that laid the foundation of postcolonial Vietnamese culture and society

seems as obvious as it does extraordinary. Appreciating the impact of these institutions has been impeded by the fact that they were created, and to varying degrees controlled, by the colonial state. The lens through which colonial Việt Nam and colonialism more generally are perceived is tinted by the belief that the colonial enterprise is inherently illegitimate. This assertion and the conviction that colonial institutions represent valid subjects of study, which were not simply instruments of subjugation and repression to be overcome, are not mutually exclusive. While acknowledging that education and legal periodicals impacted the colonial experience, most historiography on colonial Việt Nam contends that those institutions could not have been primary agents of socio-cultural change because of their nascence in the state. Rather, scholars have searched for 'real' or 'authentic' agents of Vietnamese social, cultural, and political change in the spaces outside the immediate control of the state and in extra-legal activities.

Political narratives, which have dominated historiography on colonial Việt Nam, have essentially been driven by the question: How in a generation did Vietnamese go from passive subjects of the French Empire to a politically conscious nation dedicated to eradicating foreign rule and creating an independent nation?[1] This important query has driven English-language historiography for almost fifty years. Such analysis has proven valuable and effective in highlighting colonial era antecedents for political revolutions and postcolonial outcomes. However, by asserting that the ways colonialism came to an end were central to colonial society itself, this scholarship presents a distorted portrait of the proximate past. The Democratic Republic of Việt Nam laid a foundation for such narratives in Hà Nội during the 1950s and 1960s.[2] Like all modern nation-states, the new Republic sought to use history to further its objectives and promote its self-image. The narrative fabricated in Hà Nội was of Vietnamese extraordinariness in the face of horrific colonial repression. It was the story of a small group of young men (and women) advancing the proud tradition of Vietnamese anticolonialism by triumphantly expelling the foreign occupier against all odds. That group, which was by definition outside of and against the colonial state, was promoted as the 'authentic' Vietnamese response to foreign occupation and thus the legitimate heirs of the Vietnamese nation.

That foundation has been supplemented, modified, and amplified by Western scholars. However, it has not been fundamentally challenged or altered. One of the cornerstones of this narrative is the *Đông kinh nghĩa thức* (*Tonkin Academy*), a private school in the commercial

quarter of Hà Nội established by an amorphous group of classical scholars and Westernized intellectuals, which offered free classes and lectures to the public (primarily in Classical Chinese and *quốc ngữ*). Founded in March of 1907, the *Academy* endured for barely nine months (to January 1908) before authorities shuttered its doors (see Chapter 4). Many see the *Tonkin Academy* as a socio-cultural watershed because they claim it demonstrated Vietnamese initiative and desire for Western/modern knowledge. In essence, they perceive the *Tonkin Academy* as being representative of classical scholars' break with the knowledge of the past (based on Confucian studies in Classical Chinese), acceptance of a new way of seeing the world (Western, French), and propagation of that new knowledge. Therefore, the *Tonkin Academy* is widely perceived as an historical marker representing the union of the pre-colonial past and Westernized present. That is, it illustrates Vietnamese ardent pursuit of Western knowledge and acceptance of a new way of being before they were coerced to do so by the state's establishment of a system of Westernized schools. The creation of colonial schools can thus be interpreted a belated and inadequate response to the long held Vietnamese desire for 'modernization' and advancement along Western lines.

Such analysis does not reflect the historical record. The *Tonkin Academy* represented more of a hiccup than a watershed. Its greatest impact was not to engender Vietnamese to pursue Western knowledge, but to associate that knowledge with political violence and colonial repression, stunting the transition from Classical studies (*nho học*) toward Western studies (*Tây học*). Likewise, the *Tonkin Academy* did little to pave the way for broad acceptance of *quốc ngữ*. As demonstrated in Chapter 1, Vietnamese did not gravitate towards Western education until the abolition of Confucianized examinations in the middle of the second decade of the century and subsequent creation of a pan-Việt ('Franco-Việt') education system that proved the new method of social mobility and prestige. *Quốc ngữ* was institutionalized by the Franco-Việt system and popularized in periodicals, both of which became diffuse via movement and colonial infrastructure, a process that saw *quốc ngữ* become the 'National Language' in just over twenty years.

The creation of the *Tonkin Academy* as a 'starting point' flips historical reality by averring that the colonizer impeded eager Vietnamese attempts to revolutionize along Western lines their manner of learning and knowing. In truth, Vietnamese only began to embrace

Western studies and *quốc ngữ* in larger numbers when their well-established methods of education and knowledge were effectively discontinued and replaced by the colonial administration. This profound act shifted the means for attaining what Vietnamese perceived as the purpose of post-remedial education; improved socio-economic status via appointment to the governmental positions that were the source of political, and thus economic and social, power and prestige. In contrast, the '*Tonkin Academy* narrative' perceives the schools established by the Franco-Việt system as substandard and relatively inconsequential because their creation is incorrectly interpreted as a belated state response (illegitimate) to a Vietnamese demand (legitimate).

Indeed, colonial education has been perceived in most English-language scholarship in exactly that way: Colonial schools and the Franco-Việt education system were designed to systematically keep Western knowledge from Vietnamese students by providing a backward education that militated against societal development/advancement.[3] Colonial education was seen by another scholar as mainly consisting of instruction in proper French behavior and Vietnamese morality, the purpose of which was to show students how to interact with their colonial masters and teach them how to read and follow instruction.[4] Another leading scholar of Vietnamese history stated that the purpose of colonial education was to provide students an inferior education that led to menial positions in the colonial administration.[5] Evidence supporting such assertions was not provided through the analysis of colonial schools. Rather, scholars articulated the inadequacies of colonial education by juxtaposing it with a fantastic view of pre-colonial education. Some espoused visions of highly educated classical scholars lecturing to full classrooms of around sixty students in every village.[6] Others guesstimated that 25% of all Vietnamese (not just men) over fifteen years of age were competently literate in hundreds of Chinese characters (and *Nôm*). Despite suggesting that Vietnamese civilization has always enjoyed a literary tradition, no data supporting such claims was provided. The point of such juxtapositions is not to 'prove' that one in four Vietnamese could compose Tang style verse. As further 'proof' of the inadequacy of education during the colonial period, these comparisons serve as an end in and of themselves.

In that narrative the traditional Vietnamese love of education produced a desperate desire for Western education during the colonial period. The colonial administration either

systematically refused that desire or provided for it in a backhanded way – by creating an education system that was numerically insufficient and pedagogically bankrupt. Thus education provided by the state could not have been a determinate factor in the late colonial socio-cultural transition. This conclusion is somewhat problematic because an explanation for the diffusion of Western knowledge, *quốc ngữ*, and socio-cultural change is necessary to answer the question posed above, because those factors so obviously influenced revolutionary and postcolonial outcomes. Some have sought to reconcile this dilemma through narratives of 'Vietnamese extraordinariness': In an environment in which modern knowledge was systematically withheld, Vietnamese fierce thirst for learning engendered by heritage caused them to actively seek that knowledge independent of, and often in conflict with, the state. The generation under consideration here did indeed possess extraordinary individuals. Self-study was also widespread during the late colonial period. Be this as it may, most self-study was either directly or indirectly connected to colonial education. Most of those who spoke of self-study in the historical record were students in the colony's primary and secondary schools. They utilized their school's resources and/or public libraries and research facilities (*L'Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient*, for example) for self-study. Those who were not enrolled in classes either gained literacy in a colonial school or were privately taught by someone who learned in a colonial school. Furthermore, 'radical' ideas were not as closely guarded as some might think. As Chapter 2 makes clear, most educated youths were introduced to radical politics in their school classrooms.

Other scholars have concluded that knowledge and education were most easily located outside the colony altogether: The totalitarian French colony was tied to the republican metropole. According to this view, those who traveled overseas and returned (the 'returnees') were extremely important catalysts for change because they had existed in an environment in which knowledge flowed freely and was not retarded by bad colonial schools or circumscribed by a tightly regulated press. Some individuals who traveled to the metropole did indeed impact Vietnamese society in profound ways. Men like Nguyễn Văn Vinh and Hoàng Tích Chu, both of whom spent time in France, revolutionized periodicals in two different eras. Others, like Nguyễn Tường Tam and Nguyễn An Ninh, also had great influence. However, their peers who remained in the colony were responsible for much more significant contributions. The returnees highlighted by such scholarship were the exception amongst returnees in general, who were often

criticized both for their lack of socio-cultural dynamism and for their general snobbery vis-à-vis Vietnamese culture and society.

Sources of knowledge and power apart from colonial institutions have also been found in the clandestine, the illegal, and the forbidden. The contemporaneous significance of radical political associations, organizations, leagues, parties, and individuals has been distorted beyond all recognition by postcolonial narratives. Perhaps the largest irony of movements like the Vietnamese Nationalist Party and the Indochinese Communist Party was that during the interwar period the colonial administration paid them much more heed than Vietnamese themselves. People like Nguyễn Thái Học, the founder of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party who conceived an ill-fated 'uprising' in 1930, were lauded for their bravery and condemned for their stupidity in the same breath. My point is not that anticolonial individuals and groups had no impact on interwar society, they did. My contention is that they played auxiliary roles in the drama as it occurred.

One of the reasons scholars have looked to the clandestine as a source of socio-cultural change and dynamism (other than the eventual and rather impromptu communist triumph of course) has been the perception that information outside the school was as circumscribed as it was inside the school. Many have concluded that *quốc ngữ* periodicals, which I believe were among the most important factors that shaped both late colonial and postcolonial society, were regulated by extremely strict rules and regulations. As such, the administration was perceived to heavily censor or completely curtail any political discussion or conversation about Vietnamese life and society in legal print. As Chapters 4 and 5 make plain, such assertions contradict the historical record and serve to undermine the importance of *quốc ngữ* journals, often at the expense of clandestine publications whose impact during the late colonial period was minimal.

At the apex of the narrative seeking to explain revolutionary and postcolonial outcomes sits the colonial prison. In the portrait of colonial society articulated by the scholarship under review here, it makes sense that prisons were more significant centers of knowledge and education than schools. The superimposition of the school upon the prison represents the complete delegitimization of colonial institutions and the absolute articulation of colonial society as upside-down and backward. There is a sense of sweet and dramatic irony that prisons, as the spaces in which the colonizer concentrated his ability to subjugate and repress the colonized,

were in fact the very sites in which revolutionary knowledge and political dissent fomented and flowered. I do not dispute the findings of such insight and analysis. Prisons were sites of education, organization, and the propagation of anti-colonial ideas. However, individuals who pursued knowledge in the prisons of Indochina were by and large educated in the colony's schools. The ideas they explored and propagated along with the rudimentary (reading, writing) and analytical skills with which they did so were provided them in colonial schools.

Such important studies have provided comprehensive and compelling answers to the questions they sought to address. However, in answering those questions they have highlighted phenomena deemed much more important in the postcolonial era than they were during the period itself. Some recent work has sought to alter this trajectory by moving away from political narratives through the study of social doctrine and religion. While these studies provide a more complete picture of the forces at work in colonial society, they continue to evade the institutions and processes at the heart of the socio-cultural transformation they seem keen to address. The following study of late colonial Vietnamese society adopts a different approach. By neither rejecting the impact of colonial institutions out of hand nor searching for alternative explanations divorced from some measure of state control, I hope to have added nuance to our understanding of both colonialism and Vietnamese culture and society.

In many respects, this manuscript represents the knowledge and perspective earned over the previous twelve years, most of which I spent living and working throughout Việt Nam. That experience and fluency in the Vietnamese language have permitted me the profound understanding and deep analysis conveyed in these pages. The conclusions below reflect an exhaustive study of Vietnamese-language sources in conjunction with extensive French-language archival research. A great part of my study concentrated on Vietnamese-language sources published during the interwar era. I poured over countless novels, short stories, newspaper articles, *reportage*, plays, poems, and essays. Much of the information gleaned from such sources drove my archival research, which focused on education, transportation and infrastructure, periodicals, publishing, and press laws, and opium and prostitution. A conclusion drawn from multiple Vietnamese-language sources was cross-referenced using archival documents.

A few brief examples will serve to illustrate this method. Numerous Vietnamese-language sources alluded to the fact that Vietnamese did not begin to accept and adopt the Westernized education, including *quốc ngữ*, propagated in colonial schools until after the advent of the Franco-Việt education system and abolition of the classical examinations. Archival records concerning education from the 1900s to the 1920s supported this assertion (see Chapter 1). Likewise, Vietnamese-language sources from the period paint the colony as a dynamic space in near-constant motion. Voluminous archival documentation on the development of infrastructure and transportation systems, as well as laws regulating movement, demonstrated the validity of such claims (see Chapter 3). My familiarity with the content of the Vietnamese-language press caused me to question the contention that the colonial administration enforced draconian press laws with a heavy hand. This belief was reinforced by Vietnamese voices and archival sources, which showed a much more nuanced system of regulation that evolved over time and permitted wide ranging discussion on a variety of topics previously thought too controversial for the public sphere. This proved true even prior to the Popular Front period in which press laws were further liberalized (see Chapter 4).

Finally, I utilize memoirs written by individuals who came of age during the late colonial period to illustrate various phenomena. The reasons for this are multiple. First, the examples cited are indicative of broader trends. They not only reflect many such memoirs, but also reflect the literature of the period and are supported by archival sources. For example, many memoirs, including those of teachers, scholars, and writers like Đặng Thái Mai, Đào Duy Anh, Vũ Đình Hòe, and Nguyễn Vỹ recalled the transfer of political consciousness in colonial schools. Such recollections were supported by archival documents on school curriculum and the content of school libraries and classrooms (see Chapter 2). Second, I chose to focus on specific memoirs to provide narrative continuity, particularly for readers unfamiliar with Vietnamese culture or language. For example, the experiences of Lê Thị Bạch Vân (the writer, journalist, and educator who went by the penname 'Tùng Long') are repeatedly cited to illustrate the unique challenges faced by educated young women of the period. Likewise, I cite the experiences of Nguyễn Công Hoan (b. 1903) and Huy Cận (b. 1919) in multiple circumstances to demonstrate continuity and change through time (see Chapters 1-3). Finally, the memoirs highlighted and excerpts translated provide both colorful and memorable illustrations of common experiences and larger

trends. I am confident that scholars possessing similar familiarity with variegated Vietnamese-language materials will recognize the validity of my use of such sources.

[1] Marr, David. Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945, p. 1.
[2] See for example: Trần Huy Liệu and Nguyễn Khắc Đạm. *Xã hội Việt Nam thời Pháp-Nhật* and Trần Huy Liệu, Nguyễn Lương Bích, Văn Tạo, and Hướng Tân. *Cách mạng cân đại Việt Nam*.
[3] Kelly, Gail. "Colonial Schools in Vietnam: Policy and Practice" in Kelly, Gail (Kelly, David ed.). *French Colonial Education: Essays on Vietnam and West Africa*, p. 8, 19, and 21.
[4] Marr, David. Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945, p. 36.
[5] Ho-Tai, Hue Tam. *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution*, p. 14.
[6] See Kelly, Gail. "Schooling and National Integration: the Case of Interwar Vietnam" in ibid. p. 90.

CHAPTER 1

A Revolution of Knowledge and Perception

What you think the universe is and how you react to that and everything you do depends on what you know. And when that knowledge changes, for you, the universe changes. And that is as true for the whole of society as it is for the individual. – James Burke

In 1651 the Jesuit missionary Alexandre de Rhodes published a Vietnamese-Portuguese-Latin dictionary in Rome. The dictionary systematized a novel, Latinized version of the Vietnamese language based on Portuguese phonetics.[1] The 'Romanized' form of Vietnamese de Rhodes pioneered, which came to be known as *quốc ngữ*, had little impact in Việt Nam for the following 250 years. In the early 20th century it revolutionized the Vietnamese experience, irrevocably altering the ways Vietnamese perceived themselves and the world. The systematic diffusion of *quốc ngữ* in colonial schools and the development and then profusion of *quốc ngữ* periodicals from the first decade of the century brought about this change of fortune. These forces helped transformed *quốc ngữ* from a little known foreign language at the beginning of the century to the universally acknowledged written medium of Vietnamese, the *National language*, scarcely thirty years later.

It was not as though Việt Nam lacked a written medium prior to the popularization of *quốc ngữ*. In fact, it had two. With the exception of two brief periods in the 15th and late 18th centuries, Classical Chinese was the official language of the Vietnamese court for almost a thousand years. Communiqués, laws, and histories were all written in Classical Chinese. Classical Chinese was not only the language of the court it was also the written medium of most of socio-religious life in Việt Nam. Vietnamese schooling was conducted in Classical Chinese, because the purposes of education were the possibility of official appointment to governmental office and the ability to conduct rituals with a measure of 'fluency'. The written form of the Vietnamese language was the demotic script called *Nôm*. *Nôm* transliterated the Vietnamese

language through adapted Chinese characters. While it existed from at least the 13th century, *Nôm* was never standardized and developed the way the written forms of the Korean or Japanese languages were. Other than the two brief periods in the official spotlight noted above, *Nôm* was relegated to a secondary position. Though few were *Nôm*-literate, it retained popularity and relevance because it more closely articulated the common Vietnamese experience than did Classical Chinese. For this reason, compositions in *Nôm* were often recited and memorized, becoming part of the rich fabric of Vietnamese oral tradition.

At the beginning of the 20th century perhaps 85% of the Vietnamese population could neither read nor write Classical Chinese or *Nôm*. The remaining 15% possessed widely disparate levels of literacy. The years of study required to become proficient in Classical Chinese was one reason for the general dearth of pre-colonial literacy. The stratified and hierarchical nature of the language made it still more difficult to learn and translate into a vernacular-like idiom. Partially for these reasons, *Nôm* also stagnated. While Classical Chinese was considered 'our language', Vietnamese culture remained predominately oral. In contrast, the ease with which one could learn to read *quốc ngữ* and its general informality compared to Classical Chinese had a great democratizing effect on the possibility of literacy in Việt Nam.[2]

In the pre-colonial period, education was decentralized and non-systemic. Upon researching pre-colonial education, Đào Duy Anh (1904-1988), a scholar of Vietnamese history who came of age during the late colonial period, came to the following conclusion: "The organization of education during the Nguyễn dynasty was just like it was under the Lê and Trần dynasties... it was completely decentralized at all levels; the people made their own arrangements."[3] Although most students learned from the same texts, there were no institutionalized, homogenous curricula. While decentralized and predominately local, education was tied together by like purpose and imperative. The idea that the purpose of education was the development and evolution of existing thought and knowledge was almost altogether foreign to Việt Nam. Rather, in the popular consciousness education was inextricably linked to political (and thus economic) power and socio-religious life.

Most boys and men who received any formal education were taught between one and three years, a practice that continued into the late colonial period. Such instruction provided varying degrees of literacy, from the ability to write names, decipher some characters, and

perform rote rituals, to the ability to stumble through texts and even produce a bit of verse. One to three years of schooling also enhanced local position and status and provided the ability to perform familial, and perhaps village, rituals. A minority continued their studies beyond the remedial level. Their abilities ranged from those with little more than basic knowledge of Classical Chinese and the Confucian texts to those who could analyze treaties from the Sung dynasty, compose Qing-style 'eight-legged' essays, and fluently produce their own Tang-style verse.[i] Few undertook the years of preparation requisite to sit for triennial examinations that quizzed scholars on their knowledge of Confucian and neo-Confucian texts as well as Chinese history. The purpose of the examinations, and of higher levels of education in general, was to garner governmental appointment, which promised economic, personal, and familial aggrandizement.

Photograph 3. A Classical Scholar at work, early 20th century

The language and conceptual paradigm of knowledge and learning in pre-colonial Việt Nam were utterly distinct from what they became during the late colonial period. The contrast between the two world-views that collided in the colony was sharp. Having grown-up and prepared for a lifetime in one thought-world before transitioning to his new environment by teaching himself *quốc ngữ* and French, Phan Khôi (1887-1959), a writer and public intellectual, understood how excruciating that transition could be. In a 1928 article in *Đông Pháp thời báo* (*French Indochina Times*) he explained the difference between the new, Western thought-world and its antecedent, which had existed in Việt Nam for hundreds of years. Phan Khôi believed the differences drastic and irreconcilable.[4] Western thought, as Phan Khôi explained valued science, which he defined in the following way: "According to Western thought, if one seeks to know about this object or that thing, whether it is big or small, seen or unseen, one must investigate it in a thorough and ordered manner. One cannot go about the study of an object or thing in a

[i] Note: This latter group likely comprised significantly less than 5% of the population. With very rare, and much celebrated, exceptions, they were exclusively male.

haphazard way. To satisfy this standard of study Westerners established an ordered system of investigation. The accumulated knowledge and experience gained from the study of any object or thing is continually built upon. When Westerners understand an object of inquiry in a profound manner, they establish a principal, a law, or a systemic theory whose validity cannot be questioned. The new factual information becomes part of a larger body of knowledge. This is process is called science."[5] In contrast, the Sino-Vietnamese tradition perceived the world with more esoteric, perhaps poetic eyes: "Knowledge in the East is immense and unordered. Individuals pour over books and understand them in one manner or another. Our understanding of the world around us is explained through gossip emanating from those books. Here one understanding, there another. There exists no comprehensive body of knowledge. There is no system of common knowledge and understanding. We have no methodology of inquiry or knowing. Our books teach a scrambled mess of conjecture. According to those books, everything in existence is explained by yin and yang and the five elements (*earth, water, fire, wood, and metal*). We do not even question these obtuse explanations of existence and reality. The archaic and superstitious knowledge of the East should thus be termed 'black magic'."[6] Such statements suggest how men like Phan Khôi grew to perceive the vast spaces separating the two conceptual worlds. As he wrote those words in 1928, Westernized learning had for all intents and purposes been established as the new agency of social mobility and prestige in Vietnamese society.

While there were indeed some Vietnamese who had attended colonial schools prior to the interwar period, the generation of young people born between c.1905 and c.1920 was the first to be immersed in the Westernized knowledge they propagated. Vietnamese perceived the system of knowledge and thought introduced by colonialism through the paradigm of education and thought that existed, leading those of the era to use terms like 'modern' and 'Western' to define the knowledge advanced in colonial schools. I refer to that knowledge as 'Western studies' (*Tây học*) and 'modern studies' (*tân học*), because those were common ways Vietnamese referred to them. In the same vein, I refer to schools that propagated Western knowledge and pedagogy as 'Western', 'modern', or simply 'colonial'. Terms like 'modern studies' and 'French/Western studies' expressed the novelty inherent in the education and knowledge introduced via

colonialism. Such designations also juxtaposed learning during the late colonial era ('modern') to that which existed in the proximate past (*nho học*, from here 'classical studies')

Vietnamese by and large rejected 'Western studies' from the time they were introduced in the late 19th century to the second decade of the 20th century. As noted in the introduction, rather than yearn to adopt Western mediated knowledge as an entree to the secrets of the colonizer's power, Vietnamese remained faithful to their own, well-established traditions of knowledge and learning. An understanding of contemporaneous conceptions of education helps explain why this was the case. Education was inextricably entwined with societal norms and processes, which defined its purposes – social mobility, prestige, and ritual literacy. It was not until the Confucianized examinations were abolished in the North ('*Tonkin*') and Center ('*Annam*')[ii] of the country (in 1915 and 1918 respectively) and the pan-Vietnamese Franco-Việt education system was established (in December 1917) that Western studies truly began to displace classical studies as the preferred path to social mobility and popular prestige. Until their abolition, the examinations (in Classical Chinese) remained the conduits of official appointment. Because such appointment was the primary reason for post-remedial study, an alternative, foreign form of education that did not prepare one to serve in the Imperial government was thought purposeless (*vô lý*).

Classical studies were also thought more useful at the remedial level. To the 1920s, basic knowledge of the classical texts and Classical Chinese could provide a young man entrance into the local political structure, increasingly his economic welfare and garnering him prestige and respect. Furthermore, elementary knowledge of Classical Chinese was requisite to perform the ceremonies at the heart of socio-religious life (the duty of every eldest son). A son who attended a Western school, wherein he studied in *quốc ngữ* and French, not only abrogated his chances of official appointment, but also consciously cut himself off from his heritage and past to follow the ways of the foreign conqueror. Consequently, it is little wonder that before c.1920 Western studies were regarded as a new system forced upon the Vietnamese by a foreign power that

[ii] I utilize the terms 'the North' (*Bắc kỳ*), 'the Center' (*Trung kỳ*), and 'the South' (*Nam kỳ*) for purposes of clarity and accuracy. *Tonkin*, *Annam*, and *Cochinchine* are the French translations of the above Vietnamese terms. During the colonial period (and in some scholarship, to the present) the French translations often mischaracterized their Vietnamese counterparts by implying that because these three regions were administered separately, that they in fact had distinct identities divorced from the whole. The Vietnamese terms *Bắc, Trung, Nam Kỳ* did not connote this, as the translations I offer make implicit.

threatened to replace an entire manner of knowing and interacting with the world, from an individual, familial, and societal prospective. It is understandable, perhaps even logical, that the vast majority of Vietnamese families were reluctant to send their sons to Westernized schools throughout the first two decades of the century. Such attitudes only began to shift en masse with the discontinuation of the examinations and the establishment of the Franco-Việt education system, which removed the chief purpose of education, social mobility, from classical studies and replaced it in Western studies.

Following that shift, in the 1920s and 1930s, the knowledge and thought-world emanating from the Franco-Việt classroom, as well as a medium that education system helped popularize, *quốc ngữ*, evolved into something Vietnamese consciously embraced and made their own. This rapid transformation owed much to Vietnamese ability to shape their evolving social, cultural, and political landscape; a fact reflected by two major changes made to colonial education during the 1920s. First, the creation of village-level schools, known as 'communal schools', and corresponding decentralization of education altered the existing system to Vietnamese desire and advantage. Second, an elementary school certificate, the *Certificate d'Etudes Elementaires Indigenes* (*CEEI*), was established. Vietnamese called for the *CEEI* because it afforded the conferee a statement of documented knowledge and correlative prestige. The *CEEI* also provided a measure of standardization, which was the administration's aim. The creation of communal schools and the *CEEI* were acts of translating the foreign into local idiom. Decentralized education represented the continuation the way Vietnamese experienced education in the recent past. Likewise, the utility with which Vietnamese perceived certification reflected deeply rooted pre-colonial assumptions. Such continuity rendered Western studies relevant to the Vietnamese environment and increased its general acceptance.

While such adaptations eased the transition of knowledge and perspective for men, Vietnamese women experienced the possibilities and changes wrought by the introduction of Western education in very different ways. Prior to colonization there was no organized education for girls and women in Việt Nam. The Franco-Việt education system represented a dramatic break from well-established social norms because it included education for girls and women and persistently advocated for their participation as both students and teachers.[7] The very idea of girls going to school and women working outside the home (or market) threatened to

upend both male and female notions of Vietnamese womanhood centered around the home and family. By its very existence, female education permitted and even encouraged young women to play roles outside the home by locating activity in alternative sites (schools) and engendering professional ambition that did not correlate to social reality. Indeed, Vietnamese reaction to this profound break with existing socio-cultural practice was the paramount factor for the dearth of female education during the late colonial period. In other words, the primary impetus for educating girls and women rested with the colonized rather than with the colonizer. The introduction of the possibility of institutionalized female education set-off a profound debate in Vietnamese society, which continued for the duration of the period. While more women became literate in the twenty years between 1920 and 1940 than in the previous two thousand, the period was also witness to continual resistance to women's education, not by the colonial administration (who had introduced its possibility), but by the Vietnamese themselves, men and women alike.

