

**Emulation, Differentiation, and Syncretization in Colonial Vietnam's
Development of National Written Language, National Literature,
and National Learning, 1900-1945**

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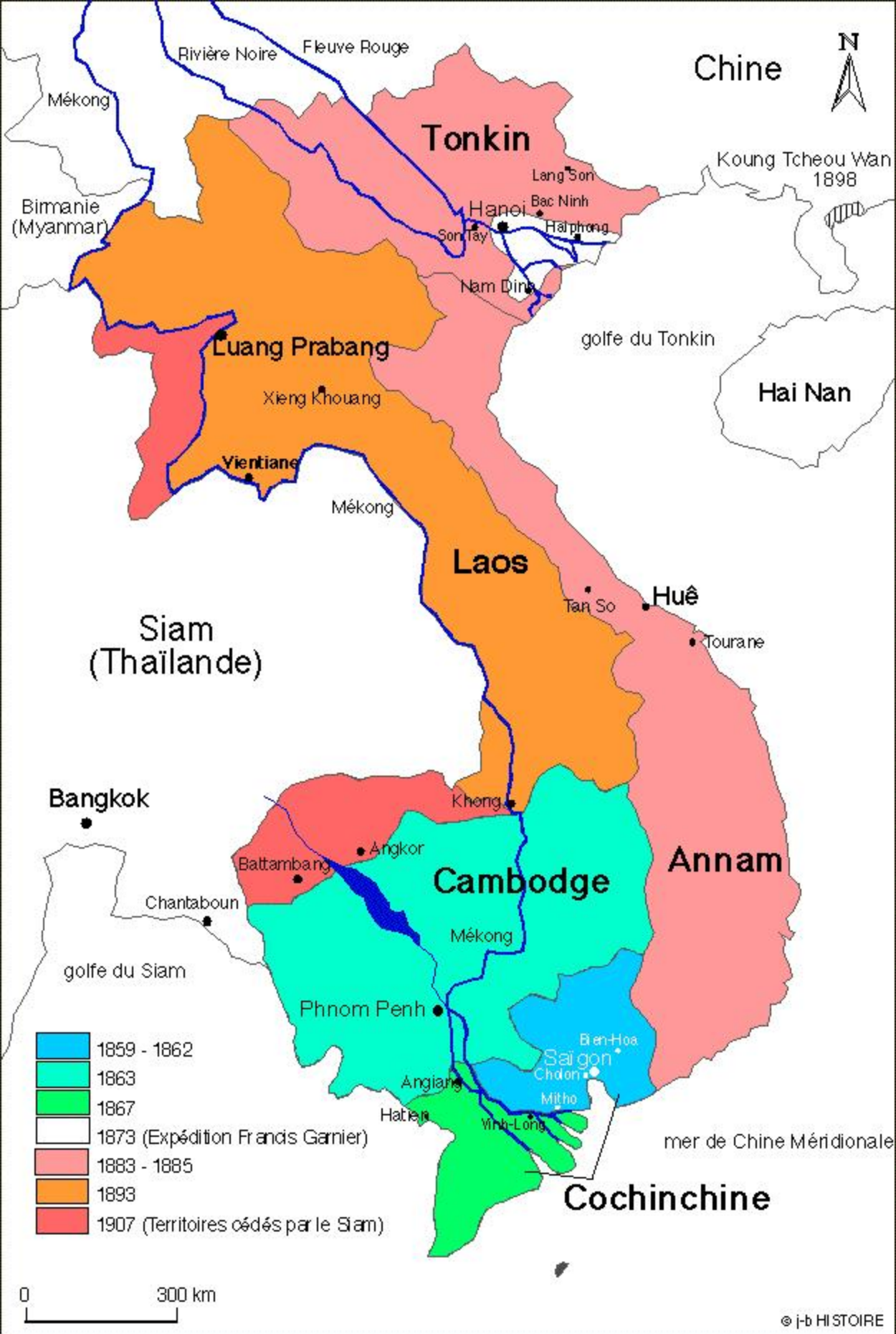


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Abstract

This dissertation attempts to answer the following question: how does a latecomer society that is profoundly influenced by a cultural hegemon transform into a nation? It argues that emulation of, differentiation from, and syncretization of cultural elements from different models are three important mechanisms in latecomer societies' nation-formation process. It traces colonial Vietnam's development of national written language, national literature, and national learning as a result of Vietnamese intellectuals' effort to create a "marker" for a distinctive and *văn minh*/civilized Vietnamese nation by emulating, differentiating, and syncretizing cultural elements of the old Chinese and the new French cultural models. Amid Vietnamese intellectuals' endeavor arose the cultural fields that included the vernacular literature field, the journalistic field, and the academic field. The cultural fields struggled for independence from the colonial state and the market economy that was brought to Vietnam by the colonial state. Intellectuals' position within the fields was determined by their contribution to Vietnam's progress toward *văn minh*/civilization.

Intellectuals' goals with regard to and understandings of the nation shifted, as did their perceptions of and relationships with the French and Chinese cultural models. Early in the colonial period, priority was placed on establishing Vietnam as a civilized nation, and the question of its uniqueness received less attention. Intellectuals sought to familiarize themselves with the French cultural model, using it to critically appraise the Chinese model and eliminate any elements that had rendered pre-colonial Vietnam uncivilized. Yet, the Chinese model continued to provide vocabulary about modernization, a frame of reference for understanding the Asian experience of emulating the Western model, and popular literature for the growing reading public. Gradually, the quest for uniqueness grew stronger after several decades of emulation, and Vietnamese intellectuals began to re-examine their past attitudes toward the two models. The French model retained its lofty aura, yet some intellectuals developed a critical eye toward it and began to emulate elements of it, using it, paradoxically, to resist it. Meanwhile, other intellectuals launched an iconoclastic assault on the Chinese model, even as it remained a key resource for Vietnamese intellectuals to claim distinctiveness *vis-à-vis* the French model.

Chapter One

Introduction

Vietnamese potters learned techniques and borrowed shapes and decorative motifs from China, but they did not slavishly follow the Chinese models... Vietnam owes huge cultural debts to China even as it has maintained a fierce independence from its powerful neighbor... Despite the innumerable cultural elements that Vietnam shares with China, it is the differences between the cultures that are constantly emphasized.

—John Stevenson, “Ceramics as National Identity”¹

While much of Asia celebrates the Year of the Rabbit, Vietnam is striking a note of independence from the dominance of Chinese culture and marking the beginning of the Year of the Cat.

— “How the Chinese rabbit became a cat in Vietnam”²

Throughout its history, Vietnam has been heavily impacted by the Chinese musical tradition, as an integral part, along with Korea, Mongolia and Japan. The ancient Indochinese kingdom of Champa also had an historical effect upon this music, because the Vietnamese court found it intriguing. However, even with these foreign influences, Vietnam has a unique musical tradition stemming from its native roots.

—Music of Vietnam, Wikipedia³

¹ The Elephant and the Lotus: Vietnamese Ceramics in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 2007.

² Agence France-Presse, =2011 <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/breakingnews/world/view/20110203-318234/How-the-Chinese-rabbit-became-a-cat-in-Vietnam>, accessed on March 11th, 2011.

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music_of_Vietnam, accessed on March 11th, 2011.

1. “We Vietnamese Are Inferior to None”: Vietnam in Search of National Identity

When I first visited Vietnam—one of the few remaining Communist countries in the world—in August 2006, I was greeted by suffocating tropical heat and thick humidity in Hanoi, Vietnam’s capital city located near the Sino-Vietnamese borders. The weather was such that even a person who grew up in semi-tropical Taiwan like myself found it extremely difficult to endure. Thus began an ensuing series of cultural shocks that I was about to experience in relation to Vietnam over the following three years.

After I settled down and started learning the modern Vietnamese language called *quốc ngữ* (literally “national language”) by taking language lessons and immersing myself in the local newspapers and books on Vietnamese history and culture, two things about Vietnam, among others, caught my attention. One is Vietnam’s cultural resemblance with China and the disproportionately large cultural, as well as political and economic, influence of China on Vietnam; another is a declaration that appears in many scholarly accounts of Vietnamese history and culture: *Việt Nam ta (or người ta) không kém thua ai*. Literally meaning “We Vietnamese are inferior to none,” this proclamation is often proudly made either as an introductory statement or a concluding remark to an author’s discussion of Vietnam’s cultural accomplishments.

As I learned more about Vietnam, it became apparent to me that underneath the seeming pride of this proclamation lay Vietnam’s anxiety to generate a *marker* that could show to the world that Vietnam is as unique and civilized as any other nation, despite the fact that it shares great cultural similarity with China. The above three quotes celebrating Vietnam’s cultural independence from China in terms of ceramics, zodiac calendar, and music offer a glimpse into Vietnam’s long-standing struggle to assert a national identity distinct from that of its powerful northern neighbor. Popular culture offers another window onto this struggle. Consider, for example, the contemporary controversy surrounding *Lý Công Uẩn - Đường đến thành Thăng Long* (Lý Công Uẩn – Road to the Thăng Long city), a historical TV serial drama intended to commemorate the millennial anniversary in 2010 of the establishment of the Thăng Long royal city. “Thăng Long” literally means “a rising dragon” and is the ancient name of modern Hanoi. The protagonist of the story is the founder of the posterior Lý dynasty (1009-1225), Lý Công Uẩn (974-1028), whose decision to move the Lý’s royal capital to Thăng Long is believed by modern Vietnamese historians to have had a profound impact on the history of Vietnam (Lockhart and Duiker 2006: 224–25). It is unsurprising that the Vietnamese government decided to recount Lý Công Uẩn’s journey to Hanoi to stir up patriotic sentiments among the Vietnamese people. What is

surprising, however, is that the Vietnamese government chose to have this serial drama shot in China by a Chinese film director whose Chinese historical dramas have been very popular in Vietnam. When the trailer was released in summer 2010, many Vietnamese were furious to discover that all the roles in this drama, including leading and supporting roles and even extras, were all dressed according to Chinese-like customs. To illustrate, below I juxtapose photos of the male and female protagonists of the Vietnamese historical drama with their counterparts from a similar Chinese historical drama. The Chinese historical drama I select here for comparison recounts a famous revenge that occurred in the Warring States period (476-221 B.C.) and involved wars, heroes, and beautiful women who were sent by the defeated king as spies to his rival in the fourth century B.C.; it was aired in 2007.



Figure 1.1: The male protagonist in the Chinese historical drama⁴



Figure 1.2: The male protagonist of the Vietnamese TV historical drama Lý Công Uẩn Đường đến thành Thăng Long Lý Công Uẩn Thăng Long⁵

⁴ http://movie.mtime.com/49987/posters_and_images/519717/, accessed as of August 12, 2012

⁵ http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_475e2f55010001nk.html, last accessed August 12, 2012.



Figure 1.3: The female protagonists of the Chinese TV historical drama (left) and the Vietnamese *Lý Công Uẩn - Đường đến thành Thăng Long* (Lý Công Uẩn – Road to the Thăng Long city) (right)⁶

The resemblance between these Chinese and Vietnamese historical dramas is striking, so much so that a famous Vietnamese poet could not help but call the latter “phim Trung nói tiếng Việt,” meaning, “a Chinese film speaking in Vietnamese.”⁷ Understandably, Vietnamese’s responses to the similarities were overwhelmingly negative: the playwright was ridiculed for being ignorant of Vietnamese history, and those involved in the production were accused of being “traitors” by confusing Vietnam with China. In the midst of the uproar, a Vietnamese PhD student in America wrote an online article in English for a reputable news agency expressing concerns about this “anti-Chinese nationalism” and defending the serial drama by appealing to the principle of freedom of speech, only to receive thousands of hate e-mails in response within a few days (Đỗ Ngọc Bích 2010). Eventually, the Vietnamese government was forced to cancel the release of the TV drama, and the huge sum of money that had been invested in it was wasted.

While Vietnam takes great pains to separate itself culturally from China, its desire for the outside world to recognize Vietnam as being a *văn hiến chi bả*ng—“a domain of manifest civility,” as Liam Kelley (2003) translated, or “a civilized state”—can also be traced to its Sino-Vietnamese legacy. That the *văn miếu*—the Temple of Literature—is the emblem of municipal Hanoi is but one example. There are many Temples of Literature in the world, and the first Temple of Literature in the world was built in China in 479 B.C. to commemorate Confucius. Other Temples of

⁶ http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_475e2f55010001nk.html, last accessed August 12, 2012.

⁷ <http://phapluattp.vn/2010091412152033p1021c1083/ly-cong-uan--duong-toi-thanh-thang-long-phim-tung-noi-tieng-viet.htm> last accessed as of August 12, 2012.

Literature can be found in Sino-centric cultural realm—China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Taiwan, as well as in overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia. Vietnam’s *văn miếu* was built in 1070, several decades after the death of Lý Công Uẩn, the founder of the Lý dynasty and the protagonist of the controversial TV drama. It was at this time that Vietnamese kings began seriously to model Vietnam’s rule after China’s governance by installing Confucian doctrine and the imperial examination system in order to centralize the royal government, which consisted of a Son of the Heaven and a bureaucracy (Whitmore 1997; Woodside 1971). Shortly after the completion of the *văn miếu*, a Quốc tử Giám or imperial academy was built in attachment to the *văn miếu* to train students in exam preparation. In the commemoration ceremonies for Hanoi’s thousand-year anniversary, the *văn miếu* was pointed to and celebrated as one of the world’s earliest universities and evidence of Vietnam’s civilized states.⁸



Figure 1.4: The emblem of Hanoi (Vietnamese: Hà Nội) and the Temple of Literature in Hanoi⁹

As my research drew me further into the historical data, I found that Vietnam’s desire to both emulate and reject the Chinese model in order to assert its

⁸ <http://www.baomoi.com/Van-Mieu--Quoc-Tu-Giam-Nghin-nam-van-hien/137/9046093.epi>, last accessed August 13, 2012.

⁹ The emblem on the left is from <http://tw.myblog.yahoo.com/vina-discovery/photo?pid=89>, the one on the right from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanoi>, and the photo of the temple from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temple_of_Literature,_Hanoi, last accessed August 12, 2012.

distinctiveness and civility can be traced all the way back to the pre-colonial era, during which times Vietnam was either part of the Chinese empire (221 BC-938 AD) or a vassal kingdom (938–1884) to China. As historian Liam Kelley (2003) explains, the pre-colonial Vietnamese literati compared Vietnam with the Chinese model in order to make sure that the Kingdom in the South, namely, Vietnam, was not too far behind the Kingdom of the North in its quality of being a “domain of manifest civility” in a world where China was the cultural and political center.

As Vietnam was later exposed to the ideas of nationalism through its contact with the French, however, the questions of how to define Vietnam’s culture, how to understand Vietnam’s relationship with China, as well as what kind of cultural relationship between Vietnam and China was desirable presented a dilemma and a great challenge for Vietnamese intellectuals. Vietnam’s desire to be a *văn hiến chi bǎng*, a “domain of manifest civility,” was transformed into a quest to become a *nước văn minh*, “a nation of civilization” or “a civilized nation.” Through the interpretations of Chinese intellectuals (which were inspired, in turn, by Japanese intellectuals) and the French colonizers, colonial Vietnamese intellectuals learned that they were now living in a modern world that consisted of nations that were supposed to be equally distinctive and civilized. They also learned that China was no longer the only model of civilization, and that competing models and definitions of civilization—*văn minh* in Vietnamese—were possible, particularly as presented to Vietnam by the French. Thus, since the colonial era Vietnamese intellectuals have been compelled to assert that “We Vietnamese are inferior to none,” especially China, and the earliest assertion of such I have been able to locate is made by a Catholic-Confucian intellectual Nguyễn Trọng Quản (1865-1911) in his preface to his short vernacular novel *Thầy Lazaro Phiền* (The Tale of Mr. Lazarus) in 1887.¹⁰

2. Literature Review: Culture, Nationalism, and the Dilemma of Latecomer Societies

Vietnam’s long-standing assertion of being a civilized and unique nation that is “inferior to none” from the colonial era to today leads me to ask the following question: How does a society whose culture is profoundly shaped by a hegemonic power transform into a nation? This question is worth pondering given the dual-faceted nature of nation-formation. The scholars of nationalism generally take a modernist stance and agree that the nation is a novel idea, a state of mind, and a

¹⁰ Nguyễn Trọng Quản and his novel will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two.

consciousness that first emerged in England, France, and America between the late sixteenth and the late seventeenth centuries (Kohn 1944). This idea presents the nation as a community that is imagined by its participating members as limited and sovereign (Anderson [1983] 2006). In this imagined community, members unwittingly exercise plebiscite on a daily basis and agree that they are equal with one another and that there is solidarity among them that transcends any dividing lines—region, age, race, ethnicity, class, gender, religion, and so on (Greenfeld 1992; Renan 1882; Weber ([1922]1978). Once the idea of the nation is established, as neo-institutionalist sociologists observe, it disseminates throughout the world and consolidates into a world polity and a political-cultural institution as other societies imitate it—whether voluntarily or involuntarily (Meyer et al 1997; Wimmer and Feinstein 2010). At the same time, however, scholars also point out that the project of nation-formation rests on inter-subjective claims of shared ethnic distinctiveness such as common language, history, culture, and memories, as a nation is imagined by its members not only as limited and sovereign but also with an explicit and peculiar character (Armstrong 1982; Hechter 2000; Smith 1991) that differentiates it both from one another and the modular nations (Chatterjee 1999). In fact, the act of protecting the unique culture of a people, as theorists of nationalism point out, supplies the source of legitimacy for a political state in the era of nationalism (Breuilly 1982; Gellner 1983).

It is necessary to point out that changes and transformation are bound to happen when societies imitate and differentiate themselves from one another. Theorists have come up with various terms to describe this phenomenon, with the most well-known examples being creolization, hybridization, and syncretism—all referring to the process by which something foreign becomes localized and blended (Cohen and Toninato 2010: 4). Postcolonial scholar Homi Bhabha coins the phrase the “location of cultures” to describe the zone where cultures come into contact and where cultural differences and the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness* are negotiated (Bhabha 1994: 2, emphasis in original). For my project, instead of using “creolization,” I will alternate between “hybridization” and “syncretization” to describe peoples’ ongoing efforts to reconcile the West with the non-West, dating from the mid-nineteenth century. Both “hybridity” and “creolization” are celebrated by anthropologists and postcolonial scholars as two closely related phenomena that signal colonized peoples’ human agency, differences from colonizers, and creativity in adopting, adapting, appropriating, and even mocking Western cultural elements in their performance and creation of new—presumably better because more diverse—cultures in the postmodern era of globalization (Bhabha 1994; Burke 2009; Cohen and Toninato 2010; Freyre 1974; Young 1995). By syncretization, a term

derived from the verb “to syncretize,” I wish to emphasize the conscious, even spiritual efforts of colonized people to reconcile the imposition of Western civilization with their own local cultures and heritage of imitating other societies. This process, it seems to me, is well captured by the idea of “syncretizing,” a verb that is defined as the “attempt to amalgamate or reconcile (different things, especially religious beliefs, cultural elements, or schools of thoughts).”¹¹

The institution of the nation diffused from the three modular nations of England, France and America throughout the world via the mechanisms of imitation and differentiation that accompanied the hybrid processes of cultural contact. Consequently, creating distinct forms of nationhood that are both recognizable *as* nations, but that also retain their own distinctiveness has been a challenging task, especially for latecomer societies that were often on the receiving end of cultural exchange with a more powerful country. Here, it is necessary to clarify what I mean by “latecomers.” Critical development theorists have criticized that this term is a product of the development ideology that presents latecomers as inherently primitive and backward and is conducive to the creation of the concept and the reality of “the Third World” (Escobar 1995). For my purposes, however, I use “latecomers” to differentiate those nations that were *not* among the earliest modular nations only in order to emphasize the significance of timing. It is a factual, rather than a normative statement to note that societies that developed forms of nationalism after the modular forms developed in the West inevitably faced the task of simultaneously emulating and differentiating themselves from the earlier model(s). Vietnam, both during the colonial and postcolonial eras, is but one example of this phenomenon.

I am not arguing that the modular nations are exempted from the requirements that latecomer societies have to meet in order to join the “club” of nation-states. For instance, Britain, where the idea of the nation made its first influential appearance in human history in the late sixteenth century, actively created sets of symbolic practices—a process famously described as “inventing traditions”—in order to connect the new nation with an immemorial past (Hobsbawm 1983). American intellectuals in the nineteenth century, for their part, were distressed by Europeans’ condescending comments that nation had no literature, despite its glorious wealth, power, and fame (Gross 2007). Concerted efforts followed to produce canonic literary works that would both comply with high-culture standards and reflect America’s national character (Corse 1997). Today’s Americans celebrate American diversity as a sign of American exceptionalism (Bramen 2000). Finally, French fine cuisine emerged as a proud symbol of French civilization and a status marker only after the

¹¹ http://oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/syncretize?q=syncretize, accessed as of March 2nd, 2013.

French Revolution, as a result of the new elite and bourgeois competing to hire French chefs at home to show their good taste, thus transforming French cooks from household servants into a highly-esteemed profession (Ferguson 1998; Trubek 2000).¹²

The aforementioned three pioneer societies' quest for national distinctiveness and enthusiasm in forming symbolic practices to explain the origins and nature of their nations is shared by many—if not all—latecomer societies. Similar campaigns of musical nationalism, for example, producing many famous works of classical music characterized the nation-formation processes of both pioneers and latecomers between the eighteenth and the early twentieth centuries (Béhague 1994; Levy 1983; White and Murphy 2001). This massive enterprise of myths and tradition-making has hardly escaped scholars' keen eyes, and an impressive scholarship has been produced to study this subject, examining: Jewish rituals and popular music (Olchs 2007; Regev 2004) and literary canons (Gluzman 2003); Japan's *Nihonrinron* (literally “the theories about Japanese”) that explains who Japanese are in order to demonstrate why Japanese are a special people vis-à-vis other nations, especially the West (Befu 2001) and the Japanese effort to “invent classic literature” (Shirane and Suzuki 2001); the appropriation of British cultural practices by African elites in British colonies in efforts to construct their own national traditions (Ranger 1983); Greek intellectuals' canonization of a Greek national literature in order to transform Greece into a member of Western Europe (Jusdanis 1991); India's pride in claiming Aryan India's status as the cradle of science and art of the world (McCully 1940), to name just a few.

The theoretical foundation for the quest for a distinctive national culture was laid down by German nationalism, which evolved from German's political and cultural geography, promoted by a group of intellectuals who were bitter and frustrated by the universalism of the Enlightenment, and intensified by the rivalry between Germany and France during the Franco-Prussian War. The idea of the nation, in fact, had been circling in Germany as early as the seventeenth century, but it had not appeared attractive to the middle class intellectuals—the main advocates of nationalism in Germany—until the nineteenth century. Middle-class intellectuals were inspired by Enlightenment thought in their university education and expected to be upwardly mobile. Much to their dismay, however, they were suspended between the coveted but unreachable nobility and the bourgeoisie whom they disdained. In the midst of their bitter frustration, these *Bildungsbürgertum* found the idea of nationalism appealing

¹² In recent years, René Redžepi, the head chef of a two Michelin-star Danish restaurant Noma, has been leading the way of inventing Danish cuisine. The motto of Noma's official website reads: “In an effort to shape our way of cooking, we look to our landscape and delve into our ingredients and culture, hoping to rediscover our history and shape our future.” <http://noma.dk/>, last accessed February 11, 2013.

“because it implied an unassailable dignity for and automatically elevated members of the national collectivity, however lowly, putting them on a par with the most exalted nobility” (Greenfeld 1992: 314). The nationalism that the *Bildungsbürgertum* were poised to promote in the early nineteenth century, therefore, was a reaction against the universalism of the Enlightenment and the associated “civilization,” which in its normative sense implies civility and is a very “French” notion (Eagleton 2000). This differentialist version of nationalism fitted well with Germany’s cultural and political geography: both the disparity between the supranational Holy Roman Empire of Germany and the subnational German states and the ethnocultural frontier between Germans and Slavs fostered a particularistic understanding of nationhood (Brubaker 1992: 1-20).

Germany’s differentialist self-understanding provides fertile ground for the thriving of German philosopher of the Romantic Movement Johann Herder’s (1744-1803) proposal that culture is the distinctive form of life of an organic community. Herder’s anthropological concept of cultures in plural form not only provides theoretical foundation for Germany’s ethnocultural nationalism but also inspires numerous cultural nationalists around the world to go to the dusty archives and into the field to collect folklores, folksongs, folk arts, language, historical anecdotes, as well as literature—the materials believed to embody the *Volksgeist*, or spirit of a people. The tension between “universal” civilization of Enlightenment and “local” cultures was further intensified as a result of the Franco-Prussian War between 1870 and 1871. France lost the war and part of its territory, and the modern German nation-state was born, as German states proclaimed union as the German Empire.

How to conceptualize culture has been a highly charged issue in the field of nationalism. Modernist scholars, who argue that the idea of nationalism precedes nations, tend to view culture as being subordinate to politics and view culture skeptically: culture is either treated as a smokescreen to legitimize political elites’ claims to a state or a weapon to oppress the inconvenient elements in a society—sometimes through means of violence and coercion—to achieve homogeneity in its population (Breuilly 1994; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1990; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Hechter 2004; Ignatiev 1993; Lebovics 1992; Lloyd 1987). To counter this instrumentalist view of culture, a small group of scholars known as perennialists or primordialists, who dispute the modernists’ view that nationalism creates nations, stress that culture is a moral regenerator of a community (Hutchinson 1987, 1999); that the modern nation has pre-modern origins, as it builds up on pre-existing kinship, religion and myths shared by an ethnic group (Hastings 1997; Smith 1987) and is the territorialization of culture and religions (Armstrong 1984); and that loyalty toward a nation is present whether the nation in question is

deprived of or embodied in a state (Connor 1994).

The debate between modernists and perennialists has dominated the field of nationalism, and the nationalisms pioneered by England, France, and America have been called liberal, rational “civic nationalism” as opposed to populist, irrational “ethnic nationalism” (see Zubrzycki 2001). Political scientist David Laitin offers a third approach to understanding culture: he adopts a game theory approach and proposes culture as an equilibrium that conditions one’s behaviors and one’s expectations of others’ behaviors in a cultural group. According to Laitin, equilibrium exists “when the members of a cultural group have overriding incentives in a range of circumstances to behave in the manner prescribed by their culture” (Laitin 2007: 66).

While I agree that culture could function as a disguise or a moral regenerator, as well as a common belief that conditions people’s behaviors in nation-formation processes—after all, culture is an extremely elusive and complex notion with a long etymological history (Eagleton 2000; Williams 1981), there still is an aspect of culture that has escaped analysts’ attention: that is, culture as a *marker* that enables a society to show that it is *recognizably* and *distinguishably* a nation. Modernist scholars have analyzed how cultural nationalists in various societies have sought to create national cultures, yet scholars have yet to discuss the structural reason why this phenomenon is so widespread and why a Herderian sense of culture is so appealing. My argument is that the doctrine of nationalism and the mechanisms through which the institution of the nation spreads require twinned, paradoxical processes of emulation and differentiation, which pose a challenging task for latecomer societies who enter the international world of nation-states after the pioneer societies.

In what follows, I will further demonstrate latecomer societies’ dilemma by surveying the nation-formation processes of (1) Russia, the earliest latecomer society in the international world; (2) European colonies in Africa and Asia; and (3) Sino-centric East Asia. I use the term “latecomer societies’ dilemma” to refer to the challenge faced by many—if not all—latecomer nations of simultaneously striking a difficult balance between emulating one or more hegemonic powers that exert significant cultural influence upon them, on the one hand, and negotiating cultural differences between themselves and their hegemonic models on the other. In her comparative historical-sociological study of the emergence of nationalism in England, France, Russia, Germany, and America, sociologist Liah Greenfeld draws upon the work of the German philosophers Nietzsche and Max Scheler, and uses the psychological and philosophical term *ressentiment* to describe the intense and never-satisfied feelings of inferiority that the imitating societies feel toward the imitated model. According to Greenfeld, *ressentiment* is the driving force for the rise of ethnic nationalism, especially in Russia, as opposed to civic nationalism. She

identifies two conditions as responsible for *ressentiment*: the imitator's belief in the fundamental commensurability between it and the imitated, and the actual inequality that cannot be overcome between the two parties (Greenfeld 1992). In my project, however, I choose to use "latecomers' dilemma" instead of *ressentiment* to emphasize the precarious situation in which latecomer societies find themselves. I also use "latecomers' dilemma" to avoid the evaluative implications in the term of *ressentiment*, which has become entangled in the dichotomy between ethnic and civic nationalisms.

A. Russia, the Earliest Latecomer: Emulation of and Differentiation from Europe

The zeal for identifying national distinctiveness in order to distinguish the self from the other—especially a hegemonic other—began in absolutist Russia, the earliest latecomer society where the latecomers' dilemma was acutely felt for the first time in human history in the eighteenth century. Russia's transformation from medieval Muscovy outside the universe of Europe to modern Russia that was reluctantly recognized by the West as an Eastern European state began with Emperor Peter I the Great (1682-1725) and continued by his successor Empress Catherine II the Great (1729-1796). Peter I singlehandedly initiated and orchestrated a comprehensive project of modernization through Europeanization, and his project was assisted by many English and French supervisors and carried out by the insecure nobility, whose status was completely dependent on the Emperor's satisfaction with their service. After a century of "compulsive mimesis" of the West, a French aristocrat visiting Russia was so thoroughly disgusted by its French-speaking nobles' and urban elites' "pretending to be what we are" that he commented disdainfully that these people were "incessantly occupied with the desire of mimicking other nations, and this they do after the true manner of monkeys, caricaturing what they copy" (Schuler 2009: 1). He further noted that the new elites were confused about who they were and mournful about the sterility of "authentic" Russian culture (Schuler 2009: 2; see also Anderson [1983] 2006; Cracraft 1997; Greenfeld 1992).

B. African and Asian Colonies before Independence: Emulation, Differentiation, and Syncretization vis-à-vis European Empires

During the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries, after they had transformed into nation-states, European powers, together with Russia, the United States, and Japan, set out to impose their interests on the rest of the world and employ their advanced technology to conquer and annex a vast part of African and Asian

territories (particularly British India), force the indigenous inhabitants to transfer sovereignty to their hands, and exercise the rule of difference that assumed the inherent and incorrigible inferiority on the part of the indigenous inhabitants (Steinmetz 2007: 1-71). Known as “new imperialism,” this phase of conquest lost its momentum in the First World War when the President of the United States Woodrow Wilson delivered his “fourteen-point” speech in 1918, declaring self-government as one of the principles for the restoration of postwar order. Imperialism came to an end in the World War II, even though the imperial system was buttressed by the empires’ supreme power and technology. The death of imperialism can be attributed, however, to none other than imperialism itself, for as historian Rupert Emerson stated more than five decades ago, “through the global conquest the dominant Western powers worked to reshape the world in their own image and thus roused against themselves the forces of nationalisms which are both the bitterest enemies of imperialism and, perversely, its finest fruit” (Emerson 1962: 17).

What Emerson described as both the bitterest enemies and the finest fruit of imperialism were a thin layer of colonial subjects who received Westernized education in either colonies or the metropole and were familiar with Western cultures. The French empire called these intellectuals *evolués*, indigenous men and women “who had left their traditional social groups but found themselves excluded from the preserves of the white man” (Fieldhouse 1967: 399). Postcolonial critiques call these Westernized intellectuals “mimic men” who appeared “almost the same, but not quite” as their master and suffered from a deep-rooted inferiority complex, which was instilled by their master and worsened by their humiliating experiences in the metropolises (Bhabha 1994; Césaire [1970] 1972; Fanon 1952; Naipaul 1967).

These frustrated and tormented souls brought doom upon their masters in the following three ways. First, they mirrored their masters, or as Anderson ([1983] 2006) put it, they “pirated” the ideas of nationalism they learned in bookstores, classrooms, salons, and cafés in the metropolises, most notably London and Paris. Second, some of them explicitly demanded that the same progressive ideas be applied to their home countries as were applied in the metropolises, and they refused to continue kowtowing to the thrones of colonizers. Third, even though they did not engage in armed struggles, the very ambivalent presence of these mimic intellectuals, who were able not only to move fluidly between European and indigenous cultural codes, but also to hybridize Europeanness with indigenous cultures, languages, even blood, thus presented a grave threat to colonial authority (Bhabha 1994; Steinmetz 2007: 1-71).

C. East Asia between the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: Emulation, Differentiation, and Syncretization vis-à-vis the West and China

Sinocentric East Asia is a historical political-cultural arena, in the center of which stands China, the Middle Kingdom that plays a crucial role in the cultural formation of Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and Taiwan, all four of which are significantly geographically smaller than China. Because of the hegemonic presence of China, the East Asian experiences of nationalization were different from European colonies in Africa and Asia in two ways. First, in addition to the West, East Asia had to deal with China, which was suffering a series of Western imperialist encroachments itself and, as a result, was turned upside down and losing its supremacy in the Sinocentric world order between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Second, with the exception of Vietnam, which was annexed by a European power (i.e., France under the Third Republic, 1870-1945), Korea and Taiwan, and Manchuria, the northeast part of China, were colonized by Japan. Alerted by Qing China's defeat in two Opium Wars with the British Empire (1839-42, 1860-65), the Tokugawa government initiated the *Meiji* Renovation in 1868 and elevated Japan from an imitator to Asia's only imperial power and imitated model when it defeated China in 1894, less than three decades after the launch of the *Meiji* Renovation.

In spite of (or because of) Japan's successful modernization, Japanese elites agonized over and attempted to create solutions to the latecomer's dilemma of being recognized by the West as a modern, civilized nation by seeking "authentic" Japanese culture that could separate Japan from China through the invention of imperial mythology (Dale 1986), the history of the Orient (Tanaka 1993), and folk arts theory (Kikuchi 2004). Japanese intellectuals also struggled to "overcome modernity," reconcile "Japanese blood and Western intellect," and determine whether or not science, which is presumably universally applicable and hence irrelevant of local cultural logics, should belong exclusively to the West (Mizuno 2009). Successfully modernized Imperial Japan acted as an "oriental West" for East Asia symbolizing what an Asian nation could achieve through reformation, and nationalist sentiments grew among intellectuals in colonial Taiwan and colonial Korea as they attempted to define who they were vis-à-vis China and Japan while they imitated Japan (Chae 2006; Schmid 2002; Wu 2003).