Classical Chinese as Vietnamese and *Quốc ngữ* as French

Analysis in this section is limited to the Center and the North because those two regions shared a trajectory at the outset distinct from the South (*Cochinchine; Nam kỳ*). Classical studies and the examination system remained the main form of education in the Center and the North until the examinations were abolished. The period from the late teens to mid twenties witnessed a corresponding rise in the popularity of Western studies. By contrast, in the South the examinations were terminated shortly after direct colonization in the mid 19th century. Earlier abolition of the examinations and introduction of Western education might lead one to conclude the South adopted modern studies long before the Center and the North. Be this as it may, it appears that classical studies remained popular in the South through the second decade of the 20th century, as they had in the Center and the North. Statistics from the mid 1920s indicate colonial primary schools in Hà Nội were better attended than those in Sài Gòn.[8] While the North had a greater population than the South, one might expect more students in the colonial schools of Sài Gòn due to the longer period of institutionalized Western education in the South. In any case, I do not include the South in the analysis in this first section because of that disparity.

However, that region is part of my analysis for the remainder of this and subsequent chapters due to the fact that the same processes of adaptation, transmission, and adoption occurring in the Center and North were at work in the South.

Prior to the creation of the Franco-Việt education system in 1917, the French administrations in the Center and the North instituted education reforms in 1908. With these reforms, the administration sought to position itself as the primary arbiter of knowledge through a more centralized form of education. The newly created Service of Education established schools offering "traditional education", as the administration termed them, alongside the decentralized classical studies' system and the few Western schools in the Center and North.[9] The purpose of the new "traditional" schools was three-fold. First, they represented the state's ambition of centralized and controlled education. Second, through the introduction of *quốc ngữ* and French, the administration sought to expose Vietnamese to the Western thought-world and move them away from classical studies. There were three levels of traditional schools: elementary, primary, and lower secondary (first degree, second degree, and third degree). The elementary level, by far the best attended, consisted of instruction in Classical Chinese and varying degrees of *quốc ngữ*, dependent on the instructors' proficiency. Instruction in Classical Chinese continued at the primary level, supplemented by *quốc ngữ*. At that level students could elect to study French. Those who chose to study French sought a future in the colonial bureaucracy. The remainder, who focused on classical studies, aspired to sit for the examinations with the ambition of being accepted into the Vietnamese Imperial bureaucracy. The lower secondary level was much the same. Students could follow classical studies or choose to focus on French and *quốc ngữ*. Traditional schools retained the goals of classical studies: at the elementary level to learn a modicum of Classical Chinese to enhance prestige and position at the local level and for the purposes of ritual. At the primary and lower secondary levels the goal was to become a mandarin (either in the French, or more likely the Vietnamese bureaucracy). Third, the reforms sought to popularize Westernized forms of education by placing them alongside classical studies. The administration appeared confident that if given the choice Vietnamese would acknowledge the superiority of French forms of knowledge and learning. That was not the case: as long as classical studies and the decentralized education system that

propagated them retained cultural and socio-economic relevance Vietnamese were reticent to participate in alternative forms of knowledge.

Attendance in the traditional schools as well as at the small number of Franco-Việt schools that existed during the first two decades of the 20th century remained poor. The vast majority of those that received any education in the teens did so within the classical studies' system. In December of 1917, the same month in which the Franco-Việt education system was created (it would take effect the following September), there were a total of 25,780 students in the traditional schools established by the French in the North (21,897 of which were at the elementary level – i.e. learning the rudiments of Classical Chinese).[10] In the Western schools of the North at the end of that same year, attendance was even lower – 9,292 boys at all levels (8,226 of whom were at the primary level) and 1,232 girls, all of whom were at the primary level. In contrast to the number of students in those colonial schools, the total of which for both the traditional and modern schools (boys and girls) was 36,304, there were 42,918 students in the 5,009 independent classical schools of the North.[11] If one takes into account the fact that the vast majority of those in the traditional schools created by the reforms of 1908 received instruction in Classical Chinese at the elementary level, the numbers become even more stark: 64,815 in contrast to only 10,524 students immersed in modern studies (I have omitted the 3,883 students at the primary and lower secondary levels in the traditional schools due to the fact that it is not clear how many focused on Classical Studies and how many elected to study French).

Vietnamese perceived the education found in colonial schools as French, which of course it was. The little known and poorly understood subject matter seemed bizarre and was taught in two foreign languages: French and *quốc ngữ*. That fact reinforced the sense of foreign-ness of Western studies and its distance from Vietnamese experience. The poet, writer, and journalist Nguyễn Vỹ (1912-1971) explained the feeling of reluctance and even embarrassment experienced by students at the beginning of the second decade of the 20th century: "For the first few days the boy just wanted to play truant because the teacher made him study '*Quốc ngữ*' - 'A.B.C.' For the young man *quốc ngữ* was very odd. It was nothing like the language of 'Heaven and Earth' that his friends studied at the classical scholar's house. Classical Chinese seemed so much easier to comprehend and so much better. The teacher made him recite *ba, bă,*

bâ, bi. He did so between bursts of laughter..."[12] Knowledge, education, and their purpose remained inextricably entwined with classical studies. Most would have agreed with the sentiments expressed by a weary father in response to his son's desire to study at the colonial school: "Annamese people study the Annamese language (*meaning Classical Chinese*). Why on earth would we study French?!" His son corrected him: "But father, *Quốc ngữ* is not French." And then the father: "I hear you saying 'a, b, c' - that's French! It's certainly not our language!"[13] Đặng Thái Mai (1902-1984), the renowned teacher, writer, and communist revolutionary, indicated similar attitudes towards *quốc ngữ* and Western studies were prevalent during his childhood in rural Nghệ An province (northern *Annam*), when he recalled an aging classical scholar forbid his children from studying *quốc ngữ* "because that is the language of those bastard Frenchmen".[14]

In contrast to the utility of classical studies, Western studies to c. 1920 were perceived as purposeless and even harmful. One could not become a mandarin by going to the Western school, because until their abolition the examinations and classical Chinese remained the conduits of official appointment. Furthermore, one who attended a Western school was both ethereally and physically cutoff from his heritage and past. In his discussion of a young man's first day in a colonial school, Nguyễn Vỹ illustrated this painful break: Upon arriving in the early morning, the young man ('Lê Văn Thanh'), was notified by the Vietnamese director of the school that when he returned in the afternoon (*following the lunch break/siesta*) he had better have cut his queue (*the coil of long hair Vietnamese men wore atop their heads*). He would then receive the beige pith helmet of the modern schoolboy. When Lê Văn Thanh returned home he told his father that the government school required that he cut his hair, a practice that was very rare during this period. His father was despondent: "The old official could not take it. He pounded the table and rattled the chairs. He noisily argued with his son: 'A son has a father just as your head has hair. According to Annamese custom a son has to let his hair grow to show respect for his parents, to show his

Photograph 4. Young man wearing the turban and long tunic typical of early 20th century dress.

piety. Cutting your hair is the same as abandoning your parents'... After he finished, the old man sat down and cried. His son also cried. Then the old official began again in an angry tone: 'To be a son you have to have a queue resting atop your head to venerate your father and show your mother respect. If you cut it you will no longer have a father or a mother!... Did you hear what I said?! If you cut your queue I'll jump into the well and kill myself!..'" [15] The aging classical scholar of Đặng Thái Mai's youth expressed similar, though less dramatic, sentiments when he told his off-spring they could not study at the colonial school: "... you are forbidden from cutting your hair! Only the bastard French cut their hair!"[16]

Unlike that gentleman, Lê Văn Thanh's father eventually acquiesced to his son doing something he could not imagine in his own youth, but whose purpose – education and the possibility of social mobility – he understood. A barber recently returned from his training in Sài Gòn was called to the house. Before the cutting commenced a ritual was performed to beg forgiveness of the young man's ancestors: "The barber nodded in agreement: 'You are correct sir. The queue atop one's head belongs to his parents and grandparents. To cut it is a sin, therefore one must pray for his ancestors' forgiveness. Through this ritual one can avoid punishment.' The white-haired barber placed a razor, mirror, and comb into his red satchel. He then followed the young man to his house. When they arrived, a box of betel, bunch of ripe bananas, and a boiled chicken had already been placed on the altar. Ten bowls of rice porridge accompanied by ten pairs of chopsticks were placed on a large wooden tray, which was set before the altar. The young man's father lit incense, kowtowed, and prayed under his breath for a long period. He prayed: 'I make the offering of this meal for my unfilial son, who according to government dictate must cut his queue in order to study at the government school. With these meager offerings I beg your forgiveness. Grandfathers and grandmothers please bear witness to this ritual! Oh, souls of the dead I beg you to support your grandson so that he may study well and gain office, fame, and a high position in life.'"[17] At the end of the ceremony and the haircutting, the young man was provided a mirror by the barber in which to perceive his new self: "The candle on the altar had just been extinguished as the barber finished forming Lê Văn Thanh's hair in the *carrê* style. The barber then took the razor from his satchel to tidy up his work. When he finished he handed Lê Văn Thanh a mirror and told him with a smile: 'Do you

see? With your new hair cut you look no different than a modern official!'[iii] The young man grinned at his reflection…"[18] As the young man considered his reflection in the mirror he thought of that new crop of officials from colonial schools who gained employment with the government of the Protectorate following their completion of primary school (grades 1-6). He saw the future. That afternoon he returned to school still wearing a black turban around his new head. When he arrived, the director completed the transformation by replacing the black turban with the beige pith helmet of the modern Vietnamese schoolboy. The new headgear needed to be worn carefully by the Vietnamese, who despite his short hair wore a long black tunic and baggy white pants, his feet atop wooden clogs or resting in the dirt. Lê Văn Thanh required instruction in a modern ritual of veneration, the director told him: "When you are inside a classroom or a house you cannot wear your hat. When you go outside and meet an official or a teacher, you must remove your hat to greet them."[19] And then he took his place with the vanguard, on a wooden bench behind a titled wooden desk in the future.

The Shift

Vietnamese initial reluctance to adopt Western studies certainly had much to do with the closeness they felt for Classical Chinese, which they thought of as 'our language'. And yet many Vietnamese were more pragmatic. Classical instruction promised ritual proficiency and possibility of social mobility. A young man studying the rudiments of Classical Chinese obtained the skills to perform veneration ceremonies for his ancestors, as was required of the eldest son. Moreover he could also possibly gain a position in the village hierarchy earning him and his family a measure of prestige and respect, at a minimum. Those who continued their studies beyond basic literacy and writing skills did so to sit for the classical examinations and become an official (*để làm quan*), because in so doing they won prestige, power, and prosperity for themselves and their families. The perception that entering officialdom was the only reason to study beyond the remedial level continued through the interwar period. Vũ Đình Hòe, who came of age during the interwar period and attended the College of the Protectorate and the

[iii] Petty Vietnamese provincial officials working in the French bureaucracy (*thầy thông, thầy ký*).

Lycee Albert Sarraut[iv], highlighted that social norm with more than a hint of sarcasm: "Of course the reason one studied was to 'become a mandarin'. Why else would one study? This has been our perception for thousands of years."[20]

While classical studies lost their social mobility *raison-d'etre* following the abolition of the examinations, their utility in terms of ritual persisted to the Revolution of August 1945 (and perhaps beyond). In my conversation with Dr. Lê Xuân Thại[21] regarding his education in the early 1940's, he told me that prior to his attendance at the Franco-Việt school he had studied Classical Chinese with a teacher in his village. He said this practice remained common amongst boys in the Nghệ-Tĩnh region (northern *Annam*) well into the 1940s. When I asked him why this was so, more than twenty years following the abolition of the classical examinations, he told me the rudiments of Classical Chinese remained imperative because without that knowledge, one could not practice ancestor veneration and other local ceremonies in the "correct manner". The revolutionary Nguyễn Thị Minh reflected those sentiments when she commented: "My father was a graduate of the examinations. He was not able to make much of himself because at that time (*in the early-mid 1920s*) Classical Chinese was not as esteemed as it had been in the past. My father only taught a few children in our village whose parents wanted them to learn the proper way to conduct ancestral veneration ceremonies and basic writing skills – so they could sell land (*i.e. read and write basic contracts*)..."[22]

Photograph 5. The prestige of classical studies: A scholar-official shaded by parasols, connoting his power and prestige.

[iv] The College of the Protectorate was a Vietnamese boys' secondary school. The *Lycee* Albert Sarraut was a French boys' secondary school, at which a limited number of Vietnamese young men were also able to study. The College was located just outside of the municipality of Hà Nội. The *Lycee* was within the municipalities boundaries. See below and Chapter 2.

Following the end of the Confucianized examinations it became increasingly clear that classical studies were no longer the source and avenue of social mobility and prestige. In popular perception if not reality, the end of the examinations and establishment of the Franco-Việt education system shifted the determinants of social mobility and prestige (classical studies – examinations – mandarinate/Vietnamese government employment). Indeed, as the scholar Đào Duy Anh noted: "... The classical examinations still existed when I was growing up so just like all other parents, my father and mother sent me to study Classical Chinese when I was six or seven. When the examinations were abolished in the North in 1915, parents began to recognize the fact that Classical Chinese was becoming irrelevant. Thereafter they started sending their children to Franco-Việt schools to study *quốc ngữ* and French."[23] The French presence in Indochina and the thought-world/education system they introduced eroded the utility and the prestige that classical studies and the Vietnamese mandarinate had enjoyed. From roughly the end of the Great War, one had to go to a colonial school to become an official. Because officialdom was the main purpose of education in popular perception, by the end of the decade Vietnamese began to attend the new colonial schools in increased numbers.

In response to the ascendance of *quốc ngữ* and French and the marginalization of Classical Chinese, petty officials in the Vietnamese bureaucracy who had just a few years prior dismissed *quốc ngữ* as 'French' began to undertake its study: "By 1919 the Imperial government discontinued the examinations based on classical studies, effectively eliminating classical studies. The veteran officials who had previously opposed *quốc ngữ* and criticized it as far from the language of the 'saints and sages' began to invite teachers into their homes so that they could learn the medium. District officials went to the provincial centers to buy the implements of that new learning – fountain pens, ink, and Western paper – and brought them home to practice writing. Those officials also made their wives and children study. In the morning and afternoon officials attended to their duties, writing their orders and receipts in Classical Chinese. However in the early afternoon and at night a joyful babble could be heard emanating from the security of their private residences: *Ba, bã, bâ, be, bê… ác, át, an, ang, áp, am…*"[24] It was not that the French or even other Vietnamese officials required petty officials to study *quốc ngữ* or French on pain of losing their positions. I have seen documents composed in Classical Chinese by local officials dating from the late 1930s and early 1940s. Studying *quốc ngữ* was a choice, perhaps

as ‘free’ as any choice under similar circumstances, in response to changes in *Vietnamese* society. Officials studied *quốc ngữ* or French because they wanted to retain their prestige (and power) vis-à-vis other Vietnamese.

The prestige of the French colonizer, which had accumulated in the Vietnamese consciousness over the previous decades, was another reason for the transition to Western studies. Much of that prestige was garnered through the magic of science and technology: asphalted roads and iron rails, automobiles and steam engines, street lights lining wide boulevards, the odd airplane making an appearance in different corners of the colony. As Phan Khôi noted: “Westerners do not put up with the inconveniences nature throws in their path. Rather, they aspire to conquer the power of the natural world. Their development of science and engineering has permitted great victories in that battle, including electricity, bridges that span vast rivers, railroad lines tunneling through mountains, etc.”[25] Electricity, roads, and tunnels were advertisements of the scientific prowess of Western civilization. While it is certainly true that the individual Vietnamese in the countryside in 1918 or 1922 might not have been acquainted with all or perhaps any of those scientific marvels, s/he had certainly heard of a number of them. Such feats were visible displays of the prowess of the colonizer: “The French had accumulated an unparalleled and profound prestige, which no Vietnamese could deny, due to their modern, scientific civilization with which no Vietnamese could argue.”[26]

The Vietnamese language began to reflect that prestige: “We need to accept the clear truth that from the day the French arrived in Việt Nam, they only propagated their civilization. They never made the Vietnamese address them with great reverence. They simply called their nation ‘France’. They never referred to it as ‘Great France’ or to their officials as ‘the mandarins of Great France’. They referred to the Governor General or Resident Superior simply as ‘Mr. Governor General’ or ‘Mr. Resident Superior’. The reverent forms of address used by the Vietnamese caused Vietnamese mandarins to lose prestige vis-à-vis their French counterparts. Because Vietnamese mandarins began addressing the French in this manner, the French began to follow suit. Thereafter it became the norm to place them at the top of the Vietnamese lingual and societal hierarchy...”[27] Just as the petty official in the countryside was not forced to study *quốc ngữ* or French, the French had not given birth to the terms of deference by which the Vietnamese classified them. Those terms were a social and verbal reflection of French power

and prestige as felt by Vietnamese and etched into the hierarchy that is the Vietnamese language and society. An attempt by the petty official to study French or *quốc ngữ* was an attempt to share in this power and prestige: to be associated with it and with the French. Rather than shun the colonial power, the vast majority of Vietnamese sought association with the French. This does not mean that there was not resentment and non-cooperation or even violence and hatred. Be that as it may, during the colonial period in general and the era of my inquiry in particular (c. 1905 – c. 1940), most Vietnamese 'cooperated', directly or indirectly, with the colonial regime of their own volition.

The speed with which Vietnamese transitioned to Western studies reflected their desire to share in the power and prestige of the colonizer. The new education system was the conduit by which the French were to teach the Vietnamese the sources of that power. The rolling transition of perception and knowledge that occurred during this period was actuated by the Vietnamese themselves, 'naturally': "If we accept the past as it occurred, we can see that all the changes of this period happened little by little, silently, almost naturally. Nothing was forced. Nothing was hindered."[28] Attending a government (colonial) school was transformed from a potential source of shame into something of which one boasted and which one actively propagated because it was associated with power and prestige – the new, the scientific, and the modern: "... The local classical scholar's students, those youths between 11 and 25 years of age, often came to hang out with the modern schoolboy. They chided him that Western studies were inferior to classical studies. In response, he told them about and show them the things he was learning in the modern school: he recited French verse, did geometry and algebra problems, showed them his physics and chemistry homework, and translated colorful maps of Europe, Asia, and America into local idiom. Following that exposure, the classical students who had been critical of modern studies, along with most everyone else in the neighborhood, became eager for Western learning. They began to compliment the colonial schoolboy's knowledge... which had earned him a special place among the youth in the area..."[29] Knowing even the rudiments of French began to be seen in a positive light, it was the (new) language of social mobility and science: "From the day the boy was able to speak one sentence in French everyone in the neighborhood complimented him. They said that his French was very good and that even though he had only studied for a year, he was already able to say the sentence: 'I am a primary school student.' The schoolboy advertised

the French language and the government school in all corners of the area so that by the following September, after the summer vacation, the school had many more students that it had a year before"[30] Although or because knowledge of the French language was much more common in the mid-late 1930s than in the late 1910s or early 1920s, its prestige seemed to grow with the years. This was as true in rural Quảng Ngãi province in the Center c. 1918 as it was in the rural Red River Delta of the North twenty years later: "Every time I returned to my hometown, my father would bring me to the homes of both my paternal and maternal relatives. He never forgot to brag to them about how well I studied and that I was also able to speak French: 'Recite that French poem for your grandparents' he would always tell me. And so, like a little machine, I would recite the poem I had learned by heart for my grandparents..."[31] It was along that same path that *quốc ngữ* went from being 'a French language' to the 'National Language' in little more than twenty years, a truly remarkable evolution.

Placing Western studies within existing socio-cultural norms also eased the transition. The administration utilized the ritual celebrations and displays of classical studies for graduates of their new system: "To advertise the new system of education, the Protectorate ordered villages to stage processions for students who had successfully completed the modern studies' examinations, just as their were processions for classical studies' examination graduates."[32] For their part, the Vietnamese were only too happy to participate in the revelry, food, and drink in what became an advertisement for the future: "The drummers and gong players led the procession walking as they beat their instruments three times in unison. There followed a villager who held a banner inscribed with the words 'Modern Studies Graduate' in Classical Chinese. Then there were two rows of people brandishing colorful flags – blue, red, purple, and yellow – that blew in the wind... People stood at either side to watch the procession as it passed. The most eager and numerous among them were women and girls hoping to catch a glimpse of the graduate... In celebration of his son's achievement and to repay the villagers, the proud father of the graduate slaughtered a cow and a pig for all to enjoy..."[33] There was a clever fluidity in the administration's use of Vietnamese ritual. By translating the power and prestige of French knowledge/Western studies in that way, the administration enlisted the Vietnamese in the reconfiguration of their own culture.

To be clear, Western studies did not usurp the role classical studies had enjoyed as soon as the Franco-Việt education system was implemented in 1918. Rather, this transition took place throughout the interwar period, and owed much to the changes in the education system examined below. By the mid 1920s there were more pupils, both boys and girls, in colonial schools than there had ever been during the pre-colonial era. It was not only that more young people were receiving some level of education (a trend that continued throughout the period); the way they learned, how they were taught, and the content of that instruction differed profoundly from the world of learning just a few years before. As mentioned above, in late 1917 there were 64,815 students of classical studies at the elementary level in the North. The 1918-1919 school year census indicated that the Franco-Việt system absorbed the 21,897 elementary school students (grades 1-3) from the 927 'traditional schools' established after 1908. Rather than 'traditional schools', they were referred to as 'primary elementary schools' when they became part of the new system. With the edition of these hybrid schools, there were 24,675 students in 1,113 Franco-Việt elementary and primary schools in the North in 1918-1919.[34] However, at least 40,140 students remained in their classical studies' village schools, meaning the new system only siphoned off some 2,000 students from classical studies its first year. In addition, around 22,000 students were added to the Franco-Việt system through a change of name ("traditional" to "Franco-Việt"). It would take another seven years for the Franco-Việt system to make up the difference. By 1926 (and after) the number of students (boys and girls) receiving education not only at the elementary level, but also at the primary and secondary levels far exceeded the number of pupils at any given time in the classical education system. In that year there were 83,706 students in elementary schools, 84,004 in primary schools, and 7,926 in lower secondary schools in the North.[35] The total for all three levels was 175,636 students. By contrast, on the eve of the education reforms in 1917, there were a total of 77,990 Vietnamese students in classical, traditional, and modern schools at all levels.

Continuity in Change: Communal Schools

The creation of "communal schools" in 1926 was one way Vietnamese adapted the policies of the colonial administration to their own imperatives. From the late teens, the number of elementary schools at the local level continued to grow. During that initial period, the goal was for most to have access to the elementary education, that is *quốc ngữ* literacy. By the mid 1920s the Franco-Việt education system could not keep up with localized demand for elementary education, which Vietnamese perceived as useful and worth the inherent cost. At the same time they assumed anything beyond that level yielded diminishing returns, a perception with antecedents in the recent, pre-colonial past.

In the early and mid 1920s individual villages and communes in the North (*Tonkin*) began demanding their own schools. They no longer wanted to send their children to an adjacent village to study. Apart from a growing appreciation of the utility of a Western education, two notions underlay this desire for local elementary schooling. One was a sense of continuity. In the past, communities often enjoyed their own scholar, usually a failed exam candidate, who supplied education to those who perceived its use and were able to contribute to the material sustenance of the teacher. Because this was in many cases a social norm – that each locale should have access to some manner of education – villages and communes sought their own schools independent of those a few kilometers distant. The second reason for the demand for local education had to do with what might be termed local patriotism, the desire of individual villages to distinguish themselves from neighboring villages. Villages of the North frequently defined themselves in opposition to surrounding villages.[v] Individuality and competition were part of what gave rise to the desire for Western studies' village schools, which we know as communal schools.

At the same time as communal schools were desired by the Vietnamese, they also made sense to the colonial administration. During this entire period, from c. 1920 to c. 1940, the

[v] Note: This is still true today. A few years ago I traveled to the village of a friend in rural Hà Tây province, to the southwest of Hà Nội. On our journey from Hà Nội we passed a rather large village, approximately 2 kilometers from that of my friend, located on the same dike road. I asked him of that village - what it was like, if he often went there, etc. He replied that he did not often go there and that there were frequently disputes between the two neighboring villages. For example, he told me that if he were dating a girl from that village he would be in danger of being physically assaulted by its men!

administration was in the process of building an education system, which propagated from the ground up an entirely novel manner of knowing and being. This was a monumental task. The relative dearth of public schools during this period reflected French hostility to indigenous education per se less than the enormity of the task and fiscal restriction: without raising taxes sharply or cutting back on basic administration, the colonial government did not have the money to build and/or staff more elementary schools, let alone more primary and secondary schools. The federal government of Indochina from Hà Nội provided the majority of the funding for the Franco-Việt education system. This was true despite of the fact that laws were passed assigning primary responsibility to the villages themselves. In 1921 for example, a little over three years from the founding of the Franco-Việt system, two laws stipulated that villages were required to fund schools in their locale.[36] This apparently proved easier to decree from Hà Nội than to accomplish in the vast, populated countryside. While the reasons for this were undoubtedly myriad, a report on the functioning of the public education system in Indochina during the decade from 1923 to 1933 blamed the failure of the law on both the offices of the provincial Residents and village officials (that is because of both French and Vietnamese failures).[37] The report stated that the situation on the ground was "purely opportunistic" and operated according to local imperatives.[38] Villages would agree to pay and lodge their teacher but when the time came to honor those obligations, would fail to do so because local social, economic, and/or political conditions had shifted. Because teachers were technically in the employ of the government of Indochina, that government, through the office of the Service of Education, was forced to shoulder those obligations.

At the time communal schools were created, the situation had not improved from the perspective of the Resident Superior in Tonkin. A report on the economic situation of schools in the North indicated a pragmatic adjustment from that stipulated by the laws of 1921. According to that report, the Government of the Protectorate was responsible for paying local teachers a stipend and providing them adequate housing. Villages were to provide local teachers a "salary" and were charged with paying for school materials (including providing a location for classes to meet).[39] Another report on the Franco-Việt education system in the North in 1926-1927 put numbers to those responsibilities. According to that report, the Government of the Protectorate provided two-thirds of the funding for education; the remainder was paid by localities. The

report cited a number of "inconveniences" to this arrangement, namely that it was funding far more of the burgeoning local, i.e. elementary, school system than it would have preferred. A solution was articulated in the form of a "uniform financial regime" for schools. This plan sought to reverse the reality of funding as it stood – to make localities responsible for two-thirds of their expenditures for education while the government in Hà Nội would makeup the remaining third. The plan was made law on the 11th of April 1927, to take effect on the first day of the following year. Part of this law, the cornerstone to the new funding schema, was to "re-establish equality in education between the communes". If it chose to have a school, each commune would assume the entire financial responsibility.[40] It was in this manner that communal schools became the solution to the administration's funding woes – that is, Hà Nội would pay less and the Vietnamese would pay more to educate Vietnamese children.