To summarize then, due to the need to simultaneously imitate and differentiate themselves from hegemonic model societies upon entering the modern world of nation-states, the three groups of latecomer societies surveyed above were all compelled to create a marker, namely, a national culture that would not only

demonstrate their belonging within the established parameters of modern civilization, but also lend them uniqueness and distinctive characteristics that could justify their need for their own state and their existence *as* nation-states in the world. To achieve this, all of these latecomer societies also deeply engaged in processes of hybridization and syncretization, as they actively sought to appropriate, blend, and negotiate cultural elements from hegemonic models and their own indigenous traditions.

3. The Case: Colonial Vietnamese Intellectuals in the Vernacular Cultural Fields, 1900-1940

The question that drives my research is this: how does a society that is influenced by a hegemonic power transform into a nation? I argue that central to this transformation is the process of constructing a marker of nationalism through relations of emulation and differentiation vis-à-vis hegemonic models. I examine colonial Vietnam as a window onto the ways in which intellectuals in latecomer societies emulate, differentiate, and syncretize elements from their own culture and the models from which they borrow the ideas of nationalism in order to produce an identifiably national culture.

Colonial Vietnam, a society that straddles both category B (it was a French colony in Asia) and C (it was a core member of the Sinocentric world prior to the French colonization) in the taxonomy explored above, is a particularly ideal case for my research. As the examples of Vietnamese ceramics, zodiac calendar and music cited at the beginning of this chapter indicate, Vietnam has been struggling for a potent marker that could culturally distinguish it from China. Vietnam's cultural resemblance is a result of the millennia-long cultural borrowings that characterized in Vietnam's "love-hate relationship" with China (Nguyễn Thế Anh 2001), relations viewed by political scientists as a classical example of the "politics of asymmetry" (Womack 2006).

The first written history record of Vietnam appears when Imperial China was formed under the reign of Qin Shi-Huang (literally "the First Empire of the Qin Dynasty"), who incorporated the northern and central part of today's Vietnam as his kingdom's southernmost province in 111 B.C. Thus began the long period of *Bắc thuộc* (literally "belonging to the North"). In addition to officials sent from northern administration centers, immigrants escaping from political turmoil in China proper also provided leadership in political, cultural, and economic areas. Quite a few Vietnamese emperors were descendants of Chinese immigrants who married local women and became "creolized," among them Lý Công Uẩn, the emperor who

established Hanoi as Vietnam's capital and the protagonist of the TV movie discussed above (Nguyễn Phúc Anh 2012; Taylor 1983).

The era of first *Bắc thuộc* ended when local elites took advantage of the weakening Tang dynasty and proclaimed independence in 938, two years after Korea broke away from China. Since then Vietnam remained one of China's vassal states until France defeated China and terminated its lordship over Vietnam in 1868, with Vietnam's vassal status otherwise only briefly interrupted by the second *Bắc thuộc* between 1407 and 1427. Vietnam began the process of Confucianization after it gained autonomy from China: the Confucius temple was built in 1070 and the civil examination through which bureaucrats had been recruited from among talented literati in China was introduced in 1075. How to evaluate Chinese influence in general and Confucian influence in particular on pre-colonial Vietnam has been a highly sensitive issue in the field of Vietnamese studies. As Kelley points out (2005), many Vietnamese historians and the majority of sympathetic Western scholars have rejected the viewpoint that sees Vietnam as a "little China" or "small dragon," arguing that *pace* the conventional understanding, during the pre-colonial era Vietnamese elites "acknowledged that they were not Chinese and refused to be Chinese" (Taylor 1991) and only halfheartedly followed Confucianism in order to stop China from invading Vietnam under the pretext of "civilizing/disciplining the barbarous South." As a result, according to these scholars, Chinese learning in general and knowledge of Confucianism in particular were fragmented and shallow at best in pre-modern Vietnam (Cooke 1994, 1998, 1999; McHale 2002, 2004). Suffice it to point out, however, that Vietnam defines itself in relation to its northern neighbor, as demonstrated by the very name "Vietnam," which means "the Viet people of the South." Also, Chinese learning, including Confucianism, helped Vietnamese rulers to centralize their power and, until the era of French colonization began, the Chinese model was the only model from which Vietnamese elites drew inspiration, knowledge, and practical lessons, even though the impact of Confucianism might have been less in pre-colonial Vietnam than it was in Korea (Yu 2010).

It was not until their encounter with French colonial officials and French Sinologists that the Vietnamese became painfully aware that they were seen as culturally similar to China and that this similarity was something that needed to be overcome if they wanted to "progress" from a "Southern" people of the Sinocentric world to a modern *văn minh* nation of the international world. Figure 1.5 below illustrates how colonial Vietnam simultaneously emulated, differentiated itself from, and syncretized elements from China, France, and to some extent Japan, to produce its own Asian model of modernization. Vietnamese nationalists sought to produce a marker that would demonstrate that Vietnam was a fitting nation that deserved a state,

be it the French colonial state or an independent state run by the Vietnamese people. In this figure, the “modular other” represents France and, by implication, the West, as providing the model of a sovereign nation-state that was introduced to Vietnam; “contentious other” refers to China, the chief focus of Vietnam’s efforts at symbolic boundary demarcation; and “minor model” refers to Japan, also a model of modernization but one with less political stake in Vietnam’s nation-formation project. The plus sign “+” indicates emulation, the minus sign “-” differentiation, and the check mark “✓” syncretization. It should be noted that since Vietnamese intellectuals did not have intimate understanding with Japan, before the Japanese invasion of Indochina in 1940, they mainly saw Japan as an exceptional East Asian nation whose successful emulation of the West and preservation of their own cultural legacy was worth learning. Neither differentiation from Japan nor syncretization between Sino-Vietnamese and Japanese cultural elements was needed.

The time period of my study is between 1900 and 1940. French military campaign against Vietnam started in the 1860s and met fierce resistance from Confucian scholars, the elite skeleton of pre-colonial society. French control of the Southeast Asian kingdom was stabilized in the 1900s, at which point Vietnamese intellectuals began to evaluate and compare the old Chinese cultural model with the new French one in order to transform Vietnam into a civilized and unique modern nation. My study ends in 1940, the year when colonial Vietnam’s political situation was greatly complicated by Japan’s invasion of Indochina in the midst of the second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) for the purpose of preventing China from importing weapons from Vietnam to neighboring Southern China.

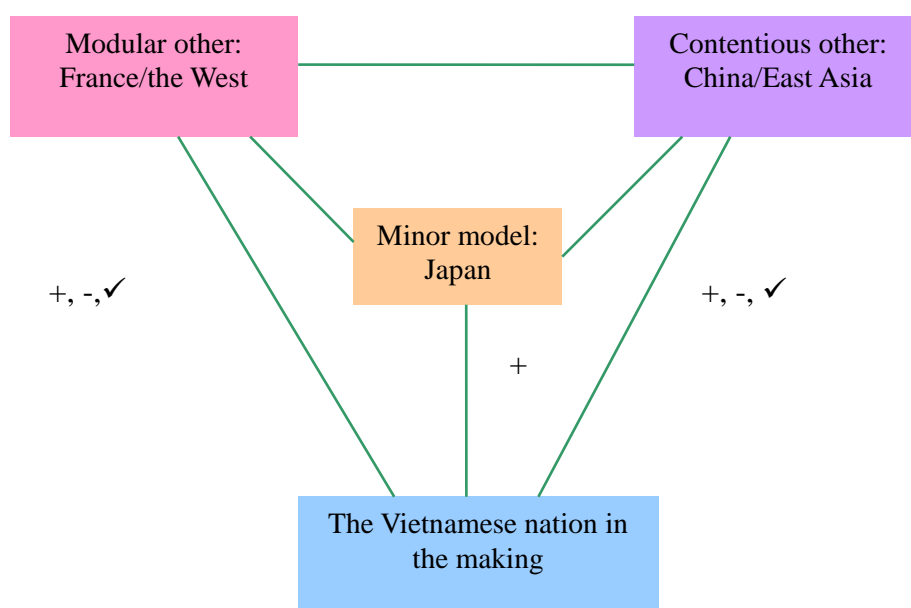


Figure 1.5: Colonial Vietnam’s emulation of, differentiation from, and syncretization of Chinese, French, and Japanese hegemonic powers

In my research, I will frequently invoke the concepts of *văn minh* and *văn hiến* to refer to two different political-cultural arenas. *Văn minh* was imposed by French colonizers imperialism in the late nineteenth century and became the primary goal that colonial Vietnamese intellectuals sought to achieve. It was commonly accepted by Vietnamese intellectuals that Western *văn minh* represented the pinnacle of the development of the human race, and it blessed the whole world with universal Enlightenment, modernity, science and technology, as well as progress and democracy. It was also commonly believed that unless Vietnam strived to upgrade itself in accordance with *văn minh*, which during the colonial time was embodied in the French model, Vietnam would stand no chance of survival. *Văn hiến*, on the other hand, is deeply enmeshed with Chinese culture and politics and is the pre-colonial version of *văn minh*: Vietnamese men of letters were anxious to prove their society's civility in accordance with the Chinese model, and they did it by devouring Chinese texts, practicing Confucianism, and sitting in the imperial exam. The term "*văn hiến*" is frequently spoken about in pre- and post-colonial Vietnam, but it received little attention during the colonial time. Still, this term concisely summarizes the Sino-Vietnamese cultural legacy to which Vietnam's national essence was often attributed, and colonial Vietnamese intellectuals, preoccupied with *văn minh* as they were, were familiar with this term.

I study colonial Vietnamese intellectuals' discourses to understand how they emulated, differentiated themselves from, and syncretized Chinese and French cultures in order to produce a marker for their nation. The reason why I choose to focus on intellectuals is twofold. First, intellectuals "appear to have the greatest agency in the shaping of national understanding, propagating the values of the nation, disciplining the people internally, and enforcing the rules and boundaries of the constituent people" (Sunny and Kennedy 2001). Intellectuals played a particularly central role in leading anti-colonial nationalist movements in European colonies, especially those with young intellectuals equipped with Western educations. Even though their agency was severely curtailed by the colonial regime, they were instrumental in importing the ideas of nationalism from their colonizers and subsequently deploying these ideas to fight against the reality of colonialism. Second, among the various groups and strata of people in societies, intellectuals are the people most sensitive to culture, who "create, distribute and apply culture" (Lipset 1963). It is intellectuals who do imaginative ideological labor in order to "articulate the nation" (Sunny and Kennedy 2001), including a nation's personality.

Intellectuals in my study are not merely a mass of educated men and women who neither have bearing on one another nor lack stakes in selecting what cultural elements to emulate, reject, and syncretize. Charles *Kurzman and Lynn Owens* (2002)

review the sociology of intellectuals, and they find that three approaches have developed: (1) intellectuals constitute a class-in-themselves that have interests in distinguishing themselves from other groups in society, an approach advocated by Pierre Bourdieu; (2) intellectuals as representatives of their class of origin, as the Italian Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci argues; and (3) intellectuals as a class-less group that transcends members' class origins to pursue universal ideals, an idea proposed by Karl Mannheim.

Of the above three approaches, I find Bourdieu's most appealing and his conceptualization of culture provides a foundation for my own. In Bourdieu's influential book *Distinction* (1984), culture acts both as a code that enables people to understand works of art and a marker that distinguishes those deemed culturally competent—i.e., people with “good taste”—from those deemed culturally incompetent—i.e., people with “poor taste.” Bourdieu famously coins the term “cultural capital” to argue that whether or not a consumer of works of art, broadly defined, has good taste depends on the amount and type of this consumer's cultural capital, which is acquired through that person's upbringing in family and schools. Artists are not purely creators of works of art: they constitute a field that achieves a certain degree of independence from direct external constraints and that has structuring laws that translate economic or political phenomena into symbolic capital (fame, authority, recognition) for its occupants. Symbolic capital is not always directly proportional to the remuneration they receive for their works. In fact, in some cases, poor artists or writers might even enjoy high esteem in the art or literary field, as they believe (or are believed) that they refuse to surrender to popular taste in order to defend the aesthetic value of their works (Bourdieu 1982, 1985, 1993; Ferguson 1998). Intellectuals may entertain some transcendent humanist ideas, as the second approach that conceives intellectuals as class-less suggests. Intellectuals may also want to serve as spokespersons for their class of origin, as the third approach advocates. Yet these inspirations are not pursued in vacuum, and intellectuals do not have the total freedom to choose whatever strategies they like. Rather, intellectual inspirations and endeavors are pursued and carried out in a space of forces and are regulated by this space's hierarchical system of relations, which assign agents to different positions and endows them with different quantities of capital.

Bourdieu's field theory and his concept of cultural capital inform my research on colonial Vietnamese intellectuals' discursive articulation of a civilized and unique Vietnamese nation in two ways. First, culture in my project is defined as a marker for a society to be recognized as a nation that simultaneously resembles and yet is also distinctive from others; in Bourdieu's works, culture is conceptualized as a form of capital derived from and a marker to signal one's class position. Second, Bourdieu's

theory provides a powerful tool for me to examine colonial Vietnamese intellectuals' stake in and affinity with various cultural elements from different cultural models, be they Chinese, French, or Vietnamese.

In light of Bourdieu's field theory, the intellectuals I study in this project are situated in the cultural fields that include the journalistic field, the academic field, as well as the vernacular literature field. These cultural fields were part of the intellectual field, or *giới trí thức* in Vietnamese, which can be divided into the cultural fields and the political fields that include the colonial state field and the anti-colonial movement field. In my research, my primary focus is on the cultural fields, but I will also touch on the political fields, as the two entwined together and the latter tried to exert influence upon the former. These cultural fields and political fields are subfields within the intellectual field; yet I will simply use "fields" instead of "subfields" to keep my rendering concise and clear.

In colonial Vietnam, the cultural fields were fields in which the hierarchical relations among players were determined by individual intellectuals' contribution to the creation of an efficient and powerful marker for the future *văn minh* Vietnamese nation. These intellectuals' practices were regulated by their *habitus*, defined by Bourdieu as "a feel for the game (of the power struggle within the field) and a "system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures" (Bourdieu, quoted in Johnson 1993: 5). In Bourdieu's field theory, a field takes in shape when its agents come to be aware of and struggle for independence from external determinants (Bourdieu 1993, 1996). There were two forces that could hinder the independence of the cultural fields during the colonial time: the colonial state that used every means possible to patronize, control, threaten, and recruit native intellectuals so as to secure its rule and boost its legitimacy; and a market economy focused on exploiting raw materials such as rubber and rice that were introduced into Indochina via the route of imperial capitalism. These two forces constituted new forms of domination educated Vietnamese persons had never experienced during pre-colonial times. Since the 1930s, the agents in the Marxian anti-colonial movement field in Vietnam and in France also attempted to take over the cultural fields, and they emerged successful over the course of the August Revolution (1945-1975). But during the time period I study, the colonial state constituted the gravest threat to the autonomy of the cultural fields, and it was the ultimate arbiter of rewards and punishments, hence why I focus on it in my research.

More specifically, the cultural fields I study are vernacular ones, even though during the time period I study French language was becoming an important language for jobs in government and an elite form of cultural capital that was associated with *văn minh*. Not unlike cultural nationalists in other societies, Vietnamese intellectuals

during the colonial period determined that written language, vernacular literature, and national learning were three cultural institutions that were central to their endeavors to create an independent national culture, as these three areas were where Chinese influence was felt most strongly. First, the art of history writing in pre-colonial Vietnam was not as well-developed as in China, Japan, or Korea; and since the civil examination was introduced to Vietnam in 1075, Chinese history had been one of the test subjects until the early twentieth century.¹³ Second, Chinese script was much more dominant in pre-colonial Vietnam than it was in its Japanese and Korean counterparts. Pre-modern monistic East Asians believed that *wen*, namely, patterns of universe and humans, was manifested in writing characters (*wenzi*), civility (*wenxian*), and Sinitic civilization (*wenhua*); hence Chinese ideograms—*wenzi*—were revered as the key to universal truth and deployed as the official written script in pre-modern East Asia (Kelley 2005). Pre-colonial Vietnam was no exception. Yet unlike Japan and Korea, where native syllabaries were well developed (the Japanese *kana* system appeared as early as the fifth century, and the Korean *hangul* alphabet was created under royal command in the mid-fourteenth century), Vietnam’s *chữ Nôm*, literally “Southern script,” was based on Chinese characters and first appeared in the tenth century, was not standardized, and was difficult to use. During the colonial time, the Romanized *quốc ngữ* (literally “national language”) writing system invented by European missionaries for the purpose of proselytizing in the mid-seventeenth century rose to replace both Chinese and *chữ Nôm*. Thirdly, as a result of the predominance of the Chinese writing system during the pre-modern era, developing a vernacular literature written in Vietnamese script became a common interest that united intellectuals of different educational backgrounds and political ideologies. Particularly at stake was vernacular fiction, as fictional prose was the most under-developed literary sub-genre in pre-colonial Vietnam.

In colonial Vietnam, the cultural fields included the academic field, where scholars like historians, linguistics, folklorists, and archeologists trained in Sino-Vietnamese Confucian learning and Westernized education background worked and competed with one another; the literature field, whose autonomy was manifested in the competition between intellectuals who claimed to write in order to help Vietnam to develop a vernacular written language and national literature, and those whom Bourdieu calls “industrial writers,” namely, the writers of popular literature; as well as the journalistic field, an arena where both political and economic domination were keenly felt.

¹³ The first official Chinese historical texts were the 130-volumed *Shiji* (Records of the Great Historian) compiled between 109 and 91 B.C.; Japan’s compilation of written history began in the seventh century; Korea’s earliest extant historical record dates back to 1175; and Vietnam’s earliest official chronicles of royal dynasties were produced in 1272.

As Figure 1.6 shows, the agents in these cultural fields possessed political capital that was determined by their relationships with the colonial state and the native population. On the one end of the spectrum were collaborating intellectuals, whose rapport with the colonial state did not always translate into symbolic capital in the fields, since they earned their political capital at the expense of the native population. On the other end of the spectrum were anti-colonial activists, whose political capital was derived from their resistance against the colonial state. I discuss this figure in greater detail in Chapter Four.

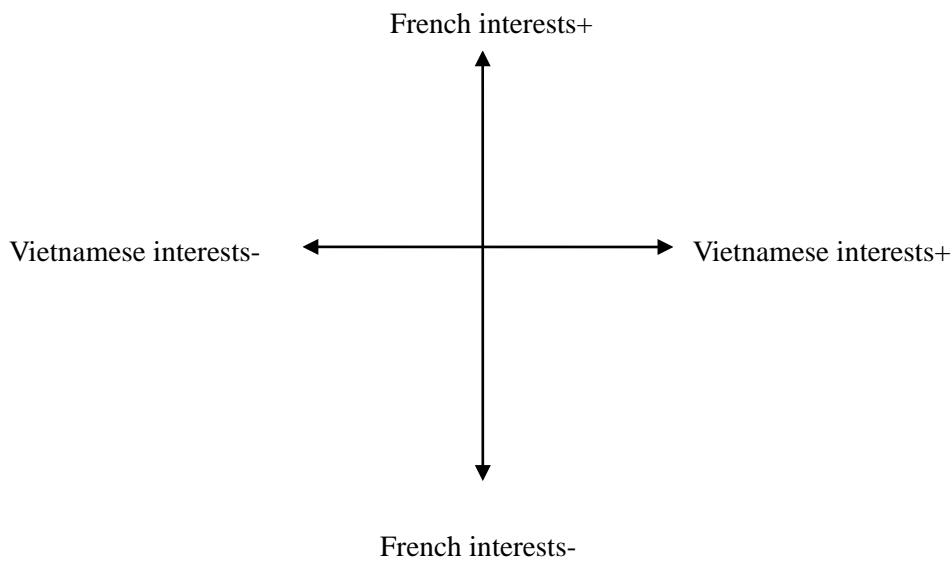


Figure 1.6: The determinants of political capital in colonial Vietnam’s cultural fields

In addition to divisions in terms of political capital, colonial Vietnamese intellectuals were also divided by the forms of cultural capital they possessed, which disposed them to mimic, differentiate from, or syncretize Chinese and French cultural elements as they competed for authority and influence *for* and *in* the fields. There were two opposing kinds of cultural capital. One was Sino-Vietnamese cultural capital, which was composed of knowledge of Chinese script and classic Confucian texts. During the pre-colonial period, this form of cultural capital was reproduced in Sino-Vietnamese village schools and private schools and reinforced by the imperial examination, and it was the most important source of symbolic capital for individual intellectuals and intellectuals as a whole. During the colonial period, it was increasingly associated with the past, but was still considered the epitome of Eastern civilization. The other form of cultural capital was French cultural capital: it was composed of knowledge of French language and European classic works, both literature and philosophy, and was reproduced through Franco-Vietnamese schools. During the colonial time, it was increasingly associated with *văn minh*, modernity and

enlightenment, and was deemed to be the representative of Western civilization.

4. Data and Methods

In this project, I investigate how three cultural institutions—national written language, national literature, and national learning developed in colonial Vietnam through emulating, differentiating from, and syncretizing cultural elements from other societies, primarily China and France, with intellectuals in the cultural fields as the unit of analysis. I am a Chinese speaker from Taiwan, and due to time constraints, I was only able to learn Vietnamese for this dissertation project. No French documents were consulted, and I am fully aware of the limitations of this research as a result. The French journalistic field would have been interesting to examine also, as there were often lively exchanges between French and Vietnamese periodicals, but given the language limitation, I focused my analysis on Vietnamese and Chinese language sources

My data comes from the following three sources. First, I consulted influential *quốc ngữ* intellectual journals and scholarly books that published and stimulated discussions and debates during the colonial period. These journals and books represent the objectified state of intellectuals' cultural capital; they also carried intellectual discourses concerning the nature of Vietnamese people, culture, society, and history in Vietnam's relation to the world in general, and to China and France in particular.¹⁴ I paid particular attention to the issues concerning the membership of the intellectual field (who should be included and who should not) and the nature of culture, history, society of Vietnam in relation to China, France, and the world.

Second, in order to document the development of vernacular literature, especially vernacular fiction, I read the *quốc ngữ* novels and short stories of Vietnamese writers. I also surveyed the catalogs of colonial books pertaining to literature, history, and culture written in *quốc ngữ*. As soon as Vietnam fell prey to French colonial rule, Vietnamese intellectuals were made aware that Vietnam needed a vernacular literature in order to claim their nationhood, and they immediately and consciously began trying to create such a literature. I also surveyed the catalogs of colonial books in *quốc ngữ*, French, and Chinese. The record of colonial publications is available online in the websites of The National Library of Vietnam (Thư Viện Quốc Gia Việt Nam, or "TVQG") in the Hanoi online database.¹⁵ During the colonial era, the colonial

¹⁴ For the list of the journals and scholarly books consulted, please see Appendix B.

¹⁵ The TVQG's website is <http://118.70.243.232/opac/>.

government required that all publishers send one copy of their publications to Paris, and one to Hanoi. The record of the former collection was first published in *Catalogue du Fonds Indochinois de la Bibliothèque Nationale* (1979) and subsequently rendered into microfiches (13 reels) and is currently housed in TVQG.

Third, I consulted biographical data for the intellectuals who were actively involved in defining the Vietnamese nation in relation to other societies. These data come from intellectuals' autobiographies, biographies, and selected works. The *Who's Who* reference publications of noted persons in colonial Vietnam also provide valuable information.¹⁶ By examining intellectuals' biographic data, I sought to understand the social properties, configurations of cultural and political capital, and the routes to power and authority of intellectuals within the cultural fields.

5. Chapter Outline

In this project, I examine colonial Vietnam as a case of study to understand how a non-national society learns the ideas of nationalism imported from other societies and simultaneously develops its own written language, national literature, and system of national learning by both emulating and differentiating itself from more powerful models.

My dissertation is organized chronologically. Chapter Two provides historical background by explaining the properties and principles of the Sino-Vietnamese intellectual world, how the arrival of the French colonialism in the late nineteenth century disrupted this world, and how a tiny group of hybrid Catholic-Confucian scholars paved the way for the vernacular cultural fields to emerge at the turn of the century, while many of their Confucian peers dedicated themselves in armed resistance against the French invader. In Chapter Three, I discuss how the cultural fields began to emerge in the midst of cultural reform movements in the 1900s, which were led by Confucian scholars and inspired by the East Asian reform movements. I also show how followers of the Chinese model—the source of *văn hiến*—and the French model—the source of *văn minh*—began to compete with each other as soon as the cultural fields emerged. Also during this decade, translated Chinese novels became popular in the emergent vernacular reading public.

In Chapter Four, I discuss how the cultural fields, though entangled with the political fields, began to take shape and struggled to gain relative independence from both the colonial state and market economy during the 1920s when they were ushered

¹⁶ For brief biographical backgrounds of the intellectuals under study, please see appendix C.

into an “era of imitation of the West” by some powerful neo-traditionalists and Francophiles in the midst of the commission of a new colonial policy, i.e., Franco-Vietnamese Collaboration. Intellectuals imitated both Chinese and French novels in order to create a Vietnamese national literature, which did not truly begin to flourish until the next decade. Chapter Five shows that after a decade of extensive imitation, during the 1920s intellectuals were eager to define Vietnam’s national soul and essence and claim Vietnam’s level of *văn minh*, and this era witnessed the efforts in canonizing a Sino-Vietnamese story and the emergence of Vietnam’s first modern vernacular novel. Chapter Six deals with the most complicated decade of the colonial era covered by my research. During the 1930s, the cultural fields’ autonomy faced a new political challenge from Marxian intellectuals, who were establishing the theoretical ground for anti-colonial struggles during the August Revolution (1945-1975). On the other hand, also during this decade, Vietnamese intellectuals were concerned about the art of becoming Vietnamese: they were anxious about asserting the distinctiveness of the Vietnamese nation, and they tried to come to terms with the fact that their ancestors had not produced a national culture as respectable and distinctive as that of other nations. In the concluding chapter, I summarize briefly the major findings of each chapter. I also discuss broader implications for future studies of cultural nationalism and field analysis.

Chapter Two

When *Văn Hiến* Encountered *Văn Minh*: the Transition of the Sino-Vietnamese Intellectual world to the Vernacular Cultural Fields in the Late Nineteenth Century

After Vietnam gained autonomy in 938, China invaded its southern neighbor several times. The brief second *Bắc thuộc* (“belonging to the North” or Chinese colonization) by the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) between 1407 and 1427 was but one example. Shortly after leading Vietnam in the *Lam Sơn* Uprising and defeating the powerful Ming troops, Nguyễn Trãi (1380-1442), the general-scholar and the mastermind of the uprising, composed a well-known “Great Proclamation upon the Pacification of the Wu” (Bình Ngô đại cáo) in Chinese characters in 1428 to base the legitimacy of the Southern Kingdom’s rule on the claim that Vietnam was not only distinctive from, but also equally civil and cultured as the Northern Kingdom: “惟我大越之國，實為文獻之邦，山川之風俗既疏，南北之風俗亦異” (“Wei wo Da Yue zhi guo, shi wei Wen Xian Zhi Bang, shan chuan zhi feng yu ji shu, nan bei zhi feng su yi yi” in Chinese modern *pin-yin*; my emphasis), which literally means “but our Great Viet Kingdom is indeed a domain of civility. Not only our natural environment is different [from the north], but our southern customs and social practices are also different from that of the north.” “Wu” is one of many designations with derogatory overtones and mythical origins that Vietnam had developed to refer to the Chinese (O’Harrow 1979).

During the colonial period, Nguyễn Trãi’s work was exalted as a great proclamation of Vietnam’s independence and was translated into *quốc ngữ* by four intellectuals: three Confucian scholars Bùi Ki (1888-1960), Hoàng Phạm Trân (1904-1949) under the penname Mạc Bảo Thần, and Ngô Tất Tố (1894-1954), as well as neo-traditionalist Trần Trọng Kim (1888-1953). Of these four translators, Ngô Tất Tố, Trần Trọng Kim and Bùi Ki translated *wen xian zhi bang* into *văn hiến chi bang* or *nền văn hiến*, both of which mean “the domain of civility;” yet Hoàng Phạm Trân (Mạc Bảo Thần) gave this term an interesting twist and translated it into *xứ sở văn minh*, meaning “the land of civilization.”¹ This twist is symptomatic of the struggles

¹ Bùi Ki’s and Hoàng Phạm Trân’s versions appear in their fictionalization of Nguyễn Trãi’s historical

Vietnamese intellectuals were about to experience in the late nineteenth century: transforming Vietnam from a domain of civility in a traditional Sinocentric East Asian political-intellectual world to a land of modern civilization while attaining its distinctiveness in the international world of nation-states.

In this chapter, I aim to show how the traditional Sino-Vietnamese intellectual world—the pillar of *văn hiến chi bang*—was turned upside down by the coming of *văn minh* brought with French colonial rule. I deliberately use “the intellectual world” instead of “the cultural fields,” because as I discussed in Chapter One, the new forms of domination—the colonial state and the capitalist market economy—were not present in the pre-colonial period. It should be noted that during this time period of French military conquest, the term *văn minh* was yet to be widely used by Vietnamese intellectuals. But from the next decade on, *văn minh* would eventually become one of the most highly-charged words in the cultural fields. Here, I discuss the circumstances that paved the way for this term to surface in Vietnam. I also show how the secular *quốc ngữ* vernacular literature was started by Catholic-Confucian scholars under the auspices of the French colonial body. These early East-West hybrid elites took up the role of middlemen facilitating the interchange between French, Chinese, and Vietnamese cultural elements in the late nineteenth century.

To this end, I first review the features of pre-colonial Vietnam’s intellectual world and the *habitus* of intellectuals. I show that during the pre-modern era, Chinese cultural elements were not only held by Vietnamese political and cultural elites as the standard against which they measured their society’s level of civility (*wenxian* in Chinese; *văn hiến* in Vietnamese), but also were absorbed into the daily live of commoners via the mechanism of *diễn*, a practice of improvised Sino-Vietnamese oral transliteration. Second, I outline the process of French colonization, which involved both military conquest and the influx of cultural elements that were radically alien to the Vietnamese, with the exception of the Catholic minority who had some knowledge about Europe and European clergy from contact with missionaries in the mid-seventeenth century. I also examine the French language policy that unwittingly provided the communication infrastructure for the emergence of both the cultural fields and the vernacular literature in the early twentieth century. Third, since the Catholic minority was the first Vietnamese community in contact with European influence, I will examine the works of scholars who were born in Confucian families and practiced Catholicism, as their translation work was central in initiating the development of the *quốc ngữ* vernacular literature and the transformation of the Sino-Vietnamese intellectual world into fields in the Bourdieusian sense. I juxtapose

account *Lam Sơn thực lục* (The True Record of Lam Sơn Uprising) prior to 1945; Trần Trọng Kim’s version is in his history textbook *Việt Nam sử lược* (A Summary of the History of Vietnam, 1919).

the literary works and biography of the earliest *quốc ngữ* writers with those of their non-Catholic peers in Vietnam on the one hand and the earliest translators of Western learning in other East Asian societies. In so doing, I show how the appearance of an overwhelming amount of alien cultural elements compelled traditional Confucian and Catholic scholars to take divergent career paths. While the French presence presented an unprecedented opportunity for Catholics and some collaborating Confucian literati, the majority of Confucian scholars, who were the actors of the Sino-Vietnamese traditional intellectual world, relied on the Chinese cultural model as they were trying to make sense of the massive upheavals brought about by the arrival of the French.

1. The Pillar of *Văn Hiến Chi Bang*: The Pre-Modern Sino-Vietnamese Intellectual World and Its Properties

The properties of the pre-modern intellectual world in Vietnam can be attributed to two factors. One is the civil service examination system that was installed in Vietnam in 1075, which introduced Confucian elements into then aristocratic and decentralized Vietnamese ruling elites and their Mahayana Buddhist monks-advisers and provided the administrative basis for Confucianism. Another factor is Ming China's occupation of Vietnam between 1407 and 1427, which was brief yet aggressive, and which decisively moved Vietnam toward a centralized state and propagated Confucianism, orthodox morality, textualism and a legal system to the largely agricultural countryside, and strengthened Confucian scholars into a meaningful elite group, now that their bitterest rivals in the court—the Buddhist monks—had been severely weakened (Whitmore 1997). Confucian literati enjoyed their greatest preeminence during the early Nguyễn dynastic rule when Empire Minh Mạng carried out a political reform based on the Chinese model that aimed to further centralize the state and tighten its control over the society, roughly half a century before Vietnam fell prey to French imperial expansion in East Asia (Woodside 1971).

As Confucian literati were being established as pre-colonial Vietnam's political-cultural elites in place of hereditary princes and military warlords, they developed two closely related *habitus*. One *habitus* of these classically trained men was looking at the Chinese model imitatively and selectively to find universal truth and practical advices for topics that ranged from the art of statecraft to religious wisdom (Buddhism and Daoism), and from medical theories to literary recreational activities (Cuong Tu Nguyen 1997; Liam 2005; Thompson 1998; Woodside 1971). Another *habitus* involved a jealous defense of Vietnam's distinctiveness from its suzerain and its high level of *văn hiến* (civility) defined in Chinese terms by

constantly invoking the South-North comparison, as scholar-general Nguyễn Trãi did in his “Great Proclamation upon the Pacification of the Wu” (1428). Together, Confucian literati became the agents of the Sino-Vietnamese intellectual world, where the most significant symbolic capital an educated man could hope to attain came from the success in passing the imperial examination and the title bestowed by monarchies in recognition of his service for the state.