Communal schools also answered the Vietnamese demand for their own local schools. On the 2nd of December 1926 the Governor General authorized those communes in the North that did not possess an official/public school to establish a school to be serviced by a teacher not in the official employ of the Service of Education.[41] The first article of the law said explicitly that they were "entirely the responsibility of the communes". From a pedagogic point of view, communal schools were elementary schools. Like 'official' elementary schools, they were to be co-ed (see below). The curricula of these schools was to follow the official elementary curricula while also corresponding to local needs, as was the case in all elementary schools. Communal schools were to provide children with *quốc ngữ* literacy and prepare them for the exam that came at the conclusion of grade three. While the communes were financially responsible for these academies, according to the law cited above, they were placed under the administrative control of the provincial Residents and their French and/or Vietnamese delegates. These parties answered to the Director of Public Education and Inspector of Franco-Việt Primary Education in Hà Nội.[42] For their part, teachers were required to possess either a Certificate of Elementary or Primary Studies or a degree in classical studies, which could include the hybrid degree created by the reforms of 1908.[43]

In effect, what the administration hoped to accomplish with communal schools was the financial decentralization of the most popular level of education, while ostensibly keeping that instruction under the control of the enormous bureaucracy established to ensure that excessively

liberal ideas did not circulate. As with official acquiescence to private schools, this was much easier theorized than accomplished. That said, when this scheme began the colonial administration was almost giddy with the satisfaction of having squared the circle by making rudimentary education more diffuse (the Vietnamese imperative) while shifting the financial burden away from the central government, at least on paper. That attitude was reflected by the Resident Superior in Tonkin, Rene Robin, who on the day the second law establishing communal schools was signed sent a memo on the subject to provincial Residents, municipal mayors, and those officers in charge of the military territories in the highlands.[44] Robin almost bragged to his colleagues that these new reforms made the "*annamite commune*" the central axis of indigenous education, meaning that the communes were to be solely responsible for funding their own schools. Notwithstanding this decentralization, Robin assured his comrades that in terms of pedagogy the new schools would follow the same stipulations as centrally funded public schools and would not enjoy the curricular latitude that was becoming problematic in private schools. In reading this letter, one gets a feel of the contradiction that was colonial rule in Indochina. Despite the hard imperatives of control colonial bureaucrats including men who, subject perhaps to a spirit of romantic liberalism, sought genuinely to serve the people and address their needs. Thus Robin wrote: "These schools are in principle co-ed. They will be composed of a single class consisting of two to three grade levels taught by a single teacher. This type of organization is very economical. In a short amount of time it will allow us to provide rudimentary education in *quốc ngữ* to a large number of children, serving the aspirations of most families."[45] Robin went on to assert his belief that communal schools would uplift and stabilize the communes by attaching a teacher to an individual school and community for a long period of time.[vi] In addition, Robin lauded the fact that children would no longer have to become "detached" from their families and communities in order to receive an education. He saw this as the foundation of modern education in the colony, which would enable the administration to allocate more resources toward the development of primary schools and secondary schools in order to reach a larger audience: "In the end, this will permit the Administration to concentrate its efforts and financial resources towards the development of primary and secondary education. Primary schools will be created in the centers of each district and hamlet. This will allow for the

[vi] Note: It was the policy of the Service of Education to transfer teachers from one location to the next every 2-3 years as a safeguard against an educated individual developing a 'following' in any one location.

development of secondary schools in provincial centers."[46] At the end of his letter he ordered his subordinates to publicize these new laws and rules as widely as possible. He asked them to go to the mandarins and members of communal councils and explain these changes and their "liberal intentions and the decentralization that inspired them..." While one of the main objectives of this new policy was to ease the financial burden placed on the Protectorate, the "liberal intentions" of which Robin spoke included 25,000$ in 'seed money' provided to poor communes in rural areas of the delta and highlands for the construction of schools in 1926 and then again in 1927.[47]

These reforms and their appending documentation paint a portrait of colonial governance very different from the narratives to which we have grown accustomed. It is not that stability, control, and advantage were not at the forefront of the minds of bureaucrats like Robin. They most certainly were. This is evident from the fact that in creating the communal school system they sought to shift the entire financial burden of elementary education to the Vietnamese while maintaining 'editorial' control and surveillance over the content of school curricula and personnel. At the same time it was felt that the colonial administration was really addressing a Vietnamese demand that had become pressing in the decade since the formation of the education system. Vietnamese were buying into the utility of that system, at least at the rudimentary level. In one sense they sought continuity – the power to have their own teacher and school to serve the needs of each local community. Prior to the financial reforms and communal schools, the administration saw no way to meet this demand. It was not that Robin and others sought only to restrict Vietnamese to only the most basic education, keeping them ignorant and powerless, as Communist-derived historiography would have it.[48] Rather, elementary education was the education Vietnamese perceived as most useful for their environment. The laws of December 1926 decentralized the education system by permitting Vietnamese to create local schools. At the same time, the French retained control over the pedagogic content of those classrooms. These laws also allowed the administration to allocate more resources to the two proximate higher levels of education, primary and lower secondary, which would with time undoubtedly become better attended as more children received that rudimentary education in their villages. For their part, the Vietnamese seized this new opportunity. By October 1927, less than a year

after their creation, there were 220 communal schools in the North.[49] Six years later 34,276 children received education at communal schools in the North.[50]

Continuity in Change: Certification

The second major alteration to the primary level of the Franco-Việt education system was the establishment of elementary level examinations and certification. In 1924 the Government General of Indochina established the Indigenous Elementary Studies Certificate (*CEEI*, *Certificat d'Etudes Elementaires Indigenes*). An exam at the conclusion of elementary school served multiple purposes. First, it standardized the level of knowledge needed to enter the primary level, north to south.[vii] Second, the creation of an elementary school certificate responded to Vietnamese demands for such a certificate. The *CEEI* helped to persuade Vietnamese families to send their children to school, to popularize Western studies, and to propagate Western knowledge. Most Vietnamese, boys and girls alike, who received any schooling during this period, did so at the elementary level. There were many reasons for this. Sending a son or daughter to school was a loss of both money and manpower. Most perceived the 'opportunity cost' to be too great for the 'return on their investment'. Those who sent their sons, and to a much lesser extent their daughters, to elementary school did so for the prestige and power education could supply. Local prestige derived from *quốc ngữ* literacy, a modicum of knowledge of the French language, and from insight into what they perceived as modern knowledge and process. One could use these skills to gain a higher position in his village or communal hierarchy, earning his family extra money and higher social standing. The *CEEI* enhanced the attractiveness of Western studies at the elementary level because it increased the prestige of the elementary school graduate. Rather than simply finishing grade three with no pomp or ceremony, the schoolboy could travel to the examination site, sit for the examination, and if successful return to his hometown with a certificate and a new title. This was another way Vietnamese translated Western studies into a familiar local idiom. Here again Vietnamese and

[vii] Note: The *CEEI* was abolished in the South in the mid 1930s. There was minor variation concerning the *CEEI* in the North, Center, and South. For example, the amount of time students were given to complete different sections of the exam and the total number of points per section varied slightly.

French imperatives intersected via different logics – the French sought greater standardization of knowledge at the elementary level, the Vietnamese wanted greater practical utility along with a degree of cultural continuity.

Lê Thị Bạch Vân (from here simply 'Bạch Vân')[viii] was one of the relatively few girls who received even an elementary school education during this period. From there she continued her studies, eventually completing secondary school. In the mid 1930s she joined her husband as a writer and journalist in Sài Gòn. Bạch Vân's father, a petty provincial official with a Western education, with whom she shared an extraordinary and quite moving relationship, saw to her education in and out of the home. When she turned six, he sent her to the local elementary school in the village of Tam Quan (in Bình Định province, Center). Upon entering the small co-ed institution in 1921, Bạch Vân found herself the lone girl in a classroom full of boys. Following the inevitable teasing which greeted her, Bạch Vân instilled in her male classmates' respect, admiration, and perhaps fear.

In her final year of elementary school, the Service of Education instituted the *CEEI*, a decision made in Hà Nội, which was felt throughout the elongated Việt territory. As Bạch Vân explained, this was a policy based on pragmatism; the demand of those students who would study no further than the elementary level and for those petty Vietnamese officials who learned *quốc ngữ* in the privacy of their homes during the siesta and in the evening: "The Service of Education created the *CEEI* the year I began third grade. The certificate not only helped students look for work after they completed elementary school (studying to that point was enough for one to become a secretary in a governmental office because an elementary school grad had enough French language skills to more or less understand what the boss was saying), it also helped the older officials working in the villages and communes. The new certificate allowed them to continue in their positions."[51] In the mid 1920s basic *quốc ngữ* literacy and a rudimentary understanding of the process of modern knowledge and the French language were enough to gain employment in a local government office. The examination and certificate served as proof of knowledge, which, as noted, carried with it a degree of social prestige. Certification also allowed existing officials to remain relevant and exert continued superiority vis-à-vis their

[viii] 'Tùng Long' was the most common pen name used by the writer, journalist, and educator Lê Thị Bạch Vân. Although she came to be known by this name, I will refer to her here as Bạch Vân.

younger colleagues fresh from colonial schools, while ensuring that those colleagues did not threaten the stability of the state.

As with so many aspects of this gradual process of acceptance, adoption, and adaptation, there existed a ritual continuity in the *CEEI*. In the classical studies system, examinations were symbols of prestige and power for successful candidates. They were a validation of years of study and to the Vietnamese mind, the logical completion of those years of hard work (or sloth). The examination itself was a ritual of Vietnamese education. Candidates were more often than not required to travel some distance, at times great distances, from their locations of origin to the exam site. There they spent days, weeks, or months in preparation, taking the examination, and awaiting the results. While the modern studies' examinations (there were exams for each level of education) tested candidates' comprehension of Western knowledge in a completely novel manner, they retained aspects of the ritual of the classical examinations: Students journeyed to the examination site seeking validation of their years of study, the possibility of its continuity, or the prestige certification engendered upon its culmination.

These elements of cultural continuity, implicit though they may have been, were critical to the success of the new education system in this early period. Vietnamese officials in the Protectorates, the vast majority of whom underwent a classical education, were less than thrilled about the official abolition of the Confucian worldview and system of knowledge. Indeed, in the early 1920s some called for the return of classical studies. In 1922, the Governor of Hà Đông province demanded the reestablishment of the triennial classical examinations upon which the previous system was largely based.[52] Two years later the Indigenous Consultative Chamber in the North struck a more conciliatory note. It asked for the return of the "*Tuyển*" examination, a classical-modern hybrid in Classical Chinese and *quốc ngữ* created in November of 1909 following the reforms of 1908. In addition, the Chamber asked that the written portion of the Certificate of Primary Studies be conducted in *quốc ngữ* rather than in French.[53] These demands were apparently so persistent that the administration had to act. The Director of Primary Education in Tonkin decided that the solution was to create a "*Certificate de scolairite*" or "*Certificat de fin d'etudes elementaires*", a two part written examination which would ask students to translate simple texts from *quốc ngữ* into French and then from French into *quốc ngữ*. The existence of these conversations in the early to mid 1920s makes clear that the establishment

of the Franco-Việt education system was an evolving process of negotiation between the French and the Vietnamese. The examination that would be the ultimate outcome of these negotiations differed from the Director's proposal in that it acquiesced to the Chamber's stipulation that the exam be in *quốc ngữ*. The testing of French language skills became optional.[54] On the other hand, the *Tuyển* exam was never reestablished as the Chamber had hoped.

As she finished her third and final year at the local elementary school, Bạch Vân made the trip from her hometown to the examination site with the ambition of continuing her studies at the primary level. Father and daughter made the journey together, an ancient ritual renewed in the present for the future: "That year I went to take the *CEEI*. I had to go from Tam Quan to Bồng Sơn district to the north to sit for the exam. My father had to ask for the day off so that he could take me. It was a trip of around thirty kilometers or so. The road sloped and was full of twists and turns so we had to take a rickshaw."[55] However, unlike in the past this was a day trip. The young girl and her father departed in the morning and returned that evening. Despite the twists and turns, this new speed was made possible by new modes of transportation and burgeoning colonial infrastructure. The smooth friction of the steel wheels of the rickshaw, gliding across alternating surfaces of asphalt and dirt, pulled its cargo swiftly towards its destination. Here was a new articulation of Vietnamese space. It provided the possibility of witnessing that space as it passed. The father perceived the journey as an appropriate time to indoctrinate his daughter in the language of the colonial bureaucracy: "As we were sitting in the rickshaw, my father carefully taught me the name of our village, district, and hometown, as well as the day, month, and year of my birth, and his full name as well as that of my mother."[56] What the provincial official failed to realize was that this new language required a bit more time and a measure of fluency than a rickshaw journey of twenty or so kilometers could provide. Without her father to act as translator in the heavy air of the examination room, the young exam candidate's rudimentary skills in the language of bureaucracy failed her: "Even though my father had carefully taught me, when I was seated with the paper and the examiner in front of me, I could not remember a thing... So I stood up and asked the examiner if I could go outside to ask my father again what the name of our hometown was, because the place we were living was not where we were from..."[57]

The language of Westernized bureaucracy was not the only source of intimidation for the young girl. Upon arriving at the examination center, Bạch Vân noticed that most of the people there were her father's age, but their own daughters were nowhere in sight: "When I entered the exam room the only people I saw were some old village officials and office secretaries. They were all around thirty or forty years old, at the time I had just turned nine. They were holding paper, ink, and a pen just as I was. I turned to my father and asked him if these old men had come to take the exam, how on earth was I going to pass?"[58] Seeing the fear and apprehension in his daughter's eyes, Bạch Vân's father lovingly explained to the young girl that the distinction between her and the other candidates had less to do with age and gender than purpose: "My father explained that the older men had come to take the exam to get the certificate for their work, and that I was taking the exam to finish one period of study and to begin another. He said that this was my first step up the ladder of education which would lead me to the higher rungs."[59] Having come into existence in the eyes of the state through paperwork and with her father waiting outside, Bạch Vân proceeded with the examination.

The *CEEI* had two sections, written and oral, each of which consisted of obligatory and optional parts. Candidates were required to pass the obligatory sections in *quốc ngữ*, to receive the certificate. Those parts of the exam deemed optional were conducted in French. Students seeking to continue their studies at the primary level and those who wanted French language certification could elect to take that part of the exam. If they passed, their *CEEI* was amended with the epitaph "*mention francaise*".[60] The obligatory written section consisted of three main parts.[61] The first was dictation. Students were read a "simple text" of 8-10 lines in Vietnamese, which they were asked to record. This was followed by 3-5 questions related to the context of the text. The second part of the written section was "*redaction annamite*". Students were given an open-ended question to which they were asked to write a response in Vietnamese. For example, in the spring of 1929 candidates at the exam center in Hừng Sơn in Thái Nguyên province (approximately 100 kilometers due north of Hà Nội) were asked: "Why should we go to school? What happens to people who don't go to school? At this stage of your lives (youth), why do you need to study?"[62ix] Finally, students were given two math problems having to do with arithmetic and the metric system and asked to find solutions. That same year in the exam

[ix] Note: The final portion of this question was gendered referring exclusively to male students (*các anh*).

center in Bắc Kạn, Bắc Kan province (approximately 250 km northeast of Hà Nội) students were given the following problems: "One person is traveling from Đông Anh to Thái Nguyên by bicycle at 11 km per hour. At the same time, another person is walking from Thái Nguyên to Đông Anh at 4 km per hour. If we know that the distance from Thái Nguyên to Đông Anh is 75 km, then when will these two people meet? How many km is it from the place that they will meet to Thái Nguyên?" and "A farmer has a rice field that is 26,460 square meters decides to sell a plot that is 108 meters long and 95 meters wide. How many *mẫu* does he have left (if we know that each *mẫu* is 3,600 square meters)?"[63] Students who passed the written section of the exam were admitted to the orals. The obligatory oral section also consisted of three main parts. In the first, students were read a simple text in Vietnamese and asked questions relative to the content of the text and language. Second, students were quizzed on three subjects: ethics, history, and geography. Finally they were given mental calculations and asked of "everyday knowledge" such as hygiene, agriculture, and domestic animals. In the written section of the optional exam students were read short passages in French, which they were required to record and then translate into Vietnamese. In the oral section, candidates were read a simple text in French and asked questions pertaining to the content of the text and the construction of the language used therein.

In that examination center in the south-central coastal province of Bình Định in 1925, Bạch Vân recalled that for the written portion of her examination she was asked about coconuts: "I still recall very distinctly, the topic that day was 'The uses of the coconut tree'. Bình Định is coconut country, so everyday I saw and heard of many ways we use the coconut tree – the leaves for the roofs of houses, the nuts to make cooking oil, the husk for fueling fires or for its fibers... And of course the water is a healthy thirst quencher."[64] That such a question was asked in a location where coconuts were a ubiquitous part of everyday life was not unusual, but was in fact woven into the fabric of colonial education, particularly in the elementary and primary cycles. The purpose was to inoculate students with 'practical' (scientific) knowledge they could use immediately outside the classroom, as was directly stipulated in Article 18 of the Primary School Regulations: "... course content and curricula should be adapted to meet the conditions and the needs of each region and locale. The ability and probable life path of the students should also be

kept in mind. Teachers should strive hard to adapt the subjects of their lectures, examples, illustrations, and exercises to those particular needs..."[65]

Like the communal schools or the *CEEI* itself, locally relevant education grew from the ways Vietnamese used French-defined knowledge and from the skills the French arbiters of modern education and their Vietnamese partners thought were imperative and useful. The assumption on which education administrators were working was that the majority of elementary school students would not continue their education. Because of this, they sought to make elementary education in particular (and colonial education in general) attractive and useful in the minds of millions of rural Vietnamese to whom this type of education and knowing was still far from the norm, though not quite as alien as it had been ten years before. The continuity of cultural forms embodied in examinations, the prestige of the certificate-bearing successful candidate, and the immediate utility of localized education all grew from this process of negotiation.

As Bạch Vân was asked of coconuts in Bình Định, exam candidates to the north in Nam Định province were provided with portraits that reflected their familiar environment: dried fish accompanied by fish sauce on the table, a group of men sipping tea and passing the water pipe.[66] Perhaps those students in the North felt the same sense of ease and elation, which greeted Bạch Vân as she read the topic she was to write on. In that case, her familiarity with the coconut produced a torrent of words, her pen journeying from page to ink-well and back again enough times for her peers, those gentlemen of her father's age, to take note of the young girl: "I just wrote and kept on writing, so much so that the old men and women peeping inside the exam room exclaimed: 'I wonder who the parents of that small child are? She sure is an excellent student!'"[67] All the while her father was also watching his daughter through the window, proud of her acumen and heartened by the public's approval: "My father was also standing outside, peering in, satisfied to see me writing without stopping. I finished my essay before anyone else and was granted permission to go outside and prepare for the next section of the exam – math."[68]

Her father might also have noted that he, and more importantly his young daughter, were part of a relatively small vanguard that ran along the coast from north to south. Bạch Vân was part of a group whose action slowly began to introduce that public to the new notion of female

education: of the schoolgirl. This process took place via countless scenes like the one mentioned here – through old men and women whose curiosity carried them to the exam site as much as their feet. They stood outside the exam room and gawked at the furious pace with which the little girl, seated beside men who might have been her father, wrote with a Western pen on Western paper, and at how her knowledge and ability visually surpassed that of the older men. Over time, that pride and those actions would have a normalizing effect on the thought and practice of female education. Societal norms regarding women's education were established during this period. A welcoming acceptance of scenes like this one grew as time progressed, especially in urban areas. However, even in those enclaves the norms that were established emphasized not full 'gender equality', but distinction – it was useful for girls to study to a certain point, beyond which education was perceived as counterproductive and harmful, as we will see below.

In 1926, the Service of Education in Hà Nội established an additional year of intermediate study in primary schools across the three Vietnamese regions of Indochina. From that year, primary school consisted of six years rather than the previous five.[x] The reasons for this additional year were multiple. The quality of elementary level education, by far the most widespread, varied widely from locale to locale, region to region. The primary language of instruction in grades 1-3 was *quốc ngữ*. According to the regulations governing primary schools, French language instruction was to increase with each passing year. The theory was that students would be prepared to study in French all subjects, save Vietnamese and Chinese language courses, when they entered the fourth grade. In practice the quality of instruction in general and French language instruction in particular varied widely. Many elementary school teachers possessed only rudimentary or nonexistent French language skills (this was especially true of Classical Scholars, many of whom were absorbed into the Franco-Việt system, particularly in communal schools). The advent of the *Certificat d'Etudes Elementaires Indigenes* (*CEEI*) in 1924 was meant to ameliorate this problem. However, due to Vietnamese demands for a *quốc ngữ* certificate, the French language portion of the examination was not

[x] Note: Primary school consisted of two 'cycles'. The 'elementary cycle' was grades 1-3 (at the end of which was the *CEEI*). The 'primary cycle' prior to this change consisted of only grades 4-5 (intermediate and advanced courses). After this change, the primary cycle was grades 4-6 (two intermediate courses and one advanced course).

obligatory. Even if all students were required to take that part of the exam, the skills tested were remedial and thus hardly indicative of future scholastic success in subjects to be taught in French. The *CEEI* did not demand candidates possess the language skills necessary to study in French at the primary level and beyond largely because that was not its purpose.

Both before and after an additional year was added, the number of students who continued to the primary level was relatively small. A cursory glance at the numbers serves to illustrate the disparity between students at the elementary and the primary cycles. In 1924 there were a total of 1,061 elementary schools (grades 1-3, the elementary cycle) in the North serving 42,000 students. In contrast there were only 91 primary schools (schools that offered the primary cycle, grades 4-6, in addition to the elementary cycle) with 19,120 students, most of who studied at the elementary level (i.e. in grades 1-3).[69] The lack of students in the upper grades is illustrated by the census taken three years later. While the total number of students in primary and elementary schools had jumped to 80,512, only 8,541 were enrolled in grades four through six.[70] The six years between 1927 and 1933 witnessed a marked increase in the number of youths in the primary school system. However, the story remained largely the same: of a total of 121,780 students, only 15,095 were in grades four through six.[71] While this represented a fairly significant numerical increase from 1927, as a percentage of the total primary student population, the increase was far more modest: from 10.6% to 12.4%. Thus the number of students who continued their studies to the primary level remained more or less stagnant.

Along with the elements analyzed in the first chapter, including the utility of Western education as perceived by the vast majority of Vietnamese (who were overwhelmingly rural), three additional factors help explain the small number who continued their education at the primary level: a/ the *CEEI*, b/ communal schools, and c/ the fact that most had to relocate to complete primary school. Recall that from 1925 students seeking to continue from grade three to grade four were required to pass the *CEEI* in order to demonstrate a somewhat standard level of knowledge. Of almost 72,000 elementary school students in the North in 1927, just 18,835 took the *CEEI*, and only 11,628 passed.[72] Despite the much larger student population in 1933, the numbers were almost the same: 20,115 candidates of whom 11,173 were 'admitted'.[73] This stagnation in the face of an increase in absolute numbers overtime makes some sense when one

considers the fact that more than half of the first grade students counted in the 1932-1933 census did not continue to even the second grade.[74]

What conclusions then may be drawn? While more families were willing to 'dip their feet in the water' of the new education system, they did little more than that. There were obviously myriad reasons for withdrawing a son following only one year of schooling, including many families' understandable reluctance to forego income or labor from a child in school. While there were calls to make primary education obligatory, especially during the late 1930s, this did not occur until after the colonial period. Be that as it may, problems with truancy and non-attendance endure in rural areas even today, as I can personally attest. One of the most persistent difficulties expressed by rural teachers during my field research at lower secondary (6-8) schools in An Giang province was the inconsistency of student attendance. Students often missed weeks if not months, and in some cases up to an entire school year, due to a variety of socio-economic factors.[xi] These contemporary patterns of persistent truancy occurred in a society in which primary and lower secondary school education are obligatory, where the utility of education is broadly if not universally accepted, and wherein that system of education, its language, and pedagogy have long been absorbed by Vietnamese. Within the socio-historic context of the interwar period as I have described it above in mind, it should not appear strange or maliciously cruel that a high percentage of elementary school students failed to make it out of the first grade, let alone to the primary level.

An additional factor contributing to the lack of continuity was the quality of education provided in elementary schools. This was undoubtedly exacerbated by the decentralization of the education system, represented by the communal schools, which helps explain the lower number of successful candidates in the *CEEI* in 1933 as compared to 1927. Then as now, education in urban areas was far superior to its rural counterpart – schools were better equipped and funded, teachers were better educated, central authorities were more immediately accountable. While the authors of the *CEEI* adapted content to fit local circumstance and environment, the level of knowledge tested was largely uniform, which is of course the *raison d'être* and goal of any standardized exam. Because the Vietnamese population was overwhelmingly rural, most elementary school students went to rural schools. The quality of

[xi] For example: To participate in rice planting and/or harvesting, because families do not have the money to pay for schools books, uniforms, tutoring, etc.

education they received often did not prepare them for the content of the *CEEI*, which was one of the main reasons that little more than half passed the exam (this was especially true for communal schools).

Girls, Women, and Education

If Western education became ever more accepted for boys and men from the late teens and early 1920s, that period also marked the beginning of the debate over female education and its wider socio-cultural implications. No organized female education existed in pre-colonial Việt Nam. Its introduction via colonialism threatened to contort well-established notions of womanhood, propagated and held sacred by men and women alike, and refashion them in unknown ways mediated by the foreign colonizer. This was perceived as a gross violation of Vietnamese feminine, and thus masculine, identity and being. Therefore, the question of female education became almost the exclusive purview of the colonized, who considered it with circumspection and suspicion throughout the interwar era.

Part of my analysis of women's education and societal roles (c. 1920 - c. 1940) focuses on the work of Đạm Phương and Phan Khôi, two thinkers and writers published in various periodicals in the North, Center, and South. I highlight their thought for multiple reasons. First, both (Mrs.) Đạm Phương and (Mr.) Phan Khôi were of two worlds, so to speak. They belonged to the generation born c. 1880 - 1900, which immediately preceded the one immersed in Western studies in the 1920s and 1930s. Most of their generation received a classical education, because they came of age prior to the advent of the Franco-Việt education system and Western studies' usurpation of classical studies. This was true for both Phan Khôi and Đạm Phương, who as a member of the royal family received an education in Classical Chinese. Second, both commented on women's education and societal roles for most of the period between 1920 and 1940. For example, Đạm Phương first published articles on female education in *Nam Phong* (*Southern Spirit*) and *Hữu Thanh* (*quốc ngữ* periodicals published in Hà Nội) in the early 1920s and was still publishing work on that topic twenty years later.[75] Finally, their variegated

commentary through time allowed Đạm Phương and Phan Khôi to illustrate the numerous and evolving attitudes regarding women's education and societal roles.

According to Đạm Phương, educating girls and women was the paramount issue of the day, which would decide the future trajectory of Vietnamese society. She made this clear in an article titled "The problem of women's education" published in *Southern Spirit* in 1921: "The issue of women's education is the most significant our country has ever faced. Opinions often divide those who wish to embrace this aspect of Western civilization from those who prefer to cling to the Vietnamese way of life as it has been for hundreds of years... Allow me to provide an illustration of the current predicament facing our society: We are at a crossroads. In one direction the road is new, wide, and crowded. Although its strange twists and turns obscure our vision, its paved surface is smooth. In the other direction stretches a narrow, old road overgrown by grass on both sides. It seems to me that the few still threading the narrow road will soon make the journey to its wider counterpart..."[76] In order to understand the two roads of which Đạm Phương spoke and how the perception of women's place in society was articulated in arguments for and against female education, it is imperative to examine contemporary sentiments with care and empathy. The trauma and anguish of a society grappling with change can be felt to this day.