Given Vietnam’s smaller size and less rigid social divisions, Vietnamese Confucian literati were more deeply embedded in commoners’ lives than were their Chinese counterparts (Woodside 1971). With the assistance of the *chữ Nôm* characters, the Chinese-based writing system that records Vietnamese sound, Confucian scholars developed a *diễn* technique both to spread Chinese cultural elements to the rural area and to mediate between the state and the village. *Diễn*, the Vietnamese rendering of the Chinese word *yan* (演), is a verb that carries multiple meanings and could mean (1) to act, to perform; (2) to take place, to occur; and (3) to elucidate, to explicate in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese languages.² When a Vietnamese Confucian scholar performed *diễn*, he would conduct it in a face-to-face setting: he would orally share the otherwise obscure and incomprehensible Chinese texts to illiterate villagers in spoken Vietnamese through transliteration and improvised translation. He would transcribe the interpretation in *chữ Nôm*, the script that since its first appearance in the tenth century existed in tandem with Chinese characters. The transcription, which was known as *diễn Nôm*, would more often be in verse than in prose, because books were written to be heard, not read, in order that memorization would be an easier job for illiterate villagers. This pre-colonial reliance on oral transmission of knowledge might be derived from Vietnam’s lack of printing: in the early nineteenth century, there was only one printing press in the whole country (DeFrancis 1977: 46). Through this process of *diễn*, Chinese cultural elements were transformed from scholarly culture (*văn hóa bác học*) into folk culture (*văn hóa dân gian*) and were integrated into Vietnamese society.

The role of the *diễn* technique in the dissemination of Chinese cultural elements in pre-colonial Vietnam is supported by the recent scholarship on pre-colonial Sino-Vietnamese publication, which shows that a high proportion of the existing *Nôm* books were produced to orally interpret and propagate Chinese texts so as to facilitate comprehension and memorization (Liu 2007: 283-292; Wang 2002: ix-xlix). A further examination of the catalog of *Nôm* books shows that Chinese texts pertaining to the teaching of filial piety, primers, music, reference books for everyday living, as well as medical care are among those that were most frequently translated into *Nôm* (Liu

² <http://www.sealang.net/vietnamese/dictionary.htm>, http://tratu.soha.vn/dict/vn_en/Di%E1%BB%85n, last accessed March 11, 2013.

2007: 285). This bibliographic evidence is in accord with the findings of studies on pre-colonial Vietnamese Confucianism: besides being a cultural, moral, and literary ideal, Confucianism served Vietnamese literati's pragmatic interest in providing tips and lessons for practical application (Taylor 2005; Woodside 1971). Some scholars suggest that Chinese texts in pre-colonial Vietnam resembled an encyclopedia of recorded wisdom (Wolter 1979: 75-85).

Further evidence of how Chinese texts were *diễn*ed into popular culture can be found in the popular *truyện Nôm* literature, verse stories written in the *Nôm* script by Confucian literati. A few pre-colonial literary works that were to be praised by colonial Vietnamese intellectuals as Vietnamese literary masterpieces are the *Nôm* rendition of Chinese romantic stories. For instance, of the three most beloved *Nôm* stories, *Truyện Kiều* (the Tale of Lady Kiều, 1814), *Lục Vân Tiên* (the Tale of Lục Vân Tiên, between 1822 and 1888), and *Nhị Độ Mai* (Plum Blossoms Bloom Again, possibly first published in the nineteenth century), both *Truyện Kiều* and *Nhị Độ Mai* are adapted from Chinese stories: *Truyện Kiều* is *diễn*ed from *Jin Yun Qiao Juan* (金雲翹傳, the Story of Jin Chong, Wang Cui Yun, and Wang Cui Qiao, between the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries), and *Nhị Độ Mai* from *Er Du Mei* (二度梅, Plum Blossoms Bloom Again, the early seventeenth century) (Nguyễn Phương Chi 2004: 1265-6). *Truyện Kiều* will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters. *Nhị Độ Mai* has been widely rendered in various forms of folk operas among Chinese communities in southern China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, as well as Southeast Asia, indicating that geographical proximity between Vietnam and South China might account for *Nhị Độ Mai*'s travel to Vietnam during the pre-colonial period. *Lục Vân Tiên* is an original story composed by Vietnamese poet Nguyễn Đình Chiểu. It takes place in China, and its story plot resembles *Truyện Kiều* and *Nhị Độ Mai*: all three of these epic poems tell how a young talented Confucian scholar and a beautiful, virtuous young lady from a decent family overcome extreme hostility and obstacles (usually from prominent but wicked government officials) to not only succeed in the imperial examination, but also consummate their love.

In the pre-modern Sino-Vietnamese intellectual world, Vietnamese lettered men tended to employ Chinese characters to both compile administrative and historical documents and compose novels that recounted creation myths, folktales, and well-known historical figures (see Sun, Trịnh, and Chen 2011). *Chữ Nôm* script was used in composing mostly verse, especially poetry. Compared to poetry, which enjoyed wide popularity in pre-modern Vietnam, prose fiction written in either Chinese or *chữ Nôm* was a marginalized literary form (Cao Thị Như Quỳnh and Schafer 1988; Trần Đình Hượu 1988). Vietnamese educated men in pre-colonial time might have been reading Chinese fiction imported from China through Chinese

immigrants and businessmen. This hypothetical readership might not be totally groundless considering the fact that traditional Sino-Vietnamese fiction and many *truyện Nôm* shared similar literary structure, story plots, and moral tones with Chinese fiction, and it might explain why prose fiction was not particularly well developed in pre-colonial Vietnam. Another possible reason is that the imperial exam in pre-colonial Vietnam was a simplified version of the Chinese one, and it attracted fewer exam takers than in China (Woodside 1971), where a flood of exam takers who used novels to express their anxiety, frustration, and resentment toward the imperial exam and the government's failure to recognize their talents, constituted half of the traditional fiction writers between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries (Wang and Liu 2010).

2. The Coming of *Văn Minh* via French Colonization

The hegemony of the Chinese model in the pre-colonial Vietnamese intellectual world encountered serious challenges for the first time when a competing model of Western *văn minh*, along with its superb military power, was imposed upon Vietnam in the mid nineteenth century, as the French government demanded that commercial contracts and religious freedom be granted to French colonists and missionaries. Unfortunately, the Sino-Vietnamese intellectual world that operated in the realm of *văn hiến chi bang* could not withstand the onslaught of *văn minh*: it was shattered to the core, and never recovered from this shock. As a result, many educated elites who were versed in Chinese learning were scattered, and they were to become the earliest agents of the political and cultural fields in colonial Vietnam. But during this early colonial period, intellectuals were too overwhelmed by the French military campaign to be concerned about cultural issues and the cultural fields were yet to take shape.

2.1. French Colonization and the Civilizing Mission

The rise of the West in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—the pioneer nation-states that I discussed in Chapter One—caused the decline of Imperial China in the nineteenth century and the resulting power reshuffle in East Asia. The once proud and splendid Celestial Dynasty whose Son of Heaven had demanded the British envoy to perform kowtow ritual before his throne and refused to trade with the “barbaric” West, China first tasted defeat at the hand of West during two Opium Wars with the British Empire (1839-1842, 1856-1860). Since then, to China's horror, its status rapidly deteriorated and it was repeatedly humiliated by the new imperial powers, so

much so that a sense of failure constituted the key component of modern China's national identity (Tsu 2005). China was quickly reduced to a semi-colony of not only a constellation of Western powers but also Japan which, thanks to the *Meiji* Restoration in 1868, managed to escape the turmoil that beset China and, to the world's astonishment, rose to replace China as Asia's new hegemonic power, defeating China and Russia in 1896 and 1905, respectively.

As a long-time member of the East Asian cultural sphere, Vietnam, too, was not only thrown into a profound confusion caused by the shift of world's power balance, but was also subjected to the imperial competition between the world's earliest nation-states, namely, English and France, as the latter intended to build a Southeast Asian colony to both rival the former's lucrative colonies in India and Hong Kong and use Vietnam as a stepping stone to China. The making of French Indochina, which includes present-day Vietnam, Cambodia, and Lao, was a complicated historical event contingent upon multiple factors. The advance force of the colonial expansion was Catholic missionaries, whose presence in Vietnam dates back to the seventeenth century and was instrumental in the founding of the Nguyễn Dynasty (1802-1945) and the largest Catholic community outside France.³ At home, however, missionaries were resented and distrusted by republicans and colonists, whose profound sentiments of anticlericalism were one of the driving forces of the French Revolution. To demonstrate their loyalty to both God and France so as to secure domestic support, missionaries emphasized their patriotism and their converts' love for *mère patrie* (i.e., the motherland). They also emphasized their critical role in spreading the universal value of Enlightenment and the "French influence" in spite of the hostility of Confucian mandarins, who cast suspicious eyes on these heterodox elements and led peasants in carrying out large-scale persecutions of Catholics, which climaxed in the 1880s, as nearly 40,000 people were killed in this decade alone. The precarious Catholic communities surrounded by violent non-Christian native population provided a perfect pretext for colonial expansion in Southeast Asia for colonists, opportunists, and businessmen (Daughton 2006).

It is true that French colonists and businessmen were motivated by the prospect of the political and economic gains a colony could bring to France. Yet, it should be noted that it is equally true that these men and women, heirs of the French Revolution and the "cult" of the French nation who insisted a French nation was made to spread universal Enlightenment and Progress to the rest of the world, genuinely believed that colonial expansion was beneficial for the colonized (Bell 2001). Known as *mission civilisatrice* in French and resting on the fundamental assumptions of French

³ The key figure was Pigneau de Béhaine (1741-1799), a missionary who helped the founder of the Nguyễn Dynasty in defeating the rival Tây Sơn regime and unify northern and southern Vietnam.

superiority and human perfectibility, this ideology became the doctrine of French assimilative imperialism. It insisted that France was the only nation that could give the invaluable gift of liberty, equality, and fraternity to the rest of the world, which was thought to be inhabited by inferior nations capable of being uplifted, though only with proper guidance from a wise mentor (Conklin 1997).

The process of turning Vietnam into part of French Indochina can be divided into three phases. Between 1858 and 1867, in the midst of the Second Opium War (1856-1860), the lower basin of the Mekong River, which includes the southern provinces of imperial Vietnam under the Nguyễn reign and the kingdom of Cambodia, came under French subordination. The colonial expansion paused between 1867 and 1882 and resumed between 1882 to 1897, during which time three French protectorates were established in Lao, central Vietnam, and northern Vietnam, respectively. When the Nguyễn court signed the Treaty of Huế with France in 1883 to accept the French colonization of the southern Mekong Delta and a protectorate over central and northern regions, Qing China intervened. The ensuing Sino-Franco War resulted in China's defeat and subsequent relinquishment of its suzerainty over Vietnam in 1885, which was formalized in the Tientsin Accord with France in May 1885. Southern Vietnam, a frontier society famous for diverse ethnic cultures and fertile land suitable for wet rice agriculture, was renamed as Cochinchina; central Vietnam, where Huế, the royal capital of the Nguyễn court, was located, was called Annam; finally, northern Vietnam, the area where Vietnam borders with China, was called Tonkin (See Map).

The profound crisis threw Vietnam into deep confusion, and the Chinese model was inadequate in providing conceptual tools to comprehend, evaluate, and respond to the invasions. On the one hand, the Nguyễn officialdom was torn between the mandarins who insisted on expelling the invader, and those who opposed the idea of Vietnam going to battle with an enemy against whom it was hopelessly outmatched. On the other hand, local scholar-gentry elites in Annam and Tonkin areas allied with peasants under the angry outcry of “*Hunt the Westerners, kill the heterodox Catholics!*” (“*Bình tây sát tả*”), since missionaries and native Catholics fought along with the French troops, supplying them with much needed militia, provisions, guides, and translation. The resistance movement held to the idea that the ideal royalty was the embodiment of Vietnam's sovereignty, and soon armed uprisings and reprisal massacre against Catholics spread across the country. The anti-colonial struggles reached a climax when the boy emperor Hàm Nghi and some mandarins who refused to appease the “barbarians” issued a call for *Cần Vương* (Aid the King) in 1885, as Hàm Nghi was deemed the real Son of Heaven and the incarnation of Vietnam's celestial mandate. To counter Hàm Nghi's claim to the throne, the French installed

Hàm Nghi's younger brother Đồng Khánh as the puppet king. Between 1885 and 1886, some eminent mandarins and activists such as Nguyễn Quang Bích (1832-1890), Tôn Thất Thuyết (1839-1913), and Nguyễn Thiện Thuật (1844-1926) secretly went to Qing China to ask help, but to their disappointment, their efforts did not achieve much success, as China itself was being deeply mired in its own crises resulting not only from the Western encroachment but also from the ambitions of Japan. This *Cần Vương* movement lost its momentum when the figurehead Hàm Nghi was captured by the French troops and exiled to Algeria—another French colony in Africa—in 1888. Both DeFrancis (1977) and McAlister (1969) attribute the defeat of the movement to the lack of a unifying ideology, and Nguyễn Thế Anh (1971) argues that the movement remained a series of regional insurgencies. But under the leadership of high-ranking scholar Phan Đình Phùng (1847-1895), sporadic uprisings lasted into the late nineteenth century.

2.2. French Language Policies and Hybrid Catholic-Confucian Scholars

Understandably, neutralizing Confucian scholars and breaking Vietnam away from the external influences of China became the colonial regime's uppermost concern, and later the primary goal of French cultural policies (Anderson 1992: 171). Out of this twofold desire to facilitate trust and communication between the colonizer and the colonized, and break Vietnam away from its ties with China so as to enforce the doctrine of assimilative imperialism, the French military and administrative body sponsored the establishment of the Latin *quốc ngữ* writing system, which henceforth witnessed slow growth in a highly hostile environment. Invented by Catholic missionaries for the purpose of proselytization, *quốc ngữ* originally was a marginalized writing script whose users were limited to missionaries and their converts, who prior to the establishment of Cochinchina made up no more than one percent of the whole native population. Once Cochinchina was made the first French colony in Southeast Asia, French military officers realized that their great need of native assistance in interpretation, administration, and mediation was not being met by their Catholic collaborators' service. The most pressing issue was that with very few exceptions like famous officer Trần Bá Lộc who utilized his knowledge of localities to efficiently and cold-bloodedly suppress *Cần Vương* guerilla activists and scholars Trương Vĩnh Ký and Huỳnh Tịnh Của whose contribution to the development of the *quốc ngữ* literature I will discuss below, Catholic collaborators were mostly untrustworthy opportunists and performed inferior service due to their ignorance of French language and their fellow Vietnamese' resentment against them. The French were well aware that they could not rely on these collaborators and hoped to recruit Confucian scholars so that economically feasible indirect administration

could be established. The possible cost of direct administration presented a difficult challenge to Paris, where heated debates over whether or not Vietnam was a desirable possession were provoked by the financial burdens and heavy casualties inflicted on the French troops during the course of repressing the *Cần Vương* movement (Buttinger 1967: 3-43; Cooper 2009: 11-28). Nonetheless, many of these traditional elites simply refused to cooperate: some rebelled, others withdrew into their native villages, and still others who were forced to take posts with the French only provided halfhearted service, while at the same time three important cities, Hanoi and Hải Phòng in Tonkin and Đà Nẵng (known to the French as Tourane) in Annam area, were placed under the direct administration since 1888.

To solve the communication problem, colonial Vietnam's first Collège des Interprète was founded in Cochinchina on the premises of the missionary school Collège d'Adran in 1861 to train Vietnamese as interpreters and to teach Vietnamese to French personnel.⁴ The second Collège des Interprète, modeled after the first, was opened in Hanoi in 1885, the year China lost the Sino-Franco War and central Annam and northern Tonkin areas became French protectorates. Compared to *chữ Nôm*, Chinese, and French, *quốc ngữ* was the most ideal candidate because of the three advantages it enjoyed over the other writing systems. First, *quốc ngữ* was easy to learn: three months' learning time proved sufficient for both Vietnamese and French to command this writing script, and therefore could free French personnel from both learning difficult characters and working with local interpreters. Second, as a Latin-based script rooted deeply in Christianity, it would help detach Vietnam from Chinese culture and neutralize the influence of Confucian scholars. Third, it would serve as an excellent transitional writing script as it would help Vietnamese familiarize with the Western script and, thus, prepare them for learning French in the future. *Chữ Nôm* and Chinese were out of question, as Chinese was dismissed as an obstacle to progress, even though Chinese and the imperial examination were still preserved in two protectorates for practical reasons and for appeasing Vietnamese parents and Confucian scholars (Marr 1971). But *quốc ngữ* was not without its disadvantage: precisely given its roots in Christianity, it was increasingly becoming a script of collaboration and was met with fierce hostility among the native population, especially in Tonkin and Annam. Even collaborators were lukewarm in promoting *quốc ngữ*, since they preferred direct French replacement of Chinese.

During this time period, Chinese and *chữ Nôm* surged to become vehicles of resistance. A body of resistance literature was composed by Confucian scholars prior to the 1900s, and the works that appeared between the 1860s and 1870s were authored

⁴ The level of collège in French Indochina was roughly equivalent to junior high school in modern America.

by Southern scholars in *Nôm* poems, which gave way to Chinese letters by northern and central scholars in the following two decades. In this literature, non-cooperating scholars expressed their anger against collaborators, some of whom were their old friends, countrymen, or colleagues, who, for their part, wrote *Nôm* poems and Chinese letters to persuade these Confucian scholars to give up their useless resistance and to defend their own position and their love for the country (DeFrancis 1977; Marr 1971).

In accordance with the civilizing mission, the French colonial administrative and military staff as a whole agreed that eventually Chinese characters and “Chinese morality” had to be totally replaced by French and French morality so that “la future France asiatique” could be built, and the prosperity of Vietnam—an adopted child of France—could be restored under France’s moral direction (DeFrancis 1977: 121). Just how and when to teach native students what kind of French, at what rate Chinese characters should disappear, and what roles *quốc ngữ* should play, however, generated much debate. Some felt that French was the only language to de-Sinify Vietnam; others thought *quốc ngữ* would be an ideal transitional tool toward “little France in the Far East.” On the one hand, it was the French administrative body that first expressed the desire for a national literature written in *quốc ngữ* in Vietnam: “There is a national literature to be created under our auspices, and when this task, which is being pursued with perseverance, is more advanced, Cochinchina will be definitely secured to France” (DeFrancis 1977: 98). It was thus, ironically, the French’s language policy and French desire to secure its rule in France’s first colony in Southeast Asia that helped pave the way for this “national literature” and for the vernacular cultural fields to emerge in the next decade. On the other hand, French generally held a very low regard for the *quốc ngữ*, viewing it as no more than an inferior “Chinese patois” and a primitive monosyllabic language without a literary tradition that was incapable of conveying abstract scientific reasoning and philosophical ideas. Hence, not many French colonists favored the solution of immediate eradication of Chinese characters, fearing that Confucian morality would decline rapidly and criminality would rear its ugly head.

In 1882, the colonial regime decreed *quốc ngữ* was to replace Chinese to be the official writing script in Cochinchina. Yet Chinese remained the official writing script along with French in Annam and Tonkin. When the option of replacing Sino-Vietnamese schools with Franco-Vietnamese ones became too expensive or difficult to implement, the French regime would mandate that *quốc ngữ* along with Chinese and, to a lesser extent, French, be taught in these traditional village schools. The colonial administrative body also established the first modern print house and published Vietnam’s first *quốc ngữ* official gazette and first modern periodical *Gia Định báo* in Cochinchina in 1865 in order to supply reading materials for

Franco-Vietnamese schools and *quốc ngữ* education. Prior to the French arrival there had existed only Catholic devotional literature written in *quốc ngữ* (Ramsay 2008). That secular *quốc ngữ* literature had been nearly non-existent must have troubled anticlerical colonists and republicans, even though they saw Catholic missionaries as valuable tools in disseminating *quốc ngữ* at no cost. The first two chief editors of *Gia Định báo* were Catholic-Confucian scholars and collaborators Huỳnh Tịnh Của (1834-1897) and Trương Vĩnh Ký (1836-1898). In addition to *quốc ngữ*, *Gia Định báo* also contained sections written in French and Chinese. In 1888, another *quốc ngữ* gazette *Thông Loại Khóa Trình* (Miscellaneaées) edited by Trương Vĩnh Ký was published, but it only lasted one year.

3. The Nascent *Quốc Ngữ* Literature

The colonial government's promotion of *quốc ngữ* script and *quốc ngữ* education created a great need for *quốc ngữ* reading materials, and thus induced the emergence of a *quốc ngữ* literature. In order to understand the characteristics of the earliest development of the vernacular literature, I examine the works of Huỳnh Tịnh Của (1834-1897), Trương Vĩnh Ký (1836-1898), Trương Minh Ký (1855-1900), as well as Nguyễn Trọng Quản (1865-1911). Huỳnh Tịnh Của, the eldest among the four, compiled Vietnam's first comprehensive dictionary *Đại Nam Quốc âm tự vị/Dictionnaire Annamite* in 1895; Trương Vĩnh Ký defended *quốc ngữ* and argued that it was capable of abstract reasoning and elevated thoughts; the youngest Nguyễn Trọng Quản penned Vietnam's first modern fiction *Truyện Thầy Lazaro Phiền* (The Tale of Mr. Lazarus Phiền, 1887). Huỳnh Tịnh Của, together with Trương Vĩnh Ký and Trương Minh Ký, were Vietnam's prominent scholars, Sino-Franco-Vietnamese translators, and writers who pioneered Vietnam's earliest non-religious *quốc ngữ* texts and expanded the usage of *quốc ngữ* script. I will discuss their background in the following section; here, it is sufficient to point out that all four of these men came from a rare background in colonial Vietnam: they were born in the families in Cochinchina that followed both Confucianism and Catholicism, a background that gave them several advantages in acquiring knowledge about *quốc ngữ*, French, and Chinese. First, because the history of *quốc ngữ* in Vietnam starts with Christianity, when the majority of Vietnamese—both mass and elite—were contemptuous of *quốc ngữ*, these four men's Catholic background must have given them a head start in their knowledge and familiarity with the *quốc ngữ* script, though at the same time reinforcing the general perception that it was a “script for Christians.” Their religious

belief also earned them trust from and connection with the French colonial officials. Second, these four men received training of the French language from their contact with Catholicism, Catholic seminary, and the college of interpretation, Vietnam's first Franco-Vietnamese school. Third, they also benefited from their familial legacy of Confucianism in that they were well versed in Chinese classical texts. These four Catholic-Confucian intellectuals were, therefore, perfect candidates to develop a national vernacular literature, regardless of whether they were aware of their role in this enterprise. My sample is thus small, but representative: with their immensely broad scope of linguistic knowledge, these four men were responsible for producing the majority of *quốc ngữ* materials during the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Table 2.1: The number of the works composed by Huỳnh Tịnh Của, Trương Vĩnh Ký, Trương Minh Ký, and Nguyễn Trọng Quản

	Nôm	Chinese	French	Research	Original	Imitation	Total
Huỳnh Tịnh Của	5#	1	0	4	0	0	10
Trương Vĩnh Ký	7	7	0	4	4	0	22
Trương Minh Ký	4	9	6	18 (9)•	3	2	33*
Nguyễn Trọng Quản	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
	16	17	6	36 (27)•	8	2	66

Huỳnh Tịnh Của's transliteration of *Nôm* works were published in the early 1900s.

• Nine of Trương Minh Ký's research works were translated from Chinese, hence, the total research works were twenty-seven plus nine translated Chinese books.

* Again, nine of Trương Minh Ký's translated Chinese scholarly books decreased his works from forty-two to thirty-three.

The bibliographic catalog of the *quốc ngữ* works (and to a lesser extent, French works) of Huỳnh Tịnh Của, Trương Vĩnh Ký, Trương Minh Ký, and Nguyễn Trọng Quản reveals that the modern *quốc ngữ* vernacular literature began with the translation of the Chinese and French literatures. Over the two decades between the 1880s and 1900s, these four writers published sixty seven books, and their publications can be categorized into six groups: transliteration of *truyện Nôm*, translation of Chinese classics, translation of French literature, scholarly research and textbooks, original works, as well as mimicking works that explicitly imitated French literary works. Of these books, scholarly works and primers comprise the largest group (40.9%), indicating that the development of the *quốc ngữ* literature was driven by the *quốc ngữ* education. Next are the categories of translated Chinese works (25.75%) and transliterated *truyện Nôm* (24.2%). The smallest groups include original works (12.12%), translated French works (9.1%), and imitation of French works and the biblical story (3%). It should be noted that half of Trương Minh Ký's scholarly works and textbooks were translated from Chinese works, especially primers for moral education, and his reliance on Chinese works in editing textbooks is indicated by the number within parentheses. So, the total amount of the book titles authored by

Trương Minh Ký is 33, equaling 42 titles minus 9 textbooks that were also translated Chinese works.

A closer scrutiny of the early enterprise of *quốc ngữ* translation shows that due to the long history of Vietnam's cultural borrowing from China, these four writers were more familiar with Chinese literature than French literature. Whereas half of the six French literary works that had been translated into *quốc ngữ* in the late nineteenth century were French influential seventeenth-century fabulist Jean de la Fontaine's parables, the Chinese works that were selected for translation were more diverse and included both Confucian classics and short stories. The early corps of *quốc ngữ* translation was also characterized by didacticism: in terms of French literature, in addition to Jean La Fontaine's parables, another seventeenth-century author François Fénelon's didactic novel *Les aventures de Télémaque* was also translated; in terms of translated Chinese literature, many were moral primers that were widely circulated among Vietnamese families during the pre-colonial era.

All of the eight titles of original works were short in length (less than twenty pages) and told in third-person narrative. Three of them were creative nonfiction, while the remaining five were short stories. Two works of creative nonfiction were written in verse form, and the narratives of one short story unfolded through dialogue—a narrative style that was to become characteristic of *quốc ngữ* literature in the twentieth century. The length and style of the earliest *quốc ngữ* original works shows that they were in line with the pre-colonial Vietnamese literary preference for verse over prose that was evidenced in the *truyện Nôm* literature and the *diễn* practice.

From the eight original works emerged Vietnam's first modern *quốc ngữ* fiction *Truyện Thầy Lazaro Phiền* (The Tragedy of Teacher Lazarus Phiền, 1887, Lazarus is the Vietnamese rendition of Lazarus). As a Catholic, Nguyễn Trọng Quản's work was clearly inspired by the biblical story of Joseph, a son of Israel's third patriarch Jacob, as recorded in the Book of Genesis. Weaving fiction and historical events, this story started from Phiền's traumatized childhood in Cochinchina: as a child Phiền was one of the ten Catholics who had survived a brutal persecution in 1862 by the Nguyễn throne, in which more than three thousand Vietnamese Catholics were martyred as a result of the Nguyễn court's reprisal of the French aggression against Vietnam (Ramsay 2008). Phiền was rescued by a French official and then raised by a Catholic father, who taught him *quốc ngữ* and sent him to a Franco-Vietnamese school. In the school, Phiền befriended another Catholic boy Liễu and fell in love with Liễu's cousin, whom he married when he started working as an interpreter after graduation. His career in interpretation, however, was an unfortunate turning point in his life. The Vietnamese wife of Phiền's French superior began to desire him and sought to have an affair with him, but she was sternly refused by Phiền. The woman bore a grudge

against Phiên and produced fake correspondence between his wife and his best friend Liễu so as to frame them for adultery. Outraged by this charge, Phiên spent two years avenging and killing both his wife and friend; he then retired into a Catholic monastery. In the monastery, Phiên was tortured by his terrible crime and became very sick. He left the monastery to travel to a beautiful beach to convalesce, and on his way he met and confided his story to the author of this book. A while later the author received a letter from Phiên, telling him that Phiên just learned the terrible truth of how his wife and friend were the victims of the clever plot of his French superior's Vietnamese wife.

The author Nguyễn Trọng Quản stated in the preface to this book that he aimed at proving to his countrymen that “we Annamites are brilliantly intelligent and talented; we are not inferior to anyone else” (quoted from Nguyễn Huệ Chi 2004: 1203), a statement that was to be echoed by the successive generations of Vietnamese *quốc ngữ* writers and that can still be found in many modern accounts of Vietnamese culture, both within and outside the academe. In spite of his nationalistic intention, it seems that because both Nguyễn Trọng Quản himself and the protagonists of the tragedy of Lazaro Phiên were Vietnamese Catholics—a group of people who were becoming increasingly isolated and despised over the course of the French colonization because of their complicated relationships with the French missionaries and troops (Keith 2008)—*Truyện Thầy Lazaro Phiên* went largely unnoticed during the colonial period. Literary critics and historians during this time were generally unaware of the existence of this work and gave the honor of Vietnam's first modern *quốc ngữ* fiction instead to *Tố Tâm* (Tố Tâm is the name of the female protagonist that means “pure heart”), a love story that was published in 1925 (Bằng Giang 1992: 23). I will discuss more about *Tố Tâm* in Chapter Five.

4. The First Generation of Non-Religious *Quốc Ngữ* Writers

Vietnam's *quốc ngữ* literature began with Catholic devotional literature, and its non-religious genre, which would be deemed Vietnam's national literature in the twentieth century, started from the translation and transliteration of Chinese, French, and pre-colonial *truyện Nôm* literature by Catholic-Confucian scholars Huỳnh Tịnh Của, Trương Vĩnh Ký, Trương Minh Ký, and Nguyễn Trọng Quản in the late nineteenth century. This first generation of *quốc ngữ* non-religious writers emerged when a new model appeared to challenge the monopoly of the Chinese cultural model. This new model offered unprecedented opportunity for writers of a hybrid

background and minority status to become the leading force in the nascent development of the *quốc ngữ* national literature, even though these Catholic-Confucian writers would soon once again fall back to their marginal positions in the society in the twentieth century when their role would be replaced by both their contemporary non-Catholic Confucian counterparts and the younger generation of intellectuals of French learning.

In order to highlight the unusual role played by these Catholic-Confucian scholars in the initial phase of the development of the *quốc ngữ* literature, it is useful to put them in the context of Sino-Vietnamese intellectual world that was being turned upside down by political agitation and then compare their careers with those of their non-Catholic peers. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, three different career pathways were pursued by mandarins and scholars: accepting and collaborating with the new regime; passively resisting the new regime by withdrawing into native villages; or actively resisting the new regime by participating in armed uprising. These patterns of responses to French colonization were similar to the ways in which their predecessors responded to dynastic changes, a frequently recurring phenomenon throughout the history of Vietnam caused either by internal power struggles among native political elites or by external invasion from China (Elliot 1999).

From the biographical data of famous *Cần Vương* leaders and their opponents in the Nguyễn court, namely, the pacifists and escapade scholars who shied away from making political commitments, several features of the collapsing intellectual world in the late 19th century Vietnam can be identified. First, these men were born between the 1820s and the early 1860s, meaning that they grew up with a Sino-Vietnamese cultural background before they reached either early adulthood or middle age when their country was falling prey to a Western power that was primarily associated with Catholicism.

Second, changes of career paths from resistance to collaboration occurred. For example, before they collaborated with the French colonial body in negotiating terms of surrender with their acquaintances and former comrades, both Phan Liêm (1833-1896), the son of a high ranking mandarin and an embassy to France Phan Thanh Giản, and doctor's degree holder Phan Trọng Mưu (1853-1904), were members of the *Cần Vương* movement. Another example was a military mandarin of the Nguyễn dynasty Nguyễn Thân (1840-1914), who joined the *Cần Vương* struggles briefly before he decided to work for the French troops. In contrast, the change of career paths in the opposite direction, that is, from long-term collaboration to armed resistance, does not seem to have occurred.

Third, the cultural capital derived from the Chinese model provided intellectuals a fallback career outside the intellectual world. Withdrawers such as Nguyễn Đình

Chiếu (1822-1888, the author of *Nôm* epic poem *Lục Vân Tiên*, one of the three most popular epic poems in Vietnam), Phan Văn Trị (1830-1910), and Nguyễn Khuyển (1835-1909) made a living teaching Chinese in Sino-Vietnamese schools, practicing traditional herbal medicine, and composing poems in Chinese and *Nôm*. Phan Trọng Mưu (1853-1904), too, chose to utilize his fame and prestige as a traditional doctor to teach in private Sino-Vietnamese schools after he had pulled himself out of the *Cần Vương* anti-colonial struggles. Indeed, teaching, prescribing herbal medicine, and composing Sino-Vietnamese poems were three popular ways for those pre-colonial literati who either failed to pass the imperial exam or were unwilling to enter the royal government to earn their living in their villages.

Fourth, all the intellectuals during this time period wrote in either Chinese or *Nôm*. In addition to the above four scholars who wrote poems in Chinese and *Nôm*, collaborator Hoàng Cao Khải wrote *Việt Sử Yếu* (A Summary of Vietnamese History) in Chinese. Writing in *quốc ngữ* was obviously not an option for these non-Catholic scholars. One of the most famous scholars who exiled himself from the center of political power was baccalaureate degree's holder Nguyễn Đình Chiểu (1822-1888), who was born to prominent Confucian family in Cochinchina and spent his teenage years in Huế, the capital of the Nguyễn dynasty. When the French campaign against Cochinchina intensified, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu escaped into the villages of his wife and composed both *truyện Nôm* and poems in Chinese to express his antipathy toward Catholicism and Buddhism. One of his *truyện Nôm* works, *Lục Vân Tiên* (the Tale of Lục Vân Tiên, unknown year of publication), was so well received that its popularity was only next to *Truyện Kiều*, and it was transliterated into *quốc ngữ* by Trương Vĩnh Ký shortly after his death.

Fifth, notable mandarins and scholars who collaborated with the French regime, such as Tôn Thọ Tường (1825-1887), Trần Bá Lộc (1839-1899), and Hoàng Cao Khải (1850-1933), assisted the French primarily in military and political areas: militarily, they utilized their intimate knowledge of the local society to help the French crush the native armed forces; politically, they relied on their personal relationships with leaders of the insurrections to persuade them to change their allegiance. Tôn Thọ Tường, a man who was born to a mandarin family but, nevertheless, was unable to gain recognition from the Nguyễn dynasty, learned *quốc ngữ* and advocated that it was easy and could be mastered within months, whereas Chinese was so difficult that one might have to spend a life's time to learn it (Huỳnh Văn Tòng 2000: 93). But other than promoting *quốc ngữ* vis-à-vis Chinese, the cultural capital of these collaborating scholars did not seem to enable them to render cultural services for their new overlord, which formed a contrast with the Catholic scholars.