One of the most profound arguments against women's education was the belief that women did not have and should not play a role outside the home and family. A woman's life was seen on a continuum revolving around the home and the family: daughter – wife/daughter-in-law – mother – matriarch. The idea of women's education threatened to cut that continuum by taking the woman out of the home and placing her in social contexts that were perceived in a negative light. As Đạm Phương observed, those changes were not simply a matter of men dictating to women, but also reflected the desire and ambition of many women themselves: "In olden times women's thoughts focused on the family, only a small handful cared for anything outside that realm. A woman's aspirations were to have a husband, children, and enough money. If she possessed those, she was satisfied with her life. Thus, women did not need to think of anything outside the family. They also did not need to have grandiose ambitions. A woman simply followed the road that would lead her to those three goals: When she was young, she

lived with her parents. After she married she moved to her husband's home. A woman worried only of her household duties and cooking for her family."[77] Phan Khôi shared the belief that 'in olden times' (before the introduction of women's education) a woman's role was that of wife and mother: "In Vietnamese civilization women occupied themselves in the household. Their only duties were as mothers and wives. They did not need to go to school to fulfill their obligations. In those days women were not allowed to participate in activities outside the home. They could not speak of the 'nation' or 'society' or working for the benefit of all, and they certainly did not give public addresses for thousands to hear."[78] Phan Khôi used very direct language, as was characteristic of his style – a woman's role was *only* in the 'inner-realm' (i.e. the home). He illustrated the French-mediated alterations (urban) Vietnamese society was undergoing by alluding to the fact that a few women were in fact making public addresses in the Sài Gòn of 1932.

Ten or twenty years earlier, public pronouncements by a woman would have been completely outside social norms, even in those new cities. Large-scale urbanization was new to Việt Nam. Cities, particularly Hà Nội and Sài Gòn, were a threat to a social order developed in an almost completely agrarian society. Indeed, as Đạm Phương observed: "It used to be that there were no unitary families living away from the larger extended family. Therefore, we never needed 'society'. One's feelings toward and relations with his family were his feelings toward and relations with society... In those days, we only had the family, but today we also have society. Because of this, individual responsibility is greater than ever, making female education even more imperative – girls must be educated so that they have the ability to deal with all that life brings their way."[79] The concept of 'society' (*xã hội*) was itself new – a neologism imported from China by way of Japan. As with so many other conceptual words in *quốc ngữ*, it was defined with the assistance of the French language. For Đạm Phương, in pre-colonial and early colonial Vietnamese society, there was only the family (extended, multi-generational living under one roof or in close proximity). 'Society' as it was defined in that new *Southern Spirit* and French way – a place where a young man and young women could live together in a unitary family, far away from their ancestral homes – was only becoming known when she wrote those words in 1926. The 'family' to which Đạm Phương referred might well be taken to mean 'clan' (*tính*), a basic unit of (pre) colonial Vietnamese society. The clan was a patrimonial institution

consisting of those with the same surname (*họ*) and location of origin (*quê hương*). The 'family'/clan *was* society (those with whom one had frequent contact and interaction). One's relations with the family were equivalent to one's relations with society. A young woman was not to be seen in public with most male members of her own family, let alone 'strange men' (i.e. those from other families/clans). However, that was exactly what female education invited – proximity to strange men, whether a young teacher, male students, or a stranger on the road to school.

Institutionalization of co-ed education at the elementary level by the Franco-Việt education system confronted girls with foreign, cross-gender interaction from the outset of their education. This was one of the most profound novelties of the new system and also a primary reason few girls saw the inside of a classroom. Prior to the advent of this system there were rare exceptions in which girls studied beside their brothers in the home and/or with male neighbors in the village school. However, before the first decades of the century the general rule was that education was segregated by gender and that girls and women were almost entirely excluded from any kind of formalized education. The statistics cited in the first chapter illustrate this point; they contain no category for girls. All enumerated students in the North in the teens were boys (save those few girls in colonial schools). The rationale behind the institutionalization of co-ed education at the local level was quite simple. Neither the colonial government nor their local Vietnamese counterparts had the finances or the desire to segregate education at that level. As explained above, administratively and financially the French were unable to keep up with Vietnamese demand for elementary schools. They were certainly not able to establish separate schools for both boys and girls. For most Vietnamese, girls' education was basically not an issue – a girl attending school amidst her male counterparts remained a scarce novelty. Girls'-only

Photograph 6. Young woman in dress typical of northern women in the early 20th century. Her lacquered teeth were the norm amongst all Vietnamese women.

elementary schools would have attracted a tiny number of pupils, if any at all, in most places in the overwhelmingly rural colony. Thus, while co-ed in theory, elementary and communal schools instructed few female students in practice.

The gender disparity at elementary schools confronted young girls with myriad novel predicaments. Bạch Vân, whom we met in Chapter 1 at the examination center, was the only girl in a classroom full of boys at her elementary school in the village of Tam Quan in the early-mid 1920s. She later recalled those first few intimidating days of elementary school: "... When I turned six, I started going to elementary school, but I had to study with the boys. When they saw that I was small, smart, and pampered by our teacher, the boys often looked for ways to pick on me. In class they stole my ink well and hid my exercise book. On the way home they found many ways to bully me."[80] Initially Bạch Vân bore the harassment of her male counterparts. The precepts of etiquette a young girl from an educated family should obey rang in her ears. However, after a period of time that ringing grew faint and the teasing and harassment became too much: "... little by little their bullying became intolerable. I began to oppose them fiercely, I was not afraid of anybody. If there were an object nearby, I would pick it up and throw it. One time I poured an entire jar of ink on the head of a boy who had a reputation for being bad, it surprised everyone..."[81] She recalled that the little boys began to fear her, perhaps they feared the threat of being stained with that purple ink so common in the colony? At the same time the boys grew to respect her because, to their surprise, a girl was a better student than they: "The boys started to like me because I studied better than they did. They begged me to help them on the math problems they could not figure out. They also asked me to write the responses when we did group work."[82]

Despite the fact that primary schools were segregated by gender, there were cases in which necessity required girls to study at the boys' primary school. Most often this was due to the lack of higher grades (5 and 6) in girls' primary schools.[xii] Nguyễn Vỹ, the poet and journalist we met in the first chapter, recalled the awkward presence of young women in his last year of primary school in 1923-1924 in the province of Quảng Trị (Center): "… The girls' school, which only had classes up to the fourth grade, was totally separate from the boys' school. This was the

[xii] For example, girls' primary school might have students in grades one through four, but either no students qualified to study in grades five and six or too few to warrant teaching those grades at the girls' school.

first time in the entire province that girls' had studied to the fifth grade."[xiii] The girls at Nguyễn Vỹ's primary school in Quảng Trị experienced the same variety of immature ostracism Bạch Vân went through in Bình Định to the south. Perhaps boys teasing and ignoring girls is a universal impulse in early youth. However, the girls who joined the 6th grade class were young women of sixteen. Their "developed" bodies carried a sexuality that was just dawning on their young male colleagues. But it did not escape their new teacher who did not have to look at them or even acknowledge their presence to feel it: "… Our teacher was from Huế. He had just received his lower secondary school diploma and was very young, 18 or 19 years old. He was handsome and often wore a glossy black silk tunic and gleaming white pants, which he ironed with geometric precision – he always looked really smart! He was very polite, but never dared look at the young women let alone call on them to go to the blackboard to answer a question. Every time he entered the classroom he began to blush..."[83] The sexual apprehension felt by the teacher was mutual. The young women feared their teacher as if his red complexion was a warning that he was about to pounce: "For their part, the four female students were as scared of the teacher as they would be of a tiger!..."[84]

Such dangers remained distant abstractions for most young women, because they did not venture outside their circumscribed social roles, even during the interwar period. What was the point of educating a girl if she did not socialize or have relationships or purpose outside the home? All she would need to know for her future as wife, mother, and daughter-in-law could be taught in the home. "There are those who assert that girls do not need to study. They say that sending a girl to school is useless, because they do not have to socialize with anyone or play a role in society at large. According to such people, cooking, cleaning, sewing, and studiously attending to familial duties is all girls need to know. That is good enough..."[85] Most Vietnamese saw female education as useless in terms of the trajectory a young woman's life would almost certainly take, partially because formal education taught her nothing of the life skills she would need to perform her preordained roles. While the poetess Anh Thơ (1921-2002) ostensibly discontinued her studies because she had been caught daydreaming of the Vietnamese countryside (see Chapter 3), the underlying rationale to her quitting school was future practicality. The questions regarding female education at the forefront of minds south to north

[xiii] Note: At this time there were not yet six grades at the primary level. Thus the 5th grade was the final year of primary school (*supieuere, lớp nhất*).

were “What for?” and “At what price?” Anh Thơ's paternal grandmother summed up that thinking quite succinctly: “My grandmother told my father: ‘She's a girl. She only needs to know a bit of math so that she can help her mother with the accounting. Why on earth should she continue her studies to a high level? To become a spinster?! Who would want to marry her?!... She should quit school...’”[86] Most Vietnamese of this period were of like mind when it came to women's education. The most important skill a young woman could learn was rudimentary math, to be used in the market and/or household business. Studying to a high level and earning certificates and academic prestige harmed a young woman’s future, because that future depended on marital prospects for almost every single Vietnamese woman of the period. An educated woman was thought more difficult to marry-off for the simple reason that the majority of men had little or no education. The thought of educating a daughter only for her to become a spinster ruled the nightmares of many a Vietnamese mother, including Anh Thơ's: “My mother was of the same mind as my grandmother. In fact, none of my relatives approved of my studies. Everyone said the same thing as my grandmother: ‘She's going to study a lot to become a spinster, huh?’ That thought scared my mother to death.”[87]

From the early years of the movement, notions of a romantic past began to combat female education through a new paradigm, the *quốc ngữ* periodical. A common tome tied ignorance to virtue (the ‘past’) and education to debauchery (the ‘present’). In 1921, Đạm Phương drew attention to that phenomenon with more than a hint of sarcasm: “Many exclaim that ‘a virtuous woman is devoid of talent’. They must be thinking of those talented girls who are not filial while in their parents’ home and disobey their husbands and neglect their children once married. The same women stubbornly adhere to their professional lives outside the home. They spout lies and neglect decorum, gorging themselves on the fulfillment of their own desires. Obviously, such women gained their gross manners through the study of new books or maybe of old books, it does not matter which – they learned it in books! I am not sure where one might go about finding such women these days, if you ask any she has not studied a word! It boggles the mind how lack of virtue results from talent for the uneducated hordes in our country! Education and virtue have as much correlation as nobility and clemency... Virtue forms the foundation of education, as clemency is the origin of nobility. Just because a woman has some education does

not make her unvirtuous!..."[88] Such arguments not withstanding, the notion that education produced girls and women void of virtue persisted throughout the period. Indeed, in the early 1940s the noted writer and journalist Ngô Tất Tố reiterated the belief that prior to the advent of female education the illiterate and unlettered masses were filial daughters who became good mothers and worthy wives.[89] Ngô Tất Tố juxtaposed that vision with contemporary reality, as he saw it, in which schoolgirls behaved as though they were ill bred.

The idea that 'in the past' women were uneducated but virtuous was deeply colored by romantic visions of Vietnamese history and 'tradition' produced during the interwar period. However, that fact does not negate the fact that Vietnamese saw female education as representing a profound break with the society they knew and recognized. Such fear of the new and unknown deserves critical empathy. Many believed education threatened women's roles as wives and mothers, which they saw as two of the most treasured and stable forces in a society being rocked by change. Women's education was thus not simply about young girls' ability to attend Western schools, it went to the heart of how men perceived women and how women perceived themselves.

Female education was seen as one of the most intimate ways foreign ideas steered the trajectory of societal evolution. This spawned resentment and apprehension in both men and women, who combated women's education by tying it to eased sexual mores, one of the primary reasons for the dearth of schoolgirls during the interwar period. People believed that close proximity to boys and young men in the classroom jeopardized a young woman's reputation, if not her actual chastity, and that formal education in general corrupted a girl's fragile virtue. Most thought that a young woman with some measure of education was far more likely to fall into a life of ill repute and debauchery than her illiterate counterpart who remained close to home. While among some Vietnamese sending a daughter to elementary or primary school was perceived as a sign of parental love, so too was not permitting her to continue her studies beyond the primary level. These two points were illustrated by the communist revolutionary Phạm Thị Vân (1919-1947)[xiv] in her conversation about a classmate who was forced by her parents to quit school: "... Ms. Vân did not quit school because her family was under financial strain. Her

[xiv] Phạm Thị Vân, more commonly known by her *nom de guerre* 'chị Hoàng Ngân', began her revolutionary activity at the age of 15 in the "Women's Liberation" organization and joined the Indochinese Communist Party at age 17. She died at the age of 28 in 1947 during the War against the French.

mother made her quit because she loved her and did not want to see her become a 'wine girl'[xv] with a life full of vice. Thereafter, Vân would go to her mother's stall in the market to help, but she only did the accounting, she never had to lift a finger... Vân's father also spoiled her. He taught her Chinese Chess and every once and a while they even played against each other! At that time, treating a daughter in that way was highly unusual..."[90] As Phạm Thị Vân explained, Ms. Vân's parents made her discontinue her studies out of love. They fretted about the possibility of an 'over-educated' daughter falling from grace into a life of debauchery and prostitution. Their solution was to keep her close and utilize the skills she had for the betterment of her family and her marriage prospects – she could use her literacy and math skills in the market with her mother until an advantageous proposal arrived. It is important to note that Phạm Thị Vân qualified the behavior of Ms. Vân's parents as *progressive*: they had allowed the young woman to study, but then removed her from her studies out of love (and fear). Her father even taught her how to play Chinese Chess, a past time then, as now, most common among men. Phạm Thị Vân indicated that a father teaching his daughter this game of skill and strategy and then sharing in it with her was indicative of an unusually close and liberal father-daughter relationship in the interwar period.

Bạch Liên, the future wife and then widow of writer and journalist Nguyễn Đình Lạp (1913-1952), had an experience similar to that of Ms. Vân.[xvi] As a young girl in the early 1930s, her parents sent her to live with her childless uncle in the northern port city of Hải Phòng. She enjoyed her studies until she completed primary school, when she was forced to quit: "My uncle... did not have children so he really loved me and let me go to school. But after I earned my primary school certificate, which was rare for a girl in those years, I had to quit school."[91] Like Phạm Thị Văn, Bạch Liên portrayed being made to quit studying in a positive light: Her uncle had allowed her to study because he loved her so. That she studied to the end of primary school and received the primary school certificate was an unusual privilege for a young woman in the 1930s. Her uncle's rationale for not permitting her to study beyond the primary level echoes that of Ms. Văn's parents: "News that I had passed the primary school exam and knew French spread throughout my hometown. Even so, my uncle still would not allow me to continue my studies because 'the only thing a well-educated girl is going to do with her

[xv] *'con gái rượu'*: a prostitute
[xvi] Note: Nguyễn Đình Lập died in 1952 in the liberated zone of Thanh-Nghệ during the war against the French.

knowledge and skill is write letters to boys.'"[92] The phenomenon of 'overly educated' young women using their newfound skills to "write letters to boys" was repeated time and again in the literature of the period. However, the love with which many parents withdrew their daughters from school did not ameliorate the heartbreak many young women experienced at the forced discontinuation of their studies. The knowledge gained in the classroom had given rise to personal ambition, intellectual curiosity, and a sense of independence that ran counter to the plans and fears of their parents. Dõng, a classmate of Bạch Văn's at the girl's primary school in Đà Nẵng found herself in such a predicament. "Dõng stammered: 'Crying, I begged my parents to allow me to continue to lower secondary school. I told them I would get married after I graduated and became a teacher. But my parents said, the more a girl studies the more likely she is to become a spinster. They asked me 'What man wants a woman who works outside the home?' They also told me that the vast majority of professional women and teachers were spinsters.'"[93] Most young girls had no choice before a destiny chosen for them: "... At that time no girl would dare argue with or disobey her parents."[94]

The idea that education sexualized young women, risking their virtue and compromising their future, proved a powerful deterrent against women's education. Accounts said to be factual of 'modern', educated young women from "good" families whose knowledge and socialization led them into lives of sexual ease, prostitution, crime, and drug use were printed endlessly in periodicals north to south. Whether this stereotype accurately described the majority of educated girls was irrelevant. They were represented as such, because such stories sold papers and reinforced existing beliefs. The view that female education was a door to debauchery was so profuse that it made its way into the literature of the period. Huyền, the heroine of Vũ Trọng Phụng's novel *Làm đĩ,* was led to a life of prostitution via her education. This was true even though the young woman's father took the precaution of pulling her out of school after she completed the primary level:

Photograph 7. Young woman in posing with water pipe and attendant.

"After I passed the certificate of primary studies, my father told me that for a girl, I had studied enough. He did not allow me to continue my studies... I had just turned sixteen."[95] Huyền, who hailed from a prominent Hà Nội family, married soon thereafter (her new husband had contracted syphilis, a condition he deemed "normal" for a young, urban man of his stature) and embarked on a life of pleasure in the urban Hà Nội of the 1930s. Following an affair with one of her husband's friends, Huyền fell into a life of prostitution. For Vũ Trọng Phụng, Huyền's Western education was not the chief culprit in her downfall. Rather it was the fact that that education and the outlook it engendered did not match the realities of interwar Vietnamese society. The sixteen-year-old girls in Nguyễn Vỹ's primary school classroom looked upon the teacher as if he were a tiger ready to pounce precisely because proximity to men was strictly regulated for young Vietnamese women. The threat of such proximity was another reason Bạch Liên's uncle would not permit her to continue her studies: "What's more, all of Hải Phòng only had one girls' primary school. Anyone who wanted to study beyond that had to study with the boys. Hell would have frozen over before my uncle would have allowed me to do that!"[96] Education provided means and opportunity for a young woman to come into contact with men in ways defined as 'inappropriate'. It did so simply by permitting a young woman a life and space outside the home and family.

For Vũ Trọng Phụng, the power and ambition engendered by education was unfair in that it was not tempered by knowledge learned outside the classroom. Huyền, like many young women in the novels of the 1930s, had an overly romantic view of life and love. Her ability to read – both in and out of the classroom – engendered that view. Especially dangerous, according to Vũ Trọng Phụng (and many others), were the romantic novels in *quốc ngữ*, which flowered during the 1930s and represented Westernized notions of romantic love, which were antithetical to the experience that most young Vietnamese women would have of love and sex. For Vũ Trọng Phụng, women's education created a class of literate, scientifically conscious women whose ambitions, idealized notions of romantic love, contact with men, and ignorance of sex did not match the societal realities of the age. Vũ Trọng Phụng was scathing in his critique of the hypocrisy of Vietnamese society. He claimed young educated women were vulnerable to the vices, which tempted Huyền, because of their romantic ignorance. Much of the source of this vulnerability lay in the fact that young women remained ignorant of sex, a subject that was taboo

in the home. In Huyền's case her romantic notions and hormones led her from her syphilitic husband into the bed of his friend, who abandoned her after he satiated his desire. Her romantic ideals dashed and her virtue compromised, Huyền was ostracized by her husband and family and fell into prostitution, a life she felt befit her following her travails.

Vũ Trọng Phụng's *Làm đĩ* is an extreme, somewhat naive, and certainly immature example of the consequences of female education. Be this as it may, the vast majority of young women like Huyền did not study past primary school (if they studied at all). Vũ Trọng Phụng's critique of Vietnamese society rang true in the following respect: for most women who received any education during the interwar period, independence and a professional career were not what awaited them at the culmination of their studies. Rather, like their uneducated counterparts, society expected them to marry, bear children, and attend to household duties. As Bạch Liên's loving father-like uncle explained to his niece in the late 1930s, she faced a natural progression, which would soon find her married and in the house of her husband: "... My father often told me: 'Train yourself over the next few years so that you are able to take care of all the household duties.' He constantly reminded me that I was grownup and had better prepare for becoming a wife, so that when I entered my husband's family home I would be able to do everything they expected of me."[97] And so, from the moment she earned her primary school certificate, Bạch Liên's time was spent in preparation of a life not found in the classroom or in romantic novels: "From that point on my days were spent reading books on how to cook and learning how to knit and sew."[98] These statements reflect the perception, and more often than not, the reality, even among 'progressive' families who sent their daughters to school. This remained the case throughout the late colonial period.

In the nine years from 1921 to 1930 Đạm Phương developed a series of compelling arguments regarding the rationale for women's education published in periodicals north, center, and south. She did not argue against the reality that the vast majority of Vietnamese girls were destined to perform the roles expected of them as wife, mother, and daughter-in-law. Rather, she worked within those expectations and social norms in arguing that it was because of those very roles, especially wife and mother, that it was of the utmost importance that girls receive an education. Times had changed, Đạm Phương argued. No longer were the Vietnamese isolated

from the rest of the world (by this she meant Europe and America). Confronted with the new global reality colonialism laid at their door, she felt the Vietnamese must change and adapt in order to compete with a nation on the other side of the world whose power had allowed it to conquer a proud people with relative ease. To refuse to educate girls and women was to acquiesce to perpetual inferiority and overlordship by a foreign power. In educating women one was not only permitting half the Vietnamese population to 'become people' (*làm người*)[xvii] but also raising men to a level of parity with their European and American contemporaries. An educated woman provided the strongest foundation for a family, as she was able to provide informed instruction for her children, boys and girls alike, within the home. From a family exposed to modern education would exit children who could build the nation itself. Such was the brilliance of Đạm Phương's argument. She was able to place the 'traditional' values of Vietnamese society in the contemporary context of 'society', 'nation' and 'world' and proclaim tradition should not produce stagnation in an attempt to stop time. Rather the importance of those familial roles decreed that change had to be accepted so as to strengthen not only the family, but the nation as well.

Đạm Phương was under no illusions as to who had brought that change, the possibility of women's education: "Permit me to exclaim: It has been fifty or sixty years since the French arrived and began governing this country. Schools for girls have just appeared in the last 15 years or less. In places they have only had a girl's school for three years, in others a few months. How can one call this progress profound? It shames me to say that our women are not equal to those of Europe and America. If this is the case, neither are our men."[99] In the approximately sixty years of French rule, only in the previous fifteen had girl's schools began to appear. For Đạm Phương, this was not an indictment of the French; she perceived the colonizer as 'pro-women's education' due to the fact that it was the French who had instituted Vietnamese women's education and because she thought French women had vast educational opportunity. Rather, her critique was aimed at those Vietnamese men who were not the equals of their Western counterparts because their women remained in darkness: "The changes society has undergone – how women act and speak, men and women working together in the same office –

[xvii] Vietnamese believe that one is not born a 'person' but earns the right to call him/herself a person through the development of character and intellect. One of my favorite Vietnamese idioms attests to this belief: *Dễ làm chó, khó thành người* (*It's easy to be a dog, but difficult to become a person*).

sow fear in the hearts of classical scholars, because such things are new and did not exist prior to this epoch. They fear we are not preserving Vietnamese customs and behavior. They are afraid we are corrupting the Vietnamese way of being. They look at the young men who attend the modern, French schools and see that although they are Vietnamese, they behave as if they were European or American. They do not know what to make of such young men who were born in Việt Nam but do not seem to possess a Vietnamese soul."[100] Đạm Phương was referring and speaking to those classical scholars who feared the changes that Western education in general and women's education in particular were sure to bring. While she held out more hope for the younger generation of (male) students graduating from the colony's schools, she highlighted the hypocrisy of their fathers – those aging classical scholars who permitted and even encouraged their sons to attend modern schools and withheld that same opportunity from their daughters. Đạm Phương did not reserve her ire for men only. She also laid blame at the feet of those women who did not feel it necessary to teach their daughters in the home, let alone send them to school: "... Vietnamese women share responsibility for their own substandard condition. Most women treat their daughters poorly and do not condescend to teach them anything. Adhering to old customs, they bully their daughters into submission, causing them to lose any sense of ambition or independence."[101] According to Đạm Phương, women were as susceptible to 'old habits' as their husbands. Again, the logic of this perspective was that educating girls was pointless: They did not participate in 'society' outside the home and family. Indeed, the trajectory of their lives would keep them in the home – not the home of their parents but that of their husband. The idea of using one's scarce resources on the education of a daughter defied logic. Why would a family make this kind of investment for a family member who was going to leave in their adolescence?

Đạm Phương did not argue with that logic. She attempted to change the landscape in which it took place – away from the imperatives of the individual family/clan and toward the welfare of the collective, that is, the nation – all Vietnamese families/clans. She was making an argument around that new concept of society, in which all families and individuals are connected and have a role to play. The benefits of educating women were not merely confined to the individual. "Women's education is a benefit for society at large, not merely for women. An educated woman can transform her house in accordance with this era of civilization, ensuring its

management has a logical flow."[102] Because the adolescent girl would soon be expected to take up household duties in a strange home upon marriage, it was imperative she be prepared to do so in that new 'civilized' manner, which directly implied that she be educated in a Western school: "That logical flow of which I just spoke is logic in educating children, who are our future. Mothers must teach their children of sanitation, social structures and mores, geography, mathematics, grammar, etc..."[103] Đạm Phương's rationale was relatively simple. It was something that she and her audience took as 'natural', embedded in the structure of the family itself: "A mother understands and shapes the character of her child more than anyone. Children are often more frightened of their fathers than they are of their mothers. This is because a child and his mother are so emotionally wrapped up in one another. Therefore a child's character often takes after his mother more that it does his father. Oftentimes fathers are not around to observe all the little things that children do day in and day out, the changes and development of their personalities, which mothers, always beside their children, witness. From the moment children are born they are developing and learning. The formation of their character in their early years has vast repercussions thereafter. Because the mother is the arbiter of that development she must be educated. Educating women lays the foundation of our civilization's future."[104] Women, being the expected primary caregivers of children, needed to be educated themselves in order to perform their duties in a society that was under-going dramatic change. While she offered this as a reason why women should be educated, the implication underneath the surface was fairly obvious: If men expect wives to take care of their children, they should equally expect that their wives have a greater influence over children in their formative youth, girls and boys alike. An illiterate, uneducated wife will influence her children through her ignorance. While many in her target audience did not feel the import of this argument when it came to their daughters, it was surely felt when they thought of their sons, whose education and preparation for school was the wife's responsibility. A compromise was between the lines – an educated wife would drive a son's education... and a daughter's.

The society in which Đạm Phương lived was at the heart of her argument, as was her experience. She was not necessarily arguing against Vietnamese 'tradition' as she or anyone else might define it. Nor was she advocating for some wholesale Westernization. Her strong contention that women should have the opportunity to be educated grew out of the circumstances

confronting Vietnamese society. The idea that girls would learn all that would be required of them in the home no longer applied to that new environment. From the time she quit school, Anh Thơ occupied her time as most girls and young women in Việt Nam did during this period, immersed in household duties, in training beside their mothers, older female relatives, cousins, and siblings in order to fulfill the future roles of wife, mother, and daughter-in-law. "... From the time I quit school I did the work of an older daughter around the house (even though I was only twelve). I helped my mother, making her duties less onerous. I woke early in the morning, before anyone else, and started a fire for cooking. Then I went outside to feed the chickens and tend to the garden... I also had to wash the family's clothes, take the porridge off the fire to cool so that when my father woke it would be ready for him to eat, wake my younger brothers, wash their faces and hair, feed them breakfast, and get their books together so that they could go to school. When my mother woke up (she was almost always pregnant and not in good health) I would bathe, put on my long white tunic, and ask my mother for money to go to the market..."[105] For Đạm Phương, that kind of activity and 'training' were common sense for a girl of Anh Thơ's age. They were requisite even for the young girl who did attend school: "Twelve year old girls should know how to do housework. Even if they do go to school, they should still be able to attend to household duties, which do no harm. In the future, a girl will need to be able to run her own household. If she knows a lot about literature, but cannot perform daily tasks around the house then the duties she will be required to perform will seem almost impossible... she will just wander about speaking intelligently but acting foolishly."[106]

Despite her ardent belief in the utility and social value of female education, Đạm Phương acquiesced to Vũ Trọng Phụng's criticism of the contradiction of female education in the interwar period. The skills learned in the colonial school supplemented those acquired in the home. By themselves they were relatively useless for a young woman's future. Going to school did not absolve a girl from her household duties and training. A young woman's studies complimented the skills she learned in the home for her future, a future in which she would be expected to possess the ability to run a household, large or small, rich or poor, urban or rural. "The family is the foundation of our society. As a bird has a nest, a woman is the head of her family, so she needs to work with all her might and become a good manager. Only by improving a little each day she can hope to have a long and stable future. Even if a man provides a

foundation of riches, if his household is not managed well, it will all be for naught."[107] If a mother were uneducated, her children would be ignorant. If women were uneducated, men also would suffer. No one could be left in the dark, everyone was needed to confront the tasks with which society was faced, to construct the past and the future from the present: "... whether our society grows or degrades, whether our families thrive or decline is in our hands. We are the hinge between the old and the new in these times of change. The old ways of our civilization do not have to go stale for they can be supplemented and integrated with the new. As the intermediaries between Vietnamese and Western civilizations we must ensure that the two are reconciled. Those in our country yet immersed in the darkness of ignorance must be brought to the light of progress. However, progress must not be a detriment to the customs of our civilization, which are the soul of the nation."[108]

There was an urgency behind her message, both because the other side of the world was no longer far removed, and because its norms were novel to Việt Nam, but thought to be old-hat in their location of origin: "In the civilized nations of the West, girls and women have long been educated. Their intellect is sharp, their thought wide. They are immersed in thousands of professions. Little by little those educated women have risen to prominence. They occupy positions of great importance, which are of utility and assistance to their fellow countrymen."[109] An over-inflated sense of women's educational prowess in the West adhered to the rhetoric they had heard and read about a place they had never seen. Phan Khôi shared that sense of fright and backwardness in the periodical *Phụ nữ tân văn* (*Women's News*) in 1932: "In the nations of Europe and America, women have long participated in the work of government, a possibility which emanated from France to other nations. From the time women became members of legislatures and parliaments they have debated the men of those institutions. The establishment of reforms has been the fruit of their confrontations, swelling the power and prestige of female parliamentarians"[110] The women of the West, which was closer than next door, were participating with fluency in thousands of occupations. They were not only educated, but the power of policy and the direction of nations was being (partially) vested in their hands. French women were able to vote in Việt Nam more than ten years before they could do so in France! Perhaps even more telling, they were permitted to smoke beside the men: "... Those women in

parliament are permitted to smoke in the middle of the House floor alongside the male members. No one can tell them not to!"[111]

As early as 1922, just over four years after the establishment of the Franco-Việt education system and the possibility of widespread, institutionalized female education it engendered, Đạm Phương felt that urgency, perhaps while wandering the streets of Huế: "... women in Europe and America have knowledge of economics, industry, art, literature... They bask in the glow of knowledge. In comparison, the women of our country cling to old customs, perpetuating their ignorance. Their lack of education erodes their dignity..."[112] It was because of the world in which they felt themselves living side by side with the West that they began to perceive themselves and their society within that reflection. As with the concepts of 'tradition' mentioned above, 'factual validity' in any kind of scholarly, quasi-scientific sense was immaterial. It was the perception of reality and its juxtaposition with the interior-other, and the alarm to which this contrast gave rise, that was important. Closeness mattered too. France and the West were no longer on the other side of the world, they were in Việt Nam: governing from the cities and provincial centers, etching black lines through cleared forests and deconstructed mountains, walking the boulevards of Hà Nội and Sài Gòn, cruising through the countryside in the odd automobile. That was why Đạm Phương provided the juxtaposition repeatedly – in 1922, 1924, 1926, ... 1930... – because it was something with which she knew her audience was acquainted and which she knew would strike a chord with them. The evil inherent in colonialism, that presumed superiority of the colonizer and the inherent inferiority of the colonized, was, as Gandhi believed, poison for all involved. It was from this – the insidious humiliations endured by the Vietnamese, repeatedly, like pinpricks that become so numerous as to gush blood, that resentment and hatred grew. Đạm Phương was poking those festering wounds hoping the blood that poured from them could spur action. The colonizer was attempting to define new social norms, including women's education. The Vietnamese had the ability, just as the French, to do the same. More than this, the Vietnamese had the right to define their culture and society, past, present, and future, for themselves. To accomplish that and truly claim parity with the French (in both Vietnamese and French eyes) Vietnamese women had to be educated. No one could remain in darkness.

This chapter has sought examine the indigenous population's evolving attitudes toward Western studies and the Franco-Việt education system and how they utilized that system within socio-cultural context and according to recent historical antecedents. Far from yearning for Western education, Vietnamese remained filial to the system of knowledge they defined as 'Vietnamese' until the decade after the advent of the Franco-Việt education system. This attitude and action were due to the fact that classical studies remained the route of social mobility, prestige, and ritual literacy. Until the late teens and early twenties Vietnamese who were able to educate their sons chose to educate them in the manner they regarded as theirs. The consequence of this action was the initial rejection of the Western education the colonial administration introduced. It was only after Vietnamese began to perceive the utility of Western studies that they chose to participate in the new system. Communal schools and the *CEEI* serve as examples as to how the Vietnamese shaped colonial systems to their society's needs and expectations. They illustrate a more nuanced view of colonial society, one in which both the colonizer and the colonized sought to further their diverse imperatives in cooperation with and in opposition to, the other. Vietnamese perspectives on female education and socio-cultural role/s prescribed to/forced on girls and women proved less malleable. Presented with an education system that provided the possibility of women's education, most families chose not to send their daughters to school. Women's education represented a violation of well-established socio-cultural norms and expectations too significant to reconcile for the vast majority who perceived female education as costly and useless at best, and harmful and humiliating at worst.

[1] Woodside, Alexander. *Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam.* p. 76.
[2] ibid.
[3] Đào Duy Anh. *Hồi ký Đào Duy Anh (nhớ nghĩ chiều hôm)*, p. 262.
[4] See Phan Khôi. "Tư tưởng của Tây phương và Đông phương", *Đông Pháp thời báo,* no. 774, Sài Gòn, 27 Sept. 1928 in *Phan Khôi: Tác phẩm đăng báo 1928* (ed. Lại Nguyên Ân), p. 101-109.
[5] ibid. p. 102.
[6] ibid. p. 103-104.
[7] See for example: P. Ory (Resident de France en Annam et au Tonkin). *La Commune Annamite*, p. 39-43. *"Le role particulier de la Commune appele "sổ hang xã" est a proprement parler le veritable role. Tous les habitants males depuis l'age de dix-huit ans y sont inscrits en suivant les regles de hierarchie et de preseance, les traditions et les usages locaux...."* (p. 39).
[8] In Hà Nội as of 5/31/1926 there were 5,320 students enrolled in public primary schools. In Sài Gòn as of 7/27/1926 there were 3,560. See Trung Tâm Lưu Trữ Quốc Gia-I (TTLTQG-I) (Hà Nội). Residence Superieure au Tonkin (RST) 36566(9), *Rapport sur la situation de l'Enseignement au Tonkin, 1926-1927* and TTLTQG-I (Hà Nội). RST 73397, *As. Inspection medicale des ecoles, lycees, colleges publiques et privees au Tonkin, 1916-1933.*
[9] See for example: (TTLTQG-I) RST 8464, *Organisation et Fonctionnement des ecoles au Tonkin, 1912-1917* and Đào Duy Anh. *Việt Nam Văn Hoá Sử Cương,* p. 258-272.
[10] *Report - Chef de l'Enseignement au Tonkin, 12/31/1917*. In (TTLTQG-I) RST 8464, *Organisation et Fonctionnement des ecoles au Tonkin, 1912-1917*.
[11] ibid.
[12] Nguyễn Vỹ. *Tuấn, Chàng trai nước Việt: Chứng tích thời đại đầu thế kỷ XX*, p. 14.
[13] ibid. p. 21-22.
[14] Đặng Thái Mai. *Hồi ký (Thời kỳ thanh thiếu niên),* p. 167.
[15] Nguyễn Vỹ. *Tuấn, Chàng trai nước Việt*, p. 32-33.
[16] Đặng Thái Mai. *Hồi ký (Thời kỳ thanh thiếu niên)*, p. 167.
[17] Nguyễn Vỹ. *Tuấn, Chàng trai nước Việt*, p. 34.
[18] ibid. p. 36.
[19] ibid. p. 37.
[20] Vũ Đình Hòe. *Vũ Đình Hòe, Thuở lập thân*, p. 171.
[21] Lê Xuân Thại, formerly of the Institute of Literature and then of the Institute of Linguistics, Hà Nội (ret.). Interview took place at the Institute of Linguistics on the morning of 23 August 2010.
[22] Nguyễn Thị Minh. *Con đường giải phóng*. In Tuyển *Hồi ký hay*, p. 167.
[23] Đào Duy Anh. *Hồi ký Đào Duy Anh*, p. 17.
[24] Nguyễn Vỹ. *Tuấn, Chàng trai nước Việt*, p. 157-158.
[25] Phan Khôi. "Tư tưởng của Tây phương và Đông phương", *Đông Pháp thời báo,*no. 774, 27 Sept. 1928, Sài Gòn.
[26] Nguyễn Vỹ. *Tuấn, Chàng trai nước Việt*, p. 361.
[27] ibid. p. 90-91.
[28] ibid. p. 254.
[29] ibid. p. 123.
[30] ibid. p. 15.
[31] Bạch Liên. *Làm vợ một nhà văn (hồi kí của bà Bạch Liên)*. In *Nguyễn Đình Lạp, Tác phẩm,* p. 880-881.
[32] Nguyễn Vỹ. *Tuấn, Chàng trai nước Việt*, p. 39.
[33] ibid. p. 40.
[34] TTLTQG-I (Hà Nội). Service de l'Enseignement au Tonkin (SET) 115, *Ecoles Primaires Franco-indigenes Etablissements Scolaires du 1er Degre du Tonkin, 1913-1924. 14 November 1923.*
[35] (TTLTQG-I) RST 36556(9), *Rapport sur la Situation de l'Enseignement au Tonkin, 1926-1927*.
[36] See (TTLTQG-I) RST 73400-05, *Organisation et fonctionnement de l'instruction publique a l'Indochine en 1923-1933*.
[37] Nguyễn Vỹ. *Tuấn, Chàng trai nước Việt*, p. 42.
[38] ibid.
[39] (TTLTQG-I) RST 84492, *Situation economique des ecoles du Tonkin de 1926-1927*.
[40] RST 36566(9), *Rapport sur la situation de l'Enseignement au Tonkin, 1926-1927*.

[41] *Gouvenor General Arrete du 2 Dec. 1926*, *Autorisant les communes du Tonkin ne disposant d'auncune ecole officielle a ouvrir des ecoles elementaires publiques confiees a des maitres n'appartenant pas aux cadres reguliers de* l'Enseignement. In (TTLTQG-I) RST 73395-02, *Recueil des articles, circulaires et correspondences diverses concernant l'organisation de l'Enseignement traditional 1912-1926.*
[42] See RST 36566(9), p. 19 and *Arrete du 27 Dec. 1926, Fixant les conditions d'application de l'Arrete du 2 Dec. 1926 relatif aux ecoles elementaires communales au Tonkin* in RST 73395-02.
[43] Art 2 – "*Les maitres des ecoles elem. comm. devront etre ages de dix-huit ans au moins et etre pourvus: Soit CEPFI ou CEEI. Soit du Certificat de Khoa-Sinh ou du Certificat d'aptitude a l'ens. du 1er degre ou du Certificat d'admissibilite concours triennaux (Nhat-Truong, Nhi-Truong, Tu-Tai, Cu-Nhan, Pho-Bang, Tien-Si).*"
[44] *Circulaire no. 263 du 27 Dec. 1926 relative a la creation et a l'organisation des ecoles elementaires communales au Tonkin*. Resident Supeuiere au Tonkin, Rene Robin a Admin. Maires, Residents Chefs de Province et Commandants de Territoires miltitaires. In RST 73395-02.
[45] ibid.
[46] ibid.
[47] RST 36566(9), *Rapport sur la situation de l'Enseignement au Tonkin, 1926-1927*.
[48] See for example Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, p. 5, 33-44.
[49] TTLTQG-I (Hà Nội), Archives de la Maire – Hanoi (AMH), 5134, *Creation et organisation des ecoles elementaires communales au Tonkin, 1927*.
[50] (TTLTQG-I) RST 73402, *Rapport sur l'organisation et le fonctionnement du Service de l'Enseignement au Tonkin pendant l'annee scolaire 1932-1933*. This figure increased 5,216 from the previous year, 1932.
[51] Tùng Long - Lê Thị Bạch Vân. *Hời ký Bà Tùng Long*, p. 35.
[52] (TTLTQG-I) SET 223, *A.s. enseignement de la langue francaise dans les ecoles franco-indigene du Tonkin, 1922-1924*.
[53] ibid.
[54] ibid. See Letter from the Director of Primary Education in Tonkin to the Resident Superior in Tonkin and the Director of Public Education in Indochina, 26/7/1924.
[55] Tùng Long. *Hồi ký Bà Tùng Long,* p. 36.
[56] ibid.
[57] ibid.
[58] ibid. p. 35.
[59] ibid. p. 35-36.
[60] See Art. 9 of the Arrete from the Residence Superior in Tonkin (24 Fevrier 1925), *Fixant les programmes et les modalites de l'examen du CEEI* in RST 73395-02.
[61] See Art. 10 of the Arrete from the Residence Superior in Tonkin (24 Fevrier 1925).
[62] (TTLTQG-I) SET 367, *Sujet des composition de l'examen du certificat d'etudes elementaires indigenes au Tonkin, 1929.*
[63] ibid. Note: A *mẫu* is a Vietnamese measurement of land area.
[64] Tùng Long. *Hồi ký Bà Tùng Long,* p. 36.
[65] See *Reglement des Ecoles primaires Franco-indigenes du Tonkin, 1924*. In (TTLTQG-I) SET 115, *Ecoles primaires franco-indigenes etablissements scolaires du 1er degre du Tonkin 1913-1924*.
[66] SET 367, *Sujet des composition de l'examen du certificat d'etudes elementaires indigenes au Tonkin, 1929. CEEI*, City of Nam Dinh, 5/1/1929.
[67] Tùng Long. *Hồi ký Bà Tùng Long,* p. 36.
[68] ibid. p. 36-37.
[69] *Reglement des Ecoles primaires Franco-indigenes du Tonkin, 1924* in SET 115.
[70] RST 36566(9), *Rapport sur la situation de l'Enseignement au Tonkin, 1926-1927*.
[71] RST 73402, *Rapport sur l'organisation et le fonctionnement du Service de l'Enseignement au Tonkin pendant l'annee scolaire 1932-1933*.
[72] RST 36566(9). That is 62%, almost half of whom received *mention francaise.*
[73] RST 73402. Approximately 56%, just under half received *mention francaise.*
[74] ibid.
[75] See for example: Đạm Phương. *Giáo dục nhi đồng.* Hà Nội, 1942.

[76] Đạm Phương. "Vấn đề nữ học" in *Nam Phong* no. 43, Jan. 1921. Hà Nội. In *Tuyển tập Đạm Phương nữ sử.* Lê Thanh Hiền (ed.), p. 61.
[77] Đạm Phương. "Cái tư tưởng của người đàn bà" in *Trung Bắc Tân Văn,* 7/1/1926, p. 288.
[78] Phan Khôi. "Thế nào là phụ nữ giải phóng" in *Trung lập* no. 6732, 20/5/1932. Sài Gòn, p. 128.
[79] Đạm Phương. "Cái tư tưởng của người đàn bà", p. 288.
[80] Tùng Long - Lê Thị Bạch Vân. *Hời ký Bà Tùng Long*, p. 31.
[81] ibid.
[82] ibid.
[83] Nguyễn Vỹ. *Tuấn, Chàng trai nước Việt*, p. 217-218.
[84] ibid. p. 218.
[85] Đạm Phương. "Vấn đề nữ học", p. 62.
[86] Anh Thơ. *Từ bến sông Thương*, p. 13.
[87] ibid. p. 13-14.
[88] Đạm Phương. "Vấn đề nữ học", p. 63.
[89] See Ngô Tất Tố. "Không tài là có đức" in *Đông Pháp* no. 5551. Hà Nội, 15/4/1943. In Ngô Tất Tố. *Thật hay bỡn*.
[90] *"Tìm lại chân dung chị Hoàng Ngân"* in *Tuyển Hồi ký hay* (nhiều tác giả), p. 213.
[91] Bạch Liên. *Làm vợ một nhà văn (hồi kí bà Bạch Liên)*. In *Nguyễn Đình Lạp Tác Phẩm* (Bạch Liên ed.), p. 880.
[92] ibid. p. 881.
[93] ibid. p. 52.
[94] ibid.
[95] Vũ Trọng Phụng. *Làm đĩ*. p. 69-70.
[96] Bạch Liên. *Làm vợ một nhà văn*, p. 881.
[97] ibid. p. 881-882.
[98] ibid. p. 882.
[99] Đạm Phương. "Vấn đề nữ học II", p. 180.
[100] ibid.
[101] Đạm Phương. "Thân phận người đàn bà" in *Trung bắc tân văn*, 18/8/1924. Hà Nội, p. 213.
[102] Đạm Phương. "Vấn đề nữ học II", p. 179.
[103] ibid.
[104] ibid.
[105] ibid. p. 14.
[106] Đạm Phương. "Con gái phải nên tập việc nhà cho quen" *Trung Bắc Tân Văn* số ra 24/5/1924, p. 200.
[107] Đạm Phương. "Người đàn bà phải nên chăm coi việc nhà" *Trung Bắc Tân Văn* số ra 25/2/1925, p. 241.
[108] Đạm Phương. "Vấn đề nữ học II", p. 180.
[109] Đạm Phương. "Muốn cho nữ lưu biết chức nghiệp phải có học Hội nữ công" in *Trung bắc tân văn*, 22/3/1926, p. 299.
[110] Phan Khôi. "Câu chuyện thú trong nghị viện có đàn bà" in *Phụ nữ tân văn*, no. 161, 28/7/1932. Sài Gòn. In *Phan Khôi: Tác phẩm đăng báo, 1932* (Lại Nguyên Ân, ed.). p. 721.
[111] ibid. p. 722
[112] Đạm Phương. "Phụ nhơn công nghệ" in *Hữu Thanh* no. 21, 1/6/1922, p. 86.

CHAPTER 2

School as Site and Society

As centers for the propagation of Western knowledge on indigenous soil, colonial schools were paramount sites, which helped determine how Vietnamese adapted and adopted the new and the foreign. Newly constructed schools were novel in that their architectural organization, structures, and classrooms shared no antecedents with the pre-colonial past. At the same time, they were spaces of great familiarity. Existing Vietnamese buildings, such as village temples and communal houses, were often used as schools, particularly elementary and communal schools. This simple and practical act infused Western education with a Vietnamese feel, not least because temples and communal halls were often sites of scholarship and learning in the proximate past. In contrast to elementary and communal schools, primary and secondary schools were often built for that purpose. While the buildings that housed those schools were novel, the spaces they inhabited were not. The very act of placing Western schools in the Vietnamese landscape rendered them spaces of intimate contrast, because the sights, smells, sounds, and histories of the spaces the foreign inhabited were familiar to the students who filled their classrooms. It was partially through the logical interweaving of the foreign and the familiar that modern studies was made to feel Vietnamese.

The dynamics at play in and around school spaces profoundly affected students and society at large. Vietnamese contact with the French at colonial schools humanized both the French and the Vietnamese. Close proximity to and relationships with French men and women lifted the veil of colonial superiority. Vietnamese students began to see the French as they were; imperfect individuals, not supermen. It was in environments like secondary schools that the lines of colonial distinction began to blur. One of the great romantic poets of the era, Huy Cận, referred to colonial schools as “little societies”. While aspects of those societies mirrored the larger society of colonial Việt Nam, they were in many ways distinct. It was within the walls of secondary schools that Vietnamese absorbed Western knowledge via Western pedagogy often

propagated by Westerners themselves. That knowledge, especially high ideals such as liberty, equality, and fraternity, in conjunction with an environment in which relationships were formed with foreigners, rendered schools metropolitan-like spaces within the colony.

The education on offer in colonial schools propagated knowledge and experience previously thought only available outside the colony or in clandestine spaces within it. While much of previous scholarship such has focused on the importance of travel to the metropole and of return to the colony, the essence of the experiences Vietnamese were said to have abroad were had in greater abundance and with larger impact in the colony itself. This does not negate the importance of 'returnees' (those who traveled abroad and subsequently returned to Việt Nam), but it does diminish their significance. In truth, the impact of 'returnees' was felt to be lackluster at best during the era itself.[1] The little society of the secondary school embodied the possibility of those experiences occurring in the colony; students received a liberal education in an environment of much greater equality and closer interaction with the colonizers than was possible in society at large. Curricular content, wide array of resources, and the fact that Vietnamese were able to take metropolitan examinations at the conclusion of their lower secondary school studies, demonstrates the 'liberal education' available in the colony. Indeed, Vietnamese students were able to sit for the *Brevet elementaire* and *Brevet primaire superieur francais* (examinations) in the colony beside their French brethren from at least the late 1910s.[2] The *Baccealaureat metropolitain,* a post-secondary school examination taken by students in the metropole, was offered to Vietnamese in the colony from 1922.[i] That same year the authorities created a colonial counterpart for that exam, the *Baccealaureat local*.[3] The spaces described here are those in which France lived in Indochina. It was not necessary to exit the colony and feel the air grow progressively more liberal the further west one's ship traveled. That liberal air was ethereally present in the colony. It spread throughout that space, in part from the institutions under consideration here, along colonial infrastructure, and into the vastness of the countryside.

[i] Note: According to Hoàng Ngọc Phách, the difference between the two exams was that the *Baccealaureat metropolitain* was more onerous: Students had to complete sections on both science and social science, while on the *Baccealaureat local* students could choose one or the other.

School as Site

Schools infused Western knowledge into colonial soil. As I indicated, elementary and communal schools (grades 1-3) often utilized existing buildings, such as temples and communal houses, rendering an indigenous feel to the foreign education propagated within. In contrast, many primary schools (grades 1-6, 4-6) were built specifically for that purpose, as were secondary schools. Vũ Đình Hoè, who studied at the Yên Phụ primary school on the edge of the municipality of Hà Nội in the early and mid 1920s and then went on to become a writer, journalist, and editor of periodicals in the 1930s and 1940s, recalled that his school was unique in its combined use of both the temple of Yên Phụ village and new structures built explicitly for primary education. He described a classical vision of his alma mater with an intimate pride and perhaps distant nostalgia: "The Yên Phụ school was at once classical and modern. It was very beautiful. Imagine: From the Red River dike you drop down and reach the school gate. The wide gate sat between the two tall pillars common to communal temples. An immense yard with bombax and royal ponciana trees[ii], whose flamboyant red flowers blossomed around exam time, spread out before you as you entered the school grounds. Cut across the yard and go up a few steps... and you stand in front of the magnificent communal temple, which looks down on Trúc Bạch Lake... The entire grandiose temple was arranged into five classrooms for the elementary school students."[4] One can almost feel the classical scholar sipping wine and composing verse in that courtyard where the pillars of a temple danced amidst tropical fruits and flowers on the edge of a lake; a self-consciously romantic vision of Vietnamese space.

Nguyễn Hiến Lê, a contemporary and friend of Vũ Đình Hoè's at the Yên Phụ school, had similar recollections of the facade of their primary school: "... In the immense garden were star fruit trees, tamarind trees, and many logan trees... I loved the ancient look of the school. My friends and I played and climbed in the three large yards that stretched down to Trúc Bạch Lake, which was the thing I liked the most. We would sit at the edge of the lake looking at the clouds, the water, the boats that went out to fish in the winter, Cổ Ngư Street (which separated Trúc Bạch Lake from West Lake), and the houses of Ngũ Xã village, which were off to the right. To the left was the bronze casting village which was on a small island in the middle of the lake."[5]

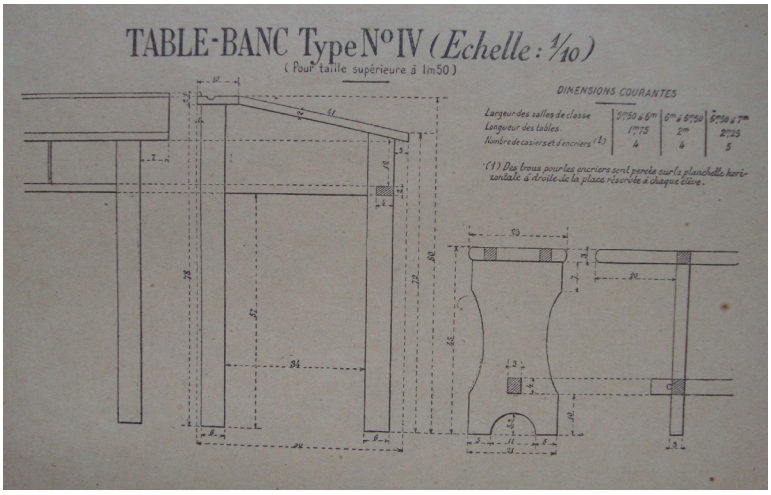
[ii] Vietnamese: *cây gạo* and *cây phượng*

The space of the modern school and the ancient village temple had an almost geomantic essence, perched as it was atop a small hill on the edge of a lake. The contrast between the two-story concrete colonial school buildings designed by the French and built by the Vietnamese and placed within those ancient walls might have seemed out of place. However, the yellow buildings were grafted into the space of the primary school. The two were beginning to amalgamate in the same way Westernized education was being adapted to Vietnamese society.

The adhesion of the ancient and the contemporary, the Vietnamese and the French, was logical. The temple of Yên Phụ village had undoubtedly been used as a part-time school for many years. Its role as a center of learning continued into the Western studies era in a silent transition of space and process in a colony. The Yên Phụ School illustrated the 'naturalness' of the change. Curricula accounted for only part of the experience of the colonial student. Space and movement also influenced and formed a perception in young minds from which it seeped into society at large. One did not read Balzac and Hugo or imbibe the Western scientific method as an entree to 'truth' in exclusively colonial, French, or Western spaces. Such transitions occurred also in spaces like the Yên Phụ School, beside the lakes of Vietnamese lore, on the edge of the old market town and former political center that was becoming new through French stimuli in a uniquely Vietnamese fashion.

Part of the distinction, felt by Nguyễn Hiến Lê and Vũ Đình Hoè, was between the outside (Vietnamese) and the inside (foreign). Huy Cận shared a similar experience in his primary school outside of Huế (Center) in the late 1920s. Although his school was not part of a communal temple, the trees and the landscape of the Center muted the introduction of the foreign edifice just as the temple pillars had in the North: "The yard of my school was pretty big and had lots of flowering trees. After summer vacation, when we returned to school, they would bloom; it smelled so sweet. During recess we picked the flowers and put them in our pockets so that the classroom would smell as sweet as the yard. There were times when it was almost as though we were drunk on the scent."[6] Flowers maintained the Vietnamese essence in a space that seemed foreign in its standardized rigidity. The geometric conformity of the Franco-Việt classroom was felt in its layout: two rows of wooden desks and benches stretched from the front of the classroom to the back. Huy Cận described his primary school classroom thus: "The students' benches and desks were made of wood... Teachers' desks sat at the front of the hall perched on raised platforms. From there, teachers could survey the entire class and see the students very

clearly. Even the desks at the back of the room did not escape their probing gaze! In the front of each room was a large blackboard. The black was very dark so that when you wrote with white chalk the letters really popped..."[7] The ambition of the colonial state to control education expressed itself in the standardization of the benches and desks upon which children sat and wrote. The attempt to control and to watch was translated through the desks to the organizational schema of the classroom itself, which can still be found in countless classrooms throughout Việt Nam.