There were five Catholic Confucian men of letters who were prominent early in

French colonial expedition: in addition to the four scholars I discuss above (Huỳnh Tịnh Của, Trương Vĩnh Ký, Trương Minh Ký, and Nguyễn Trọng Quản) was an Nguyễn official Nguyễn Trường Tộ (1828-1871). All of them learned Chinese and doctrines of Confucianism at home, and it is likely that they learned *quốc ngữ* with Catholic clergy at their churches. All of them attended schools where French was the instruction language, and except for Trương Minh Ký, who obtained his diploma from the Collège of Interpretation in Cochinchina, the other four men had experience studying abroad in Penang (Malaya), Algeria, and France. In terms of careers, none of these five men followed the traditional path in terms of sitting for the imperial examination. Except for the youngest Nguyễn Trọng Quản, who worked as a low-ranking clerk in the colonial government, the other four put their bilingual talents to use and were involved in the intermediary service for both the Nguyễn court and the French regime. The careers of Nguyễn Trường Tộ and Trương Vĩnh Ký were especially remarkable. Nguyễn Trường Tộ's experiences of traveling in Europe and studying in France convinced him that Vietnam was in need of a thorough reform, yet his advocacy for adopting *quốc ngữ* as the official writing script and political reform was rejected by the emperor and the majority the Nguyễn mandarins. Trương Vĩnh Ký was a linguistic genius who was fluent in more than twenty-five different European and Asian languages and a professor at the College of Interpretation. He became a high-ranking academic official in both France and Vietnam.

Clearly, these Catholic Confucian scholars' networks with Catholic communities and their knowledge in French, Chinese, and *quốc ngữ* enabled them to not only bypass the imperial examination in pursuing their careers, but also to become interpreters, journalists, and Vietnam's first generation of non-religious *quốc ngữ* writers. These men's careers in the colonial government and vernacular literature are but one example of the significant role Confucian scholars-turned interpreters played in the initial phase of modernity in East Asia. The counterparts of these Vietnamese Catholic Confucian interpreters in East Asia, such as prominent thinkers and writers Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901) in Japan, Yu Kil-chun (1856-1914) in Korea, as well as Yen Fu (1854-1921) in China, were all in charge of selectively translating Western literature pertaining to science, technology, and enlightenment into their own native languages. Nevertheless, it is important to note that while Vietnamese translators' jobs geared toward fulfilling the new educational need for *quốc ngữ* reading materials, their counterparts in Japan, Korea, and China were more interested in using translation to introduce modern knowledge into their societies.

As the class of Confucian scholars and mandarins was devastated by a series of psychological traumas caused by the horrible defeat of their kingdom, Catholic scholars initiated the development of *quốc ngữ* literature, and the first generation of

young intellectuals of Western training began to form. An example of this is *Hội Trí Tri* in the Tonkin Delta, which was the earliest Franco-Vietnamese organization created in 1892 to facilitate the training of bilingual native functionaries at lower levels. One of its founding members was Paul Doumer, who would become Governor-General of French Indochina between 1897 and 1902. Originally it was not named *Hội Trí Tri* but *Hội giúp nhau học tập*, literally “the Society of Mutual Instruction” (Société d’Enseignement Mutuel du Tonkin). The name of this society indicates its original founding purpose: to provide a platform for the first generation of native functionaries in Tonkin area to improve their French language skills. When the first Collège of Interpretation was open in Hanoi in 1885, it had great difficulty recruiting students from parents who were horrified by the idea of sending their sons to learn “barbarous” French (Nguyễn Công Hoan 1994). The promise of tuition waivers and scholarships was not enough: the government had to draft students from reluctant local population. Due to the great and urgent need for staffing the lower ranks of the civil administration with native interpreters in newly conquered Tonkin, students in the collège received less than a year of French training before they assumed positions in the colonial regime. Mostly in the age group between twelve and fifteen, these youths discovered that they were inadequately equipped to perform the jobs as soon as they entered the government. Under the leadership of Nordemann, then the Head of the Education Board in Cochinchina, these young functionaries began to meet regularly outside their jobs to continue learning French in 1892. Thus began the history of the *Hội giúp nhau học tập*, namely “the Society of Mutual Instruction,” with twenty French and 108 Vietnamese as its founding members. After a decade or so, its close ties to the French government transformed it from a society designated for Vietnamese young clerks to help each other improve French into one that was aimed at modernizing Vietnam. I will take up this topic in the following chapters.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I discuss the pre-modern Sino-Vietnamese intellectual world, which in China’s imperial imagination and the Vietnamese embassy’s poetic description participated in the Sinocentric East Asian civilization in a way that was reminiscent of an asteroid orbiting the Middle Kingdom. This *văn hiến chi bang*, i.e., the Domain of Civility, learned Sinocentric civilization from its contacts with and borrowings from China and defined its level of civility and uniqueness through

comparison with China. The imperial examination through which the royal courts recruited functionaries based on exam takers' knowledge about Confucian texts and the *diễn* technique through which Confucian scholars transmitted knowledge written in Chinese characters to villagers through demotic *chữ Nôm* were two institutions central to the evolution of the *văn hiến chi bang*.

The pre-modern Sino-Vietnamese intellectual world was fragmented when the French imperial expansionists took interest in establishing trading routes to China and spreading its Enlightenment *civilisation*, or *văn minh* in Vietnamese, via military means. Confucian scholars put up fierce resistance, especially in the protectorates of Tonkin and Annam, to the point that public opinions in Paris were split over whether France should even possess a colony in remote Southeast Asian mainland. Because of traditional elites' non-cooperation, colonists counted on missionaries and their native Catholic converts to provide much-needed local knowledge and interpretation in spite of their anticlerical sentiments. Nonetheless, these collaborators proved to be untrustworthy. As communication presented a urgent problem, the Romanized *quốc ngữ* became the most ideal writing script for the French colonial body in that it could alienate Vietnamese people from the influence of China and Confucian scholars. As they established educational institutions to train interpreters and promoted *quốc ngữ*, however, the French regime unwittingly paved the way for the emergence of the *quốc ngữ* vernacular literature and the cultural fields.

As the Sino-Vietnamese intellectual world was dissolving, Confucian scholars became collaborators, activists, translators, or withdrew into their villages. They held on to Chinese characters, even though beginning in the next decade, these scholars would gradually become the earliest agents of the vernacular cultural fields. While Confucian scholars were insistent on using Chinese characters and *chữ Nôm* and were not hesitant to show their hostility toward Christianity and "traitors' script" *quốc ngữ*, the Catholic-Confucian scholars, who were born in Catholic families with Confucian traditions and who learned *quốc ngữ* as part of their Catholic upbringing, constituted Vietnam's earliest "hybrid" cultural elite, and under the auspices of the French government, their mediation and translation would lead to the existence of the vernacular literature and the vernacular cultural fields in the twentieth century.

Chapter Three

Understanding *Văn Minh* through the Lens of *Văn Hiến*: the Emergence of the Vernacular Cultural Fields in the 1900s

The root of colonial Vietnam's vernacular cultural fields was laid down by hybrid Catholic-Confucian scholars outside the Sino-Vietnamese *văn hiến* intellectual world. In the mid-seventeenth century, European Jesuit missionaries created Latin alphabets to transcribe Vietnamese phonetics and produce religious tracts to convert and teach native peoples. Two centuries later, several highly exceptional men who were familiar with both *văn hiến* and *văn minh* made use of their valuable knowledge of Sino-Vietnamese culture and *quốc ngữ* to assist the French to consolidate power in the midst of violent resistance and non-cooperation of Confucian elites. Mediating between the Vietnamese and the French, these hybrid Catholic-Confucian scholars were crucial political negotiations between France and the Nguyễn court and the suppression of the *Cần Vương* Aid the King Movement, in which these scholars and their Confucian peers were deeply involved.

At the turn of the century, Confucian scholars who had been Vietnam's political and cultural elite for more than five centuries, were recovering from the shock of the military campaign against their country and the resulting disintegration of their Sino-Vietnamese intellectual world. During the first decade of the twentieth century, they participated in the East Asian Reform Movement, and their efforts resulted in the emergence of the vernacular cultural fields. Through endeavors to resist and not cooperate with French troops, these elites soon came to realize that in order for their country to survive, they would have to understand Western *văn minh* as soon as possible. They tackled this urgent task by resorting to their *habitus* of consulting with the Chinese model for knowledge, lessons, and advice about how to approach *văn minh*. Their efforts manifested in the country-wide *Duy Tân* Reform Movement, and Confucian intellectuals developed different attitudes toward *văn minh*: some followed China's revolutionary path and favored armed struggles, while others insisted that imitating the West and carrying out cultural modernization under the assistance of the

French was the best medicine for their society. The conflicts resulting from the clash of *văn minh* and *văn hiến* are best captured by the disputes between Phan Bội Châu and Phan Chu Trinh, two famous patriotic Confucian scholars from the conservative Annam area.

This chapter is organized into three sections. The first section reviews the colonial educational policies and vernacular presses, both of which were conducive to the growth of the *quốc ngữ* vernacular writing system and the creation of a new *habitus* that would dispose younger Vietnamese intellectuals to favor French civilization. The second section analyzes the political and cultural *Duy Tân* movement—the process, appeals, and activists’ biographical data and forms of contention. This latter section is the focus of the chapter, for it was through *Duy Tân* activists’ political and cultural involvements that the vernacular cultural fields began to take shape, thanks to the foundation of *quốc ngữ* communication infrastructure laid down by Catholic-Confucian scholars in the previous century. Finally, the third section discusses the reception for translated Chinese novels and what this reception meant for vernacular literature in colonial Vietnam.

1. Colonial Policies on Education and Publishing

1.1. Education

When the French empire added Mainland Southeast Asia to its overseas territories, it was met with stubborn resistance from the scholar-gentry class, the elite actors of the Sino-Vietnamese intellectual world. This class was closely tied to Sino-Vietnamese schools, where they established their *habitus* by learning Chinese characters, memorizing Chinese ancient texts, and preparing for the imperial exam. In other words, in a Bourdieusian sense (1990), traditional Sino-Vietnamese schools and the imperial examination system were central to the reproduction of the Sino-Vietnamese culture and the Sino-Vietnamese intellectual world. From the colonizer’s point of view, however, a new *habitus* that favored French civilization needed to be cultivated. Therefore, after the *Cần Vương* Aid the King Movement was crushed, establishing a new schooling system to replace the traditional one understandably became a top priority of French colonial rule.

Nevertheless, except that a new school system was needed, no further consensus was reached among key decision-makers with regard to what should be taught in the new colonial curriculum. In fact, this was an exceedingly contested issue as the new schooling system was expected to achieve several conflicting goals: to implement the French colonial officials’ vision of *mission civilisatrice* and help the native population

to achieve progress and civilization; to create a new stratum of elites imbued with French cultural elements; to create, maintain, and reinforce the hierarchical difference between the colonized and the colonizer so as to consolidate the French control of Vietnam; to placate the native population and the traditional elites, who strongly despised heterodox Catholicism and *quốc ngữ*, in the hope that traditional elites would be recruited into the seriously understaffed administrative apparatus.

The first step the French regime took toward a new school system was to unify the pre-existing but fragmented systems that had already developed in the three *pays*—namely, Cochinchina, Tonkin, and Annam—during the turbulent era of military conquest in the latter half of the nineteenth century. These included schools founded by missionaries and Sino-Vietnamese village schools. The unification was necessitated by the fact that the schools systems in the three *pays* were inconsistent, and as a result intellectuals educated in different *pays* had different *habitus* and configurations of cultural capital. To begin, Cochinchina, France's first colony in Southeast Asia, had the most Westernized education system, and served as an educational laboratory for the rest of French Indochina (Brocheux and Hémery 2009: 220). Nearly fifteen years after it conquered Cochinchina in 1862, the colonial regime decreed that the Latin-based *quốc ngữ* script become the official writing system and that the imperial examination that linked Vietnam to Sino-centric East Asian cultural sphere be abolished, on the grounds that Chinese characters were hindering Vietnam to progress (Marr 1981: 146). In contrast to its active intervention in Cochinchina's educational affairs, the French regime generally kept its hands off the schooling system in Annam, the conservative central protectorate where the royal capital of the Nguyễn Dynasty was located and the system of the mandarin was preserved. Annam's first Franco-Vietnamese secondary school was the *École Primaire Supérieure*, better known as the *Collège Quốc học* in Vietnam, and throughout the entire colonial era there were only four Franco-Vietnamese secondary schools in Annam. Finally, the schooling system in Tonkin stood in the middle ground between the systems in Cochinchina and Tonkin: while Vietnam's second *Collège of Interpretation*, modeled after its predecessor in Cochinchina, was opened in Hanoi in 1886, the influence of Chinese culture remained strong in Tonkin due to the fact that Tonkin was still part of the Nguyễn Empire and that it was geographically proximate to China (Kelley 1975: 9-50).

Paul Beau, the reform-minded general-governor of Indochina between 1902 and 1908, admitted that the inconsistent schooling systems in the three colonial *pays* were “the cause of current discontent” (McHale 1995: 24). To remedy this problem, a Council for the Improvement of Native Education was commissioned under Beau's leadership in 1905. The council was comprised of three different parties:

French politicians and settlers, high-ranking officials from the Nguyễn court, and the nouveau riche class from Cochinchina. The views of these groups toward what constituted the best education policies for Vietnam differed greatly. While the French politicians and settlers' main interests were to make sure that the Vietnamese would always be grateful and submissive pupils to the enlightened French mentorship without the *mission civilisatrice* being compromised, the affluent landowning Cochinchinese who acquired their wealth from their collaboration with the French settlers wanted to be more involved in the French order on an equal footing with the French colonizer. And the Nguyễn officials buttressed by the Confucian bureaucracy system, for their part, shied away from Western learning and insisted on continuing the traditional Sino-Vietnamese way of education (Kelley 1975: 9-50).

It took the Council twelve years to finalize their recommendations for colonial education policy. Much to the disappointment of the Cochinchinese landowning elites, it became apparent from the start that the Council was heading toward a diluted version of French vocational education instructed in *quốc ngữ* that would prepare native population to become docile manual labors, artisans, farmers, and petty clerks, completed with the moral teaching excerpted from Chinese classical texts. Chinese was no more than an object of study, and elementary French was introduced in upper-primary schools. The imperial examination remained effective in both Annam and Tonkin during this time period, and it is reported that there were over 6,000 candidates taking the exam in Tonkin in 1906 (Brocheux & Hémery 2009: 222).

During this time period, the highest education that Vietnamese pupils could obtain was a secondary one (Kelley 1975: 9-50), as colonial administrators had greater priority to primary teaching (Brocheux & Hémery 2009: 223). In addition to two Collèges of Interpretation in Cochinchina and Tonkin founded in the late 19th century, only two more secondary schools designated to train low-ranking civil servants for employment in colonial institutions were opened. They were the Collège Paul Bert and the Lycée du protectorat (School of Protectorate, known as “Trường Bưởi” in Vietnam), founded in Hanoi in 1903 and 1909 respectively. In 1907, Paul Beau opened the Indochinese University in Hanoi, the first university in Indochina, for the purpose of countering the widespread influence of nationalist movements among intellectuals. Yet the university's tenure was short-lived. When angry peasants in Annam rose in 1908 to protest devastatingly heavy taxes, the French regime under the order of Paul Beau's successor Antony Klobukowski panicked, blamed Confucian scholars, and shut down the university, which remained closed until 1917 (Brocheux and Hémery 2009: 221). Virtually no higher education was available for native students during the decade of the 1900s; aspiring parents with deep pockets sent their children either to China or all the way to France if they wanted their children to have

a university diploma (Kelley 1975).

This Franco-Vietnamese schooling system, though rudimentary, fragmented, and inconsistent as it was, accomplished several things for the cultural fields. First, it produced the first generation of “secular” Westernized intellectuals, who broke the Catholic monopoly over the vernacular literature field prior to the twentieth century. The group size of these men was small, yet some of whom were to become the prominent agents of the cultural fields. The most notable examples included ardent Francophile Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh (1882-1936) and Phạm Duy Tồn (1881-1924) from Hanoi’s Collège of Interpretation, both of whom were involved in the *Duy Tân* Movement led by Confucian scholars of an earlier generation. Together with their famous classmates Phạm Quỳnh (1892-1945) and Trần Trọng Kim (1883-1953), these young men were to become highly influential writers, scholars, commentators, and politicians in both *quốc ngữ* and French. From their education, they developed a *habitus* that was different from that of Confucian scholars: while Confucian scholars looked at Chinese texts—the embodiment of *văn hiến*—for advice and inspiration, these Westernized intellectuals looked on the French model as the standard of *văn minh* with which they either tried to syncretize the West and the East, such as Phạm Quỳnh and Trần Trọng Kim, or to eliminate the primitive and embarrassing elements of Vietnamese culture altogether, like Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh.

Next, the new schooling system also helped to improve the literacy and legitimacy of *quốc ngữ*, thus further stabilizing the written language for the emergent cultural fields. During the 1900s, the principle of “one school for one village” began to be observed in all three colonial *pays*, especially in major cities. This was achieved by adding *quốc ngữ* into the curriculum of the existing traditional Sino-Vietnamese communal schools (Brocheux and Hémerly 2009: 220). Although the *quốc ngữ* literacy was still relatively low, some Confucian scholars noticed the populist potentials of *quốc ngữ* and began to tie *quốc ngữ* with the future of Vietnam. But this spread of *quốc ngữ* was uneven among the three *pays*. Cochinchina had the highest number of *quốc ngữ* users, as it was the most urbanized and Westernized area where the imperial examination was first abolished. The widespread use of *quốc ngữ* script in Cochinchina was evidenced in the fact that colonial Vietnam’s reception of translated Chinese novels started in Cochinchina in the early 1900s and that colonial Vietnam’s earliest *quốc ngữ* periodicals appeared in Cochinchina 48 and 62 years ahead of Tonkin and Annam, respectively.¹ Therefore, it is safe to surmise that Vietnam’s vernacular reading public began to take shape in Cochinchina (Võ Văn

¹ Vietnam’s first *quốc ngữ* periodical was *Gia Định Báo*, published in Cochinchina in 1865. All the Catholic-Confucian scholars I discuss in chapter two worked for this journal. The first *quốc ngữ* periodicals in Tonkin and Annam were *Đông Dương tạp chí*, published in 1913, and *Tiếng Dân*, published in 1927, respectively.

Nhon 2007).

1.2. Publishing

During the decade of the 1900s, thanks to the colonial regime's subsidy and the growing urban population's hunger for *quốc ngữ* literary recreation, Cochinchina continued to outpace Annam and Tonkin in *quốc ngữ* publishing. Two vernacular weekly journals published in the 1900s in Cochinchina were particularly important for the development of *quốc ngữ* and the cultural fields: *Nông cổ mín đàm* ("Talks over tea on agriculture and business," 1901-1924) and *Lục tỉnh tân văn* ("News from the six provinces," 1907-1944). The former was published by Paul Canavaggio (?-1902), a member of the Colonial Council of Cochinchina, and the latter François Henri Schneider (1852-?), a French printer and a publisher who opened some of the earliest printing houses in colonial Vietnam. Both periodicals were edited by Cochinchinese Vietnamese intellectuals, the most famous ones being Confucian scholars Lương Khắc Ninh (1860-1931) and Westernized intellectual Gilbert Trần Chánh Chiếu (1869-1919), who after graduating from the missionary-founded Collège of D'Adran (the predecessor of the Collège of Interpretation) made his fortune and became a landowning millionaire and later a naturalized French citizen on account of his establishment of Rạch Giá market. At first glance, these two men seemed to be ideal cultural middlemen for the colonial state. Unlike preceding collaborators, many of whom were Catholics and proved themselves to be untrustworthy, these two men understood the French language and appreciated the Enlightenment value of the Western *văn minh* embodied in the French model. More importantly, both of them enjoyed rapport with the colonial regime, which, in turn, provided them with political capital that was simultaneously desirable and despicable in the eyes of many colonial Vietnamese intellectuals. They were influential figures in the political fields, and the French colonial state collaborated with them in the cultural fields in the hope of enhancing its own legitimacy.

When the *Duy Tân* Reform Movement erupted and the cultural fields began to form, Lương Khắc Ninh and Gilbert Trần Chánh Chiếu responded differently. While Lương Khắc Ninh was only mildly involved in the movement and did not challenge the hierarchical differences imposed by the colonial state, Gilbert Trần Chánh Chiếu was so eager to see the more of Western *văn minh* in colonial Vietnam that he became a threat to the recently imposed colonial order, to the point that even his naturalized French citizenship—the rarest form of political capital a colonial state could possibly grant its colonial subjects—could not save him from the jails. Gilbert Trần Chánh Chiếu was the first Vietnamese intellectual who, like so many other contemporary colonial intellectuals, simultaneously reflected and resisted the colonial state. His

defiance against the French authority also indicates the relative autonomy intellectuals had from the colonial authority. As historian Philippe Peycam puts it, Cochinchina elites like Gilbert Trần Chánh Chiêu “showed not only a willingness to mold [their] action in relation to the colonial order and its republican paradigms but also a capacity to act autonomously,” even though they came from an established elite class (Peycam 2012: 57).

2. The *Duy Tân* Reform Movement and the Beginning of the Vernacular Cultural Fields

While the sporadic *Cần Vương* insurgency in the late 19th century was inherently a spontaneous patriotic reaction to the country’s loss of sovereignty (Nguyễn Thế Anh 1998), in the early twentieth century intellectuals began to look deeper into Vietnam’s situation, hoping to identify the possible causes of and solutions to its problems. Impressed by the amazing success of Japan’s *Meiji* Restoration (1868) and China’s efforts at reformation in accordance with Japan’s model (1898), Vietnamese intellectuals starting in 1903 attempted to duplicate Japan’s modernizing experiences, and their efforts gave birth to Vietnam’s first wave of nationalist movements: the *Duy Tân* Reform Movement (Sơn Nam 2003: 11-18). From this movement, the cultural fields—namely, the academic field, the vernacular literature field, and the journalistic field—emerged. The movement was suppressed in 1908 when some of its intellectual members tried to merge intellectuals’ cultural reform with peasants’ anti-tax protest in Annam. Confucian scholars were dealt a particularly heavy blow when the movement was suppressed, and they were never able to recover from this setback.

The name *Duy Tân* suggests the affinity between Vietnam’s *Duy Tân* movements and the modernizing movements that had been sweeping Japan and China since the mid-nineteenth century, a time when East Asia was desperately trying to survive the West by emulating the West. This East Asian modernizing movement started with Qing China’s Self-Strengthening movement in 1861, gained momentum with Japan’s successful *Meiji Ishin* (the *Meiji* Restoration) in 1868, intensified with China’s failed Hundred-Day *Weixin* (the Hundred-Day Reform) in 1898, and finally made its way into Vietnam through *Tân thư* (“Xinshu” in Chinese), or “new books” or “books about new learning.” These *Tân thư* were authored by Chinese reformist intellectuals and entered Vietnam through the long-established networks of Chinese merchants and bookstores (McHale 1995: 20; Đinh Xuân Lâm 1997; Trần Nho Thịnh 2008). The most well-known Chinese reformists in Vietnam during the 1900s were monarchist Confucian scholars Kang Youwei (1858-1927) and his student Liang Qichao

(1873-1929), both of whom were leaders of China's Hundred-Day *Weixin* and were exiled to Japan after the movement was crushed by the Qing court in 1898. Due to the lack of fluency in Japanese language, the Vietnamese *Duy Tân* movement relied on Chinese *Tân thư* to learn both Japanese *Ishin* and Chinese *Weixin* experiences.² *Duy Tân* is the Vietnamese rendition of Chinese compound word *Weixin*, which means restoration, reformation, and renovation. It is rendered *Ishin* in Sino-Japanese, and became a household term among East Asian intellectuals at the turn of the century because of the successful *Meiji Ishin* (the *Meiji* Restoration) in 1868. The term was first coined by Japanese intellectuals who borrowed it from Chinese classical texts, and it was then imported back to China and finally introduced to Vietnam.

In what follows, I discuss the processes, appeals, as well as the leading intellectuals-activists of the *Duy Tân* Reform Movement. Special attention is paid to the question of how the *Duy Tân* movement defined the agenda of the cultural fields and the dynamics of power contention within them.

2.1. The Processes of the *Duy Tân* Movement

The *Duy Tân* Reform Movement was an umbrella term that encompassed three strands of nationalist movements: cultural reform, armed struggles, and economic development. Its development underwent three stages. It was initiated by the remnants of the *Cần Vương* Aid the King Insurgency, most notably Phan Bội Châu (1867-1940) and Nguyễn Thành (1863-1921). Both men were highly respected degree holders from the Annam area and were sympathetic with the cause of the *Cần Vương* uprising, namely, expelling the enemy by force and restoring Vietnam's sovereignty by reinstating the Nguyễn monarchy. In 1904, these two men draw on the *Weixin Hui* founded by Chinese reformists and monarchists Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao to establish the *Duy Tân Hội*, the Society for Reformation, in order to advance the cause of constitutional monarchy. Phan Bội Châu and Nguyễn Thành actively sought support from other Asian countries, especially China, Vietnam's former overlord, and to a lesser degree, post-*Meiji* Japan, who appeared eager to take on the role of the "big brother" for Asia.

The *Duy Tân* movement entered its second stage in 1905, when Japan shocked the whole world by defeating the naval armies of Russian Empire, the world's largest country. Japan's military triumph over a formidable European power not only

² Vietnam's first Japanese language book was not published until Japan invaded Vietnam in 1940. It was published in 1942 by Nguyễn Mạnh Bông (?-1952), a Confucian scholar who had translated quite a few Chinese novels and "Sex arts" books (apparently translated from Chinese) before he penned Vietnam's first self-teaching guide to Japanese. Two of his younger brothers were famous poets, Nguyễn Khắc Hiếu (1888-1939) and Nguyễn Tiến Lãng (1909-1976). I will talk more about these three brothers later.

quicken the pace of the *Duy Tân* movement, but also caused it to diversify into different paths. Shortly after the end of the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), the *Duy Tân Hội* entrusted Phan Bội Châu with a secret mission to Japan to fulfill three tasks: bringing Prince Cường Để of the Nguyễn royal family to Japan to be the figurehead of the *Duy Tân Hội*, soliciting support from Japanese politicians who expressed sympathy for Vietnam's plea for independence, and observing Japan's progress in modernization. Along with Phan Bội Châu and Prince Cường Để was Phan Chu Trinh (1872-1926), another degree holder and influential patriot from the Annam area. They had to stow away to Japan, as France was turning a suspicious eye on Japan for the counsel on the construction of legal structure after the *Meiji Ishin* that Japan received from Germany (Kanamori 1999), with which France had had a hostile relationship since its defeat in the Franco-German War in 1870.

During their stay in Japan, Phan Bội Châu also managed to meet some influential Japanese politicians and Chinese reformist Liang Qichao, who was then in exile in Japan. Apparently, this trip to Japan made a deep impression on Phan Bội Châu and Phan Chu Trinh. Upon returning to Vietnam, Phan Bội Châu heeded Liang Qichao's advice to cultivate young talents, and he started encouraging Vietnamese students to study in Japan. Thus began the *Phong Trào Đông Du* or the East Study Movement in 1905. It was hoped that Vietnam's suffering under the French would be soon alleviated by the latest knowledge about military and revolution technologies that Vietnamese youths were supposed to acquire during their study in Japan. On the other hand, Phan Chu Trinh invited his close friends Trần Quý Cáp (1870-1908) and Huỳnh Thúc Kháng (1876-1947)—both were the holders of traditional *tiến sĩ* (equivalent to modern PhD) degree from Annam—to travel around Vietnam so as to spread the idea of *Duy Tân* and make connections with like-minded compatriots. Their motto was *mở mang dân trí, phát triển công nghệ và thương mại, chú trọng vào khoa học thực dụng*, which means “enlightening people's understanding, developing industries and commerce, and emphasizing practical science” (Son Nam 2003:13). Phan Chu Trinh's proposed solution for Vietnam was a project of thorough cultural renovation that could make Vietnamese people as *văn minh*/civilized and self-dependent as Japan.

Meanwhile, intellectuals, especially those from Cochinchina, the region where trading activities were very dynamic due to the presence of Chinese communities (Marsot 1993), tried their hand at opening shops, hostels, and private schools in order not only to raise funds for the *Đông Du* movement, but also to show their support for the call for economic development and their determination to end Chinese dominance in economic affairs. This was called the *Phong trào Minh tân*, i.e., the *Minh Tân* movement.³ The motto of the *Minh Tân* movement was “Đưa Quan Công về Tàu, mời

³ “Minh tân” is the Vietnamese rendition of “ming xin,” which comes from one of the Four Books of

Thích Ca về Ân Độ,” meaning “bring Guan Yu back to China; send Guatama Buddha back to India.”⁴ Among these intellectuals who were involved in commercial activities, Gilbert Trần Chánh Chiêu, the editor-in-chief of the daily *Nông cổ mín đàm* and a wealthy French citizen, was the most influential: in response to Phan Bội Châu’s advocacy of the the *Đông Du* movement, he donated a huge sum of money, sent one of his sons first to Japan and later Hong Kong to learn English, and published essays and advertisements in *Lục Tỉnh tân văn* and *Nông cổ mín đàm*—the periodicals subsidized by the colonial government for which he served as the chief editor—to show his support for the cause. He also published many essays in *Lục Tỉnh tân văn* and *Nông cổ mín đàm* to advocate the importance of cultivating a national bourgeoisie for Vietnam and criticize the deficiencies he believed inherent in Vietnamese people’s characters that had prevented such a class of local entrepreneur from prospering in Vietnam (Nguyễn Huệ Chi 2004: 1776-1778). The collective deficiencies he found among Vietnamese included neglect of the value of trust and lack of planning and entrepreneurship (Trần Chánh Chiêu 1907, 1908a, 1908b).

By 1905 then, under the banner of the *Duy Tân* movement, there appeared three different approaches to Vietnamese independence: armed uprising led by Phan Bội Châu, cultural renovation advocated by Phan Chu Trinh, and economic development headed by Trần Chánh Chiêu. Ngô Đức Kế (1878-1929), a *tiến sĩ* from Annam, categorized the first approach as *ám xã*, the clandestine group, and the other two as *minh xã*, the open circle (Son Nam 2003: 11).

The establishment of the *Đông Kinh nghĩa thực* (Tonkin Free School) in Hanoi by a group of reform-minded Confucian literati and several Westernized intellectuals in March 1907 brought the *Duy Tân* movements to a culmination. The venue of the school was in the house of Lương Văn Can (1854-1927), a *cử nhân* (equivalent to modern bachelor degree holder) and the head of the school. His sons Lương Trúc Nam (1879-1908) and Lương Ngọc Quỳnh (1885-1917) had gone to Japan to study before they were recruited to teach in the school. Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh (1882-1936) and Phạm Duy Tồn (1881-1924), two of the earliest graduates of Hanoi’s Collège of Interpretation, assisted Confucian literati in obtaining permission from the government. As such, the school embodied an interesting convergence between the reformist tradition of the Nguyễn court that was initiated by Catholic-Confucian official Nguyễn Trường Tộ (1828-1871) in the late nineteenth century, whom I discussed in Chapter Two, the modernizing project of the colonial government, and

Confucianism *Da Xue* (the Great Learning) and means “manifesting virtue.”

⁴ Guan Yu (?-219) was a general and a famous protagonist of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. He was canonized by Chinese rulers in the late 16th century as a god of war, and his cult spread to Korea and Southeast Asia. The worship of Guan Yu was brought to Vietnam by Chinese immigrants. Shakymuni Buddha, however, was venerated by very few Indian immigrants, if any, since not many Indians were Buddhists. It was Vietnamese, not Indians, who venerated Shakymuni Buddha.

the reformism of the Confucian literati (Brocheux & Hémery 2009: 89).

The *Đông Kinh* Free School was patterned after the Keio Free School (the modern-day Keio University), Japan's first Western-styled private school built by *Ishin* intellectuals in 1858 in the hope that the Keio would function as the engine of mass enlightenment.⁵ According to Chương Thâu's discussion (1997: 48-65), the curriculum of the *Đông Kinh* school opposed traditional Sino-Vietnamese Confucian learning, purportedly corrupt Confucian scholars, Chinese characters, and the imperial examination. Instead, it promoted *quốc ngữ*, new learning, humanism and creativity, patriotism and nationalism, popular education, and professional training. The school offered classes for free, and both men and women of all ages were welcome. The subjects taught included history and geography of Vietnam and the world—particularly that of China and the West, mathematics, basic knowledge of science and technologies, hygiene, and ethics. All classes were instructed in *quốc ngữ*. In terms of languages, the *Đông Kinh* Free School recruited Confucian scholars to teach Chinese and Vietnamese civil servants to take charge of instructing *quốc ngữ* and French. Underneath all these modern subjects was an insistence on nationalism: explications of modern concepts such as nation, the leadership of nation (a monarch in the case of the *Đông Kinh* Free School), society, family, individuals, as well as the proper relationships among these entities that aimed at forging inhabitants of Vietnam into a *Tân quốc dân* (new people) imbued with deep nationalistic sentiments received special attention (Chương Thâu 1997). Patriotic Confucian scholar Phan Chu Trinh's lectures were reported to be extremely popular (Nguyễn Hiến Lê 2002 [1968]).

Even though the *Đông Kinh* Free School was opened legally, it appeared too radical to both the colonial regime and traditionalist literati: the former found the curriculum politically perverse, and the latter were unhappy about the fact that French was included in the curriculum (McHale 1995: 24). Despite of the disapproval of these two parties, the school still attracted a great deal of attention from the excited native population in the Tonkin area and stimulated intellectuals in Annam and Cochinchina to imitate it. In Annam in 1908 alone, there were seventy-two commercial enterprise and modern private schools opened after the model of the *Đông Kinh* Free School (Brocheux and Hémery 2009: 298). It was reported that four to five hundred men and women would hurry to the school every night to learn the knowledge that was not taught in the government-run Franco-Vietnamese schools before the school was shut down in March 1908 (Brocheux & Hémery 2009).

⁵ Vietnamese intellectuals named the school “Đông Kinh” both to signal the location of the school and to pay tribute to the Keio school. “Đông Kinh” is a Sino-Vietnamese term that literally means “eastern capital,” from which the term “Tonkin” is derived, which was the area where the school was located. “Nghĩa thực” is equivalent to the Japanese “Gijuku.” The name “Tokyo,” Japan’s capital, also means “eastern capital.” Both “Đông Kinh” and “Tokyo” are written in the same Chinese characters “Dong Jing” (Marr 1971: 164).