Photograph 8. One of four desk-bench prototypes compiled by the Service of Education, mid 1920s.

The poetess Anh Thơ, a contemporary of Huy Cận whom we met in the previous chapter, also noted the juxtaposition of interior and exterior in her school in rural Bắc Giang province (northwest of Hà Nội) in the early 1930s. "During recess I just stayed inside and looked out of the glass-less window. The windows of my classroom were very wide, so that before my eyes spread a large garden of tall trees. Each time the wind picked up the leaves danced in the sun. Goats roamed about eating the grass while cows lay chewing beneath the trees."[8] She reflected on how daydreaming through the contrast between the schoolhouse and the space it inhabited could at times be painful: "One early morning I was staring out the window at the yellow leaves falling on a cow's head. He looked like he was enjoying the spectacle through his sleepy eyes. I was mesmerized when all of the sudden there was a loud bang on my desk. Startled, I turned around to hear the teacher yelling my name. I stood up and the teacher demanded that I repeat what she had just said. How could I repeat what she said when I did not hear a word of it? Sensing my awkwardness, my classmates burst into laughter."[9] To make the situation worse, her teacher descended from her imposing perch to forcibly remind the young girl of the distinction: "My teacher rushed from her desk to the bench were I was sitting. She grabbed my ear and pulled me to the front of the classroom where she ordered me to face the wall... She then grabbed a stick and began beating me."[10]

The violence brought about by Anh Thơ's daydream of the Vietnamese countryside through the glass-less window of the classroom proved too much for her to continue. The young girl chose to follow the path of her grandmother, who was never confronted with such juxtapositions: "I was so mad I got away from her grip and ran home. I asked my grandmother to tell the school that I would not be going anymore. My grandmother supported me and said: 'That's right, you're proud just like me. You don't need to go to school anymore!'"[11] The teacher, representative of the colonial state, seated high above his students monitoring their every move and thought was the colonizers' fantasy. The administration was under no illusions as to what the establishment of the Franco-Việt education system meant, or the power it unleashed. That environment, meant to convey the power of scientific absolutism and rigidity, mingled with visions of sleepy cows and the scent of indigenous blossoms.

Nguyễn Công Hoan, one of the most prolific novelists and short-story writers of the 1930s, entered the College of the Protectorate in 1912. When he began his studies at the College, it had only been established on the shore of West Lake for four years. The school and its way of knowing were in fact so new that the College was not yet really a 'College' at all. Nguyễn Công Hoan began his studies at the primary level. After eight years (with some starts and stops) he completed lower secondary school (grades 7-10) and went on to study at the School of Pedagogy in Hà Nội. The story of the College of the Protectorate parallels that of 20th century Hà Nội, despite the fact that for the majority of this period it was just outside the municipality in Hà Đông province.[iii] Nguyễn Công Hoan explained the political delineation at the time he began his studies in 1912: "At that time, the northern end of the city only extended to the end of Quán Thánh Street. From the beginning of what is now Thụy Khuê Street was Hà Đông province. There, at the edge of the city... right next to a French policeman's house, was a tram stop."[12] As he composed his memoirs in the late 1950s and 1960s, the College of the Protectorate still existed, as it endures to this day, as the beautiful Chu Văn An lower secondary school. The school as it was at its beginning differed vastly from what it would become, as did the area in which it rested: "The school was developed little by little and was very different when

[iii] Note: When the municipality was expanded in 1942 the area where the College of the Protectorate is located, Thuỵ Chương village, was incorporated into Hà Nội.

I began my studies in 1912. A printing house had previously occupied the area on the edge of the lake where the school was located. The close-set one-story buildings of the printing house became the school. One was divided into three classrooms. Another was used as a lab. A third was the cantina, with a kitchen on one end. Another was divided into two – half was a student dormitory, the other half was the French vice-principal's quarters. Finally, one of those buildings was used as an art studio and divided into several other rooms, which we called the Chinese dorm. My class was at the front of that building. It was out of the way so I never remembered where anything was and always got lost…"[13]

The College rested on borrowed land just outside the municipality. Recall that before the advent of the Franco-Việt system at the end of 1917 and after the education reforms of 1908, the College inhabited the space between Western and classical studies. Some of Nguyễn Công Hoan's colleagues were immersed in the classics even as he himself was studying in *quốc ngữ* and French. By the middle of the decade, the school began to expand: "Just beyond the main gate two new buildings were constructed, one next to the other. One building was three stories, the other a single story. The roof of the three-story building was a bit different than those constructed thereafter. On the ground floor there were four classrooms for the four years of lower secondary school. The student dormitory was on the second and third floors. The one-story building was used for primary school classes."[14] The multi-storied buildings began to delineate the space as that of the most prestigious school in the North. It was in the process of becoming a lower secondary school (*College*) and would later incorporate the secondary level as well (grades 11-13, making it a *Lycee*). But this had not yet occurred. In the

Photograph 9. College of the Protectorate c. 1920. Note the three-story building described by Nguyễn Công Hoan.

teens the College still offered primary education, for the simple reason that before one ascended to the secondary level, one had to first conquer the primary level. In the decade following the establishment of the Franco-Việt education system it became a lower secondary and then secondary school.[iv]

Hoàng Ngọc Phách entered the College of the Protectorate in 1914. Unlike Nguyễn Công Hoan, he began his studies at the College at the lower secondary level (from grade 7). Because he and his classmates began their studies that year, they were known as the "Class of the Great War", which broke out days after the school year began thousands of miles away. The College of the Protectorate, situated as it was on the shores of West Lake, almost in a little cove, was a beautiful natural location. Hoàng Ngọc Phách reflected on that space, and how it elicited poetic feelings of the past amongst he and his comrades: "The students who went to the College were able to gaze at the lake morning, afternoon, and evening. The best time was in the middle of the night under a full moon, we would hangout on the lakeshore or go out on boats. Those silver waves touched my soul. Sitting there, I thought of myself as an old man who had paid witness to their decadent shimmer."[15] At the same time, that ancient space, like the Yên Phụ primary school, was becoming new. When the young students were overcome by the poetry of the moon shining on the lake sparkling with a hazy reflection of some past, they could escape: "At the same time, we were immersed in a modern lifestyle with the people who lived around that poetic lake..."[16] One place the young men frequented in the mid and late teens was a seller's stall, just beyond the gates of the school: "Around a hundred meters from the College there was a very large bombax tree. At the foot of the tree was a stall that sold snacks: sticky rice, rice porridge, *bánh đúc*, *bánh đa*, and fruit."[17] Most of the young men who attended the College of the Protectorate in the teens (and thereafter) were not from the area in and around Hà Nội. In the second decade of the 20th century, the attraction of Hà Nội, whose gravity pulled migrants to it, had really just begun. It would be greatly accelerated in the 1920s and 1930s transforming the ancient market town and political seat of power into a modern urban space.

Hoàng Ngọc Phách, like Nguyễn Công Hoan and most of the other students at the College, had moved to the edge of the municipality for their studies. At times, they were akin to

[iv] Note: In 1928 the College of the Protectorate began offering grades 11-13 and was thus re-named the *Lycee du Protectorat*.

transients in need of a familiar place to relax and have a quick meal: “That stall at the base of the tree was packed with students in the morning before school began and in the afternoon when classes let out. There, we ate breakfast, drank tea, reviewed lessons... We laughed and joked around with each other. We gossiped about things that had just happened inside and outside of the school's gates.”[18] There was continuity in that space. Perhaps the old seller had provided the same service to classical examination candidates in Hà Nội or Nam Định. Her stall was located to the east of the school, just across the street from a large temple. There she served pilgrims who had come to worship as well as the young men, novices at the French temple of logic down the street. “The stall was at the intersection of Quan Thánh Street and the Cổ Ngư dike road. People participating in religious festivals or just viewing the lake and mountains also stopped there.”[19] The young men, far away from home for the first time, grew close to the proprietor of the food stall: “We all really loved the woman who ran the stall... Students often called her ‘mom’ because she was older and she had a warm heart...”[20] It was not only that the older woman played the role of surrogate mother through hot food and an empathetic ear: “... she would often play the role of ‘mother’ and go to the school to ask permission for us to be let out of school so that we could go outside to hang out... because of this, we started calling her stall ‘mom's cafe’.”[21] Because the young men cared for her, they provided her with a nickname and a back-story: “No one knew where she was from or even what her name was. We often called her Mrs. Khán. The word *khán* was a village title, not a name. She sold her wares in a stall with a tiled roof (it was actually more of a tram stop). People said that she came with the school, meaning she had been there since around 1907.”[22] The back-story did not stretch to a distant past as did their feelings while watching the moonlit lake. It was closer to their present reality. The older woman, like the young men, was the vanguard of the future. Their legacy stretches to the present. Just as there are young men (and now young women) occupying the beautiful grounds of the College, so too are there (now countless) vendors lining Thụy Khuê Street outside the school to provide for their needs and desires.

Physical changes accompanied atmospheric changes with the passage of time. Nguyễn Hiến Lê did not mention if the old woman was still there under that great tree when he attended the College of the Protectorate in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The number of vendors had undoubtedly increased, as had the number of students. Nguyễn Hiến Lê entered the College a year after he completed his studies at the Yên Phụ primary school and passed the primary school

examination (*Certificat d'Etudes Primaires Franco-Indigenes, CEPFI*). The delay was due to the fact that he failed the entrance examination to the College on his first attempt. He was successful a year later. Nguyễn Hiến Lê was one of the few whose family lived in the Hà Nội area. His childhood and adolescence paid witness to the transformation the ancient capital was undergoing in the early 20th century: "Like my primary school, the College was on a lake, West Lake. However, it was much bigger, its architecture was much newer; it had rows of multi-storied classrooms, the top floors of which were used as dormitories for the students who boarded... To the left of the school was the tramline that went north to Yên Thái village. Just to the south was Bách Thảo Park... Nùng Mountain was in the park. Anyone who thinks of Thăng Long (*the ancient name of Hà Nội*) immediately thinks of Nùng Mountain and the Nhị River..."[23] By the time Nguyễn Hiến Lê began his studies at the College in 1927 the one-story buildings from the old printer described by Nguyễn Công Hoan in 1912 had for the most part been replaced by multi-story edifices. Nguyễn Hiến Lê's words provide a chronological glimpse at the juxtaposition between ancient and contemporary to which Hoàng Ngọc Phách referred. This was a fluid process, which was occurring with ever-increasing speed. The tram was emblematic of that speed. By the late 1920s the tramline extended from the heart of Hà Nội, swang around Hoàn Kiếm Lake, passed through the commercial quarter, proceeded up Quán Thánh Street, and continued outside the municipality – past the College all the way to *Bưởi* Village at the other end of West Lake.

Photograph 10. Quan Thánh Street (Rte. Grand Bouddha). Note the tram rails that run through the middle of the road.

Bách Thảo Park sat immediately to the southeast of the College directly behind the palace of the Governor General of Indochina. The colonial government created the park as a showcase of the flora and fauna of their Indochinese colonies. Trees from every corner of the Union were planted there (and labeled). Tigers and rhinoceros and monkeys were jailed in cages for

spectators' pleasure. Paved paths wound throughout the public space facilitating movement. A public park and a zoo were entirely novel concepts imported from France and transplanted on the edge of Hà Nội. They served the purpose of providing the municipality with the distant vistas one might encounter in the metropole. Nguyễn Hiến Lê's initial recollections of the park were not of the trees or the animals or the paved walkways on which he enjoyed those spaces and sites. Rather he recalled the 'Nùng Mountain', roughly situated at the park's center, and how that ancient sacred space in the middle of the new public park was emblematic of old Thăng Long, capital of the *Kinh*, not Hà Nội, capital of French Indochina. Despite his ancient dreams, Nguyễn Hiến Lê and his classmates enjoyed the park in the novel, recreational manner of the sightseeing tourist: "Whenever we had a free hour or two before, after, or between classes, my friends and I went to the park. We looked at the clusters of logan and star fruit in the trees or gazed at the lotus floating atop one of the park's ponds or checked out the orchids beside the monkey cages."[24] The dual images Nguyễn Hiến Lê had of Bách Thảo Park, so similar to the way colonial schools were described in the 1920s and 1930s, seemed to cohere in the young women from the village immediately to the park's west: "Just behind Bách Thảo Park sat Ngọc Hà Village, which grew flowers sold in the city... The girls there were half country-bumpkin half city sophisticates. They had the gentle manner of the countryside and the cold distance of the city. Khái Hưng immortalized them in his novel *Gánh hàng hoa*".[25] The young women, who more often than not grew flowers rather than attend school, were evolving with the space they inhabited, just like Nguyễn Hiến Lê, the College *cum Lycee* of the Protectorate, and the Hà Nội area itself. A similar evolution was taking place in and out of colonial schools throughout the elongated territory of what would become Việt Nam.

Huy Cận described the *Quốc Học* (National School) in Huế, and secondary schools in general, as societies in and of themselves. Those societies, doting the Vietnamese landscape north to south, were at times microcosms of the larger society outside their gates, as the romantic revolutionary poet observed: "The schools functioned as societies, small societies within a much larger society. Though they were surrounded by walls, the larger society was still able to penetrate the society that was the school."[26] This was especially true of sound and of air, which traversed the high walls of the *Quốc Học* with ease. In his new life as a boarder at a Franco-Việt secondary school, Huy Cận discovered that time was rationed in a very careful, military fashion. A Vietnamese soldier rang a bell or sounded an alarm a few meters outside the walls of the

school every morning at 5:30 to ensure the young men woke: "There was a barracks a few hundred feet from the school. Every morning at five thirty sharp the soldiers began to play the bugle. The sound of the horn drifted into the dormitory and woke us up."[27] The bell of the Thiên Mụ pagoda penetrated the concrete walls of the dormitory prior to their morning alarm provided by the Vietnamese soldier, waking the young men: "The sound of the bell was very deep and resounded for a long time. Sometimes it would drone for several minutes, especially on clear summer mornings..."[28] Perhaps not to be outdone by its Buddhist counterpart, the Catholic Church adjacent to the school also greeted the pre-dawn with sound: "The Phủ Cam Cathedral was also close to the *Quốc Học*, so we could hear its bell clearly. It was really loud!"[29] The cacophony of sound made by that larger society outside the walls of the *Quốc Học* rang in each new day. The ancient Vietnamese pagoda competed with its more recent French Catholic counterpart in the soundscape of the early morning. Try as they might to blend with the moan of the pagoda bell, the bells of the cathedral stood apart. The *Quốc Học* itself shared that distinction. Its colonial structures, the French architect's dream of what Vietnamese buildings might look like in some future, were seated on the banks of the Perfume River just across from the Imperial Citadel and Palace. The larger society certainly perceived the difference, as did the smaller society centered around its multi-storied structures, gymnasium, and football field. The distinction was made audible to the young men in the dormitory: "The sound of the two bells was so different! They were both religious sounds, but the sound of the cathedral's bell was that of an eagerness to embrace life, that sound carried within it a passion for the heart's desires. In contrast, the low drone of the pagoda bell was the sound of the lust for life dissolving into a dreamscape, into the purity of space."[30]

As the sound of the larger society penetrated the smaller society of the secondary school, so too did the knowledge and perspective propagated in those temples of logic seep into Vietnamese society through the actions of young people like Huy Cận. As the following chapter makes clear, students as conduits were a profound driver of societal evolution. The altogether novel forms of being and living introduced on school grounds formed part of the process by which new social and cultural implements transformed late colonial society. When Nguyễn Công Hoan began his studies at the College of the Protectorate in 1912, he entered a world completely distinct from that he had known in his village in Bắc Ninh province, to the

municipality's northeast. He described the school almost as if it were another dimension, the entrance to which was around thirty kilometers from his hometown: "I entered the school like a bird lost in the woods. The grounds were immense. The buildings were big and tall. The school was crowded with students; most of them were adults. For a young boy from the countryside who had never left his house alone, entering the College of the Protectorate was like moving from one world to another... I was lost and scared. As I stood in the school yard, I came to realize there was an entire class of people, the teachers at the College, who dressed in the stylish, sophisticated manner of a couple of the provincial officials in the area of my hometown. The teachers also wore shirts with starched collars, bright white pants, and Western shoes."[31] The sophisticated way his new teachers were dressed reminded Nguyễn Công Hoan of two petty officials from his home province. He had briefly studied a kind of pigeon French with one of those officials. At that time, the curious wardrobe of those provincial officials seemed like an attractive novelty. Their display of the new and the foreign was an isolated case of eccentricity to his provincial eyes. In the crowded courtyard of the College of the Protectorate he witnessed that sophistication multiplied on a level that was at once puzzling and illuminating. As he stood there, staring and not knowing how to move in that new space, he perceived in those well-dressed teachers the future, and in himself the past: "I still had (the traditional) tuft of long hair, which my mother had coiled like an onion atop my head placed in the middle of my new turban. I wore a long tunic that reached far beyond my knees. Below my baggy cloth pants I wore a new pair of stiff bamboo clogs."[32]

The crowded courtyard, the school's size or its seemingly sophisticated teachers were not the only things that surprised Nguyễn Công Hoan. In that new world he still heard the Vietnamese language, but it sounded foreign; like what one might hear in the market or on the banks of the Red River between common laborers. The vulgar sound of that new way of using Vietnamese was juxtaposed against the most prestigious Vietnamese school in the North: "From the moment I entered the school gates, the thing that surprised me most was the way students addressed each other. This one addressed that one as '*mày*' and referred to himself as '*tao*'...[v] I thought for sure that people who used such uncouth language did not hail from the educated

[v] *xưng hô:* The hierarchical system of Vietnamese pronouns. '*Mày*' (you) and '*tao*' (me) are an intimately familiar form of address. They are principally used in two situations. The first is between two people of roughly the same age and social position who consider each other intimate friends. The second is as a marker of disrespect towards a party you are involved in an argument with or hate.

families of mandarins. The children of mandarins called friends '*cậu*' and referred to themselves as '*tôi*'. They said 'please' and 'thank you' in accordance with the standards of good breeding. The students at the College of the Protectorate did not just address each other in that overly familiar, uneducated manner. They spit vulgarities at one another and spoke as if they were cursing each other out. They laughed, joked, teased, insulted, and went after each other..."[33] We may imagine Nguyễn Công Hoan entering the city school direct from the countryside standing tentatively within the large school-gate and gawking at a scene, which likely seemed out of science-fiction. The sensory overload inundating his eyes and ears rendered him mute and paralyzed.

To the early-mid 1920s most teachers at the College of the Protectorate were French, the vast majority of whom did not condescend to learn Vietnamese. Rather, they expected pupils to learn their mother tongue. Nguyễn Công Hoan arrived at the College with little French. He was however fluent in the language of fear for the foreigner with whom he had no previous direct contact, but of whom he had heard horror stories since his earliest years.[34] In those first days in the classroom, with the French teacher and his seemingly more experienced peers, he faced moments when he had to combine vocalization with movement, each of which require a measure of fluency. In such moments of urgency he remained paralyzed: "I was so bold in my timidity that when I had to go to the bathroom in class I did not dare ask the teacher, I would just pee where I was sitting. The first few times I was very skillful about this, only getting my pants wet. But then one time I soaked the brick floor at my feet. The two students on the bench at either side of me let out a loud cry which got the attention of the teacher..."[35] It was through such moments of humiliation and urgency that Nguyễn Công Hoan learned how to move (quickly) in that new environment that was the colonial school and how to interact with foreigners, not necessarily in French, but in a language universal to humanity: "The teacher taught me how to ask permission to go to the bathroom. I did not understand what the sentence meant, but I had to learn it by heart: *'Permettez – moi de sortir, je vous prie, madame'*. Suffice it to say that was the first sentence I ever spoke to a French person in French. Although I could repeat it after the teacher said it, I could not produce the entire sentence when I had to use the bathroom. It was so difficult and so long, and in those moments I had to go so bad! So when the teacher saw me standup and urgently grab my pants she nodded her head in permission. I then made a dash for the restroom in the nick of time."[36] Nguyễn Công Hoan recalled that his French was substandard.

He did not say how long he practiced this ritual of standing up, holding his pants, and jumping around, but one would imagine that it was not long before he mastered that first sentence and many others. What is certain is that Nguyễn Công Hoan was able to move with fluency within the school grounds and without them in the city and to speak that distantly intimate and vulgar city dialect of Vietnamese. After his first year at the College he left the shelter of the dormitory and moved into a rented room with some classmates in Hà Nội's commercial center.

Boarders represented a new way of being Vietnamese, a new lifestyle that began even before they entered the school dormitory. Huy Cận began his studies at the *Quốc Học* in Huế in September 1932. Because he performed well on the entrance examination, Huy Cận was permitted to live in the dormitory on school grounds (he also received a scholarship). He used the small amount of money his family scraped together as a gift for a central necessity of his new life: "With the money my family gave me, I went to a furniture store by the Thượng Tứ Gate in Huế and I bought a wooden trunk that was red with black iron hinges. The trunk was fairly large – big enough for all my clothing and schoolbooks. Even today, the smell of varnished wood makes me high, almost like the feeling of anticipation I had before starting classes at the school. The trunk also had two polished bronze locks. Every time I opened them they clanged, enhancing my prestige as a student of the *Quốc Học*."[37] Having obtained a secure place for his belongings in the strange environment of the dormitory, Huy Cận went about decorating the centerpiece of his new home in a manner reminiscent of many a junior high school boy to follow: "I decided to put a few lines of poetry I really liked on the pine wood bands inside the trunk's lid. I used these as guidelines: 'Having the good fortune to be born on this earth, One must aspire to fame and prestige' (*by Nguyễn Công Trứ*) and 'Knowing how to endure hardship in silence, one stands firm and becomes a man' (*an old proverb*). I wrote those two verses in black Chinese ink on *croquys* (*drawing paper*) and glued them to the pine bands."[38] Whispers of the feeling Nguyễn Công Hoan experienced as he entered the grounds of the College of the Protectorate in Hà Nội 20 years prior could still be felt in Huy Cận as he made his way into the *Quốc Học* with his new wardrobe: "The schoolyard was so big! To both sides of the gymnasium were two beautiful bamboo groves. However, I did not really have time to check out the attractive schoolyard. I had to go to my new room on the top floor of the large dormitory to the right of the school."[39] After he lugged his new trunk to his room on the second floor of the dormitory, he described his new home: "Every boarder was given his own bed made of very

sturdy pine. Each bed had a mattress that was covered with ultra-white bedding – as white as sea-foam."[40] Each student was provided an individual Western-style bed. Huy Cận's time at the *Quốc Học* was surely the first time he had slept on a Western bed or slept alone. Most Vietnamese of this period slept on a woven mat on the ground. Men often slept with men (beside or in very close proximity). Women slept with women.[vi] The individual beds of the dormitory were covered with sparkling white sheets, the glare of which still reflected in Huy Cận's mind decades later. However, that was not what excited the young man most. Despite the fact he had recently purchased a trunk for his belongings, he liked the idea of more storage space: "The thing I liked the most was that each of us got two compartments within a larger wardrobe that we shared with a few other students. The wardrobe was also made of pine. We were responsible for our own locks... the space was big enough for clothes and books with enough room left for keepsakes, sweets, and dried food sent from home..."[41]

Supplies and delicacies from home were initially under lock and key. In time those treats were taken out and shared – a culinary exploration of Việt Nam in one place. Sharing not only reflected the fact that Vietnamese rarely eat alone (without inviting others to join them), but also the familial camaraderie that began to develop amongst the young men in that new environment. At the *Quốc Học* in Huế in the 1930s such closeness, likely to develop in any comparable situation, had the effect of amalgamating the familiar with the new. Beds were shared and perhaps pushed together: "On cold nights we used to sleep together. We waited for the monitor (every room had a monitor) to make his rounds and go to bed and then we looked for a friend to sleep with. At least a third of the students slept together like that. If the monitor found out in the morning, he would usually just look the other way."[42] Such comradeship was not reserved for the cold evenings of winter. Friends, like brothers or cousins, could share their beds with each other at any time: "... pairs of friends would often talk late into the night. We shared secrets, talked about literature, about life..."[43] Although the young men attempted to warm the initially foreign environment of the dormitory with an essence of the familiar, they also utilized that space for individual purposes. This was especially true of the time in and around examinations, in which students sought solitary contemplation: "There were many nights when we all worried about the examinations. We lay in our own beds, each with a tiny lamp made from an old Western medicine bottle. The candle was placed in the bottom of the bottle. Its flame was small, just

[vi] Note: This is still common, especially in rural areas.

bright enough to illuminate the book page."[44] That light, confined to the book page would spread. Like the ancient sound of the pagoda breaking the early morning silence of the dormitory, it traversed the walls of the school and found its way deep into the larger society. That gradual, but persistent seeping, transformed Vietnamese society during the late colonial period and thereafter, much like the knowledge of the colonial school itself.

The Liberal Arts in a Colony

The content of instruction students received at colonial schools was much more liberal and even progressive than has heretofore been acknowledged. The curriculum taught in Franco-Việt schools approximated its metropolitan counterpart. That knowledge, in conjunction with the environment of the colonial school, created a unique dynamism, which reshaped the landscape of late colonial and postcolonial Vietnamese society.

The official Primary School Regulations, published first in 1924 and subsequently reaffirmed in 1927, outlined the class schedule which both boys' and girls' schools were to adhere to for the elementary (1-3) and primary (4-6) cycles. The schedules posted below reflect courses taught in Franco-Việt schools to the end of the colonial period.[vii] They retain a contemporary familiarity, save a couple of exceptions[45]:

Primary Schools for Boys:

Grade	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th
Subject:			(*Hours per week*)			
Ethics	1h30	1h30	1h30	1h	1h30	1h30
Vietnamese lang.	8h	6h	5h	2h	2h30	1h45
French lang.	5h	7h30	9h	16h30	11h30	11h30
Writing	2h30	1h30	1h	0h30	0h30	0h30
History	2h30	0h30	0h30	0h30	0h30	1h
Geography	1h	1h	1h	0h30	1h	1h
Arithmetic	3h	3h	3h	1h30	3h	3h

[vii] Note: Fourth grade (*Moyen 1*) was created in 1926. These time schedules include that addition. Prior to that time primary school had only five grades.