The fate of the *Duy Tân* movement was sealed in March 1908, when the panicked French colonial regime rushed to punish Confucian scholars for their involvement in Annamese peasants' anti-tax protest, even though the scholars' involvement probably was not very significant. Vietnamese students in Japan were expelled by the Japanese government in accordance with its agreement with France, the *Đông Kinh* Free School closed, the anti-tax protest forcibly repressed, and involved intellectuals either condemned to death, thrown into prison, or sent to exile. The *Duy Tân* movement was thus brought to an abrupt end. Until then, more than two hundred Vietnamese students had gone to Japan to study, of which more than a hundred students came from Cochinchina, fifty or so from Annam, and fortyish from Tonkin (Phan Bội Châu, quoted from Sơn Nam 2003: 74). Interestingly, as Table 3.1 below indicates, even though Tonkin was the most populous *pays* and where the *Đông Kinh* Free School was founded, it sent out the fewest students to Japan. The largest student body came from Cochinchina, which can probably be explained by Cochinchina's urbanization and wealth, and the fact that Annamese students might have been recruited through communal networks with Phan Bội Châu and Phan Chu Trinh, the two famous Annamese Confucian scholars who went to Japan to witness the success of the *Meiji* Restoration. After the *Duy Tân* movement was suppressed, all Vietnamese students were expelled from Japan, and many went to exile in Mainland China, Hong Kong, or Southeast Asia.

Table 3.1: Estimated population in colonial Vietnam, 1875-1913 (in thousands), and the regional breakdown of the *Đông Du* student body

	1875-1880	1913	Rate of growth	The number of students who went to Japan
Cochinchina	1,502	3,165	11.07	100+
Annam	3,000	5,000	0.67	50+
Tonkin	6,000	6,000	0	40+
Total	10,502	14,165	0.35	

*Adopted from Brocheux and Hémery (2009: 254) and Sơn Nam (2003: 74)

2.2. The Appeal of the *Duy Tân* Movement

The *Duy Tân* movement was Confucian in nature, but with a much higher level of hybridity compared with the *Cần Vương* Aide the King Movement of the late nineteenth century, which was also Confucian in nature. Its primary goal was twofold: understanding Western *văn minh* and transforming Vietnam into a nation of *văn minh* after the model of Western civilization in order for Vietnam to not only survive, but also prosper in the modern world. But the pursuit of this goal was not without

ambivalence and conflicts. While some intellectuals insisted that following *văn minh* was Vietnam's only hope, others felt indignant about the way in which the legacy of *văn hiến* and their country were violated by *văn minh*. Also, some wondered if a Vietnamese version of *văn minh* could be defined solely in Western terms without taking into consideration *văn hiến*, especially when *văn hiến* provided a lens and perspective to perceive *văn minh* for *Duy Tân* intellectuals, most of whom inherited a *habitus* of looking at the Chinese model for advice and legitimacy. This *habitus* disposed them to consult Chinese *Tân thư* (new books; books of new learning) to learn what *văn minh* really was and how other East Asian societies were dealing with it.

The Confucian nature of the *Duy Tân* movement was reflected in a belief widely held by the *Duy Tân* intellectuals that in order to understand and acquire *văn minh*, intellectuals, especially top scholar-gentry, must take on a leading role in the mission of *khai dân trí* (enlightening people's intelligence). This argument was best articulated in the *Đông Kinh Free School's* manifesto "The Booklet of Civilization and New Learning" (*Văn Minh Tân Học Sách*, 1907). After suggesting that Vietnam needed to be "civilized," curiously, the anonymous author(s) hastened to clarify that it would be a big mistake to view Vietnam as an uncivilized nation. It was pointed out that as part of Asia, one of the cradles of the world's great civilizations, Vietnam had always been praised by other nations as *văn hiến chi bang*, namely, a society with a high level of cultural and intellectual development. Unfortunately, according to the author(s), Asian civilization was inherently stagnant and backward and, therefore, was the antithesis to its ever evolving, expanding, and progressing European counterpart. The opposite natures of Asian and European civilizations were attributed to the contradictory forces that were at work in ideas and thoughts, education, politics and economy, people's temperament, as well as custom. The origins of these contradictory forces lay in Asia's deeply entrenched traditions of racial discrimination against the non-Asian "barbarians": Asia preferred "the kingly way" over "the hegemonic way," eulogized the past at the cost of the present, and dignified government officials while belittling commoners (Chuong Thâu 2010: 169-193, 203-233). Apparently, Asian civilizations, of which Vietnam used to be a proud member, were in desperate need of a complete upgrade and overhaul: all the "bad" traditions must go or Vietnam would stand no chance of surviving the onslaught of Western civilization.

Like East Asian intellectuals in the early 20th century, the author(s) of "The Booklet of Civilization and New Learning" wholeheartedly embraced the philosophy of social evolutionism and the universalism of the Enlightenment. Based on these beliefs, which were widespread in the world in the early twentieth century, the author(s) insisted that every nation had the potential to progress, and Vietnam too

could progress and become as *văn minh*/civilized as Western societies as long as it observed the following advice. The first task was to promote the *quốc ngữ* writing system so as to widen people's knowledge in a most efficient way. Here, the author(s) frantically rejected the contention that a native script had never existed in Vietnam: all nations, even Vietnam's "barbarous" neighbors, have their own writing systems, and Vietnam as a *văn hiến chi bang* should not be exceptional.⁶ Its native writing script, they argued, must have been lost when Vietnam was incorporated into the Sino-centric world order in the ancient past. But thanks to the *quốc ngữ* script, which faithfully recorded Vietnamese sounds and was easy to learn for even women and children, Vietnam now had a convenient and efficient tool to enlighten its people.

We lack the data to gauge the size of the intellectual community that actually used or at least advocated for the use of the vernacular script during the 1900s. What is certain is that traditional cultural elites' aversion to the *quốc ngữ* developed by missionaries in the late nineteenth century was now undergoing radical changes: *quốc ngữ* was being disconnected from its Catholic roots as it gradually transformed into *the* national script. Parallel to the increasingly positive view of *quốc ngữ* was a shift towards increasingly blaming Chinese script for preventing the cultivation of a national spirit for Vietnam. Phan Chu Trinh, the charismatic leader of the open circle of the *Duy Tân* movements, famously stated in Chinese characters that *Bất phệ Hán tự, bất túc dĩ cứu Nam quốc*, meaning, "Vietnam would have no hope of salvation unless Chinese characters are abolished" (Jamieson 1993: 67; Nguyễn Hiến Lê 2002: 92-93). An anonymous poet also wrote a poem to promote *quốc ngữ* (quoted from Marr 1971: 167):

Quốc ngữ is the saving spirit in our country
We must take it out among our people
Books from other countries, books from China
Each word, each meaning must be translated clearly

In conjunction with the effort to demote Chinese characters, the author(s) of "The Booklet of Civilization and New Learning" also wrote "A Proclamation against the Fuddy-Duddies" (Cáo hủ lậu văn, 1907) to mock those Confucian scholars and mandarins who resisted the call for reform. In this proclamation, the author(s) flew in the face of the Confucian principle of honoring seniority and scholarly accomplishment. They classified conservative intellectuals as a group of fools whose

⁶ Apparently, colonial Vietnamese intellectuals were not aware of the fact that the writing systems of their "barbarous neighbors," namely, the perished Champa Kingdom in present-day Southern Vietnam and Vietnam's neighboring Cambodia, are descended from one of ancient Sanskrit script. Vietnam is not alone in deriving its demotic *Nôm* characters from a borrowed script.

stupidity derived from their total ignorance of the modern world and Western learning. The author(s) demonstrated these old fogies' silliness by resorting to a rumor that some Confucian scholars allegedly instructed their pupils that they better have nothing to do with the new learning if they wanted to succeed in their pursuit of a career in the officialdom (Chuong Thâu 1997: 135-140). It is worth pointing out that the Sino-Vietnamese intellectual world was disintegrating under the attack of none other than Confucian scholars, whose criticism was reminiscent of Chinese *Weixin* criticism of Confucianism.

The second counsel offered by “The Booklet of Civilization and New Learning” with regard to mass enlightenment was to set up an institution to select, translate, and publish books from China, Vietnam, and Europe. Of particular importance were the materials that could nourish people’s morals and nationalist sentiments, which were believed to be conducive to Vietnam’s progress toward *văn minh*/civilization. It was lamented that Vietnamese people spent millennia studying Chinese history and philosophical debates over Confucian doctrines among Chinese scholars at the expense of Vietnamese history. This was increasingly seen as a waste of time and effort for Vietnamese students. Now, it was time for Vietnamese to shift their focus to practical knowledge and the histories of their own nation and of Europe (Chuong Thâu 2010: 169-193; 203-233).

Not irrelevant to the above strategy, the following two pieces of advice were about revising the mechanisms of talent recruitment. The traditional mechanism, that is, the imperial examination, was accused of filling Vietnam’s brightest minds with useless training in poem composition and repeated memorization of some ancient Chinese texts, a daunting task that had drained energy out of the Vietnamese people. Since the imperial exam was still effective in Tonkin until 1915, the author(s), obviously based in the Tonkin area, proposed that the old exam subjects be replaced with modern subjects such as international law, Vietnamese history, world history, mathematics, geography, hygiene, and so on. It was guaranteed that before long, even intellectuals of traditional background could enter the new world of practical learning if this advice was followed. Interestingly, however, right after the attack on the imperial exam for stupefying Vietnamese people, the author(s) urged Vietnam to recruit its best talents from those who had passed the imperial exam, as they were thought to be able to lead Vietnam out of blindness and backwardness. Finally, the last suggestion was that Vietnam should improve its manufacturing so that it could free itself from its long-term dependence on Chinese goods and commodities. What China could produce, the author(s) asserted, so could Vietnam, only with lower quality, and if this was not improved, they argued, it was no wonder that Vietnamese people could not rid themselves of their slavish dependence on Chinese commodities and their

superstitious assumption that Chinese commodities were always better than their Vietnamese counterparts (Chuong Thâu 2010: 169-193; 203-233).

The relationships between the Vietnamese *Duy Tân* and the Chinese *Weixin* were complex. On the one hand, as part of the East Asian modernizing movements during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Vietnamese *Duy Tân* displayed great resemblance with the Chinese *Weixin*: both were inspired by Japanese *Ishin* and strived to turn their devastated kingdoms into independent and respectable nation-states governed by constitutional monarchy (for the discussion of *Weixin*, see Liang Qichao 1903); both stressed the indispensable role of modern education to cultivate nationalist pride among people and equip them with skills, ideas, and the knowledge required to survive in the modern era of Social Darwinism; and last, but not least, Confucian scholars provided the backbone of both movements. On the other hand, while the *Duy Tân* mirrored the *Weixin*, it also endeavored to differentiate Vietnam culturally and economically from China. In the cultural area, *Duy Tân* activists advocated the use of the *quốc ngữ* script at the expense of Chinese ideograms, the reformation or even the abolishment of the imperial examination that had acted as a mechanism of recruiting elite on the basis of exam takers' mastery of Confucian doctrines, as well as the teaching of Vietnamese history and practical knowledge instead of Chinese history and literary ability in composing ancient-styled poems and essays. In the economic area, *Duy Tân* activists criticized that Chinese middlemen and Vietnamese people's "slavish dependence" on Chinese commodities hindered Vietnam's way toward a prosperous, wealthy nation. In addition, the division between the clandestine *ám xã*—which was oriented toward seeking help from China—and the open *minh xã*—which sought to push France to take its goal of *mission civilisatrice* seriously— among the *Duy Tân* activists also indicated that the Chinese model was no longer the only model from which Vietnamese intellectuals drew inspiration. This is the topic that I address in the following section.

2.3. The Intellectuals in the Cultural Fields

2.3.1. Demographic Overview

Due to space constraints, instead of locating all the *Duy Tân* participants, I focus on the leading activists. I draw on secondary literature to find out the prominent leaders of the movements, and through them I identify their comrades, supporters, followers, patrons, opponents, and so on. The most influential *Duy Tân* leaders were Phan Bội Châu and Phan Chu Trinh, representatives of the movements' clandestine *ám xã* and open *minh xã*, respectively. From these two Phans, I trace connections to forty-eight intellectuals—fifty in total including the two Phans—who were involved

in the *Duy Tân* movements.⁷ They were born between the 1850s and the 1890s: five were born in the 1850s, thirteen in the 1860s, sixteen in the 1870s, eleven in the 1880s, one in the 1890s, and four activists' years of birth remain obscure. Twenty-three activists were thrown into prison and five were executed on charges of involvement in the anti-tax protest, and two committed suicide. Three were degree holders from Annam, the place where the protest began.⁸

The educational background of these fifty *Duy Tân* intellectuals reflects the regional differences in the colonial government's education policy during the 1900s. First, the Tonkin area had the greatest share of *Duy Tân* intellectuals, even though it sent the fewest students to Japan: it produced nineteen *Duy Tân* intellectuals, compared to fourteen from Annam and twelve from Cochinchina. The educations of the northern *Duy Tân* intellectuals were characterized by diversity: one was a law PhD in France; eleven were degree holders; three had attempted the imperial exam prior to the movement but had not been able to make it; two graduated from Franco-Vietnamese schools and would become influential writers and ardent Francophiles who later launched an attack against Phan Bội Châu, the well-respected leader of the movement's clandestine activities (more in the next chapter); and two received military training in China after being expelled from Japan in 1908. The *Duy Tân* intellectuals from Annam, where the imperial exam was abolished the latest among the three colonial *pays*, excelled in the area of Sino-Vietnamese academic accomplishment: Annam area boasted seven *tiến sĩ* activists, including Phan Bội Châu and Phan Chu Trinh. Other *tiến sĩ* activists from Annam were also highly influential, examples were Trần Quý Cáp, Huỳnh Thúc Kháng, and Ngô Đức Kế, all of them were Phan Chu Trinh's comrades. Finally, Cochinchinese activists were the least Confucian in their educational background compared to their comrades in the two protectorates. Apart from two intellectuals whose educational attainment was unclear, five Cochinchinese intellectuals were educated in Franco-Vietnamese schools, and another five received Sino-Vietnamese education from private tutors, who were either family members or village teachers, and two received higher education in France and Hong Kong, respectively. Since the imperial exam was abolished in Cochinchina as early as in the 1880s, students who wished to pursue excellence along a Sino-Vietnamese career path and gain an imperial degree had to travel either to Annam or Tonkin to take the exam.

⁷ For the list of these intellectuals, see Appendix One.

⁸ See Appendix One.

Table 3.2: Demographic Information for *Duy Tân* Activists (N= 50)

	Tonkin	Annam	Cochinchina
France and other countries	1	0	2
Franco-Vietnamese	2	0	5
China	2	0	0
Private tutor	0	1	5
Tiến sĩ (PhD)	1	7	0
Cử nhân (Master)	6	2	0
Tú tài (Licentiate and lower)	5	2	0
Âm sinh (Heritage students)	0	2	0
Failed exam	3	0	0
Total	20*	14	12•

*Nguyễn Hải Thần received a bacclaireate degree in Vietnam before he received military training in China after he was expelled from Japan.

- The educational attainment of Mai Lão Bạng (?-1942), Hoàng Trọng Mậu (1874-1916), Nguyễn Viên Kiều (1872-1944), and Nguyễn Trọng Lợi (1881-1911) was unclear.

In terms of the forms of cultural capital, the majority of the *Duy Tân* intellectuals were deeply versed in Chinese and were willing to promote *quốc ngữ*, even though they were not comfortable using it in their writing. They learned Chinese at home and proceeded to deepen their knowledge of Chinese and/or learn *quốc ngữ* at village schools. Six out of fifty *Duy Tân* activists were trilingual intellectuals who knew Chinese, *quốc ngữ*, and French: four of them learned French in Franco-Vietnamese schools or the *Đông Kinh* Free School, and two other were autodidacts.

2.3.2. Confucian Literati in the *Minh Tân* Movement

The *Minh Tân* movement could be viewed as the Cochinchinese branch and treasurer of the *Duy Tân* movement, and quite a few Confucian literati responded to the *Minh Tân*'s call for economic development by opening shops and commercial enterprises, something that was unprecedented in Vietnam's history. In pre-colonial Vietnam, where small peasant economy was the major form of production, native scholars were representatives of ruling states and provided leadership for political and cultural affairs in villages, with women operating trading activities outside homes and Chinese merchants controlling wholesale and retail of commodities (especially rice), overseas trading, mining, and mintage (Chen 1960; Phan Đại Doãn 2004). Given the long indifference toward economic affairs among the elite stratum, the endeavors made by Confucian scholars to perform business transactions were quite extraordinary, even though they handled their business awkwardly and poorly due to their inexperience (Nguyễn Hiến Lê: 2002 [1968] 116).

Nguyễn Hiến Lê (2002 [1968]: 105-119) and Sơn Nam (2003: 173-219) give some details about the forty-five shops and commercial enterprises run by the *Minh Tân* intellectuals, and my calculation indicates that the intellectuals tended to open

one of the following four types of shops. The most popular shops and enterprises were the ones that specialized in Vietnamese commodities, such as rice, fish sauce, tea, and silk. Fish sauce factories were extremely appealing, for fish sauce is a staple condiment in Vietnam that the native population had long known how to brew, but the wholesale and retail of which had been controlled by Chinese merchants (McIntyer 2002). Sino-Vietnamese herbal medicine stores were also popular. Since Sino-Vietnamese medical texts were written in Chinese, Sino-Vietnamese herbal medical practice, like teaching in village schools, was a career particularly suitable for Confucian scholars who voluntarily or involuntarily withdrew from political affairs to put to use their knowledge of literary Chinese. Some intellectuals ventured into restaurants in attempt to break the Chinese dominance over eateries, holding that Vietnamese people's disdain for occupations associated with food and eateries should be challenged. Finally, some opened hostels in order to provide venues for activists' mass meetings.

Table 3.3: Shops and Other Enterprises Opened by *Minh Tân* Intellectuals

Names of shops	Names of owners	Locations	Business Type	Year	Source
Đồng Lợi Tế	Đỗ Chân Thiết, Nguyễn Phương Sơn, Dương Bá Trạc	Mã Mây, Hanoi	Vietnamese commodities	1907	N: 112
Tụy Phương	Đỗ Chân Thiết and Phương Sơn	Hàng Cỏ, Hanoi	Sino-Vietnamese medicine	1907	N: 113
Đông Thành Xương	Hoàng Thăng Bí, Dương Bá Trạc	Hàng Gai, Hanoi	Textiles, tea	1907	N: 113
Cát Thành		Hàng Gai, Hanoi		1907	N: 114
Hồng Tân Hưng	Dương Bá Trạc	Hàng Bồ, Hanoi		1907	N: 114
Phúc Lợi Tế	Tùng Hương	Phúc Yên, Tonkin		1907	N: 114
Hưng Lợi Tế	Tùng Hương	Hưng Yên, Tonkin		1907	N: 114
Sơn Thọ	Nguyễn Trạc	Việt Trì, Tonkin		1907	N: 114
Quảng Nam thương hội	Phan Châu Trình			1908	N: 108
Nghiêm Xuân Quảng		Hàng Gai, Hanoi			N: 115
Minh tân khách sạn	Phủ Chiếu	Cochinchina	Hostel		N: 115
Chiêu Nam lâu	Nguyễn An Khương	Cochinchina	Restaurant	1908	N: 115; S: 85
Tư Bình Đường		Bến Tre, Cochinchina	Sino-Vietnamese medicine		N: 116
Tân Hợp Long Tân Quảng Huệ	Hồ Nhựt Tân	Chợ Thủ, Cochinchina			N: 116
	Nguyễn Đình Chung	Cochinchina			N: 116
Liên Thành thương quán	Trần Quý Cáp; Nguyễn Trọng Lợi		Fish sauce		M:
Khuyến Du Học Hội	Nguyễn Thần Hiến		Private school	1907	

Triều Dương thương quán	Đặng Nguyên Căn, Ngô Đức Kế, Lê Văn Huân		Vietnamese commodities	1907	
Nam Trung khách sạn	Trần Chánh Chiếu	Cochinchina	Hostel	1907	S: 180
Minh Tân khách sân	Trần Chánh Chiếu, Đặng Thúc Liêng	Cochinchina	Hostel		
Minh Tân công nghệ	Trần Chánh Chiếu, Huỳnh Đình Điền	Cochinchina	Vietnamese commodities; soap “better than Chinese ones”		P: 57
Nam Thọ Xuân	Đặng Thúc Liêng		Sino-Vietnamese medicine		
Bắc Phước Hung Đông	Đặng Thúc Liêng		Sino-Vietnamese medicine		
Hồng Tân Hưng	Nguyễn Quyền Lưu Tựu Kiệt		Sino-Vietnamese medicine		
Nam Kỳ khách sân	Nguyễn Chánh Sắc	Cochinchina	Hostel		S: 185

The letter “N” stands for Nguyễn Hiến Lê (1989), “M” for McIntyer (2002), “P” for Peycam (2012), and “S” for Sơn Nam (2003). The numbers following these letters indicate the page numbers.

2.3.3. Power Competition in the Cultural Fields: the Chinese model vs. the French model

The main division within the emergent cultural fields during the 1900s lay in intellectuals’ different orientations toward the Chinese and the French models, and this disagreement was manifested in two ways. The first was in tensions between traditional literati, who insisted on sticking with the Chinese model, and reform-minded scholars, who simultaneously drew on it and rejected it. The battle line between these two groups of scholars was drawn over the issue of the writing script. For instance, when *tiến sĩ* Trần Quý Cáp tried to include French and *quốc ngữ* into the curriculum of the prefect school in Annam where he worked as a teacher, he was opposed by conservative literati and expelled from the school (Triều Dương 2004: 1801-2). When the *Đông Kinh* Free School was opened, a group of angry literati from the Tonkin area made the following statement:

From the time that our country fell into decline, Great France has propagated its writing and speech among us, but only those who do not know characters study it. Although Western script develops the intellect, why does France force us [to learn this script]?...Those who do not know characters lack moral sense [không thông nghĩa lý] (quoted in McHale 1995: 24)

The majority of the *Duy Tân* intellectuals accused traditional literati of being

snobs whose obsession with obtaining positions in the colonial administration was damaging the hard work of renovating Vietnamese culture (Chương Thâu 1997: 135-140). This accusation was echoed by Phan Chu Trinh, who wrote piece after piece mocking and reprimanding traditionalist Confucian scholars as enemies of Vietnam (Phan Chu Trinh 2005c [1907]), simpletons who cared about nothing but obtaining a certificate of “obedient people” as Vietnam was dying from the serious disease of primitiveness (Phan Chu Trinh 2005a [1904]). The *Duy Tân* actors mocked those who employed substantial *quốc ngữ* transliteration of Chinese words in their *quốc ngữ* writing for not only showing off their knowledge of Chinese texts, which unfortunately proved to be useless and outdated, but also preventing commoners from understanding (Son Nam 2003: 291). Gilbert Trần Chánh Chiếu, one of the main sponsors of Phan Bội Châu’s *Đông Du* movement, also lamented that out of a combination of arrogance, ignorance, and selfishness, traditionalist Confucian scholars not only failed to fulfill their responsibilities as intellectuals, but also locked their fellow illiterate commoners in the darkness of stupidity by stubbornly resisting much-needed cultural reform (Trần Chánh Chiếu 1907). Gilbert Trần Chánh Chiếu’s insistence on the cultural reformation of Vietnamese society aligned him with Phan Chu Trinh, but distanced him from Phan Bội Châu, whose first priority was ending foreign dominance rather than cultural modernization. Still, some *Duy Tân* intellectuals, such as Nguyễn Phương Sơn (1862-1960), believed that Chinese learning constituted the foundation of Vietnamese cultural tradition, and therefore found Phan Chu Trinh’s desire for a total replacement of Chinese characters with *quốc ngữ* unacceptable (Nguyễn Hiến Lê 2002 [1968]: 92-93).

Another manifestation of the disagreement over the question of which model Vietnam should emulate was seen in the criticism of Phan Chu Trinh, the leader of the open *minh xã* of the *Duy Tân* movements, against Phan Bội Châu, the underground *ám xã* leader. Phan Chu Trinh was attracted by the French model of political governance, and he was willing to tolerate the presence of the French colonial state as long as it was true to its promise of civilizing Vietnam. In 1908, Phan Chu Trinh was thrown into prison for his alleged support for Annamese peasants’ anti-tax protest, and was then exiled to France after his release. He spent more than a decade in Paris and worked as a photo retoucher to support himself. While in France, he continued to write comments, essays, and plays about historical figures who were famous for standing up against China’s invasion (more on this in the next chapter). He also *diễn* Chinese reformist Liang Qichao’s translation of a Japanese novel *Kaiji no kigū* (Strange encounters with beautiful women) in *Nôm* characters and verse form. Published in installments between 1885 and 1897, *Kaiji no kigū* was *Meiji* Japan’s first political novel. It was written by Shiba Shirō (1852-1922), who graduated from

the Wharton Business School at the University of Pennsylvania. The story related how Shiba Shiirō befriended two beautiful European women he met in the Independent Hall in Philadelphia, and how their friendship later developed into both shared lamentation for the misfortunes of their respective countries and determination to fight against Western imperialist powers. *Kaiji no kigū* was an instant hit in Japan, and Liang Qichao, attracted by its patriotic sentiment, translated it into *Jia ren qi yu* between 1898 and 1900, adding his own twist and improvisation, which Phan Chu Trinh then *diễn*ed a *Giai nhân kỳ ngộ diễn ca* (the ballad of Strange encounters with beautiful women) in *chữ Nôm* while he was in France (Vĩnh Sinh 2005).

Phan Bội Châu, on the other hand, was not particularly thrilled about the prospect of Vietnam becoming *văn minh*. He had spent nearly twenty years overseas participating in military uprisings and making connections with Chinese and other Asian revolutionists before he was arrested in Shanghai by the French police and sent back to Vietnam in 1925. During these two decades, he closely followed the dynamics of China's nationalist movements, solicited interest and substantial support from Chinese sympathizers, and applied the strategies produced by Chinese nationalists to Vietnam. The monarchist *Weixin* reform movement in the late nineteenth century and the Republican Revolution in 1911 were of special significance to Phan Bội Châu. The former inspired him to establish the *Duy Tân Hội* in 1904, a Vietnamese version of the Chinese *Weixin Hui* that sought to install Prince Cường Để of the Nguyễn Dynasty as Vietnam's first independent monarch after overthrowing the French colonizer by force in the hopefully foreseeable future. The meetings between Phan Bội Châu and Chinese reformist intellectuals in Japan also convinced him that Vietnam was in urgent need of learning techniques of independence and modernization from advanced Asian nations. Following his meetings with his Chinese counterparts, he began his advocacy that Vietnamese youths study in Japan, which led to the *Đông Du* movement between 1905 and 1908.

Early in the next decade, Phan Bội Châu's conviction to employ military means to avenge the blood and tears shed in the tragedy of *vong quốc* ("losing one's country," Phan Bội Châu 2001a [1905], 2001b [1907]) was strengthened by the spectacular triumph of the Chinese Republican Revolution and the resulting replacement of the Qing court by a republican polity. Phan Bội Châu reorganized the old *Duy Tân Hội* into the *Việt Nam Quang Phục Hội* ("Vietnam Restoration League") after the model of Chinese *Tungmeng Hui* ("the United League," 1905), the leading underground society in the Chinese Republican Revolution. The *Quang Phục Hội* would undergo reorganization once again in 1922, when it became the *Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng* (Vietnamese National Party), this time modeled after the Kuomintang (the Chinese National Party), the nationalist party that carried the torch of the Republican

Revolution (Marr 1981).

Phan Bội Châu's reputation as an anti-colonial patriot was slightly tainted by his brief consideration of the possibility of Franco-Vietnamese collaboration in 1918, which was proposed by the colonial Governor-General Albert Sarraut (1912-1919) for the two-fold purpose of mobilizing Vietnamese people to support the French armies in the First World War (1914-1918) on the one hand, and appeasing anti-colonial sentiments among native intellectuals on the other. I discuss Franco-Vietnamese collaboration further in the following chapter; it suffices to point out here that during the 1900s, Phan Bội Châu was always very critical of Western *văn minh*/civilization and the tragedies and disasters he saw Western *văn minh*/civilization was inflicting on his people. In his famous essays "The History of the Loss of Vietnam" (Việt Nam vong quốc sử, 1905) and "A Letter Written in Blood from Overseas" (Hải ngoại huyết thư, 1907), Phan Bội Châu did not hold back his deep contempt for the French colonizers: he portrayed them as greedy thieves and cruel slave masters who were only interested in plundering Vietnam's rich resources. Their greed, according to Phan Bội Châu, was evidenced by the endless imposition of unbearably heavy taxes upon the native people. He also contrasted the craftiness of the French with the pathetic ignorance of his uneducated *đồng bào* ("compatriots"), whose own blindness prevented them from awakening. Although Phan Bội Châu did acknowledge that France was far more advanced than Vietnam scientifically, militarily, politically, and economically, the idea of emulating France in order to inaugurate a project of modernization in Vietnam did not seem to occur to him during the 1900s (Phan Bội Châu 2001a [1905], 2001b [1907]). Phan Bội Châu's complaints about heavy tax and *corvée*—labor extracted by the colonial state—foretold the coming of the anti-tax protest in 1908 and, doubtless, he sent his comrades to join in the angry peasants in hope of expediting the downfall of the colonial regime.

While Phan Bội Châu gravitated toward the Chinese model and perceived France as nothing but a predator that had to be expelled if Vietnam was to be free, Phan Chu Trinh, Phan Bội Châu's travel companion to Japan in 1905, held that the situation in Vietnam was too precarious and backward to afford entering the modern world without the guidance of the French mentor, who had promised to implement *mission civilisatrice* in its Southeast Asian colony. He once chastised Phan Bội Châu's for aspiring to a coup and for pinning his hopes to military support from China and Japan by stating *vọng ngoài tắc ngu, bạo động tắc tử*, meaning, "setting hope on outside assistance is stupid; violence leads to nothing but death" (Phan Chu Trinh 2005c [1907]: 69). Nevertheless, Phan Chu Trinh's criticism of outside assistance needed to be taken with a grain of salt. A year after he returned from Japan, he wrote an open letter to Jean-Baptist Paul Beau (1857-1927), the Governor-General of French

Indochina between 1902 and 1908 who fostered association in the area of education (Duiker and Lockhart 2006: 42-3). Phan Chu Trinh's letter was the first open letter that Vietnamese intellectuals addressed to their colonizer, and in it he tried to win favor and trust from the colonizer so as to promote his cause. Taking advantage of the discourses of liberty and equality, it drew a lot of attention from Parisian media and public opinion. In this long letter, written in Chinese and some *chữ Nôm*, Phan Chu Trinh repeatedly differentiated himself from Phan Bội Châu—without specifically invoking his name—and other intellectuals by claiming that unlike the former who only dared stay abroad grumbling loudly and the latter who sheepishly withdrew into villages and turned a blind eye to the deplorable plight suffered by fellow commoners, he was the only trustworthy intellectual who was bold enough to speak the truth of the current situation to the French protectorate in the hope of improving the Franco-Vietnamese relationship so as to benefit both France and Vietnam. He questioned Phan Bội Châu's choice of counting on China, whose influence over Vietnam was one of France's biggest concerns in terms of their colonial rule: if relying on foreign countries' help was the reality in which Vietnam found itself, the nature of reliance would not be different from that of Vietnam's pre-colonial reliance on its neighbor simply because Vietnam was now relying on one country and rejecting the other, not to mention the fact that Vietnam had been slave to a particular country for thousands of years (Phan Châu Trinh 2005b [1906]: 51-65). In describing Vietnam's relationship with China as slavishly dependent, Ph Chu Trinh was also implying that he did not wish France to become another China.

When Phan Bội Châu wrote his essays, the readers he had in mind were Chinese and Vietnamese intellectuals (Marr 1971: 120-155), especially top scholar-gentry. In his writing, he did not seem to make any efforts to distinguish himself and his *ám xã* approach from intellectuals who opted for other approaches, chiefly Phan Chu Trinh and the *minh xa*. He probably did so with the hope of connecting to as many compatriots as possible; yet it should be noted that unlike Phan Chu Trinh, who tried to gain trust from the colonial state, Phan Bội Châu in this decade did not desire for this form of political and cultural capital. Phan Chu Trinh, on the other hand, took great pains to differentiate himself from Phan Bội Châu, even though he did not specify Phan Bội Châu's name, and he did earn political capital from the colonial state. The targeted reader of Phan Chu Trinh was, first, Paul Beau, the reform-minded governor general, and, second, like-minded intellectuals who were interested in the pursuit of cultural modernization. In order to convince Beau that Vietnam was a worthy pupil with great potential given the existence of progressive intellectuals such as Phan Chu Trinh himself, and similarly to assure Beau that he would not participate in any actions that would threaten the reign of France, Phan Chu Trinh appropriated

the discourses of *mission civilisatrice* and tested how tolerant the colonial regime could be toward potentially dangerous discourses. Because, as Phan Chu Trinh reasoned, it was extremely embarrassing for a civilized people to enslave a nation as poor as Vietnam.

Apart from their opposing views toward the consequences of *văn minh*/civilization, the difference between two Phans was not an ideologically reconcilable one. Phan Bội Châu, like Phan Chu Trinh, also expressed his great disappointment for the outdated Confucian learning and his “feeble-minded” fellow countrymen and acknowledged that Western technologies and Western learning were much more advanced than their Asian counterparts (Phan Bội Châu 2001a [1905], 2001b [1907]). Both Phan Bội Châu and Phan Chu Trinh saw that the elite members of top scholar-gentry class were the only people capable of rescuing their countrymen, as they believed these men of letters were more intelligent and hence expected to take greater responsibility. Nevertheless, while Phan Bội Châu blamed the French colonial regime for stupefying Vietnamese people, Phan Chu Trinh attributed the suffering to some Vietnamese people’s undesirable traits that were unfitting for the state of *văn minh*/civilization. Also, both Phan Bội Châu and Phan Chu Trinh operated within the Chinese model, as both of them were inspired by the Chinese *Tân thư* and Chinese *Weixin* reform movement. Neither of them managed to find the time for learning French, even though Phan Chu Trinh spent more than a decade in France. Phan Bội Châu, however, would stick to this model throughout his life, and in 1925 he would produce the book *Confucian Lamp* (Khổng Học Đăng, 2000 [1925]) in the hope of shedding a new light on the doctrines of Confucianism (more on this in Chapter Six). Phan Chu Trinh, on the other hand, wanted to discard the Chinese model—especially that of government and the art of statecraft—so that Vietnam could concentrate on emulating the new and more powerful model effectively.

The disagreement over how to achieve a better future for Vietnam between the two Phans—both were Confucian scholars and degree holders—was symptomatic of the emergence of a critical approach toward the Chinese model that was to be followed by many intellectuals of the succeeding generations. Phan Chu Trinh was the one who found Phan Bội Châu’s emulation of the Chinese model and insistence on expelling the French by force silly and disastrous, and he brought this issue to the attention of the colonial regime and his peers. In doing so, he simultaneously mirrored and rejected the Chinese model, as he depended on it to access Western learning but also sought to tear it down so as to make way for the more promising French model. Phan Chu Trinh’s harsh critique of his fellow Vietnamese people and Vietnamese culture was echoed by Gilbert Trần Chánh Chiếu, the head of the *Minh Tân* movement of economic development who, as I noted above, spilled much ink in *Lục*

tinh tân văn and *Nông cổ mín đàm* criticizing Vietnamese people's shortcomings. Yet, Gilbert Trần Chánh Chiêu, armed with French citizenship, never voiced criticism against Phan Bội Châu, who did not seem to feel that exposing the cultural weakness of Vietnam should be an item on his revolutionary agenda.

3. The Dawn of Vernacular Literature and Translated Chinese Novels in Cochinchina

The first decade of the 20th century witnessed a great reception for *quốc ngữ* translation of Chinese novels in Vietnam, and the most popular ones were those pertaining to fantasy, historical stories, martial arts and heroic adventures (Yan 1987: 265-316). The appearance of these popular Chinese translated novels was driven by the market economy, and these novels constituted colonial Vietnam's earliest industrial literature.

This reception began in Cochinchina, the region out of which a *quốc ngữ* reading public was first born, thanks to the expansion of Franco-Vietnamese schools and the greatest extent of urbanization among the three colonial *pays* (Brocheux and Hémery 2009). More specifically, these translated Chinese novels made their first appearance in Vietnam in the *Nông cổ mín đàm*, the Cochinchina-based vernacular periodical staffed by some *Minh Tân* movement leaders.

Vietnamese historians of vernacular literature tend not to attach historical significance to this *Phong trào dịch chuyện Tàu*, literally “the vogue/movement of translating Chinese stories,” holding that the translation of French literature exerted much greater impact than Chinese literature on the development of modern Vietnamese literature (Bằng Giang 1992: 234-281). In contrast, I argue that it is a crucial historical event in that translated Chinese novels in colonial Vietnam very much defined what a popular literature was, and they provided a literary model for Vietnamese intellectuals to emulate and differentiate themselves from in their attempt to produce an “authentic” vernacular literature. As I will show in later chapters, in the remainder of the colonial epoch, the agents in the cultural fields would make every effort to intervene, discipline, and distinguish the national literature from this popular one and those writers who threatened to blur the boundaries between the two literatures. I will also show that whether to emulate the Chinese or French cultural model was one of the crucial factors in determining to what positions—central or marginalized—a particular intellectual and/or writer belonged.

The emergence of a popular literature was occasioned by the reception for translated Chinese novels and can be seen as shepherded in by Confucian scholars,

who were also familiar with the reformist Chinese *Tân thư* and were responsible for the birth of the vernacular cultural fields. During the 1900s, there were four prominent translators of Chinese novels in Cochinchina: Trần Phong Sắc (birth year and death year unknown), Nguyễn An Khương (1860-1931), Nguyễn Chánh Sắc (1869-1947), and Nguyễn Kỳ Sát (birth year and death year unknown) (Võ Văn Nhơn 2010). Apart from Nguyễn Kỳ Sát, a translator whose biographical data is nowhere to be found, Nguyễn An Khương and Nguyễn Chánh Sắc shared something in common: both learned Chinese in their preschool years and graduated from Franco-Vietnamese schools, and both were sympathetic with the *Duy Tân* movement and shared a keen interest in renovating Vietnamese culture.

Nguyễn Chánh Sắc's story of how he began translating Chinese novels is worth noting. Before he translated Chinese novels for the *Nông cổ mín đàm* periodical in the early 1900s, he served as an administrative assistant and Franco-Vietnamese interpreter in the notorious *Côn Đảo* island jail, and his knowledge of Chinese was greatly improved as he received tutoring from imprisoned Confucian scholars and the *Cần Vương* (Aid the King) activists in the late nineteenth century. By contrast, Trần Phong Sắc, a teacher of ethics and Chinese in Franco-Vietnamese schools, never attended a Franco-Vietnamese school; neither did he ever show the slightest interest in any strand of the nationalist movements that were stirring passionate debates among his teachers, students, and colleagues in *Nông cổ mín đàm*, such as Nguyễn An Khương and Nguyễn Chánh Sắc.

In pre-colonial Vietnam, *diễn*ing, that is, translating, transliterating, and explicating Chinese stories into verse narratives in Vietnamese, was one of the favorite literary pastimes among scholars. What distinguishes the pre-modern *diễn* from the translation works in the early 20th century lies in the fact that while *diễn* was always in verse form and usually written in *chữ Nôm* to facilitate memorization among illiterate villagers, and the stories chosen to be *diễn*ed were therefore short in length and simple in plot, modern translation was literary translation in prose narratives that were capable of relating long and complex stories.⁹ For instance, the last and the longest *Nôm* verse tale is *Truyện Kiều* (The tale of Lady Kiều, 1814), which includes 3,254 verses. It was *diễn*ed by Nguyễn Du from *Jin Yun Chiao Juan*, a Chinese tragic-romantic novel composed by an anonymous author in the mid-15th century that spends twenty chapters telling dramatic stories of the lives of twenty characters. The first *quốc ngữ* translation of a Chinese novel, on the other hand, is *Romance of the Three Kingdom* by Nguyễn An Khương and appeared in the *Nông cổ mín đàm* in serial form from 1901 to 1905 before it was published in book form in

⁹ Phan Chu Trinh's *diễn* of *Jia ren qi yu*, therefore, resembles pre-colonial *diễn* practice more than it does modern translation.

1907; it takes 120 chapters to account extraordinary stories of nearly 200 colorful characters.

In addition to Chinese fictions, pre-colonial *Nôm* poems and classic Chinese texts that had been imperial examination topics before the exam was dismantled were two other genres of literary works frequently transliterated and translated by Cochinchinese Confucian scholars during the 1900s (Bằng Giang 1992). These two genres were the first genres of literature transliterated and translated into *quốc ngữ* in the last century by Catholic-Confucian scholars, the only educated men well-versed in *quốc ngữ* at the earliest development stage of Vietnam's non-religious *quốc ngữ* literature. French literature was rarely translated, as Westernized intellectuals outside the Catholic community were still a minority who were too young and linguistically challenged in the French language.

While the earliest Franco-Vietnamese interpreters worked for the colonial administration, Nguyễn An Khương, Nguyễn Kỳ Sắt, Nguyễn Chánh Sắt, and Trần Phong Sắc represented Vietnam's first generation of Sino-Vietnamese professional translators. Their translation was fueled by the market economy and the great demand from the growing vernacular reading public, especially in Cochinchina. They were different from their preceding *diễn*ers in that they were able to channel their training in the Chinese language into profitable business and collect remuneration first from vernacular periodicals—where their translation would be serialized—and then from commercial publishing houses—where their translation would be printed into books. Both the periodicals and the publishers had been brought to Vietnam by the French regime. The Franco-Vietnamese translators would join in the realm of translation and compete with their Sino-Vietnamese counterparts in the next three decades.

In terms of original literary works, not many were produced during this decade. This lack of original vernacular literature during the 1900s was evidenced by the fact that only one contestant submitted an entry to Vietnam's first novel competition held by *Nông cổ mín đàm* in 1906 (Võ Văn Nhơn 2007: 25). It would take a decade or two for intellectuals to become linguistically mature enough to compose *quốc ngữ* literature, a topic I discuss in greater detail in the following chapters. Like their Catholic-Confucian predecessors, the few writers who produced vernacular works composed creative nonfiction and travelogues. Đặng Lễ Nghi and Trần Chánh Chiếu, the leader of the *Minh Tân* movement and the chief editor of *Nông cổ mín đàm* between 1906 and 1910, respectively, were the two most notable examples. According to Bằng Giang's survey (1992: 141-161), Đặng Lễ Nghi was the main translator of Sino-Vietnamese verse tales during the 1900s: from 1905 to 1909, the publishing houses in Cochinchina published his fifteen pieces of *quốc ngữ* transliteration of *Nôm*

verse tales and a piece of Sino-Vietnamese work.¹⁰ Đặng Lễ Nghi also authored two travelogues: one was on Nanjing and Beijing (1906), two pre-eminent historical cities of China, and the other was on puppet emperor Thành Thái's trip to Cochinchina (1907). Bằng Giang's survey also showed that in the year when Gilbert Trần Chánh Chiếu was appointed to take charge of *Nông cổ mín đàm*, he traveled to Hong Kong and Japan to meet Phan Bội Châu and Prince Cường Để, the head of the *Đông Du* movement and the president of the *Duy Tân Hội* (the Reformation Society), respectively, and three years later he published *Personages in Hong Kong* (Hương Cảng Nhơn Vật) and *The Scenery of Guangdong Province* (Quảng Đông tỉnh thành phong cảnh) to record his travel to Hong Kong and his meetings with the *Đông Du* leaders (Bằng Giang 1992: 136-140; Nguyễn Huệ Chi 2004: 1776-8).

In the midst of this growth in popularity of translated Chinese fictions, Chinese classic texts, and *Nôm* verse tales, Francophile intellectual, journalist, and politician Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh opened the first Vietnamese-owned publishing house in Hanoi in 1907 after he returned from the Colonial Exhibition in Marseille. In the 1920s, this publishing house was to print Vietnam's first *quốc ngữ* version of French novels translated by Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh himself, a topic I examine in the next chapter.

4. Conclusion

During the 1900s, in response to the French colonial presence, Confucian scholars in the crumbling Sino-Vietnamese intellectual world followed their *habitus*, drew on the knowledge about *văn minh* acquired from the Chinese *Tân thư* (New books), and imitated Japanese and Chinese intellectuals' campaigns of cultural reformation. Their efforts to transform Vietnam into a *văn minh* society and their conflicts with the colonial state resulted in the *Duy Tân* Reform Movement, which lasted fewer than ten years but gave rise to the modern vernacular cultural fields and helped to turn *quốc ngữ* into a national written language decoupled from its Catholic roots.

Confucian scholars in the *Duy Tân* movement relied on the Chinese model to both understand the Western *văn minh* and reject the dominance of the old Chinese model. Although they could only understand the alien concepts pertaining to Western

¹⁰ The transliteration of the Sino-Vietnamese verse tale is *Trần Đại Lang thơ* (1907), and the *Nôm* transliterated works are *Thơ Lý Công* (1905), *Án Tình thơ* (1906), *Thơ Mục-Liên, Thanh-Đề* (1906), *Lục Vân Tiên* (1907), *Lâm-Sanh Xuân-Nương thơ* (1907), *Phạm Công Cúc Hoa* (1907), *Cổ Nhơn diễn ca* (1907), *Thạch Sanh Lý Thông* (1907), *Tư Đại Kỳ Thợ* (1907), *Câu hát đối và câu hò* (1907), *Sơn hậu tuồng* (1908), *Nữ trung báo oán* (1909), *Tiên Bửu thơ tuồng* (1908), *Trò Đông* (1909), and *Nàng Út* (1909). The information about Đặng Lễ Nghi could not be located.

văn minh through Sino-Vietnamese *văn hiến*, these Confucian scholars were very impressed by the former. Nonetheless, not all of them were optimistic about the promises of the French *mission civilisatrice*. Some were suspicious about *văn minh* and sought to follow the Chinese model in order to overthrow the colonial state by force; others were convinced that only through the guidance and mentoring of the French could Vietnam have a hope of advancing into the realm of *văn minh*. The debate between Phan Chu Trinh and Phan Bội Châu was the first manifestation of the disagreement among intellectuals over whether Vietnam should follow the Chinese or French model in the cultural fields.

Meanwhile, the march toward *văn minh* was being made. Written language, national literature, and national learning were identified as the three cultural institutions required of all civilized nations in the modern world. *Quốc ngữ* writing script was just beginning to gain acceptance, and the vernacular literature field was born out of the dominance of popular Chinese novels translated by Confucian scholars. Indeed, it was precisely such popular literature that Vietnamese intellectuals would turn against and attempt to exclude from the national vernacular literature in the following decades. And it would not be until the 1920s that intellectuals would begin to discuss what might constitute national learning for a respectable Vietnamese nation.

Chapter Four

Imitating *Văn Minh* and Reassessing *Văn Hiến* in the Vernacular Cultural Fields in the 1910s

In Chapter Three, I discussed how colonial Vietnam's vernacular cultural fields emerged in the 1900s as Confucian scholars responded to two new forms of domination—colonial rule and the market economy—with the *Duy Tân* Reform Movement, which mobilized intellectuals in the political fields. The movement was led by Confucian scholars who drew their inspiration from Japan's successful *Meiji* Restoration (1868) and China's failed *Weixin* Reform Movement (1898), both of which were recounted and discussed in Chinese *Tân thư* (new books). I pointed out that the tensions between the old Chinese and new French models manifested themselves in power struggles in the political fields between Phan Bội Châu (1867-1940) and Phan Chu Trinh (1872-1926), two Confucian scholars from the Annam area. Phan Bội Châu was suspicious and pessimistic about Western *văn minh*/civilization and insisted on emulating the Chinese Republican Revolution to overthrow the colonial regime by force. Phan Chu Trinh, on the other hand, believed that France could be a modernizer and dismissed Phan Bội Châu's violent approach as only digging grave for himself and Vietnam.

In the post-*Duy Tân* era, the French colonial regime adopted more active measures to counter the influence of Confucian scholars by both building its *văn minh*/civilization as a model of emulation, and continuing to cultivate Westernized intellectuals to serve as native elites in place of Confucian scholars. The strategies employed by the colonial regime included sponsoring more *quốc ngữ* newspapers, restructuring Franco-Vietnamese schooling, as well as advocating the program of Franco-Vietnamese collaboration. As a result, the Westernized intellectuals entrusted by the French colonial state, in spite of being young in age and few in number, took the initiative to imitate *văn minh*, reconstruct *văn hiến*, and launch debates with their Confucian counterparts regarding the relationship between *quốc ngữ* and Chinese, what *văn minh*/civilization was, and where *văn hiến* should go, and so on. While the

majority of intellectuals were convinced that both *văn minh* and *văn hiến* were needed, they were not so sure about how to incorporate these two.

In the cultural fields, transmitting Western learning and enriching *quốc ngữ* so that a *quốc văn*, i.e., a national literature written in the vernacular script, could develop were the two most significant contributions expected of intellectuals. The concept of *quốc văn* was new and did not emerge until the colonial era. A national literature written in *quốc ngữ* was not only desirable for the French colonial state, as I pointed out in Chapter Two; intellectuals also hoped that the existence of a national literature would rectify the sorry state of Vietnam's impoverished prose narrative, which was underdeveloped and had until then been written exclusively in Chinese. Moreover, the need for *quốc ngữ* reading materials was ever increasing, as more schools and presses were being established. During this period, intellectuals did literary and free translation of Chinese and French literatures, which represented lowbrow and highbrow literatures, respectively. Realist prose fictions in vernacular *quốc ngữ* were particularly encouraged. Intellectuals believed that realist works could remedy the errors of overtly obsessing with Chinese literature and the resulting neglect of Vietnamese reality. They also believed that literary realism would guard the reader and the young *quốc ngữ* literature from what were seen as the bad influences of Chinese fantasies, the most popular sub-genre of Chinese literature in colonial Vietnam.

This chapter is organized into four sections. The first section reviews colonial policies on education and publishing, paying particular attention to education reform in 1917 and the establishment of several *quốc ngữ* intellectual journals edited by prolific Westernized intellectuals. The second section provides a detailed discussion of the ongoing and escalating conflicts between *văn minh* and *văn hiến* and the resulting tensions between Confucian scholars and Westernized intellectuals. Thirdly, I discuss intellectuals' literary imitation of French and Chinese novels. The fourth section looks at the agents in the cultural fields, especially how the *Duy Tân* activists fared in comparison with Westernized intellectuals in the post-*Duy Tân* era. Since many activists followed Phan Chu Trinh's model of turning to French mentorship in the march toward *văn minh*, I also take a closer look at the typology of collaborators and patriots.

1. Colonial Policies on Education and Publishing

1.1. Education

In Chapter Three, I showed how in the previous decade reform-minded General Governor Paul Beau (1902-1908) launched an educational restructuring program that

aimed to create a unifying Franco-Vietnamese schooling system in place of Sino-Vietnamese communal schools for the three *pays*. The main purpose of this education reform was to break Vietnam away from Chinese influence. In the 1900s France attempted to achieve this goal by introducing French and *quốc ngữ* into school curriculum. The widespread nature of the *Duy Tân* Reform Movement proved that the colonial regime's concerns over the possible damage the Chinese cultural and political influence could cause to the colonial order were not unfounded. Nevertheless, during the 1900s, the colonial regime was still very hesitant in employing French as the medium of instruction in Franco-Vietnamese schools, as it deemed French to be too difficult for the native population to handle. Since neither French nor Chinese seemed to be an appropriate instruction language for pupils, the vernacular Romanized writing script and vernacular *quốc ngữ* language emerged to fill the gap. The French regime was also reluctant to accede to the demands of Westernized elites for an education comparable to that in the metropole. Such demands were especially loud among the landowning class, civil servants, and interpreters in the Cochinchinese area, but despite its self-proclaimed *mission civilisatrice*, very few Frenchmen believed that the idea of total assimilation was possible or even desirable.

During the 1910s, however, the colonial regime's reluctance to produce either a yellow-skinned French-speaking people or a higher education in the colony began to dissipate. This change of attitude can be attributed to two factors. The first factor was the occurrence of the terrorist attacks on French officers in Tonkin area in 1913 and the Thái Nguyên uprising in 1917. Both incidents were initiated by the *Việt Nam Quang Phục Hội* (Vietnam Restoration Society), a revolutionary organization founded by Phan Bội Châu in 1912. The organization was modeled after China's Restoration Society, which spearheaded the Republican Revolution of China in 1911. Both incidents forced the colonial regime to make some efforts to appease the native population (Brocheux and Hémery 2009).

The second factor was the outbreak of the First World War (1914-1918), which created a great need for troops, money, and provisions from the colonies. To ensure that the much needed resources could be extracted efficiently from a colony where crowds were reported to march to prisons to deliver the people who were jailed because they refused enlistment (Brocheux and Hémery 2009: 282), the colonial regime decided to promote a close association between France and Vietnam, and creating a comprehensive Franco-Vietnamese schooling system. These measures were intended both to instill loyalty to France among Vietnamese students, and to gain support and collaboration from the native elite by meeting their demands for a quality education.¹ It was Albert Sarraut, a Radical Socialist deputy in the French National

¹ It was estimated that during the WWI nearly a hundred thousand Vietnamese men were drafted to

Assembly, a firm believer of civilizing mission, and a prominent two-time General-Governor of French Indochina (1911-1914, 1917-1919) carried out this new policy, with the assistance of a small, yet competent staff from France (Duiker and Lockhart 2006: 335).

With Sarraut's skills in public relations, an era of "discourse" and "Frenchifying Vietnamese elite" began, despite the strong disapproval of French *colons* (Brocheux and Hémery 2009: 301; Buttinger 1967: 89-91). The educational restructuring project that had been initiated by Paul Beau saw some important gains in the 1910s. For instance, the Indochinese University in Hanoi was reopened in 1917. It was the first university in Vietnam opened by Paul Beau in 1907 in the hope of calming the political and cultural ferment caused by the *Duy Tân* Reform Movement, but which had been subsequently shut down in 1908 shortly after the peasants in Annam rose up to protest heavy taxes (Buttinger 1967: 91). By reopening the university in 1917, Sarraut intended to discourage Vietnamese students from flocking to France to pursue a higher education that had been virtually unavailable in their land since the establishment of the French rule (Kelley 1975).

Also in 1917, the Council for the Improvement of Native Education founded in 1905 by Paul Beau issued "the Code of Public Instruction" (*Règlement général de l'Instruction publique; Học chính tổng qui*) after a series of meetings. Containing seven chapters and 558 items, the Code established three levels of Franco-Vietnamese education: primary, secondary, and university schooling. The Code stated clearly that there were to be two separate tracks of general education and occupation training in Franco-Vietnamese schooling system (Phạm Quỳnh 1918c: 323-44), though vocational training was still emphasized at all three levels (Kelley 1975: 26). The Code required that all classes be conducted in French, and *quốc ngữ* was only to be allowed as the language of instruction for the first two to three years' primary education if schools had difficulties recruiting teaching staff with basic knowledge of French. *Quốc ngữ* and Chinese were merged into a marginal *quốc văn* (which could mean either "national language" or "national literature") class, which was offered three hours a week (Phạm Quỳnh 1918c: 323-44). Not surprisingly, what these three hours aimed to accomplish was not so much the development of language skills, as indoctrination in morality, as the teaching materials were exclusively excerpts of morality lessons from ancient Chinese classic texts (Kelley 1975).

Sarraut's language requirement proved to be unrealistic and would be abandoned in the 1920s, as the supply of qualified teachers fluent in French always ran short in French and native communities (Kelley 1975: 27). Also, since the Code was issued in

Europe to fight for France, in addition to a huge fiscal contribution to the French troops from the heavy taxes levied on the Vietnamese people, of whom over ninety percent were peasants (Brocheux and Hémery 2009: 302).

the late 1910s, its impact on colonial Vietnam’s cultural fields would have to wait until the next decade to be fully felt. Still, the Code exerted considerable influence on the cultural fields in the following ways. First, it provided a legal context within which Franco-Vietnamese schools were to evolve and consolidate into a system producing not only low-ranking civil servants, teachers, journalists—the products desired by the colonial regime, but also radicals and revolutionaries that would both mirror and reject the French model in the next two decades (Scott 1989; Tai 1992). The majority of the future students of Franco-Vietnamese schools, as I will show in Chapters Five and Six, would become major power contenders in the cultural fields between 1930 and 1940, fighting with each other for fame and recognition and engaging in an iconoclastic generational war with Confucian scholars.

Next, the Code exerted considerable impact on the process of remaking *văn hiến* politically and culturally. Politically, as the Franco-Vietnamese curriculum was ready to be instituted within classrooms and the imperial examination dismantled in Tonkin and Annam in 1915 and 1919, respectively, the Chinese model was stripped off its direct relevance to Vietnamese people as a whole. It ceased to provide either an example for governance or a ladder to social prominence. Nevertheless, as some rebellious Confucian scholars continued to draw on the Chinese model for inspiration and strategies in their armed struggles to bring down the colonial regime, as I will discuss below, the Chinese model remained politically sensitive for both the colonial regime and intellectuals during the 1910s. When the Council for the Improvement of Native Education designed school curriculum, it was certainly informed by a desire to neutralize the political influence of the Chinese model. Culturally, while the Code paved the way for a new generation of Westernized intellectuals to emerge who were more conversant with French than with Chinese, it also tied *quốc ngữ* with Chinese by combining Chinese and *quốc ngữ* in the school curriculum.

Table 4.1: Curriculum of Franco-Vietnamese schools in the Tonkin area, 1917-1945

School cycle	Length of study (in years)	Students’ age cohort	Subjects taught	Diploma offered
Elementary	3	7-9	Morality, Vietnamese, French, Chinese characters, History and geography of Tonkin and Indochina, Hygiene and physical education, Algorism, Basic labor skills	Certificate of Elementary Studies
Primary	3	10-12	Morality, French, Vietnamese, Chinese characters, History and geography of Tonkin and Indochina, Hygiene and physical education, Algorism, Elements of	Certificate of Primary studies

			Geometry, Basic physical and Natural Sciences, Labor skills	
Upper Primary	4	13-16	Morality and psychology, French, Vietnamese, Chinese characters, History and geography of Indochina and France, Natural history, Hygiene and Physical Education, Math, Technology	Diploma of Franco-Vietnamese Higher Primary Education
Secondary	4		Morality and psychology, French, Vietnamese, Chinese Characters, History and geography of Indochina and France, Math, Physics, Chemistry, Technology, Natural history, Drawing	Colonial Baccalaureate

*The data above is adapted from Tran Thi Phuong Hoa (2009).

The colonial regime called the decree of the Code and the reopening of the Indochinese University in 1917 a gesture of French gratitude for Vietnam's assistance in battle on the Europe continent (Ennis 1936, quoted from Kelley 1975: 26). In fact, this education reform was part of the package called Franco-Vietnamese collaboration (Franco-Annamite collaboration; Pháp Việt đề huề) advocated by Albert Sarraut when he began to serve his tenure as a general-governor in French Indochina in 1911. This package reflected France's readjustment of its colonial policies after dealing with continuous challenges from both elite scholar-gentry and peasants. Such challenges had brought great embarrassment to the Western power, which took pride in its purportedly revolutionary legacy, enlightened rule, assimilation policy, and commitment to civilize "backward" lands (Cooper 2001). The colonial regime thus changed gear in the 1910s to adopt a more "pro-native" form of liberalism that would cultivate a stratum of pro-French indigenous elite, rather than relying on coercion (Womack 2003: 43), though it would flip back and forth on this issue throughout the rest of the colonial era. Tasked with carrying out this policy change, Sarraut implemented the program of Franco-Vietnamese Collaboration, which promised not only a limited expansion of native representation to native elites, but also held out the possibility that Vietnam could gain independence once it was ready and fully "civilized" (Womack 2003: 45).

Schooling system was a crucial state apparatus for cultivating new social elites with a new *habitus* and a new form of cultural capital. After the Code of Publication Instruction was issued, some members of the newly-rich landowning class in Cochinchina, disappointed to discover that Chinese texts remained in their children's school curriculum, insisted that Chinese learning must go. Their mouthpiece was the Franco-Vietnamese bilingual semi-weekly *Công Luận báo/l'Opinion*, edited by writer and translator Lê Hồng Mưu (1879-1941), and the weekly *An Hà báo/l'Appeal* edited by Võ Văn Thơm (year unknown), whose childhood experiences of studying

Chinese had not led him anywhere (Phạm Quỳnh 1919b: 134). Some Confucian scholars, such as Nguyễn Mạnh Bồng (?-1952), the elder brother of poet Tản Đà, came to the defense of the Chinese model, arguing that having Chinese learning as a subject should not be taken as “some corrupted Confucian scholars”’ insults against the new learning (1918: 164-5). *Công Luận báo*’s competitor *La Tribune Indigène*, a French-sponsored press based in Cochinchina and edited by neo-traditional Westernized intellectual Bùi Quang Chiêu, also endorsing Sarraut’s policy by arguing that despite not being conducive to Vietnam’s progress toward modernization, Chinese learning was, nonetheless, crucial in nourishing people’s characters. Furthermore, they argued, it was precisely because Confucian learning had been abandoned too hastily that, Vietnamese society was now suffering all sorts of moral decay. This moral disease was especially evident among youths, who were cut off from their roots and tradition (quoted from *Nam Phong* 1918a: 57-58).

1.2. Publishing: *Đông Dương Tạp Chí* and *Nam Phong*

During Albert Sarraut’s two terms as Governor-General of French Indochina, publishing, especially *quốc ngữ* vernacular publishing, began to take off. According to Huỳnh Văn Tòng’s data (2000), whereas in the interval between the 1860s and the 1900s there appeared fifteen Vietnamese-edited periodicals, during the single decade of the 1910s this number rose up to seventeen. Both the steadily growing number of native people capable of reading *quốc ngữ* and Albert Sarraut’s desire to use periodicals to promulgate the idea of Franco-Vietnamese collaboration and the excellence of French civilization played critical roles in this growth of native periodicals.

Of these periodicals, two Hanoi-based ones stood out: weekly *Đông Dương tạp chí* (Indochina Journal, 1913-1918) and monthly *Nam Phong tạp chí* (“Southern Wind/Ethos of South,” 1917-1934), two of the most influential intellectual periodicals during the colonial era (Phạm Thế Ngũ 1986 [1961]). They were edited by Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh (1882-1936) and Phạm Quỳnh (1892-1945), respectively, graduates of Hanoi’s Collège of Interpretation, two of the most prominent Westernized intellectuals, and native elite favorites of the colonial authority. Phạm Quỳnh was well-known for his neo-traditionalist and assimilationist ideologies²; Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh participated in the *Duy Tân* movement by petitioning to the colonial government both for permission to open the Free School, and for amnesty for Phan Chu Trinh when the school was shut down and intellectuals who had been involved were arrested.

² Although Phạm Quỳnh advocated for assimilation (“đồng hóa” in Vietnamese), he did not mean for Vietnamese to become French. See Chapter Five and Six for further discussion.

Đông Dương tạp chí and *Nam Phong* are particularly relevant to this chapter's analysis of cultural fields and intellectuals' power struggles for the following reasons. First, both periodicals were aimed at Vietnamese intellectuals and were the mouthpieces of Sarraut's Franco-Vietnamese collaboration program, even though Phạm Quỳnh of *Nam Phong* in the 1910s still harbored some doubts about the feasibility of this plan (Phạm Quỳnh 1919b: 128). More specifically, both were the products of the careful planning of Louis Marty, the presiding official of the Political Affairs Directorate (Direction des affaires politiques), who advised Sarraut that the government should make every effort to make these journals appear native-owned by avoiding explicit propaganda, instead producing sophisticated and seemingly liberal essays and recruiting native intellectuals to sit on the editorial boards (Henchy 2005).

Second, despite many differences and later hostility toward each other, the editors-in-chief of both periodicals sincerely believed that only through emulating French culture could a backward, weak East Asian country like Vietnam hope to survive. Both men held that this mission could not be completed without French tutelage and mentorship. Taking upon themselves the grand mission of cultural renovation, both Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh and Phạm Quỳnh were determined to utilize their political capital—namely, their rapport with the colonial regime—to push Vietnam to comply with Western ideals of *văn minh*. It would not be exaggerating to suggest that *Đông Dương tạp chí* and *Nam Phong* were akin to “users’ guide for *văn minh*/civilization,” designed to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation for the French model among Vietnamese intellectuals. But it should be noted that while Phạm Quỳnh, a deeply neo-traditionalist, wanted to come up with a West-East synthesis, Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh was impatient with his own country's seemingly slow adjustment to *văn minh* and was not interested in syncretizing the West and the East.

Third, both *Đông Dương tạp chí* and *Nam Phong*, especially the latter, were widely read by Confucian scholars and Westernized intellectuals alike. They served as a platform where intellectuals of different backgrounds debated issues relating to language, literature, education, Vietnamese people's characters, Vietnamese culture, and so on. As intellectuals exchanged their thoughts and engaged in competition for symbolic capital, discourses regarding how best to merge *văn minh* and *văn hiến* so as to create a marker of Vietnam's national identity emerged in the cultural fields.

Đông Dương Tạp Chí was a special edition of the *Lục Tỉnh tân văn* (“News of the Six Provinces,” 1907-1944), a *quốc ngữ* daily that shared with *Nông cổ mín đàm* (1901-1924) the famous chief editor Gilbert Trần Chánh Chiếu (1869-1919), a devout supporter of the *Duy Tân* Reform Movement, whose commitment to the movement was such that even his French citizenship had not prevented him from being imprisoned twice as a result. *Đông Dương tạp chí*'s editor in chief Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh

was a rarity among his generation of intellectuals. Despite his humble origins, thanks to his language prowess and his zeal for Westernization, Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh was among a prestigious group of Vietnamese who attended the Colonial Exhibition in Marseille in 1906 after having spent a few years as an interpreter in the colonial administration (Goscha 2004). Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh was fascinated by Western journalism and French culture, and he vowed to bring what he saw in France back to Vietnam. After several unsuccessful experiments with *quốc ngữ* journals in the 1900s, Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh was given an opportunity by Sarraut in 1913 to pursue his dream of establishing a Westernized Vietnam through a modern periodical. The publication of *Đông Dương tạp chí* came earlier than the planned due date, though: the assassination of a prefect chef and two French officers in Tonkin by the activists of Phan Bội Châu's radical *Việt Nam Quang Phục Hội* (Vietnamese Restoration Society) forced the colonial government to publish *Đông Dương tạp chí* "in a hurry." Its aim was to shower Vietnamese intellectuals with the blessings of French civilization and snuff out "the fuses on the firecrackers of the rebels to prevent them from going before the bells and drums of civilization" (*Đông Dương Tạp Chí* 1913, no. 1, quoted in Jamieson 1993: 73).

The targeted readers of *Đông Dương tạp chí*, many of whom were members of the Confucian literati class, enjoyed reading translated Chinese novels by Nguyễn Đổ Mục (1875-1941), translated French literature by Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh, as well as the essays on Vietnamese culture and Western science, technologies, and philosophies. Nevertheless, because they found Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh's ardent pro-France stand simply too slavish to respect and his blatant criticism of both Confucian learning and Phan Bội Châu and his followers outrageous, they were not convinced that *Đông Dương tạp chí* was anything more than a French-owned propaganda apparatus, nor did they endorse the idea of Franco-Vietnamese collaboration (Jamieson 1993: 73). Gradually, *Đông Dương tạp chí* transformed into an education journal that offered teachers in Franco-Vietnamese schools pedagogical advice and instructional materials. In 1918, it became *Học báo* (Gazette of Education), an official bulletin of the Board of Education. The twofold mission of advancing the cause of Franco-Vietnamese collaboration and cultivating a native elite class for France by the introduction of French culture was passed to *Nam Phong*, which made its appearance in Hanoi in 1917. Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh continued his career as a journalist but with other publications.