Geometry	0h30	0h30	0h30	0h30	0h45	1h
Drawing	"	"	"	"	0h30	0h30
General ed. & hygiene	2h	2h	2h	1h	2h15	2h15
Manual labor	1h	1h	1h	0h30	1h	1h
P.E.	2h30	2h30	2h30	2h30	2h30	2h30
Recess	"	"	"	"	"	"

Primary Schools for Girls:

Grade	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th
Subject:			(*Hours per week*)			
Ethics	1h30	1h30	1h30	1h	1h30	1h30
Vietnamese lang.	7h30	6h	5h	1h30	2h	1h30
French lang.	5h	7h	8h30	16h30	10h	10h
Writing	2h30	1h30	1h	0h30	0h30	0h30
History	2h30	0h30	0h30	0h30	0h30	1h
Geography	1h	1h	1h	0h30	1h	1h
Arithmetic	3h	3h	3h	1h30	2h30	2h30
Geometry	0h30	0h30	0h30	0h30	0h30	0h30
Drawing	"	"	"	"	"	"
General ed. & hygiene	1h30	2h	2h	1h	2h	2h
Home Economics	1h30	2h	2h	0h30	3h	3h
Manual labor	2h	1h30	1h30	0h30	1h	1h
P.E.	2h30	2h30	2h30	2h30	2h30	2h30
Recess	"	"	"	"	"	"

The first conclusion one might draw after reviewing these time schedules is that Franco-Việt schools were designed to provide students with a general 'liberal arts' education. Most of the courses listed above can be found in contemporary primary and secondary schools throughout the world. The main exception being the course called 'manual labor' which was designed as a practicum for agriculture, animal husbandry, and household chores. Focus was placed on language instruction in both cycles. Note that in the elementary cycle (1-3) the decrease of Vietnamese language instruction corresponded with an increase in French language instruction. This was at once designed to provide elementary school students with *quốc ngữ* literacy while preparing them to continue their studies at the primary level, which was theoretically to be

conducted in French. Like the elementary cycle, the primary cycle (4-6) was language based. The main distinction was the drastic decrease in the amount of Vietnamese language instruction and the increase of French language instruction. This was most apparent in the fourth grade, in which well over half of all class-time was reserved for French language instruction. Indeed, that was the *raison d'etre* of the addition of this year. While the amount of time for learning French decreased in the final two years of primary school, it remained the most significant part of a child's education. This because for students who terminated their studies at the primary level, good French language skills were necessary to pass the primary school examination (*Certificat d'Etudes Primaires Franco-Indigenes*, *CEPFI*) and secure employment. Likewise, those continuing to secondary school needed good French because the medium of instruction at that level was French. Finally, it is interesting to note that ethics (*morale*) played a less significant role in a child's education than did recess.[46]

Because individual schools were required to supply the Service of Education with teachers' time schedules, we can surmise that schools did follow these regulations in word, but at times not in deed. For example, Mme. Tuyền's third grade class at the *Primary School for Vietnamese Girls* (*Ecole de jeunes filles annamites*) in Hà Nội in 1924-1925 was as follows[47]:

Monday: Arithmetic, ethics, geography, culture
Tuesday: The metric system, general ed., French (reading, recitation, and translation), writing
Wednesday: Geometry, French conversation, French spelling and translation, reading
Thursday: Classical Chinese and Vietnamese translation
Friday: Arithmetic, Vietnamese history, reading and recitation, translation, drawing
Saturday: The metric system, French reading, spelling and translation, writing, P.E. (gymnastics)

Mme. Tuyền's schedule was a very close approximation of the regulations cited above, as were those of her colleagues at the girls' school in Hà Nội. Heavy emphasis was placed on language instruction, especially French. Other than this, the education provided was very general and included math, ethics, and history. Thursday was supposed to be a sacrosanct day in the Franco-Việt system. Thursday mornings were reserved for the study of Classical Chinese, which provided students a connection to the past and employment for many classical scholars. Conspicuously absent from this time schedule was 'manual labor' (none of the other five grades at the school included this course either). This is not surprising as the school was located in Hà

Nội – most of the girls' families were likely not directly involved in agriculture. The one disparity was that physical education was apparently taught in grades 1-3, but discontinued in grades 4-6. It is surprising that physical education was offered at all due to the fact that the very idea of girls taking part in such activities dissuaded many Vietnamese parents from sending their daughters to school in the first place.[viii]

The resources a school possessed, including books, are equally revealing of the education provided. Like time schedules, inventories were required of each individual Franco-Việt school, primarily so budgets could be calculated and resources doled out.[48] The inventory from the girls' primary school of Bắc Ninh (northeast of Hà Nội) creates an environment. There were three classrooms with twenty-one desks and seventeen benches.[49] The art decorating the school walls included a map of *Tonkin*, a map of Indochina, a chart of the human body, a chart of the metric system, and charts that taught students the rudiments of *quốc ngữ*. Objects were also important. The school possessed a globe, a porcelain fish, clay and wood vases, a nightlight, and for some reason a pipe. The school's instruction manuals included: *Hygiene* (by Dr. Lecomte), *Bắc kỳ địa dư* (*The Geography of Tonkin*), *Histoire naturelle* (by Dr. Regaud and Dr. Mandron), *Địa dư sơ học đông dương* (*The Basic Geography of Indochina,* by Russier), *Histoire d'Annam, Coutes de Perault, Fables de La Fontaine,* and *Ruines d'Angkor*. There were also books on grammar and math as well as illustrated stories, among others.

The inventory of the boy's primary school in Bắc Ninh was even more expansive. It was as if the world was brought to the school, in two dimensions. The following maps adorned its walls: physical and economic maps of France as well as maps of French cities; maps of Europe, Asia, North and South America, Oceana, French West Africa, Algeria, *Tonkin*, *Cochinchine*, and the city of Bắc Ninh. Course manuals and the content of what must have been the school's library had a much more scholarly air than that of the girls' school. The *Selected Works* of Daudet, Voltaire, Diderot, Musset, Rousseau, and Sand were to be found within the provincial school walls, as were volumes and *Collected Works* by Corneille, Moliere, Racine, Zola, and Goethe (all presented in French). Teachers used books like these as course manuals – primers of

[viii] See *Tour de les ecoles au Tonkin et au Annam, 1925 par Chef du Service Regionale de l'Instruction Physique en Tonkin et en Annam* in SET 115. These are fascinating documents detailing this official's journey to various schools in the North and Center in 1925. The purpose of travels was to document the progress individual institutions were making in implementing physical education. The administration deemed this important because it was closely tied to the indigenous army it sought to establish in Tonkin and Annam. The official often commented on the poor or non-existent quality of PE at girls' schools.

thought, language, and civilization. Their content was in part preparation for the next level of education in the Franco-Việt system; lower secondary school (7-10).

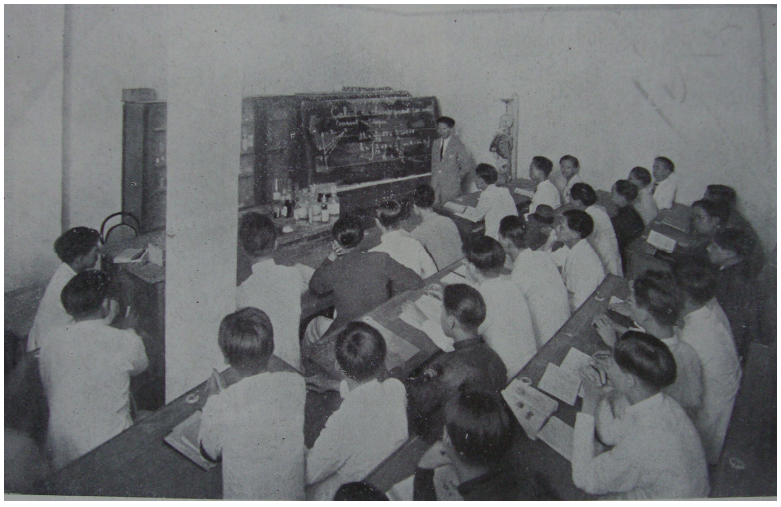
The administration compiled a comprehensive program for Franco-Việt lower secondary schools, the *Franco-Việt Lower Secondary School Program*, in the late 1920s. While the course offerings of individual institutions might have differed slightly, it is worth examining this document in terms both general and specific. Doing so will illustrate the contention that the education on offer in the colony was analogous to that in the metropole. The basic time schedule for the four years of lower secondary school was as follows[50]:

Secondary School:

Grade	7th	8th	9th	10th
Subject:		(*Hours per week*)		
French:				
Reading and recitation	3h	3h	3h	3h
Spelling	2h	1h	1h	1h
Vocabulary	1h	1h	--	--
Grammar	1h	1h	1h	--
Composition	2h	2h	2h	2h
Vietnamese	3h	3h	3h	2h
Chinese	2h	2h	2h	2h
Ethics	1h	1h	--	--
History	--	--	1h	1h
Geography	1h	1h	1h	1h
Math	4h	4h	4h	3h
Physics	1h	1h	1h	1h
Chemistry	1h	1h	1h	1h
Natural History	1h	1h	1h	1h
Writing	1h	1h	--	--
Drawing/Art	2h	2h	2h	1h
Business	--	--	--	1h

Depending on their area of specialization, fourth-year students (10th grade) could take additional courses in business, agriculture, technology, drafting ('geometric drawing'), administration, and pedagogy. In broad terms, secondary schools continued the emphasis on French language skills found in primary schools. At a minimum, students who finished lower secondary school left with a commanding knowledge of the French language. While this opened the door to a sea of knowledge published in French, the content of the other courses better illustrates the nature of secondary school education. For example, in the first year Ethics was divided into individual, familial, and social components. Virtues such as loyalty, courage, work, and temperance were discussed, as were reciprocal family relations. Study of 'the society' was undertaken in the second year. 'Society' was divided into civilized and barbarous and defined with distinguishing characteristics such as security, freedom, individuality, and the ways knowledge was transmitted from one generation to the next. The ethics of the 'fatherland' was taught in the second-year as if to offset instruction in the concepts of justice and brotherhood, which preceded it. The Vietnamese and French fatherlands were compared and contrasted and the "benefits of the French occupation"[51] were examined. Curiously the very statement quoted above was footnoted within the document. The footnote read: "Domestic and foreign tranquility – Administrative honesty – Economic and intellectual development".[52]

The syllabi for the 9th and 10th grade history courses were equally intriguing. The 9th grade history course was entitled "Notions of Annamese History". It preceded chronologically from an introduction to the country and its people through Chinese domination, the Vietnamese dynasties of the first half of the second millennia, the Trịnh//Nguyễn divide, the Tây Sơn and the Nguyễn dynasty. The final two chapters (of twenty two) were dedicated to the French in Indochina. The 10th grade history course was entitled "General Notions of History". It was



Photograph 11. A secondary school class, mid 1930s.

basically a European history class with the exception of two chapters that focused on India and China. The text for this class was written by Cyrus Mus (father of Paul), the Director of the College of the Protectorate in the 1910s.[53] It spanned time from pre-history to the age of imperialism. Focus was placed on the foundations and greatness of European civilizations (especially French), but there were also chapters on England, Germany, the United States, Russia, and East Asia (China and Japan).[54]

Students were required to take geography all four years of lower secondary school. The first year concentrated on basic world-geographic concepts such as the dimensions, form, and movement of the earth and their implications on the day, night, and seasons, as well as the continents, the oceans, and the climate. These were then brought to bear through a study of the general geographic features of the students' known environment, that of Indochina. The geographic *cum* socio-economic study of Indochina continued in second-year geography. The five regions of the Union were separated and studied individually by way of introduction to the course and as justification for their administrative separation. They were subsequently reunited through the study of the Indochinese economy and the benefits the French had brought the Union, which they again felt the need to articulate in the report: "The results of the French occupation of Indochina: defense against foreign aggression, domestic peace, education, medical assistance, and infrastructural improvements (railroad, canals, cables), economic development."[55] Third-year geography was a world geography course. Asia (from the Middle East to Japan), Oceana, America, and Africa were all studied. An in-depth analysis of the geography of Europe was undertaken in the final year of lower secondary school. The first part of the course focused on Europe, sub-divided into five regions. In the second part students were treated to a study of French space and greatness.[56] Phạm Văn Vinh, a student at the College of Vinh in Nghệ An province (northern *Annam*), provided the following description of his geography courses: "... M. Trần Đình Chín gave many lectures on how to read a map in our geography classes... it was difficult for students from the countryside like us to imagine the basic conditions of the natural world and the lifestyles of peoples on the other side of the earth, of whom we had never seen a glimpse... Through M. Chin's lectures, we came to understand concepts like longitude and latitude. We learned about the continents, oceans and geographic features like mountains, rivers, deltas, and beaches... We also learned how things like climate

and flora and fauna influenced agriculture, industry, commerce, and human society and culture in different regions all over the world."[57]

Math was emphasized in all four years. Students studied arithmetic, the metric system, geometry, algebra, and trigonometry.[58] Physics was also taught all four years. In the first year, students learned of gravity, density and weight, the properties of liquids, gases, pneumatic machinery, and acoustics. They were also able to conduct experiments, such as demonstrations of Archimedes' principle. It seems the second year of physics was focused on theory and practice. "Simple experiments" were conducted with regards to temperature. Notions of heat and cold were examined along with their implications on physical properties. Electricity was the focus of the third year of instruction. Students learned both how man produced electricity and how it came about in the natural world. Finally, forth year students studied the properties of light. Within this course, students learned about microscopes, photography, and X-rays.[59] Chemistry, like physics, was included in all four years of lower secondary school. In the first year, simple concepts of chemistry were introduced. Students learned of the content of the air, the composition of water, and the possibilities of carbon. Metalloids and metals were the focus of second-year chemistry. The professor established the rules and principle laws of nomenclature. Special attention was given to phosphoric, sulfuric, and chloric acids and their affect on metals. Third-year chemistry began with a quick review of the second. Thereafter, study focused on the compounds, minerals, and their properties and uses. Finally, forth-year study concentrated on the composition of organic materials. Petroleum and acetylene were studied. Students learned of the process of distillation and what was needed to make alcohol. The processes of tanning and papermaking were also examined.[60]

This brief review of the content of lower secondary school curriculum illustrates why the adjectives 'scientific', 'western', 'liberal', and 'modern' are appropriate in describing the type of education available in the colony from the late 1910s. As with primary schools, secondary schools were required to supply the administration with time schedules. The classes at the College of the Protectorate in Hà Nội followed the prescribed schedule in a manner similar to Mme. Tuyền's third grade class at the girl's primary school. An average time schedule for grades 7-10 in 1925 was as follows[61]:

7th Grade

Monday: History, Drawing/Art, French, French, Physics

Tuesday: Vietnamese, Math, Drawing/Art, French, Geography

Wednesday: French, Natural Science, French, History

Thursday: Writing, Chinese, Math

Friday: Chemistry, French, Math, French, Geography

Saturday: Vietnamese, French composition, Math, Ethics

8th Grade

Monday: Chinese, French, French history, French, Math

Tuesday: French composition, Vietnamese, Math, Natural science

Wednesday: Math, Vietnamese history, French, French, Geography

Thursday: Drawing/Art, Physics

Friday: French, Vietnamese, Ethics, French, Writing

Saturday: French, Math, Geography, Chemistry, Drawing/Art

9th Grade

Monday: French, History, Math, Math, Vietnamese

Tuesday: French, Math, French, Natural science

Wednesday: French, Math, Geography, French composition

Thursday: Drawing/Art, Physics

Friday: Vietnamese, Math, French, French, Geography

Saturday: Chemistry, French, Ethics, Chinese

10th grade

Monday: French, Math, French, Physics, French

Tuesday: French composition, Math, Ethics, History

Wednesday: French, Math, Vietnamese, French, Math

Thursday: Drawing/Art, Chinese

Friday: Geography, Chemistry, French, History, Natural science

Saturday: Vietnamese, French, Math, Drawing/Art, Geography

The actual time schedules from the College of the Protectorate cited here broadly adhered to secondary school content as described in the *Franco-Việt Lower Secondary School Program*. The main discrepancy was that both ethics and history were taught in all four years (rather than two). Another somewhat surprising difference was the fact that Classical Chinese was not taught

exclusively on Thursday mornings, as stipulated in the school regulations of both the primary and secondary levels. Similarities between the theory described in the *Program* and actual practice at the College of the Protectorate, as well as Vietnamese narratives of the period lead one to conclude that the content of education described above did indeed mirror that provided in secondary schools in the colony.

Further evidence that this was the case can be gleaned from the physical and scholarly resources at the College of the Protectorate. As part of my research in the National Archives 1 in Hà Nội, I accessed the voluminous inventory books of the College from the mid 1920s. Like their much more modest primary school counterparts, they create an environment through which one can begin to perceive the past. At that time, the College had thirty-one classrooms (including an art room), an infirmary, a cafeteria, a gymnasium, and six dorm rooms.[62] Its resources were too numerous to recount in any kind of comprehensive manner. However, I will highlight some for the purpose of illustrating the kind of education available at such an institution. For use in scientific experiments, the College possessed pendulums, Newton and Mariotte tables, balances, thermometers and barometers, a steam engine piston, an electroscope, and various types of magnets. Wax sculptures of human anatomy were used to teach students, as were actual human bones.[63]

Two large inventory books were used to classify the College of the Protectorate's catalogue of books. The first, labeled "Classical Library", contained books used by students as texts. This can be inferred from the fact that the library held well over a hundred copies of each volume. History courses were taught via books like Gauthier and Dechamps' *Cours Superior et complementaire d'Histoire de France*, Maspero's *Histoire ancienne des peuples de l'Orient*, and Malet's *Histoire de France jusqu'a la Revolution* and *XVIII: Siecle de Revolution et Empire*. The library also contained geography books, such as Gallonedee and Maurette's *Geographie generale monde moins l'Europe* and *La France et les colonies*, and natural science books such as Faideau's *La nature en images: Plantes et fleurs, L'homme et le betes*, and *Le terre et l'eau*. Part of the copious amount of French studied at the College was studied via literature in 'reading' courses. Instruction books included *Le Cid* and *Horace* by Corneille, Racine's *Britannicus* and *Les Plaideurs*, and Moliere's *L'avare* and *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*.[64]

The inventory of the General Library was very extensive, running over fifty pages.[65] The library contained volumes on every imaginable subject, including: law, philosophy, psychology,

evolution, education, pedagogy, French, Vietnamese, English, Italian, German, World War One, the modern Western democracies, political economy, colonial life, football, theater, literature, history, literary criticism, history of literature, algebra, geometry, physics, chemistry, natural science, electricity, zoology, hygiene, geology, flora and fauna, forestry, agriculture, chemistry, art, books on individual nations and metropolitan examinations, collections of great writers and thinkers, religion, and ethics. The library also contained dictionaries and political, economic, and topographical maps of every region of the world. The most bewildering contents of the library were its volumes of literature. While predominately French, the works of other Western writers were also present. The library contained multiple volumes and often collections of works by Corneille, La Fontaine, Moliere, Hugo, Balzac, Sand, Zola, France, Loli, and Maupassant. French philosophers like Rousseau, Pascal, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Le Sage, and Daudet were well represented. Students were also able to access the work of Poe and Tolstoy, as well as those great commentators on colonialism and empire, Conrad and Kipling.

These inventories showed that the school in question was in a colony in only two ways. First, both the Classical and General Libraries contained French language books on Indochina and maps of the region (too many for general interest). Second, the inventory of the General Library contained a list of books in *quốc ngữ* running around two pages in length.[ix] There might also have been another way an astute scholar of empire could deduce that the College was not in the metropole. The school appeared too modern – it was *avant-garde* in the way only possible in a colony and often aspired to in the metropole (especially in the postcolonial era). The quality of the education received in schools like the College of the Protectorate became apparent in subsequent decades through the quality of the still peerless literature and public discourse that occurred in the colony.

School as Society

Colonial schools afforded students the opportunity to form close relationships with French men and women. Such relationships rendered the colonizer less remote, less

[ix] Note: This fact is less reflective of some desire to deprive Vietnamese students of texts in the Vietnamese language than it is reflective of the fact that in the mid 1920s there remained a dearth of books published in *quốc ngữ*.

intimidating, and more human. French teachers could be found in almost every public and most private secondary schools from the north to the south. Most Vietnamese avoided and even feared Westerners, about whom they had heard stories from childhood. The oral histories Vietnamese told of the foreign conquerors, in conjunction with what were thought to be irreconcilable differences, were at the root of those common perceptions. Indeed, as the famous writer, teacher, and communist revolutionary Đặng Thái Mai recalled: "When I was a kid, we were only scared of two things: ghosts and Frenchmen. I did not know what ghosts looked like, but Frenchmen were truly grotesque... They wore white hats, kaki shirts, and felt hobnailed boots, and road horses. They had reddish hair, callous eyes, pointy noses, and really white teeth. Their 'thick beards and sunken eyes' were the most frightening thing a boy from the countryside could encounter."[66] Franco-Việt schools in general and secondary schools in particular modified such perceptions. The secondary school experience by no means replaced negative images of foreigners with romantic notions of French cultural superiority. Rather, intimacy between Vietnamese students and French teachers humanized both the *Westerner* and the *indigene*. The fact that this process occurred in colonial space rendered possible a reciprocal dynamic, something impossible in the metropole. Images inherited from childhood of the French bogeyman began to be replaced with an appreciation of French humanity: kindness, understanding, and empathy existed beside hatred, ignorance, and malice. Proximity also reshaped Vietnamese resentment, an emotion present from the start of colonial conquest. Notions of equality and even of superiority *vis-à-vis* their colonial overlords began to germinate. These feelings were juxtaposed against the realities of colonial society. Constant small and large humiliations (born out of ignorance and fear) were now being inflicted on people who were becoming confident of *their own* equality to Europeans. Along with admiration and the realization that the foreign and the French were not a panacea grew resentment and hatred for the brutal hypocrisy that was intrinsic to French rule in Indochina.

Hoàng Ngọc Phách recalled a dearth of Vietnamese teachers when he began his secondary school studies at the College of the Protectorate in 1914. In the teens, few Vietnamese taught at the lower secondary schools because most lacked the kind of knowledge and pedagogy

necessary.[x] The other reason for lack of Vietnamese personnel was the fact that in 1914 the Franco-Việt education system had not yet come into existence. Part of the *raison d'être* of the system was teacher training (perpetuating Western knowledge and providing employment for the educated). Teachers were recruited from all levels of the education system. In this initial period, elementary school graduates often taught in elementary schools. Primary graduates in primary and elementary schools. Lower secondary degree holders taught in schools of that level or in primary schools, etc. In the years Hoàng Ngọc Phách studied at the College of the Protectorate, between 1914 and 1918, qualified Vietnamese teachers were either not yet available or employed elsewhere. Thus the College provided what was available: "... the teachers at the College included old decrepit Frenchmen unable to go to the Front and Frenchwomen who remained in Hà Nội while their husbands returned to Europe for the war. They thought it unnecessary to be a professional teacher to teach in a colony, that is, knowledge and experience were not required. They believed anyone could do the job at any time..."[67] According to Hoàng Ngọc Phách, the instructors at the College of the Protectorate in the mid and late teens were little qualified for their duties, despite their white skin and fluent French.

The non-professional teachers created bizarrely efficient classrooms in which one subject ran into the next. The old Frenchmen and husband-less wives who taught at the College were provided manuals for the subjects under their charge. A history text, opened in one hour could be closed the next *en lieu* of a book on geometry: "All of the male teachers came to class and read the lessons (read from a book would be more accurate) to the students. The only difference was whether they read the entire lesson or if they stopped half way through. This was the case for all subjects and all lessons. For example, in geometry they would read the letters of a triangle and then the equations..."[68] The French women were in a sense more proficient; their presence was scarcely required in the classroom. Rather, they bade the young men, many of whom were soon to be teachers themselves, to tend their duties while they themselves were occupied in more pressing pursuits: "... Those feather-haired Frenchwomen just needed to come to class, open a book, and read from it. The subject did not matter, even if it was math or science. Most of the time they could not even manage that. They often made students with good voices read the lessons from beginning to end. Meanwhile they would sit in their chairs and sew or stand at the

[x] Note: Vietnamese teachers during this period taught predominately the Vietnamese language (*quốc ngữ*) and Classical Chinese.

door talking to the teacher in the classroom next door..."[69] Following the recitation of text in class, students were required to memorize the lessons outside the classroom. The next period their memorization skills were quizzed.

At times, the European teachers were forced to interaction with their indigenous pupils. They did so with the same factory-like efficiency that was turning out model-T's in Detroit: "When a teacher wanted a student to read a passage or go to the blackboard he did not call his name, but referred to him by his student number. We thought this offensive; it lacked intimacy, like we were inmates in a prison. In any case, the student got up and went the teacher's desk. He read the memorized passage word for word exactly as it had been written in the book as he stood in front of the teacher, arms folded. Students also read the letters A, B, C if it was a geometry problem and the solutions to mathematical equations."[70] The cold intimacy of memorization and numbers made sense. Students like Hoàng Ngọc Phách had endured years of study by the time they reached the College. They were able to distinguish between individuals who were qualified to provide instruction from those whose only qualifications were white skin and fluent French. This posed a problem in the colonial school. Two dynamics were at work. The first, common to all schools, was that a teacher's manifest incompetence could destroy student respect. Second was the fact that the teachers, being French, were supposed to exude an inherent superiority – knowledge, professionalism, and ability – over their Vietnamese charges. But the fact that they were ignorant both of basic pedagogy and of the new, French knowledge propagated in the classroom bred a contempt among students that was intensified by the dehumanization inherent in the penal number system described above. They pretended that incapacity and ignorance were immaterial because all that mattered was skin color, fluent French, and national origin. The alternative to using numbers was unthinkable in such circumstances: constant mispronunciation of student's names, giving rise to laughter each time they made an attempt, thus further undermining their authority.

Rather than demonstrate inherent superiority, referring to students by number further denuded French teachers. Like most students during the interwar years, his time at the College represented the first real interaction Hoàng Ngọc Phách had with foreigners. This experience ripped the mask of superiority from the colonizer in a way that must have been fairly painful for young men at the College in the second decade of the century. They responded in distinctly Vietnamese ways, such as the practice of nick-naming, which can be as lovingly intimate as it

can be playfully scornful: "We named the teacher we regarded the most, M. Duvigneau, Mr. Pumpkin-head because his bald head resembled a pumpkin. Anyone who saw him had to laugh because the nickname was so appropriate... Next was M. Roudet. He was sort of hunch-backed and moved slowly. He always got to class at least ten minutes after everyone else and then accused students of being lazy, so we named him 'the Turtle'. Everyone knew the names 'Mr. Turtle' and 'Mr. Pumpkin-head' both inside and outside of the school. Their popularity 'immortalized' them."[71] Nicknames like 'Mr. Pumpkin-head' and 'Mr. Turtle' expressed a subtle form of Vietnamese power and translated into local idiom students' experience at the College of the Protectorate and close proximity to the French; something understood within and without the walls of the College. The Vietnamese pronoun Hoàng Ngọc Phách used for those teachers, *cụ*, is one of distant reverence connoting respect for both men and women of great position and/or age. The act of giving those teachers nicknames sabotaged their prestige and position in a way they were surely ignorant. Nicknames removed foreign teachers from their pedestal by rendering them the objects of humor and derision.