Nam Phong's chief editor Phạm Quỳnh (1893-1945), who would become a fierce competitor of Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh in the 1920s, had a profile similar to that of Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh's, except that the former did not have humble origins as the latter's. Phạm Quỳnh was equipped with excellent French language skills, a passion for French learning, and a rapport with the colonial regime that started developing when he took

a job at the École Française d'Extrême Orient as a teenager.³ He began his career in journalism by working with Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh in *Đông Dương tạp chí* when it published its first issue in 1913. During the First World War period, Sarraut invited Phạm Quỳnh and Nguyễn Bá Trác (1881-1945), a Confucian scholar and former supporter of the *Duy Tân* Reform movement, to co-edit a propaganda gazette, *The War History of Europe* (Âu Châu Chiến Sử), in Chinese for Chinese readers as a means to counter propaganda efforts in China by Germany, France's rival in the war (Huỳnh Văn Tòng 2000: 141-47).⁴ When *The War History of Europe* was about to transform into *Nam Phong*, Marty, the top official at the Political Affairs Directorate, made sure that *Nam Phong* would continue transmitting anti-German sentiments with a tone and content sophisticated and autonomous enough to avoid the appearance of propaganda before its readers, i.e., intellectuals, whom Phạm Quỳnh defined as the "high society" (*người thượng lưu*) and the "roof of the house" (*nóc*) of Vietnam (Phạm Quỳnh 1917: 1-7) (Jamieson 1993). With Marty's clever planning and careful calculation, *Nam Phong* took off and became the most prestigious and influential periodical in colonial Vietnam during the 1910s and 1920s. As *Nam Phong* grew in its influence, it also evolved from a Chinese-Vietnamese bilingual monthly that aimed to accommodate both Confucian literati and graduates of Franco-Vietnamese schools, to a Chinese-Vietnamese- French trilingual publication that supplied Vietnamese readers with French reading materials to improve their French language skills (Phạm Thế Ngũ 1986 [1961]; Womack 2003).

After the First World War, *Nam Phong* became the organ of the Association of Intellectual and Moral Formation of Vietnamese (*Hội Khai Trí Tiến Đức*; Association pour la formation intellectuelle et morale des Annamites, AFIMA hereafter), which was established in 1919 in Hanoi by Louis Marty to encourage Vietnamese intellectuals to "follow the government's enlightenment policy in a lawful way so as to make a contribution to broadening people's understanding, upholding people's morality, propagating Western sciences—particularly those pertaining to French learning, preserving the national essence of Vietnam, as well as promoting the economic interests of both French and Vietnamese" (Bùi Đình Tá 1919: 160). To a certain extent, the goal of the AFIMA overlapped with the *Duy Tân* Reform Movement in its encouragement of Vietnamese intellectuals to embrace Western *văn minh*/civilization and preserve *văn hiến*, and its advocacy for economic independence

³ After Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh graduated from the College of Interpretation at 14, he started working as a secretary in the bureaucracy. Phạm Quỳnh worked as an assistant researcher in the École Française d'Extrême-Orient in Hanoi at 16.

⁴ Phạm Quỳnh, Nguyễn Bá Trác, and Bùi Quang Chiêu, among others, were executed by the Communist Việt Minh, i.e., the League for the Independence of Vietnam, in 1945, on account of their active collaboration with the French government. Had Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh not died of dysentery in Laos in 1936, he would probably have been killed by the Việt Minh as well.

from Chinese business communities. But the similarity ended here. The AFIMA departed from the *Duy Tân* in its insistence on pursuing *văn minh*/civilization in a law-abiding manner (as opposed to Phan Bội Châu's armed violence against it) and its resort to traditionalism as an antidote to the potential damage that could be caused to the colonial authority by Vietnamese intellectuals' zealous pursuit for a version of modernity that was deemed to be too "advanced" for supposedly primitive Vietnamese minds.

During the 1910s, there appeared several other famous periodicals that were also sponsored by the colonial government and edited by Vietnamese, though they were not as influential as *Đông Dương tạp chí* and *Nam Phong*. First, *La Tribune Indigène* in Cochinchina was the organ of the Constitutional Party founded by agronomics engineer and naturalized French citizen Bùi Quang Chiêu (1873-1925) to advocate Vietnam's self-government and economic interests of the Vietnamese bourgeoisie at the expense of Chinese business communities. *La Tribune Indigène* was more concerned about political and economic affairs, especially issues concerning Vietnam's advance towards self-government and economic benefits for the Vietnamese bourgeoisie. Second, the daily *Trung Bắc tân văn*, like *Đông Dương tạp chí*, was based in Hanoi and edited by Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh. Third, *Nữ Giới Chung* (Women's Bell, February to September 1918) in Cochinchina was Vietnam's first *quốc ngữ* periodical for female readers.⁵ It was edited by Nguyễn Thị Ngọc Khuê (1864-1922), daughter of Nguyễn Đình Chiểu (1822-1888), a Confucian scholar and the author of famous epic poem *Lục Vân Tiên* (Huỳnh Văn Tòng 2000: 137-140; Võ Văn Nhơn 2007).

La Tribune Indigène was a French publication with a political and economic focus rather than a *quốc ngữ* cultural periodical; *Trung Bắc tân văn* was a daily but not an intellectual journal; and *Nữ Giới Chung* survived less than a year. Therefore, I focus primarily on *Đông Dương tạp chí* and *Nam Phong*, among others, to analyze the intellectual pursuit of *văn minh* and the parallel development of the cultural fields in the 1910s. I rely particularly on *Nam Phong*, not only because it lasted much longer and all its volumes are available in electronic form (while the volumes of 1915 and 1916 of *Đông Dương tạp chí* are nonexistent), but also because it made a lasting impression on Vietnamese intellectuals, according to testimonials in their own memoirs (Đào Duy Anh 2002: 22-23).

⁵ The French name of the daily *Trung Bắc tân văn* was Gazette de l'Annam-Tonkin (Gazette of Annam and Tonkin). At some point it changed its name to *La Tribune Indochinoise* (the Indochinese Forum).

2. The Dynamics of the Cultural Fields

2.1. The Logics of the Cultural Fields

In the 1910s, the cultural fields underwent three significant transformations. First, they were becoming autonomous from the colonial state and market economy. On the one hand, it was true that the colonial state deeply impacted and closely watched Vietnamese intellectuals, be they Confucian scholars or Westernized intellectuals. But through its interactions with Vietnamese intellectuals, the colonial state also gradually understood that its control over the cultural fields needed to be exercised with extra caution, especially when the French regime was using the banner of *mission civilisatrice* to justify its colonial rule and still holding up (however vaguely) the prospect of Vietnam's national independence. The way in which the French colonial state changed its propaganda strategies vis-à-vis *Nam Phong* demonstrates that the cultural fields did enjoy a certain level of autonomy, albeit under the state's strict censorship. The impact of market forces on the cultural fields was evidenced in the journalistic field, where colorful polemics were frequently used by periodicals' editors and writing staff to exchange insults or assign blame in order to excite readers and increase circulation (Henchy 2006). Nevertheless, what debate topics would appeal to Vietnamese readers during the colonial era was very much decided by the issues relating to *văn minh* and *văn hiến*, indicating that the cultural fields were not totally subject to the power of money.

Second, the ruling principle of distributing symbolic capital (i.e., fame and recognition) within the fields began to crystallize: one's position in the fields hinged on one's contribution to the mission of transforming Vietnam from a backward society to a proudly civilized nation. The more significant one's contribution was, the greater the symbolic capital one would earn. How to evaluate the significance of one's contribution was a contentious issue among intellectuals, who competed over the power to define what *văn minh* was, and what deeds, works, and kinds of knowledge were seen as advancing it.

A further difficult question arose: what roles should France and China play in Vietnam's civilizing process? Some intellectuals believed that Vietnam's *văn minh* was tied with the French colonial regime, and they acquired their political and cultural capital from their rapport with the colonial authority and their knowledge of French language. Phan Chu Trinh probably was the first Vietnamese intellectual in the cultural fields who openly confessed his faith in the colonial regime's promise of political and economic modernization for Vietnam, even though he was still very ambivalent about Western *văn minh*. Other intellectuals were less optimistic about what kind of future *văn minh* would hold for Vietnam though, and some intellectuals'

symbolic capital came from exposing the dark side of *văn minh*, especially among those who equated it with Westernization. Confucian scholars Phan Bội Châu (1867-1940) and Tân Đà (1888-1939), the head of the *Duy Tân* Movement's clandestine anti-French armed struggles and one of Vietnam's earliest *quốc ngữ* poets and writers popular in the 1910s, respectively, were the most notable examples of this latter group.

The third shift is worth noting, though it remained largely embryonic in the 1910s. Some intellectuals began to focus more on identifying the characteristics of Vietnamese culture—both the strengths that merited preservation and the shortcomings that were to be eliminated. During the 1910s, however, emulating the French model and developing *quốc ngữ* prevailed over this task of searching Vietnam's national soul. It would not be until the 1920s that the question of how to define Vietnam's national personality vis-à-vis both Chinese and French cultures would become a hotly debated issue in the cultural fields, as I will discuss further in the next two chapters.

Vietnamese intellectuals were facing a dilemma in the 1910s: if French learning was to be spread and *quốc ngữ* strengthened, it was virtually impossible for either the French or the Chinese model to be discarded, despite the escalating tensions between them that had been building since the mid-nineteenth century. Intellectuals responded to the shifting power balance between the two models differently. Some, like Phạm Quỳnh, strove to reconcile the two by transforming the Chinese model in light of the French one. Others, like Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh and Nguyễn Háo Vĩnh (1893-1941), who advocated for total Westernization, worked hard to tear apart *văn hiến*—which was seen no more than the outgrowth of past borrowings from China, and clear everything that would be an obstacle to the way to *văn minh*. They were impatient with the Chinese model and Confucian scholars, and figured that Vietnam would be far better off if it could just get rid of both.

2.2. The Tensions between Confucian Scholars and Westernized Intellectuals

As it became increasingly clear that the twofold task of promulgating Western learning and strengthening *quốc ngữ* was the most effective means for Vietnamese intellectuals to move upwardly in the cultural fields, many intellectuals were faced with the dilemma of how to draw on both Chinese and French models on the one hand, while competing with one another for symbolic power on the other. The earliest indication of this strained relationship between the two models and their agents can be found in the “Proclamation against the Fuddy-Duddies” (Cáo Hủ Lậu Văn 1907), which was published in the *Đông Kinh* Free School's (1907-1908) manifesto the

“Booklet of Civilization and New Learning.” As I showed in Chapter Three, in this statement, those Confucian scholars who stuck to the Chinese model and rejected both Western learning and *quốc ngữ* were pronounced irrelevant by their reform-minded peers. In response, they insisted that Vietnam would lose *ngĩa lý* (justice and morality) if Chinese characters disappeared from Vietnam’s cultural horizon.

The tensions between the two models—French *văn minh* and Sino-Vietnamese *văn hiến*—and their agents—Westernized intellectuals and Confucian scholars—were manifested in both the political fields and the cultural fields. In the political fields, the tension culminated when terrorist attacks plotted by Phan Bội Châu and the *Việt Nam Quang Phục Hội* based in South China succeeded in killing several colonial government staff members in the Tonkin area in 1913, a plot inspired by China’s Republican Revolution of 1911. As I mentioned earlier, these assassinations prompted Francophile Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh to publish the *Đông Dương tạp chí* earlier than originally intended by the colonial state. Not surprisingly, Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh heaped words upon words to warn and revile those Confucian scholars who followed Phan Bội Châu in attempting to overthrow the colonial regime. He called them “ngụy nho,” false Confucian scholars, as opposed to “chân nho,” true Confucian scholars. Although Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh did not specify who were qualified to be “chân nho,” it is safe to assume he had Phan Chu Trinh in mind, the first Confucian scholar who openly disapproved of Phan Bội Châu’s resort to violence and asked the colonial government to carry out the *mission civilisatrice* and participate in the Franco-Vietnamese collaboration in 1906.

Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh and Phan Chu Trinh also agreed with each other on the evil of the traditional political system and wanted it to be eliminated. In addition to “ngụy nho,” whose relentless opposition to French rule in Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh’s view could cost Vietnam the once-in-millennium opportunity to move upward into the realm of Western *văn minh*, there were some Confucian scholars who turned their back on the French model, fearing that following the West would cause Vietnam to lose its *quốc hồn* (national soul). Although their passive resistance to the French model did not present any immediate threat, Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh still described them as “hủ nho,” or rotten Confucian scholars (Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh 1913: 5). For Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh, Westernization was far more important than preserving *quốc hồn*.

When he was 54 years old, a year before his untimely death in Laos in 1936, Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh admitted that Chinese learning exerted a tremendous impact on him during an interview (Nhất Tâm 1957: 9). But a younger Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh during the 1910s was quick to announce that any Confucian scholars, no matter how deep their knowledge of Chinese learning or how greatly they were revered by people, would be irrelevant to Vietnam’s future if they continued to reject the Western way,

whether actively or passively. By making such a claim, Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh tried to set up emulating the West so as to usher Vietnam into the new era of *văn minh* as the dominant “rule of the game” for the burgeoning cultural fields, so as to delimit their position and holdings of capital within the fields. Rebellious Confucian scholars, despite having been crushed by the French oppression during the 1900s, did not take these insults from their Westernized counterparts quietly. In his plea that Confucian and Westernized scholars should work together to blend the best elements of the French and Chinese models for Vietnam, Phạm Quỳnh acknowledged that some name-calling had gone on between the two parties: Confucian scholars would accuse their Westernized peers of being *đê tiện* (abject; ignoble) or *những nhố* (ridiculously stubborn) people, and the latter referred to the former as *hủ bại* (corrupted) (Phạm Quỳnh 1913: 8-10).

The French regime changed its strategies a few years later. In 1917, another uprising related to the *Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng* broke out in Tonkin: the *Thái Nguyên* Uprising in the Tonkin area occurred in the *Thái Nguyên* penitentiary on August 31 and was quickly suppressed by the French force only five days after it began. Despite its brevity, according to historian Peter Zinoman, the uprising at the prison marked “a transition from traditional Vietnamese anticolonialism to the modern nationalist movements in the 1930s” (Zinoman 2001: 158). The rebels included political prisoners, common criminals, and mutinous prison guards, and unlike the preceding uprisings that were regional in nature and led by Confucian scholars, the *Thái Nguyên* rebels were from over thirty provinces of Vietnam and led by individuals from every stratum of society (Zinoman 2001: 159). The leader in charge of strategy, who also wrote the proclamation for the uprising, was Lương Ngọc Quỳnh (1890-1917), a man of Confucian education, a member of the *Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng*, and the son of *Đông Kinh* Free School’s principal Lương Văn Can. The French colonial regime was torn between two conflicting interpretations of the uprising: a “political” event or merely a “local” event (Zinoman 2001: 168). This time, instead of launching a large-scale propagandistic attack like Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh in *Đông Dương tạp chí* did in 1913, *Nam Phong* followed General-Governor Sarraut’s interpretation: it dismissed the uprising as a minor local revolt stirred up by a small group of crazy people and gave it only a short paragraph of coverage (*Nam Phong* September 1917b, no. 8: 204), thus silencing the agents who had been inspired by the Chinese model in the political fields.

In the cultural fields, the hostility between Confucian scholars and Westernized intellectuals erupted into a heated debate in *Nam Phong* in 1918 over the question of whether or not Chinese vocabulary should be heavily incorporated into *quốc ngữ*. To better understand this debate, it is necessary to consider briefly Phạm Quỳnh’s

enthusiasm for borrowing Chinese vocabulary into *quốc ngữ*. Phạm Quỳnh was a hybrid Westernized neo-traditionalist and a fervent advocate of *quốc ngữ* who adhered throughout his life to the idea that Vietnam's future lay in *quốc ngữ*'s development and intellectuals' abilities to select and mix the best parts of both Western and East Asian civilizations. He intentionally borrowed quite a few Chinese vocabularies in his translation, introduction, and exposition of Western ideas. In the first issue, *Nam Phong* provided a *Tự Vựng* (lexicon) appendix to explain the newly transliterated Chinese words and their French equivalences. This lexicon appendix lasted to the fourteenth issue, after which it was moved from the appendix to footnotes at the bottom of pages in subsequent issues. *Nam Phong* explained its purpose in publishing a lexicon as follows:

Currently our *quốc văn* is still very poor and hence is in great need of vocabulary to become a workable language. Therefore, we have to borrow *chữ nho* [terms written in Chinese characters] so as to name new things and *diễn* [explain] new ideas and thoughts (*Nam Phong*, no. 1: i, 1917)⁶

Below is an example of how *Nam Phong* explained what “anh hào” (literally “hero”) meant in Vietnamese and French:

Anh hào, 英豪 [ying hao] = Người giỏi, người tài đức hơn chúng [talented people; people who possess outstanding talents and virtues]—Grand home [great man]; homme de genie [genius] (*Nam Phong* 1918, no. 13: xi)

The above example indicates that for Phạm Quỳnh and Nguyễn Bá Trác, borrowing and translating Chinese neologisms into Vietnamese was the best approach to strengthen *quốc ngữ*. But Nguyễn Hào Vĩnh (1893-1941), a Cochinchinese Westernized intellectual, frantically disagreed with their strategy. In 1918, under the pen name “Ng.-H.-V.,” he wrote a long and explosive letter to the chief editors of *Nam Phong*, questioning their editors' cultural identity and complaining that southern readers in the Cochinchinese area were having a hard time grasping *Nam Phong* due to its obsession with Chinese characters (1918: 198-209). In Nguyễn Hào Vĩnh's eyes, there was no evidence that *Nam Phong*'s editors were anything but a group of snobbish northerners who loved showing off their knowledge of Chinese by endlessly bombarding their readers with aloof, incomprehensible borrowed Chinese vocabulary. He wrote:

⁶ The *chữ nho* here referred specifically to the terms originally written in Chinese characters and were given new meanings when Japanese intellectuals in the nineteenth century borrowed them to coin neologisms relating to modernity.

[It is]...as if you gentlemen are Chinese people who have come to invade Vietnam; as if you want to bring the language of the Chinese guys out there and give it to Vietnam. Thank you very much, gentlemen, no need for such a business here! Because Chinese people had done this very thing for thousands of years! Those Chinks brought Chinese characters to Vietnam and forcibly fed, stuffed, flooded, and pushed them into our language beyond its digestion capacity that our poor mother tongue cannot help but bloat! (Ng.-H.-V. 1918: 200) 7

“Who are you, really?” Nguyễn Háo Vĩnh demanded, “Are you Chinese or Vietnamese?” He made a purist claim by arguing that “true” Vietnamese would not dare questioning the beauty and depth of Vietnamese language, which, contrary to what *Nam Phong* editors wanted their readers to believe, did not really have to rely on any foreign language, be it Chinese or French, to coin new terms. He stressed that Vietnamese language was rich and “not inferior to any other languages in the world” (Ng.-H.-V. 1918: 204), and that Vietnamese intellectuals had no excuse for their failure to coin neologisms without borrowing. He then cited the example of Japan and complained that intellectual sloppiness was the only thing preventing Vietnamese intellectuals from following their Japanese counterparts in developing neologisms in a totally self-dependent way (Ng.-H.-V. 1918: 203).⁸ Nevertheless, as historian linguist John D. Phan shows (2010), Vietnamese language was born when Chinese speakers native to the Annam province in imperial China shifted to the local “Proto-Việt-Mường” language around the first A.D. As a result, although Vietnamese is closely related to the Mường language and genealogically unrelated to Chinese, more than seventy percent of modern Vietnamese words are of Chinese origin. There does not appear to have been alternative ways other than transliterating from Chinese characters to coin neologisms, and much as Nguyễn Háo Vĩnh did not think borrowing Chinese was a good idea, he did not offer any alternative solution. Indeed, neither did he himself succeed in using significantly fewer Chinese loanwords in his letter.

Before I proceed to discuss the responses to Nguyễn Háo Vĩnh’s letter, I would

⁷ Nguyễn Háo Vĩnh, like many Vietnamese elites in Cochinchina during the colonial era, used a racial slur “Chệt” to express their resentment toward Chinese dominance in economic matters. Here, I use the American slur “Chink” to translate “Chệt.”

⁸ Apparently, Nguyễn Háo Vĩnh’s information about the history of modern Japanese lexicography was inaccurate: before the *Meiji* era began, the need to translate Western knowledge had prompted Japanese intellectuals to search Chinese ancient texts to come up with new words for new concepts and ideas, and these words were then reintroduced to China, Korea, and finally Vietnam. Japanese intellectuals started by transliterating some foreign terms, but they eventually gave up and replaced them with the Chinese-derived neologisms (Liu 1995).

like to pause here to examine the regional dimension manifested in his reproach against *Nam Phong*. It seems that Nguyễn Háo Vĩnh was offended by the way in which less Sinicized Cochinchinese were looked down by Tonkinese, who, due to Tonkin's geographical proximity to China, had been deeply Sinicized and still held on to their old pride derived from Sino-Vietnamese tradition. I argue, however, that this regional strife also pointed to the tensions between the old *văn hiến* and the new *văn minh*. Cochinchina as a French colony since 1859 was the region where the imperial examination was eliminated first, *quốc ngữ* popularized earliest, and the influence of French culture felt strongest among all three colonial *pays* in Vietnam. Cochinchinese intellectuals thus had different configurations of cultural capital than their counterparts in Annam and Tonkin. They might have taken pride in their early Westernization, yet as I will show in the next section, to the eyes of some hardcore Confucian scholars in Tonkin and Annam, moral decay and materialism was rampant in Cochinchina. Phạm Quỳnh (1918e: 280) also commented that because Confucian learning was abandoned first in Cochinchina, although *quốc ngữ* was most common there, the vernacular literature in Cochinchina was still immature.

In addition to *Nam Phong*'s editors, who appeared to commit a crime that was no less than treason, and Vietnamese intellectuals in general, who were so lazy that they were content to watch their mother tongue being forced to assimilate into the Chinks' language, Nguyễn Háo Vĩnh was also very critical of Confucian literati. In line with the mocking spirit that was evident in the *Đông Kinh* Free School's "Proclamation against Fuddy-Duddies," Nguyễn Háo Vĩnh (1918: 200) described Confucian literati as a group of silly men who were wasting away by doing nothing but reciting Chinese poems while shaking their thighs ("rung đùi rung vế") to the rhythms of their recitation.⁹ Nguyễn Háo Vĩnh scoffed that while these men bragged about their knowledge of famous Chinese sceneries that appeared in Chinese poems, they knew absolutely nothing about Vietnam's history and geography.

Nguyễn Háo Vĩnh's letter enraged quite a few Confucian scholars. Nguyễn Như Nông (1918: 381-2) found Nguyễn Háo Vĩnh's revilement "ungrateful to our ancestors," and Nguyễn Bá Trác, who like Nguyễn Háo Vĩnh had supported the *Duy Tân* Reform Movement, was particularly offended by Nguyễn Háo Vĩnh's disgraceful portrayal of Confucian literati by poking fun at their habit of "rung đùi rung vế," obviously a denigrating term commonly used to refer to Confucian literati. Nguyễn Bá Trác defended his Confucian peers by emphasizing that the class of Confucian literati as a whole had not only long quitted this embarrassing habit, but also had quietly withdrawn into the background and entrusted Westernized intellectuals with

⁹ The behavior of "rung đùi rung vế" is associated with vulgar culture in both Taiwan and Vietnam, although no studies have been done to identify this peculiar practice.

the task of leading learning, knowledge acquisition, and intellectual development, as they realized that a new era was dawning in which their Westernized peers would soon be better qualified than they. After establishing that Confucian scholars were no more than a harmless group of underdogs who would only be grateful for Westernized intellectuals if they diligently got their jobs done and led Vietnam out of backwardness, Nguyễn Bá Trác asked why Nguyễn Háo Vĩnh would want to attack these men of traditional education in such a vicious manner when they not only posed no threat, but had willingly, even patriotically, refrained from competing with Westernized intellectuals for power (1918b: 256-8).

Nguyễn Bá Trác's complaints attested to the antagonism between closely matched Confucian scholars and Westernized intellectuals, a point also made by Nguyễn Văn Ngọc (1919: 37-9). On the one hand, while Westernized intellectuals were taking the stage and dominating the cultural fields, the size of this group was still very tiny. It did not help when Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh and Phạm Quỳnh's prestige in the cultural fields, derived from their rapport with the colonial ruler, appeared disproportionate to their contribution to Vietnam's advance toward civilization, at least in the eyes of the Confucian scholars. During the 1920s and the 1930s, Confucian scholars would rise up to challenge Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh and Phạm Quỳnh's prestige, and I discuss this further in subsequent chapters. On the other hand, while it is true that the stratum of Confucian literati was disintegrating and declining as a result of Vietnam's transition from one of the Celestial Dynasty's tribute kingdoms to a modern nation through the path of colonialism, and many of their leaders were either executed, put behind bars, or in exile after the colonial regime put down the *Duy Tân* movement, they were still indispensable to the growth of *quốc ngữ*. Adding to their cultural capital was their political capital, which was derived in a manner quite opposite to that of the collaborating hybrid Westernized intellectuals. Although the reputation of Confucian bureaucracy as a whole was tainted by the Nguyễn court's failure to preserve Vietnam's sovereignty, Confucian scholars still commanded respect from the people as they had led the anti-colonial *Cần Vương* (Aid the King) struggles in the late 19th century and the *Duy Tân* movement in the 1900s.

Other responses to Nguyễn Háo Vĩnh's letter showed that the majority of intellectuals, Confucian scholars and Westernized intellectuals alike, tended to be in agreement with Phạm Quỳnh's opinion that it was utterly unthinkable and unpractical for the Vietnamese language to do away with Chinese loanwords. Nevertheless, they also agreed that it was time to call for a reconstruction of the Chinese model to give it a new identity, and that intellectuals should consult that model only selectively and wisely (Phạm Xuân Nùng 1918: 258-59; Tr.v. D. 1918: 259-67; Chu Lăng Vân 1918: 382-83; Thân Trọng Huề 1919: 17-20; Nguyễn Văn Ngọc 1919: 37-39; Phạm Quỳnh

1919a: 83-97; Nguyễn Tất Tể 1919: 197-201). This is the topic I turn to in the following section.

2.3. Reconstructing the Chinese Model and Rediscovering the Sino-Vietnamese *Văn Hiến* Legacy in the Cultural Fields

Although assessing the impact and future of the Chinese model was not an item that received much attention in the cultural fields during the 1910s, some Vietnamese intellectuals still committed themselves to this task. Phạm Quỳnh adopted a creative approach that likened Chinese learning in East Asia in general and in Vietnam in particular to the role Latin and Greek texts of antiquity played in the European Renaissance between the 14th and 17th centuries. Phạm Quỳnh saw a lot of parallels between Latin and Chinese languages: both were the cradles of world civilizations, out of which grew European and East Asian vernaculars, among them French and Vietnamese; also, both were dead languages no longer spoken by Europeans and Vietnamese, respectively (Phạm Quỳnh 1919b: 86).¹⁰ These parallels gave Phạm Quỳnh every reason to be optimistic about the benefits Chinese learning could possibly shower on Vietnam's literary and moral development: as long as Chinese learning was not slavishly revered as a model, as had been the case in the past, but was regarded instead as a subject of humanities to be studied as Latin and Greek antique texts were in the Renaissance era, there was no reason that an East Asian Renaissance would not blossom in Vietnam in the near future. Phạm Quỳnh (1918c: 345) justified his favor for the Chinese model by pointing out that even French, once a vernacular language under Latin and now the richest language in the world, also had to borrow words pertaining to sciences from Latin. Phạm Quỳnh (1918b: 335, 340) also followed Albert Sarraut's advice in suggesting that the Chinese language should be taught in a new manner: while in the past Vietnamese students spent decades memorizing difficult ideograms in order to pass competitive examinations, in the modern era Chinese should be viewed as simply assisting to better learn the vocabulary, etymology, sentence structure, and allusions of the Vietnamese language.

Phạm Quỳnh (1918b: 340-41) made another appealing argument to keep Chinese learning in Vietnam. As more and more Vietnamese people were *khai hoá* (enlightened), intellectuals came to realize that in higher education curriculum of all *văn minh* nations in the world there was a subject called humanities that taught

¹⁰ Chinese continues to live and grow, but Phạm Quỳnh's argument resembled Benedict Anderson's discussion of the cultural roots of modern nations (1992): Chinese, Latin, Arabic, and Pali were the sacred truth languages out of which religious imagined communities of the Middle Kingdom, Christendom, Islam, and Buddhist worlds were created. In this sense, Chinese is, indeed, a dead language to Vietnam in that the majority of modern Vietnamese people do not understand Chinese, even as they continue to borrow words from Chinese to this day.

classical literature, languages, arts, philosophy, and history. In order to become a truly *văn minh* nation, Vietnam too needed to produce its own brand of humanities. Phạm Quỳnh himself and his Confucian colleagues on *Nam Phong*'s editorial board set an example for intellectuals of how to expedite the coming of Vietnamese Renaissance by reviving Chinese learning: Phạm Quỳnh (1918c: 4-15) translated French Sinologist Édouard Chavannes's (1865-1918) essay on Confucianism to assist his readers in learning its true spirit, and Nguyễn Bá Trác (1918a: 129-141) wrote a commentary on Chinese learning in hope of reconciling the old and the new models.

What Phạm Quỳnh and Nguyễn Bá Trác were doing with the Chinese model was a relatively rare endeavor in the cultural fields during the 1910s. They were joined by Confucian scholars who had been exposed to Chinese reformist *Tân thư* (new books) and were keen on examining the ancient Sino-Vietnamese texts in the hopes of piecing together a respectable *văn hiến* for the Vietnamese nation. These intellectuals employed both fictional and non-fictional approaches to depict a vision of Vietnam that would serve two seemingly paradoxical purposes: self-affirmation and self-criticism. According to their approaches and purposes, intellectuals' assessments of Sino-Vietnamese legacy during the 1910s can be organized into three groups. Both the first and the second groups were aimed to raise awareness of and confidence in Vietnamese culture among Vietnamese people, though they differed in their approaches: while the first group was comprised of scholarly projects and creative nonfiction, the second group was artistic projects, and historical novels were apparently a very popular genre. The third group, all of which were non-fictional works, were intended to expedite the process of Vietnam's transition into *văn minh* by exposing the inherent darkness and weakness of Vietnamese culture. In Table 4.2 below, I list these three groups of works and some representative works for each.

Table 4.2: Vietnamese intellectuals' approaches in evaluating Sino-Vietnamese legacy

	Self-affirmation	Self-criticism
Non-fictional rendition	Group 1	Group 2
Fictional rendition	Group 3	Group 4: None

The self-affirmative non-fictional works can be categorized into two sub-groups. The first sub-group was comprised of transliteration, translation, and annotation of Vietnamese and Chinese poems from Chinese and *chữ Nôm* to *quốc ngữ* (Nguyễn Hữu Tiến 1916, 1917). Vietnamese intellectuals were particularly eager to elevate *lục bát* (six-eight couplet) and *song thất lục bát* (couplet of seven followed by a six-eight couplet) poetic meters, two native poetic styles that I will discuss more in Chapter Six. Since they were Vietnam's two popular poetic structures that never appeared in traditional Chinese poems, *lục bát* and *song thất lục bát* were hailed to express the

Vietnamese nation's *bản sắc* (national characters) (Nguyễn Hữu Tiến 1918: 340-354; Tôn Thất Phan 1918: 311-2), and were deemed to be strong evidence to the world that Vietnamese literature was not at all inferior to literatures of other nations (Phạm Quỳnh 1918e: 27-9), especially that of China (Tuyết Huy 1919: 145-147). Another sub-group of works was scholarly research and translation of Vietnam's dynastic records and biography of historical and mysterious figures (Tuyết Huy 1918: 142-150; Trần Trọng Kim 1917-1918; Phan Kế Bính 1917: 209-216). These projects were dedicated to construct an evolutionary, linear history of Vietnam that started from *hồng hoang* (the primitive ages), underwent phases of *giã man* (the barbarous ages) and *bán khai* (the semi-civilized ages), eventually reaching *văn minh* (civilization), thanks to the arrival of France (Tuyết Huy 1919: 142-150). Tuyết Huy was the pen name of Dương Bá Trạc (1884-1944), a reformed Confucian scholar, former *Duy Tân* supporter, and then an active writer for *Nam Phong*. In saying that Vietnam could only evolve toward a higher stage of intellectual and cultural development under France, Dương Bá Trạc might have been flattering the colonial state or simply showing deference to the state's censorship; but it is widely held among intellectuals that the French arrival made it clear that Vietnam's current stage of *văn minh* was far from being satisfactory and desperately in need of an overhaul.

The self-affirmative fictional works were all historical novels and dramas about heroic historical figures. There was a common thread present in all these works, namely, China's domineering over Vietnam. It seems that as early as the 1910s, intellectuals had reached a synonymous agreement that the best strategy to boost people's self-esteem in the midst of backbreaking hardship and profound humiliation was to underscore how tiny Vietnam had been able to heroically defeat all odds and persevere, and even prevail sometimes, over its villainous neighbor. The protagonists of Phan Bội Châu's *Tuồng Trưng Nữ Vương* (The Drama of Queen Trưng, 1911),¹¹ Phan Kế Bính's *Hưng Đạo Vương* (The story of lord Trần Hưng Đạo, 1912), and Nguyễn Hữu Tiến's *Đông A Song Phụng* (Two phoenixes in East Asia, 1916)¹² were all historical figures who either successfully rebelled against China's reign, such as Queen Trưng and her younger sister between 39 and 43 AD, or led Vietnam to defeat formidable Mongol armies' aggressions in 1257, 1285, and 1287 when Mongol was able to rule China, devastate Europe, and terrify other parts of Asia, such as Trần Hưng Đạo and his subordinate Phạm Ngũ Lão.

Through artistic renditions of Trần Hưng Đạo, an image of the Trần Dynasty

¹¹ Phan Chu Trinh, too, wrote *tuồng Trưng Nữ Vương* when he was briefly imprisoned in Côn Đảo in 1908 (Phan Chu Trinh 2005, vol 2: 99-116).