The female teachers of the College were not immune from this process of devaluation and humiliation, even those who were young and attractive: "... One of the female French teachers was older, her name was Mme. Caroulle... she was in the habit of singing, but when she did so her voice would tremble and quiver so we gave her the name 'the old shaker'. Another woman who taught French literature was young and beautiful, but she was also very playful and loose. Her husband's name was Manderon, so we called her 'little mother Mang'.[xi] Later, we dropped the 'little' and just called her 'mother Mang', which was also a very popular nickname."[72] The young Mme. Manderon undoubtedly opened herself up to greater gossip and teasing at the hands of her young male students due to an illicit liaison she apparently conducted with the Director of the College, Cyrus Mus. Despite the Director's position and power over the student body, the young men did not hesitate to dub him with a sexualized moniker: "... The Director of the College was an old Westerner named Mus. He had a thick beard, a potbelly, and the dignified gait of a colonial official... He was having an affair with 'mother Mang', the wife of the school manager. Every student knew about the affair and felt that we should give him the nickname 'Mus the old goat' or 'Director goat' because Mus had the beard and character of a

[xi] Note: In Vietnamese, Mme. Caroulle's name is pronounced *Ca-run*. The nickname she was given, *"Cả run"*, was thus also a play on the Vietnamese pronunciation of her French name. In Vietnamese, Mme. Manderon's surname is pronounced *Măng-đơ-rông*. The nickname she was given, *"mẹ Măng non"* was a sexualized play on her last name.

goat..."[73] The nicknamed earned by Mus, one that remains popular, is used to identify and shame an older man with an eye for younger women. The soap opera acted out within the walls of the College in the late teens played out before the eyes (and ears) of the young men, especially those who boarded at the school. One night while the boys were asleep, Mus burst in, red-faced, breathing heavily in an undershirt and barely fastened trousers, seeking refuge in the dormitory. The Director was just caught with his pants down attending to Mme. Manderon by the woman's husband (and Mus' employee and colleague). Mus exited through the dormitory window.[74]

From the early and mid 1920s a metropolitan seriousness began to take hold in colonial schools. European teachers, who had previously barely condescended to read lessons straight from the book, began to perceive the inherent intellectual capacity of their students. M. Foulon, one of Nguyễn Hiến Lê's favorite teachers during his four years at the College of the Protectorate, was emblematic of the evolution of instruction in the colony: "M. Foulon... taught ethics... and philosophy (or French literature)... He prodded students to try their best by using material that was of a higher level than the standard curriculum... M. Foulon did not use a book when lecturing. He just spoke off the top of his head on this topic or that for almost the entire hour. We sat there listening and taking notes. When we got home we re-wrote the lecture notes; they often ran a page and a half of the large 23 x 33 cm paper. The following period M. Foulon checked a few students' papers. If there were mistakes, he asked us to fix them... Almost every week we had to do an additional assignment, so we learned a lot about French literature very quickly. I liked that way of studying, it really produced results."[75] Through interaction with his Vietnamese students, M. Foulon discovered they were not too distinct from their metropolitan counterparts. M. Foulon's methodology reflected his belief in the inherent ability of those students. It also demonstrated the respectful and even caring relationship that had developed: "When he was about to return to France for a six month vacation, M. Foulon came to school to bid us farewell. When he noticed that I had not yet arrived, he told my friends to make sure to give me his regards and apologies that he could not wait for me because he had a lot of work to do before his departure."[76]

Relations between the colonized and the colonizer were not invariably distant and subject to European control. The product of Franco-Việt relations in colonial schools was a greater sense of shared humanity between the colonizer and the colonized, a sensibility that grew with

time. The nature of most personal cross-cultural interactions at colonial schools was positive. Đinh Văn Tương, a student at the College of Vinh from 1920 to 1925, recalled the kindness of the school's first director: "... M. Surrugue often looked after the health of the students. He would make surprise inspections of the cantina and give the cook advise. Before the graduation exams, he took students to the beach at Cửa Lò to relax for three days. While there we ate seafood and M. Surrugue explained the health benefits of the sea and the sea breeze."[77] Positive interactions like this were common. Indeed, despite the decades of war that had passed in the interim, Vũ Đình Cán, another student at the College in the mid 1920s, fondly remembered the school's second director: "Of course the Director was a Frenchman, M. Le Breton. My classmates and I hold a good impression of him to this day because he had the bearing of an intellectual and scholar – he even wrote a book about Việt Nam..."[78] Through such experiences, the trepidation with which an entire generation of youth perceived the French prior to their entry into the colonial school began to vanish. Cross-cultural interactions also blurred the distinction between the colonized and the colonizer, creating a sense of equality only possible on colonial soil, as Đặng Thái Mai recalled: "All our teachers, French and Vietnamese alike, esteemed us as bright and serious students."[79]

From the early 1920s young Vietnamese who received a Western education in the colony increasingly staffed colonial schools. Interaction with their Western-educated Vietnamese brethren impacted students in ways no less significant than their relations with foreign teachers. Indeed, Vietnamese teachers often acted as role models for their students. They also taught an entire generation to consider their language and cultural heritage with appreciation and pride. Both these dynamics, unique to schools in the colony, had tremendous impact on late colonial and postcolonial Vietnamese society. One such teacher, lauded repeatedly by his former students, was a man by the name of Lê Thước. After graduating from the *Quốc Học* in Huế and from the School of Pedagogy in Hà Nội, Lê Thước began teaching at the College of Vinh in the early 1920s.[xii] He taught French and Vietnamese literature as well as history.[80] Of the many who credited him with influencing their lives and thought, perhaps the most significant comments were made by Đặng Thái Mai, who entered the College in fear of Westerners and ghosts: "... M.

[xii] Note: Initially, the University of Indochina contained the following seven Schools: School of Medicine, School of Veterinary Studies, School of Public Works, School of Pedagogy, School of Law, School of Agriculture, and School of Commerce. Some of these schools remained throughout the colonial period, others were terminated, still others were added.

Lê Thước was the first teacher to heavily influence an entire generation of students from the Nghệ Tĩnh region... He did not just teach the intellectual basics of the school curriculum. The thing we learned from him was to take pride in ourselves as Vietnamese. In M. Lê Thước we saw a Vietnamese person who was not afraid of French men or women, no matter if they be officials or dignitaries. On the days when there was a large festival at the school or when a French official or Resident visited, the faces of the old Vietnamese officials went white; they were unable to utter a word in front of those 'high mandarins'. M. Lê, on the other hand, was always calm, cool, and collected. He responded to any questions clearly and logically without a hint of awkwardness."[81]

The sense of pride in the Vietnamese language and culture engendered by Western educated Vietnamese teachers in colonial schools was of equal importance to such demonstrations of parity. Nguyễn Vân Mùi, also a graduate of the School of Pedagogy in Hà Nội, taught French language and literature at the College of Vinh during the 1930s. Students at the College affectionately referred to him as "Confucius-Mùi", because his graduate thesis at the School was on Confucius. Though M. Mùi instructed students in the French language, they recalled him creating in them a sense of value for their mother tongue. The journalist and writer Bùi Hiển explained how M. Mùi used French language courses to accomplish such a feet: "M. Mùi also taught us translation; taking French sentences and translating them into Vietnamese sentences. He taught us to recognize that Vietnamese had beauty and nuance, just like French."[82] Bùi Trương Chính, a contemporary of Bùi Hiển at the College, echoed those sentiments, commenting that M. Mùi was the first person to show him that the Vietnamese language was not lesser than the French language.[83]

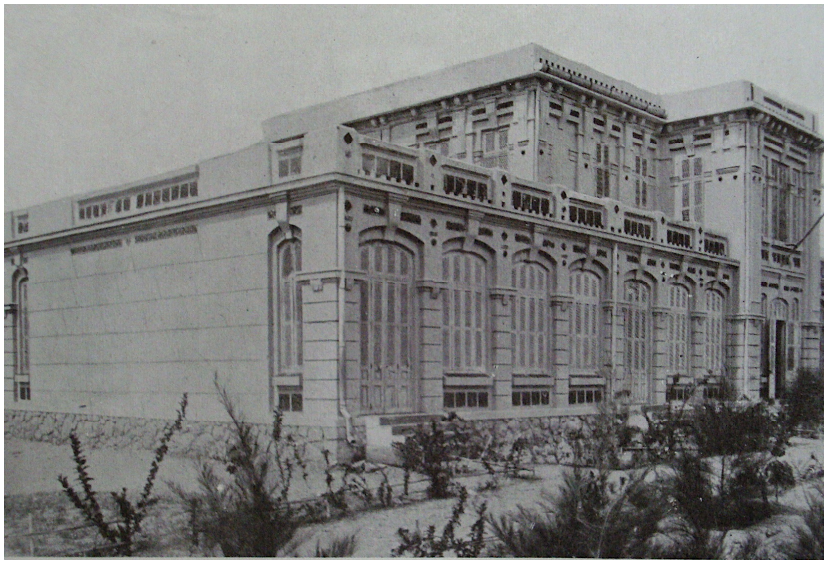
Vietnamese teachers at colonial schools also introduced students to a cultural heritage from which they were linguistically distant due to the fact that they studied in *quốc ngữ* and French, rather than Classical Chinese. *Quốc ngữ* became the medium through which the generation of students during the interwar period became acquainted with the cultural treasures of the past, composed in Classical Chinese and *Nôm* (this is equally true of each subsequent generation of Vietnamese students to the present). While Vietnamese language (*quốc ngữ*) courses composed only a small portion of curriculum from the lower secondary level, their impact was profound and far-reaching. At the *Quốc học* in Huế, Lê Xuân Phương introduced students to the laments *Cung oán ngâm khúc* and *Chinh phụ ngâm*. Originally composed in

Classical Chinese and *Nôm*, M. Phương spent hours carefully explaining the verse to his students via *quốc ngữ* translation.[84] Likewise, Phạm Thiều exhaustively explained the *Nôm* epic, the *Tale of Kiều*, to students at Trương Vĩnh Ký College in Sài Gòn. As one of his students during the 1930s recalled: "He... always stood on the dais and lectured passionately, as if he were giving an address. It was very captivating. M. Phạm Thiều had a foundation of classical studies before he began Western studies. He explained the classical method of study and the Imperial examination system to us. We really enjoyed his stories of how candidates went to the exam sites and his explanations of the differences between the provincial, metropolitan, and palace examinations. It was because of M. Phạm Thiều that we understood the *Tale of Kiều*, including important elements of Nguyễn Du's literary style and perspectives on the concepts of piety and chastity. He also taught us aspects of the great poet's philosophical thought, such as the idea that one can be rich in some things and poor in others and the law of karma according to Buddhism..."[85] The very essence of such experiences, whose profound impact on late colonial and postcolonial Vietnamese society can be felt to the present, were only possible in schools in the colony.

There was ample room for improvisation and embellishment in the colony's primary and secondary schools. Indeed, Huy Cận recalled a young teacher at his primary school supplementing lessons with resources from outside the classroom: "M. Tiên... was from Quảng Ngãi province. He studied at the Pellerin Catholic School in Huế and had just earned his lower secondary school degree in the summer of 1928 when he was appointed to my primary school... He would often ask us our opinions about the books we read both in and out of school... He set aside a few periods for us to talk about the things we were reading outside of school each month..."[86] Similar pedagogy was used during Huy Cận's years at the *Quốc Học* in Huế: "M. Phương taught Vietnamese history. He told use to follow the curriculum by reading Maybon's book, but his lectures extended far beyond the bounds of the official curriculum into ideas of patriotism and ethnic pride. On the days before the breaks for *Tết* and summer vacation, when we had finished the course's program, ... he told us to shut the classroom door and spoke to us of our collective past..."[87] Despite the impressive bureaucracy created to manage and police the Franco-Việt education system, such deviations were the norm rather than the exception. Not only did it prove impossible to curtail the intermittent propagation of unauthorized material in the colony's primary and secondary schools, the content of the approved curriculum was itself

liberal and ripe for interpretation. One common example was Alphonse Daudet's *The Final Lesson*, the story of an aging teacher in Alsace-Loraine giving his pupils their final lesson in the French language, following the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 and German usurpation of the region. Đặng Thái Mai recalled that while Lê Thước presented the story in a simple, straightforward manner, his students at the College of Vinh still grasped its profound meaning for their lives.[88]

Political awakening did not necessitate travel to the metropole or clandestine activity in the colony itself during the interwar period. Rather, most acquired political consciousness within the walls of the colonial school. The revolutionary writer and scholar Đào Duy Anh illustrated this fact as he reflected on his experience at the *Quốc Học* in Huế: "I became enamored of the French Revolution through the French literature and history curriculum I was able to study at school. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen seemed to me to mark the pinnacle of human progress. Likewise, I thought French philosophers like Rousseau, Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Diderot demonstrated humanity's highest intellectual achievement."[89] Similar impact, particularly regarding literature and history courses was common to schools in the North, the Center, and the South. For example, Vũ Đình Hoè mentioned a favorite teacher at the College of the Protectorate just outside of Hà Nội: "... there was one teacher who taught us about the history of the French Revolution in a very colorful manner: M. Vaillande. He told us the story of Danton... that he would rather ascend the scaffold than run like a dog..."[90] Tôn Thất Vỹ had an analogous experience to the south at the College of Vinh: "... M. Trần Đình Dàn created a love for history in his students. He taught us about the French Revolution, which we super-imposed on our own society... Though none of us knew his head from his ass, we all dreamt of becoming a Danton or a Robespierre and eloquently



Photograph 12. College de Qui Nhon, c. 1925

encouraging the masses to throw off the shackles of repression..."[91] Still further south, Nguyễn Vỹ illustrated the transfer of that passion at the College of Qui Nhơn: "...Our history teacher, M. Mariani, was the best. Each time he lectured about French history we were enamored… He would rush into class as if he was about to give an impassioned speech against colonial policy. He then opened the course book, read five or ten lines from it, and threw it to the ground. He spoke in uproarious crescendos as he pounded his fists on the desk and kicked his chair from under him. On his feet, he rolled up his shirt sleeves, his jowls swelled, his eyes popped, his face reddened, and he spoke, he spoke... 'The people are king! The people are God! Yes, that is right! The people are everything! The people are the supreme rulers of the country! Whoever commands the people exploits the people, think about it!..."[92] The effect this form of translation had on the colony's pupils was profound in both depth and immediacy: "As I sat there listening to the spectacle my jaw dropped. It was like drinking cool water on a hot day. The strong, vehement words of the history teacher were intoxicating. At the end of the period he was still rambling. He exclaimed: 'revolution is an uprising, a rebellion of the weak against the cruel. The weak always triumph! Justice always triumphs! Liberty always triumphs! The oppressors and persecutors will crumble... under the weight of history!...' When he finished he stood up, put his briefcase under his arm and went out the door... I wanted to run after him, hold on to his leg, and kiss his hand..."[93] While teachers like M. Vaillande at the College of the Protectorate, Trần Đình Dàn at the College of Vinh, and M. Mariani at the College of Qui Nhơn might have been unique, the fact that the ideals of French liberalism were an integral part of official curricula in every school, North, Center, and South is beyond dispute.

It was through such interactions at the colony's schools that an entire generation became acquainted with both the humanity and hypocrisy of their colonial overlords. Rhetoric like that cited above speaks to the inherent contradiction of the French Empire, from whose crucible and humiliation the Third Republic was born, a fact that certainly did not escape the young men who absorbed that narrative. It was clear as day to those young people that the great values they were taught in school were not applied in the colony and that the reality of those ideals was withheld from those required to memorize their worth. The journey from interested absorption of foreign concepts in the classroom to independent critical investigation was short. Indeed, Đặng Thái Mai recalled that it was his introduction to Marxism at the School of Pedagogy in Hà Nội that sparked his interest in the doctrine: "Our history teacher was a member of the (French) Socialist

Party. The content of his course was clearly influenced by Marxist thought. M. Houlie, our philosophy teacher, graduated from the University of Pedagogy in Paris. He had taught and researched Western thought for many years... We found it a bit strange that his courses on ethics incorporated many Marxist ideas. His curriculum also drew many conclusions that were hostile to the capitalist system and conservative thought... A few of M. Houlie's comments gave me pause and made me want to understand more about Marxism."[94] While such interactions in colonial schools are less dramatic than the tales of French repression and illicit Vietnamese discovery with which Vietnamese historiography has been saturated, they were in fact the experience of most of those educated during the interwar period. The prosaic nature of such encounters belies their significance as one of the most important phenomenon of the late colonial period.

The education received and experience garnered by the young generation of the 1920s and 1930s provided them with a love of French literature, history, and the French language. Their ability to think in a Westernized manner, intimate relations with French men and women, and appreciation for their own language and culture engendered by Vietnamese teachers, convinced them of their equality. The contradiction at the center of their lives was the fact that their own self-image did not match the reality of the society in which they found themselves: Despite their education and positive self-image, they endured the continuation of painful and persistent humiliation. Such degradation was possible even in the colonial school, where it lived beside the kindness and humanity cited above, as it did in society at large. Nguyễn Vỹ illustrated such an episode at the College of Qui Nhơn. A student was eviscerated in front of his classmates after being unable to respond to the teacher's question regarding an assignment he was supposed to have completed: "… I sat down quietly. M. Gabriel looked at me and then started yelling: 'You're a freaking idiot! *Imbecile! Cretin, va*!... Sit down and shut your mouth you stupid savage! All you *Annamese* are ignorant savages. What a stupid and dirty race!'"[95] While the cruelty of such words speaks for itself, in the Vietnamese context it was especially penetrating. Calling someone 'stupid' (*ngu*) in Vietnamese is among the worst insults one can hurl, because it goes to the heart of the Vietnamese self-image as a people of letters (despite the fact that before and during this period the vast majority were either uneducated or illiterate). Shaming someone as 'stupid' is closely related to calling someone 'uneducated' (*vô học*), again a gross violation of

not only individual, but of collective self-image. The term 'savage' (*mọi*) carries similar weight. The Vietnamese conceived themselves as part of one of the great traditions of world knowledge; classical studies based on Sinic learning and Confucianism. This fact, largely a legacy of the Nguyễn dynasty (whose rule from the Imperial capital of Huế began in 1802 and from the 1880s ran concurrent to French colonialism) and perceptions of Vietnamese identity fabricated during the colonial period itself, was a distinction of superiority the Vietnamese enjoyed *vis-à-vis* the proximate 'others' who populated the eastern part of the Indochinese peninsula – the ethnic groups of the highland regions (North, Center, and South), the Cham, and the Khmer. This distinction of letters and ties to the Great Civilization of classical China rendered the Vietnamese self-consciously 'civilized'. The image of 'Vietnamese' (that is, the *Kinh* ethnic group) as civilized was directly juxtaposed against those proximate others, especially the highland peoples.[xiii] The feelings of inadequacy engendered by the French conquest and by subsequent proselytization of French and Western civilization as inherently superior to and visibly more technologically advanced than Vietnamese civilization opened a festering wound in the collective psyche of the *Kinh*. This was only assuaged by thoughts of classical Vietnamese civilization, by its connection to Chinese civilization (which even the French admitted was impressive), and by the juxtaposition with their proximate, 'savage' others. Referring to a Vietnamese as a 'savage' destroyed the effects of this balm, leaving only the pain and humiliation of the wound. The psychological impacts of the use of a term like 'savage' cannot be underestimated. So much did this engender hatred and resentment that its sting is still felt today.

Such injustices illustrated the political tension inherent in 'liberal empire' and undermined the kindness and humanity of some Frenchmen, which was of course part of that same colonial reality: "In school, many French teachers engendered in me a love of French literature, thought, philosophy, and science. I was addicted to reading French novels. I passionately devoured French poetry... drama, surrealism, and romance... I absorbed scientific and medical theories... I cannot even begin to recall how many famous people I encountered in our schoolbooks. I loved studying and talking about them so! However, that love and admiration for an entire nation and its heroes was easily eclipsed by only a few Westerners ..."[96]

[xiii] Note: This view was pervasive throughout the late colonial period and continues in an analogous form to the present. See VTV 4, the 'ethnic-minority' television channel in Việt Nam, for example.

This generation had a complex, and seemingly contradictory, relation with 'French'. The hatred and resentment felt toward the French existed side by side and indeed within love and admiration: "You would think that hating the French also made us hate the French language or that as lovers of French literature we would also be close to Frenchmen. That was not the case... the vast majority of my generation liked studying French and speaking in French, but we also hated the French and deeply resented them for the way they treated us. That feeling was common to all my generation, to men like Nguyễn Thái Học, Đặng Thái Mai, and Võ Nguyên Giáp..."[97] The young generation students during the interwar period was systematically taught the virtues and superiority of the French and the Western from the time they began their formal studies. As was explained in Chapter 1, Vietnamese society was a visual canvass of that prestige and prowess. The love they felt for French language, literature, and history was the fruit of the concerted effort made by the colonial power to sow the seeds of awe and a strong sense of inferiority in the colonized heart (as well as a sense of pride in their own distant association with such a great power and civilization). Such feelings of admiration were genuine; there was no cheating.

[1] See for example Phan Khôi. "Tôi thất vọng về ông Nguyễn Tiến Lãng" in *Đông tây,* sô 160 (6 Avril 1932) và 161 (9 Avril 1932).
[2] See Hoàng Ngọc Phách. "Chuyện trường Bưởi, khoa 1914-1918" in *Tuyển tập Hoàng Ngọc Phách*, p. 157.
[3] ibid.
[4] Vũ Đình Hòe. *Vũ Đình Hòe, Thuở lập thân*, p. 134-135.
[5] Nguyễn Hiến Lê. *Hồi kí Nguyễn Hiến Lê*, p. 41.
[6] Huy Cận. *Hồi ký song đôi: Tình bạn trong sáng*, p. 116-117.
[7] ibid. p. 153.
[8] Anh Thơ. *Từ bến sông Thương*, p. 12.
[9] ibid. p. 12-13.
[10] ibid.
[11] ibid.
[12] Nguyễn Công Hoan. *Đời viết văn của tôi*, p. 35.
[13] ibid.
[14] ibid.
[15] Hoàng Ngọc Phách. "Chuyện Trường Bưởi (Khóa 1914-1918)" in *Tuyển tập Hoàng Ngọc Phách*, p. 149.
[16] ibid.
[17] ibid.
[18] ibid. p. 152.
[19] ibid.
[20] ibid. p. 153-154.
[21] ibid.
[22] ibid.
[23] Nguyễn Hiến Lê. *Hồi kí Nguyễn Hiến Lê*, p. 66.
[24] ibid.
[25] ibid. p. 67.
[26] Huy Cận. *Hồi ký song đôi: Tình bạn trong sáng*, p. 211.
[27] ibid. p. 258.
[28] ibid. p. 259.
[29] ibid.
[30] ibid.
[31] Nguyễn Công Hoan. *Đời viết văn của tôi*, p. 33-34.
[32] ibid. p. 33.
[33] ibid. p. 34.
[34] See ibid. p. 16-22.
[35] ibid. p. 45-46.
[36] ibid. p. 46.
[37] Huy Cận. *Hồi ký song đôi: Tình bạn trong sáng,* p. 207.
[38] ibid. p. 207-208.
[39] ibid. p. 208.
[40] ibid. p. 209.
[41] ibid. p. 209.
[42] ibid. p. 258.
[43] ibid.
[44] ibid.
[45] *Reglement Scolaire - Ecoles Primaires Franco-Indigenes du Tonkin, 3/10/1924* and *25/2/1927*. In (TTLTQG-I) SET 115, *Ecoles primaires franco-indigenes etablissements scolaires du 1er degre du Tonkin 1913-1924.*
[46] See Marr, David. *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945*. Marr devotes an entire chapter to the importance of morality and morality texts.
[47] (TTLTQG-I) SET 104, *Emploi du temps des professeurs de l'Institution de jeunes filles annamites a Hanoi*, 1924-1925.
[48] This was stipulated in the Arrete of 23 December 1912 (Article 15).
[49] *Inventaire du moblier en service a l'Ecole des filles annamites de Bac Ninh, 1924* in SET 732.

[50] *Programme de l'Enseignement complementaire franco-indigene*. In (TTLTQG-I) RST 7340, *Fonctionnement du College du Protectorat du Tonkin, 1917-1932*.
[51] ibid. p. 4.
[52] ibid.
[53] See (TTLTQG-I) RST 74190. Mus' text was called *Notions d'Histoire Generale*. He completed it in 1913.
[54] *Programme de l'Enseignement complementaire franco-indigene,* p. 5-7.
[55] ibid. p. 8-9.
[56] ibid. p. 7-12.
[57] Phạm VănVinh. "Rèn luyện khả năng tự học". In *70 năm Quốc học Vinh Huỳnh Thúc Kháng, 1920-1990*, p. 66.
[58] *Programme de l'Enseignement complementaire franco-indigene,* p. 12-17.
[59] ibid. p. 17-20.
[60] ibid. p. 20-22.
[61] See *College du Protectorat, Emploi du Temps, 1925*. In (TTLTQG-I) SET 211, *Tableau de Service des Professeurs Francaises et Indigenes*.
[62] See *Inventaire de materiel en service au College du Protectorat a Hanoi a la date du 31 Decembre 1924*. In (TTLTQG-I) SET 754, *Inventaires du Mobilier en Service, 1924*.
[63] See *Inventaire du materiel scientifique en service au College du Protectorat a Hanoi a la date du 31 Decembre 1924* in SET 754.
[64] See *Inventaire des livres en service a la bibliotheque classique du College du Protectorat a Hanoi a la date du 31 Decembre 1924* in SET 754.
[65] See *Inventaire des livres en service a la bibliotheque generale du College du Protectorat a Hanoi a la date du 31 Decembre 1924* in SET 754.
[66] Đặng Thái Mai. *Hồi ký (Thời kỳ thanh thiếu niên),* p. 225.
[67] Hoàng Ngọc Phách. "Chuyện Trường Bưởi (Khóa 1914-1918)", p. 138.
[68] ibid.
[69] ibid. p. 137.
[70] ibid. p. 138.
[71] ibid. p. 138-139.
[72] ibid. p. 139.
[73] ibid. p. 141.
[74] See ibid. p. 162-164.
[75] Nguyễn Hiến Lê. *Hồi kí Nguyễn Hiến Lê*, p. 65.
[76] ibid. p. 65-66.
[77] Đinh Văn Tương. "Khóa học mở đầu". In *70 năm Quốc học Vinh Huỳnh Thúc Kháng, 1920-1990*, p. 9
[78] Vũ Đình Cán. "Nhập môn trường Nghệ". In *70 năm Quốc học Vinh Huỳnh Thúc Kháng, 1920-1990*, p. 27.
[79] Đặng Thái Mai. *Hồi ký*, p. 346.
[80] Nguyễn Xiển. "Tưởng nhớ thầy Lê Thước". In *70 năm Quốc học Vinh Huỳnh Thúc Kháng, 1920-1990*, p. 14.
[81] Đặng Thái Mai. *Hồi ký*, p. 249-250.
[82] Bùi Hiển. "Câu chuyện học văn". In *70 năm Quốc học Vinh Huỳnh Thúc Kháng, 1920-1990*, p. 59-60.
[83] Bùi Trương Chính. "Bài học vỡ lòng về văn chương". In *70 năm Quốc học Vinh Huỳnh Thúc Kháng, 1920-1990*, p. 52.
[84] Huy Cận. *Hồi ký song đôi: Tình bạn trong sáng*, p. 217.
[85] Trần Văn Khê. *Hồi ký (Quyển 1)*, p. 54.
[86] Huy Cận. *Hồi ký song đôi: Tình bạn trong sáng,* p. 154-155.
[87] ibid. p. 218.
[88] See Đặng Thái Mai. *Hồi ký*, p. 254.
[89] Đào Duy Anh. *Hồi ký Đào Duy Anh (nhớ nghĩ chiều hôm)*, p. 26.
[90] Vũ Đình Hòe. *Vũ Đình Hòe, Thuở lập thân*, p. 142-143.
[91] Tôn Thất Vỹ. "Nhớ mái trường xưa, nhớ thầy, bạn cũ". In *70 năm Quốc học Vinh Huỳnh Thúc Kháng, 1920-1990*, p. 34-35.
[92] Nguyễn Vỹ. *Tuấn, Chàng trai nước Việt: Chứng tích thời đại đầu thế kỷ XX*, p. 274.
[93] ibid. p. 274-275.
[94] Đặng Thái Mai. *Hồi ký*, p. 285- 286.
[95] Nguyễn Vỹ. *Tuấn, Chàng trai nước Việt: Chứng tích thời đại đầu thế kỷ XX*, p. 276.

[96] ibid. p. 311.
[97] ibid. p. 511.