¹² The two phoenixes were Trần Hưng Đạo and his subordinate commander Phạm Ngũ Lão. The phoenix in East Asia is similar to the Western phoenix but carries no implication of resurrection. Symbolizing excellent virtues, the term is reserved to eulogize outstanding men.

(1225-1440) as Vietnam's golden age began to emerge in the cultural fields. Three reasons explain why Vietnamese intellectuals picked up the Trần era for nostalgia. First, it produced Trần Hưng Đạo, whose multiple defeats of Mongol were considered to be one of the greatest military feats of the world's military history. It is not surprising that Trần Hưng Đạo was hailed to embody Vietnam's proudly determined refusal of imperial China's assimilation. Second, during the Trần era, Vietnam significantly expanded its territory southward by acquiring new territory from the ancient Champa Kingdom in 1306 through political marriage. This historical event was part of a long *Nam Tiến* (Marching to the South) process that lasted for more than seven hundred years, and it was proudly cited as proof that Vietnam possessed the ability to thrive independently even under the shadow of China.¹³ Third, Vietnam imported the Confucian model of governance in the early eleventh century, but during the Trần era it had to compete with Buddhism and Daoism, and its influence was still shallow. The Trần was overthrown in 1400, followed by China's invasion in 1407, and Vietnamese historians generally viewed this "second colonization" between 1407 and 1427 as a fateful turning point when the negative influences of Confucianism took root in Vietnam: China forced assimilation and a deteriorated version of Song Confucianism (Tống Nho) upon Vietnam, burned down libraries, and carried the remaining books away to China, leaving a cultural vacuum that Confucianism was able to exploit. Below is an idealized rendition of the Trần era found in the preface to Phan Kế Bính's *Hưng Đạo Vương* (Phạm Văn Thụ 2008 [1912]: v):

How unusual it was for the Trần court to be able to establish democracy (dân đoan)! It practiced Buddhism and displayed the virtues of self-sacrifice, benevolence, adventurousness, perseverance, desire to perfect in morality, and therefore it was able to build a great civilization. Kings and servants shared banquets while holding hands and singing—what a picture of equality! Council of elders discussed the strategies of fighting the Yuan Mongol armies—what a spirit of constitutionalism! Village mayors were wonderful: they consulted all officials regardless of their ranks and entrusted them with authority—clearly the practice of regional autonomy. Therefore people's rights got more and more respected, morality advanced, and national soul strengthened.

¹³*Nam tiến*, or Marching to the South, is a pro-longed process that lasted roughly from the eleventh to the eighteenth centuries. The ethnic Kinh Vietnamese people, in alliance with Chinese refugees, expanded their territory southward into the ancient Champa kingdom. Only by the end of *Nam tiến* did the long S-shaped Vietnam that we know today come into existence (Choi 2004; Li 1998). I will briefly touch on this subject again in Chapter Six.

When intellectuals wrote self-affirmative works, they were largely in tune with each other in using evil China to contrast with the patriotic and heroic characters of Vietnamese ancestors. Yet, their criticisms of Vietnamese morals and customs were more diverse. The list was extensive and included servility, laziness, superstitious and unnecessarily extravagant customs, lack of frugality and trustworthiness, and corrupt and inefficient village administrative systems plagued by partisan divides (Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh 1913a, b; Phan Kế Bính 1973[1915]). Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh's criticism was particularly detailed and harsh. He complained that Vietnamese people had never been really passionate about anything, so much so that they were even indifferent toward religious and philosophical matters, and as a result they had never been able to produce their own school of thought (1913a, b). He even went so far as to deride his fellow Vietnamese for being totally ignorant of the proper arts of laughter that they simply laughed at everything on all occasions. Although he did not specify whether he spoke from the experiences of his French acquaintances, he pointed out that “people” (người ta) found Vietnamese irritating, because Vietnamese would laugh in response to basically everything, from a question to a compliment or even a rebuke, confusing or even enraging the other parties (1913b). Although Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh's complaints sounded extreme and his comments about Vietnam's lack of serious thinking and native school of thought did not find sympathy among his peers during the 1910s, his critiques were, nevertheless, a precursor of the debates to come in the 1930 over whether or not Vietnam had ever had a national learning.

In terms of culture, intellectuals argued that the traditional Sino-Vietnamese learning style, given its main purpose of preparing students for the imperial examination, had hindered Vietnam's progress into *văn minh*—i.e., higher stage of civilization—due to its pedagogy and curriculum. Pedagogically, as intellectuals in the *Đông Kinh* Free School's manifesto the “Booklet of Civilization and New Learning” (1907) criticized, repeating and memorizing ancient Chinese texts was its only approach to impart knowledge to students, and this over-emphasis on memorization had resulted in a servile mindset and discouraged the habit of critical thinking—believed essential to the emergence of science—from taking root in Vietnam. This pedagogical criticism of Sino-Vietnamese education had been around in the cultural fields since the 1900s, when Confucian scholars, presumably through reading Chinese reformist new books, became aware of similar criticism made by their Chinese counterparts against China's traditional education. Concern about the negative influence of the Sino-Vietnamese curriculum, on the other hand, only began to be raised by Westernized intellectuals in the 1910s, when their knowledge of French language enabled them to compare Sino-Vietnamese and French literatures as representatives of East Asian and European civilizations. For instance,

French-educated Phạm Quỳnh (1913: 8-10) and an unknown author Dương Tự Nguyên (1919: 45-47) compared European writers with traditional Chinese and Sino-Vietnamese ones and concluded that while the former produced works that were both beautiful in style and profound in content, the latter, brilliant as they were, were so obsessed with aesthetic quality of literature that they generated no more than a shallow corpus of *hư văn* (formalistic literature).

2.4. Constructing the French Model and the Problems of *Văn Minh*

In addition to the conflicts between Confucian scholars and Westernized intellectuals, the agents of the Chinese and the French models, respectively, intellectuals' competition for the power to define what *văn minh* was and who could be qualified as a member of *văn minh* was another source of tensions in the cultural fields during the 1910s. The knowledge of French language played a tremendously important role in this power struggle: since it was an essential component of and an instrument to *văn minh*, as the Code of Public Instruction suggested, French was a form of cultural capital that one had to possess in order to be recognized by Westernized intellectuals as a legitimate and respectable agent in the cultural fields and a civilized person in Vietnam.

In the previous decade, knowledge of French was less a form of cultural capital than a political statement. When Confucian scholars tried to duplicate Japan's *Meiji* Restoration and China's *Weixin* Reform Movement in Vietnam by leading the *Duy Tân* Reform Movement during the 1900s, very few of them were able to read materials in either French or other European languages; they had to rely on Chinese reformist new books to familiarize themselves with modern concepts and ideas. In spite of their lack of French language skills, these reformist Confucian scholars were the first group of intellectuals who encouraged Vietnamese to learn French, as French provided direct access to Western learning and it was reasoned that Vietnam would learn *văn minh* better and faster if they knew the language of their tutor (Huỳnh Thúc Kháng. 2005 [1936]). For these reformist Confucian scholars, learning French, like learning *quốc ngữ* to spread Western learning and expedite the process of mass enlightenment, was a patriotic task that could upgrade Vietnam's level of *văn minh*. Some Confucian scholars were sufficiently serious about their patriotism that they took on this difficult task of learning a foreign language. At age 26, Nguyễn Bá Trác, Phạm Quỳnh's colleague in *Nam Phong*, was one of those who went to Hanoi to learn French as a way to show his support for the *Duy Tân* movement (Phạm Thế Ngũ 1986 [1961]: 326-7).

During the 1910s, however, as knowledge of French became more widely spread in Vietnam and Westernized intellectuals were replacing Confucian scholars as leaders

in the cultural fields, so too did knowledge of French language shift from a patriotic act to a form of cultural capital that one had to acquire to prove one was distinctive from the uncivilized mass. When Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh denounced the multiple assassinations plotted by Phan Bội Châu and his Confucian followers in *Việt Nam Quang Phục Hội* in China, he made sure to offer a diagnosis of the cause of their rebelliousness: their linguistic incompetence, which left their perception of the French government and *văn minh* deeply distorted and their judgment fatally mistaken (*Đông Dương tạp chí* no. 1, 1913). By announcing that Confucian scholars' inability to read French resulted in their misplaced patriotic desire to drive out the French colonizer, the messiah who brought the blessings of enlightenment and civilization to Vietnam, Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh in fact made an argument that only intellectuals with the knowledge of French language were qualified to measure others' levels of *văn minh*. Again, Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh might sound extreme, but his argument resonated with those made in later decades.

French language as a form of cultural capital was to be acquired primarily through Franco-Vietnamese educational institutes. Nevertheless, since linguistic forms of cultural capital are not inimitable, French language was in constant danger of devaluation. This danger was first signaled by the decree of the Code of Public Instruction in 1917, which ordered that French be the instruction language in all Franco-Vietnamese schools. The Code virtually guarantee that over time the population of French-educated Vietnamese would grow and the value of French language as cultural capital would decrease at the same time, which meant that eventually the prestige of Westernized intellectuals would evaporate. So, unlike their Confucian counterparts, Westernized intellectuals were hesitant to see French become a language spoken by people from all walks of life. Phạm Quỳnh (1918b: 340) expressed this anxiety in his reaction to Sarraut's decree: French was such a supreme language that it should be mastered totally or it would become a disaster to people, and, in his opinion, Vietnamese were not ready yet to use French as the medium of instruction.

What Phạm Quỳnh ascribed to French language was but one example of what Westernized intellectuals tended to do in order to guard their superior yet tenuous position in the cultural fields: consecrating French language to ensure its rarity by praising that it was the most beautiful, advanced, profound language in the world (Thân Trọng Huề 1919). A language as sacred as French, they argued, merited careful and respectful handling by a small group of people whose motive to learn French was purely for intellectual and aesthetical reasons, rather than, for example, using French to find a job in the colonial regime or pursue higher education in France (Đương Tự Nguyên 1919; Phạm Quỳnh 1919b: 127). Also, while the political capital accrued

from good relationships with the French colonial state seemed suspicious, mastery in French language was another story; it was an envied form of cultural capital and did not stir doubts. Phạm Quỳnh maintained that French should be taught exclusively to male students, because it was the job of men to guide Vietnam upward so as to enter into *văn minh*, and thus it was they who needed to be equipped with French. Women, on the other hand, were supposed to stay home to raise children, support their husbands, and take care of their in-laws. Women, therefore, should not learn French lest their job and Vietnam's family system be damaged by a language whose depth was far beyond their intellectual capacity.

With French language rising to replace Chinese script to become the latest form of cultural capital, how, then, did vernacular Vietnamese as another form of cultural capital rank in terms of its capability to bless its users with the glow of *văn minh*? Apparently, it was not very high, as both Vietnamese intellectuals and French colonizers believed that it was not yet an adequate tool to bring Vietnam forth into the realm of *văn minh*. For instance, when Albert Sarraut explained why he wanted to keep Chinese in the curriculum of Franco-Vietnamese schools, he stated that *quốc ngữ* was still unable to fully convey modern ideas, thoughts, and emotions (Phạm Quỳnh 1918b: 340). It was reported that some French-speaking highbrows in Cochinchina disparaged Vietnamese as a lowly language of vulgar people (Phạm Quỳnh 1918f: 281). For instance, in the early 1930s, the cultural fields were outraged by a Vietnamese political elite's public declaration in French that *quốc ngữ* was nothing but a patois (Hồ Duy Kiên 1931). On the other hand, it seemed that in order to compensate for the low ranking of Vietnamese language's degree of *văn minh*, some intellectuals developed linguistic purism and applied it to the learning of the language and the language itself. Nguyễn Hào Vĩnh from Cochinchina discussed in section 2.1 was an example, whose purism was echoed by an unknown author Sông Cừ Thị (1918) and other intellectuals in the decades to come (more on this in the following chapters).

Another strategy that intellectuals employed to preserve the rarity of their cultural capital was to define *văn minh* in such a way that it excluded those who led a Western lifestyle, but lacked a deep understanding of Western learning. This definition was based on a binary conceptualization that divided *văn minh* into spiritual and material areas, namely, Western learning and a Western lifestyle void of it, contrasting the best of Western civilization with its superficial dregs, respectively. During the 1910s, as Phan Bội Châu continued to be pessimistic and critical about hypocrite Western powers using *văn minh* as a pretext to exploit those less fortunate, other intellectuals were gradually becoming less suspicious of the Western lifestyle. Nguyễn Hiến Lê (2002 [1968]) reports that Phan Chu Trinh pioneered wearing short

hair and a Western outfit to signal his embrace of Western style, and he attracted a lot of followers. Nguyễn Công Hoan (1903-1977) recalls affectionately how he found it funny that Nguyễn Trọng Thuật (1883-1940), a Confucian scholar and a regular editor of *Nam Phong*, asked Nguyễn Công Hoan to accompany him to buy Western shoes because he was left wondering *nhà Nho bây giờ phải sống văn minh chứ?* (literally “Confucian scholars should live a *văn minh* lifestyle, shouldn’t they?”) after another Confucian scholar Nguyễn Hữu Tiềm (1875-1941) had received him at home by offering him a glass of iced water instead of a cup of hot tea (Nguyễn Công Hoan 2004). The colonial regime itself reinforced this binary thinking by claiming *văn minh mua được bằng tiền*, i.e., “you can purchase civilization by money” when it tried to encourage Vietnamese to buy government bonds to support the French troops during the First World War (*Nam Phong* 1918b: 227).

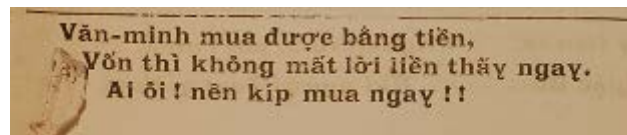


Figure 4.1: An advertisement for government bonds in 1918, a print ad in *Nam Phong*. The advertisement reads: “*Văn minh* is ready for you to purchase. Not only won’t you lose your principle but you also will get your interest immediately. Everybody should buy it now!”

Nevertheless, intellectuals warned that people without proper understanding and the virtue of self-control would be fools to believe that they too could easily ascend to the realm of *văn minh* by mimicking the outward appearance of true *văn minh* people. Both Westernized intellectuals and Confucian scholars shared this fear of *văn minh* being misunderstood as superficial Westernization. For instance, Confucian scholar Nguyễn Bá Học’s (1857-1921) short story “The Story of a Family” (*Câu chuyện gia đình*, Nguyễn Bá Học 1918a: 242-246) depicted how dangerous *văn minh* could be when misunderstood by illustrating the diverge fates of a poor old lady’s two sons: the older son, a Confucian scholar, was too proud of his Confucian learning to take trivial jobs, though they were all he could manage to find; the younger son, on the other hand, led an extravagant life after graduating from the Franco-Vietnamese school, claiming that splurging on alcohol and prostitutes was the *văn minh* lifestyle suitable for a young person of new learning.

Confucian scholar and poet Tấn Đà (1889-1931) was among the earliest intellectuals who called for a clarification of the definition of *văn minh*. He sarcastically praised Vietnamese people as the world’s fastest nation in the *văn minh* race, because they thought they could transform themselves into a *văn minh* people simply by visiting hotels, smoking tobaccos, speaking French, partaking in Western

food, and so on. Phạm Duy Tồn (1881-1924), a Westernized intellectual from Tonkin, published Tản Đà's criticism in a Cochinchinese press *Lục tỉnh tân văn* (News from the Six Provinces) in an attempt to distinguish “true” *văn minh* intellectuals from “false” ones. Phạm Duy Tồn held that it was the responsibility of *người thượng lưu* (elites, i.e., intellectuals) and their publications to provide guidance for Vietnam in its journey to *văn minh*: if Vietnam was like a ship tossed over the seas in its race to *văn minh*, publications should serve as the rowers and helmsmen in charge of bringing Vietnam safely to the port. Unfortunately, he pointed out, the majority of Vietnam's publications and intellectuals only practiced *văn minh giả* (false civilization) without internalizing the true spirit of *văn minh*, and the consequences had been disastrous (Schafer 1994).

In his criticism, Phạm Duy Tồn did not specify who those “false civilized intellectuals” were in the cultural fields, yet *Lục tỉnh tân văn*'s competing periodicals in Cochinchina, especially the famous *Nông cổ mín đàm*, protested vehemently. Just as Nguyễn Háo Vĩnh, the Westernized intellectual from Cochinchina, was so offended by Hanoi-based journal *Nam Phong*'s heavy use of Chinese loanwords, as discussed earlier, that he accused northern intellectuals of looking down on their southern peers, Nguyễn Kim Đính, the editor of the famous press *Nông cổ mín đàm* was similarly convinced that Phạm Duy Tồn's denunciation against *văn minh giả* was directed at intellectuals in Cochinchina area, the most westernized *pays* in Vietnam. As a result, *Nông cổ mín đàm* launched a series of attacks against Phạm Duy Tồn between the end of 1915 and early 1916 (Schafer 1994).

At first glance, the debates between Phạm Duy Tồn and Nguyễn Kim Đính seem to be examples of the strategy of taking advantage of regional hostility between intellectuals in Tonkin and Cochinchina to boost the circulation of newspapers.¹⁴ I argue, however, that the controversies concerning who could be counted as “true,” highbrow members of civilization as opposed to superficial copycats were manifestations of intellectuals' competition for position in the cultural fields: by insisting that one could not obtain a ticket to the exclusive club of *văn minh* without fully immersing oneself deeply in Western learning, Phạm Duy Tồn was attempting to play the role of capital distributor and gatekeeper, preventing the cultural fields from being flooded with “unqualified” pretenders.

3. The Emergent Vernacular Literature in Relation to French High Literature and Chinese Popular Literature

¹⁴ Intellectuals from the Annam area were largely silent during this time period. Please see section 3 below.

In this section, I would like to examine the development of the vernacular literature vis-à-vis Chinese and French literary models. As the above sections demonstrate, intellectuals felt compelled to prove to the world that Vietnam was not a benighted place, despite being a colony and despite belonging to the Sinocentric East Asian cultural sphere rather than Western civilization. The fact that Vietnam had never broken its dependence on Chinese writing script prior to French colonization however, seemed to be anathema to the claim that Vietnam was no less civilized than other nations. Vietnamese intellectuals agonized over the problem of writing script. Sông Cừ Thị (1918: 128) commented that a people without their own script was no different from animals, because “language is [the] soul [of a nation], and writing script is [the] spirit [of a nation].” Similarly, Trần Văn Ngọan mourned that the most wretched nations on the earth were those without their own scripts (1919: 58). It is no surprise, then, that constructing a *quốc văn* (national or vernacular literature) was a task to which both Confucian scholars and Westernized intellectuals were committed, and that the development of such a literature assumed prominence in the cultural fields.

It was during the 1910s that professional writers began to emerge in the vernacular literature field. During the pre-colonial period, virtually all writers were intellectuals, namely, Confucian scholars, and all scholars were mandarins, aspiring mandarins, or failed exam takers. In the late nineteenth century, a tiny but resourceful group of Catholic-Confucian scholars introduced to Vietnam a small collection of French proverbs, poems, and short stories. During the 1910s, for the first time in Vietnam’s history, professional writers emerged outside of the realm of mandarin in particular and government service in general. Nguyễn Mạnh Bồng was one of the earliest professional writers, and he called himself *nghệ buôn văn bán chữ*, literally “making a living on selling writings and letters” (Nguyễn Mạnh Bồng 1918: 293).

The 1910s can also be described as an era of literary imitation, which is attested to by the surging interest in translating both Chinese and French literatures not just for mass consumption, but also for would-be writers to learn from these literary models and practice their writing skills. Since the *quốc ngữ* translation of *The Romance of Three Kingdoms* made its debut in Vietnam in 1901, Chinese novels in serial form translated by an army of Confucian scholars found their way to numerous print houses, bookstores, and families all over Vietnam, with lengthy adventure fantasies, historical novels, and romantic fairy-styled stories between Confucian scholars and beautiful women from ambiguous backgrounds—or combinations of the three—being the most popular sub-genres during the 1910s. These novels constituted colonial Vietnam’s

industrialist literature, out of which the vernacular literature field was born in the 1900s. Because they were so popular and translators were abundantly available, these Chinese novels were published so quickly and sold at such low prices that they were dubbed “tiểu thuyết ba xu,” literally “novels of three cents’ worth,” which were equivalent to Western dime novels in the nineteenth century. Added to the flood of Chinese fictions were a few translated works of French and English prose fiction. The earliest French prose fictions translated into *quốc ngữ* were Alexandre Dumas’s (1802-1870) romantic works: his historical and adventure novels *Le Comte de Mont-Cristo* (The Count of Monte Cristo, 1845-1846) and *Les Trois Mousquetaires* (The Three Musketeers, 1844), which were freely translated into *quốc ngữ* by Gilbert Trần Chánh Chiêu and serialized in *Lục Tỉnh Tân Văn* in 1907 and 1913, respectively. The first literary translation of French fiction was done by Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh, who translated Honoré de Balzac’s (1799-1850) realist work *La Peau de Chagrin* (The Magic Skin, 1830) and serialized in *Đông Dương Tạp Chí* in 1917.

Intellectuals emulated Chinese and French fiction through translation in order to produce Vietnam’s own vernacular literature. Through their contact with the modern ideas of nationalism, they were made aware that the modern institute of “the nation” was not simply a political institution; it was a cultural one as well, one that required of each participating member a canon of national literature. Vietnamese intellectuals acknowledged the painful reality that the main body of their literary legacy was verse works in either Chinese or Chinese-based *chữ Nôm* and that prose fictions were few and in Chinese. They desperately wanted a national literature written in vernacular *quốc ngữ*, especially prose fiction, and they looked to Chinese and French literatures as models to emulate. It was no accident that even Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh, an apologist for French greatness, made his famous statement *Nước Nam ta mai sau này hay, dở cũng ở chữ quốc ngữ*, meaning “how our country will fare depends on [the development of] *quốc ngữ* script,” in his preface to a *quốc ngữ* version of *The Romance of Three Kingdoms* translated by Phan Kế Bính and Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh himself in 1903 (Jamieson 1993: 67).¹⁵ An online survey of the website of Vietnam’s National Library (Thư Viện Quốc Gia Việt Nam) shows that no German literature was translated, which was understandable, as Germany was a rival of France in the First World War, and the possibility of Vietnamese intellectuals understanding German was close to zero. More surprisingly, however, neither was any Japanese literature translated, despite the fact that Japan was a French ally during the war. This paucity reflects Vietnamese intellectuals’ lack of interest in Japanese literature, even when it was fashionable to

¹⁵ Vietnam’s first *quốc ngữ* version of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, translated by Nguyễn Chánh Sắt and Nguyễn An Khương, appeared in serial form starting in 1900 in the Cochinchinese newspaper *Nông cổ mín đàm*. The version translated by Phan Kế Bính and Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh was *The Romance*’s first vernacular translation in the Tonkin area.

emulate Japan during the short-lived *Đông Du* (East Study) movement, which had encouraged Vietnamese youth to study in Japan in the previous decade.

An illustration of intellectuals' emulation of Chinese or French fictions so as to create Vietnamese work can be found in Hồ Biểu Chánh's (1885-1958) writing career. Hồ Biểu Chánh, real name Hồ Văn Trung, was a Cochinchinese writer and civil servant in the colonial regime who learned Chinese in his home village and proceeded to learn French and *quốc ngữ* in Franco-Vietnamese schools during his formative years. When the *Duy Tân* Movement was sweeping Cochinchina, Hồ Biểu Chánh found inspiration in popular Chinese fictions and decided that literature written about Vietnam in the Vietnamese language would be a powerful weapon to further spread the idea of *Duy Tân*. Nevertheless, he was frustrated to realize that the training in Chinese he had received in his childhood failed to adequately equip him to fully express his support for the *Duy Tân* movement. To improve his literary skills, after the movement was crushed, he spent the remaining years of the 1900s studying classical Chinese texts. He then spent the next decade translating several traditional Chinese fictions that told romantic tales of talented young exam takers and beautiful women on the one hand, and experimented with serialized prose fictions about Vietnam on the other. Since the 1920s, Hồ Biểu Chánh began to translate French prose fictions such as the popular *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo*, though his translation, like the previous *quốc ngữ* version done by Gilbert Trần Chánh Chiếu, was a free translation (Nguyễn Khuê 1998).

In the table below, I classify prolific fictional translators and writers who translated or composed fictional prose that included novels and dramas during the 1910s into six different groups. First, I divide these intellectuals into two groups according to the literary model they emulated and translated: the Chinese group and the French group. During the 1910s, except for Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh and Phạm Quỳnh whose linguistic prowess enabled them to translate both Chinese and French fictions, intellectuals generally stuck with one major source language in translation. Next, I classify intellectuals in each group into three sub-groups. The first sub-group constituted fiction authors who started their career with translation of foreign literatures, including Chinese literature, French literature, or other foreign novels translated into either Chinese or French. Next are those writers who had not translated any foreign literary works before they made their literary debut in Vietnam. Finally, there were translators of Chinese and French literatures who never tried their hand at producing prose fictions. I also list the areas where the listed intellectuals received their education, with T, A, and C representing Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina, respectively. Westernized intellectuals' names are underlined to distinguish from Confucian scholars.

Table 4.3: Translators-turned writers, writers, and translators of vernacular literature in the 1910s

	Translators-turned writers	Writers	Translators
Chinese	Nguyễn Chánh Sắt (1869-1947, C) Hồ Biểu Chánh (1884-1958, C) Nguyễn Tử Siêu (1887-1965, T)	Nguyễn Bá Học (1857-1921, T) Tân Đà (1889-1939, T) Nguyễn Mạng Bồng (?-1952, T)	Nguyễn An Khương (1860-1931, C) Trần Phong Sắc (1878-?, C) Phan Kế Bính (1875-1921, T) Nguyễn Hữu Tiến (1875-1941, T) Nguyễn Đỗ Mục (1882-1951, T) Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh (1882-1936, T)★
French	Trần Chánh Chiếu (1868-1919, C) Lê Hoàng Mưu (1879-1942, C)※	Phạm Duy Tồn (1881-1924, T) Trương Duy Toàn (1885-1957, C)	Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh (1882-1936, T)★ Trần Trọng Kim (1883-1953, T), Phạm Quỳnh (1892-1945, T) Nguyễn Háo Vĩnh (1893-1941, C)※

★Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh translated both Chinese and French fictions, and the earliest examples of these two types were published in the 1900s and 1910s respectively.

※Both Lê Hoàng Mưu and Nguyễn Háo Vĩnh were the first Vietnamese translators who introduced non-French Western literature (from French translation) to Vietnam. Nguyễn Háo Vĩnh, for instance, was responsible for translating several of William Shakespeare's plays into *quốc ngữ*.

Eighteen intellectuals are listed, ten of whom were Westernized intellectuals. The table shows that, first, in the decade of the 1910s, intellectuals from the Annam area, despite their strong attachment to Sino-Vietnamese learning and fierce pride in academic excellence, were conspicuously missing from both *quốc ngữ* literary translation and creation, as cultural conservatism ran much deeper in Annam than Tonkin, not to mention Cochinchina. Phan Bội Châu and Phan Chu Trinh, two of the most influential Annamese Confucian scholars in Vietnam's anti-colonial history, were still composing literary works during the 1910s even as they were in exiles in China and France, respectively, but they wrote in Chinese and some *chữ Nôm* instead of *quốc ngữ*. Second, the table shows that more intellectuals, even Westernized intellectuals such as Nguyễn Chánh Sắt and Hồ Biểu Chánh, were devoted to translating Chinese works than they were to French ones. Third, while intellectuals from Cochinchina tended to be translators before they composed original works, most of their Tonkinese peers skipped this “internship” stage. That translated Chinese and French literary works were much more abundantly available and easily accessible in

Cochinchina than in Tonkin might account for this regional difference between Tonkin and Cochinchina.

Intellectuals' reliance on the Chinese model in the vernacular literature field is attributed to the fact that Chinese was still more prevalent than French during the 1910s, and that translating from Chinese was far easier than from French to meet the growing demand of the rapidly expanding *quốc ngữ* readership. Nevertheless, Chinese literature was losing the credibility and respect it used to enjoy among intellectuals. When he visited Cochinchina, Phạm Quỳnh (1918f: 268-85) was impressed by its prospering publishing enterprise, but he also lamented that Cochinchinese readers were too obsessed with translated Chinese novels, which “over the course of eighty dynasties/reigns had generated nothing but some deceiving fantasies fabricated by a bunch of crazy, idle Confucian scholars in China to satisfy lowly people.”¹⁶ He reported it was widely maintained that none other than these absurd Chinese fantasies full of martial arts and adventures were behind an insurrection in Cochinchina in 1916 (Phạm Quỳnh 1918f: 279). This insurrection was organized by a Cochinchinese geomancer Phan Xích Long of Chinese origin, who claimed to be the descendant of deposed Emperor Hàm Nghi, the figurehead of the anti-colonial monarchist *Cần Vương* Aid the King uprising in the late 19th century, and boasted that anyone who drank his magic potion would turn invisible and immune to guns, bombs, and other deadly weapons. After Phan Xích Long was imprisoned, his cult drank the liquid and broke into the jail in an attempt to release him, only to be rounded up and executed by the colonial police (Brocheux and Hémery 2009: 292). For Phạm Quỳnh and the anonymous source he quoted, this insurrection proved just how easily a senseless, uneducated crowd could be excited by dangerous and poisonous Chinese novels. As for those romantic stories between young Confucian scholars and beautiful women, Phạm Quỳnh simply called them “obscene” (1918f: 279). This comment formed a sharp contrast to what Phạm Quỳnh would say about *Truyện Kiều* (the Tale of Lady Kiều), Vietnam's most famous romance between scholars and beauties, in the next decade when he tried to promote it to be Vietnam's greatest literary work. I will talk more about this in the next chapter.

The contemptuous remarks Phạm Quỳnh made about Chinese novels signaled that these novels, though popular in the *quốc ngữ* reading public and important in the development of vernacular literature, were devalued in the cultural fields. The status of Chinese novels stood in sharp contrast with that of French ones: during this time period, Vietnamese intellectuals displayed great admiration and reverence toward even those French works that were considered by French literary critics to be

¹⁶ It is unclear what Phạm Quỳnh meant by “eighty dynasties/reigns” (tám mươi đời triều). It was probably a pejorative figure of speech he used to describe the lengthy yet unfruitful Chinese history.

industrialist literature, such as Dumas's romantic adventure novels. During the 1910s, intellectuals disdained Chinese novels as merely pop literature for the vulgar and ignorant mob, even though they themselves enjoyed reading these "absurd" fantasies (Đặng Thái Mai 2001). In the brief translator's notes to the translated French essays, Phạm Quỳnh and Nguyễn Mộng Bồng made it clear that their purpose was to provide a literary model for would-be Vietnamese writers to emulate, and they always told readers that the works they translated were so deep and beautiful in both style and content that they, the translators, had to ponder these masterpieces over and over again, and yet often found themselves still at a loss for the proper words to do the works justice (Nguyễn Mộng Bồng 1918: 159; Phạm Quỳnh 1917: 71; 1918a: 139).¹⁷

Another factor that led to the devaluation of translated Chinese novels in the cultural fields had to do with literary styles. In the 1900s, French works of romanticism, such as those of Dumas, were among those few French fictions that were selected for translation. In the 1910s, however, it seemed trendy in the cultural fields to introduce realist works to Vietnam for emulation, as Phạm Quỳnh (1918g: 355; 1919d: 194) suggested, "in the areas of literature and fine arts nowadays, realism is preferred over idealism in the West."¹⁸ Honoré de Balzac and Guy de Maupassant were two of the most famous French realist writers introduced to Vietnam during the 1910s (1919d: 148), even though, ironically, French writers at the time considered Balzac vulgar and explicit. Realism provided the standard to determine whether a particular literary work should be categorized as vernacular literature or simply popular literature, and since the Chinese novels that were translated in the 1910s were in the romantic and/or fantasy sub-genres, they were ostracized within the cultural fields, and their translators received little status.

In addition to translated Chinese novels, the *sâu* literature—those mawkish literary works that were considered to be detached from reality and written without careful elaboration—were also not welcome in the cultural fields. These descriptions were used by two Confucian scholars, Nguyễn Mộng Bồng and Phạm Xuân Nùng (1918: 360-2), to warn off those intellectuals who were not talented in literature but, nonetheless, coveted a position in the vernacular literature field. The message was clear: such aspirants should not be so naïve to believe that there were no gatekeepers to guard the field from being flooded with worthless works. Works of realism by Westernized intellectuals, such as that of Phạm Duy Tồn (1881-1924) and others, on the contrary, were reviewed favorably and praised as capable of correcting the flaws

¹⁷ It is possible that Nguyễn Mộng Bồng, a Confucian scholar from a famous Confucian family, translated from Chinese rather than original French.

¹⁸ The authors who were introduced included Paul Bourget (1852-1935), Alfred de Vigny (1797-1863), Jean Marie Guyau (1854-1888), Hugues-Félicité Robert de Lamennais (1782-1854), and Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893).

of traditional vague, indistinctive literary styles (Phạm Quỳnh 1918g: 355-57; Phạm Quỳnh 1918h: 384-86).

In contemporary France and Europe, there were many literary “isms” circulating—romanticism, symbolism, illuminism, Dadaism, naturalism and so on, in addition to realism (Finch 2010), but literary realism might have been the most accessible literary “ism” for many colonial Vietnamese intellectuals, who understood the French language but did not live in the cultural environment of Paris. Also, literary and artistic works that were associated with those other movements might not have been available in Indochina during the 1910s. In addition, literary realism aided Westernized intellectuals’ efforts to use Chinese fiction as the antithesis of both elite literature and vernacular literature. The tendency to use Chinese fantasies to define what vernacular literature was *not* about had been evident in the 1900s. *Nông cổ mín đàm*, the famous press in Cochinchina that supported the cause of the *Duy Tân* Reform Movement, made it clear in its announcement of a fiction contest in 1906 that superstitious (*dị đoan*) works about divinities were not welcome (*Nông cổ mín đàm* 2000 [1906]: 23-24). During the 1910s, the Vietnamese writers who first experimented with *quốc ngữ* prose short stories such as Trương Duy Toàn, Hồ Biểu Chánh, Lê Hoàng Mưu, and Trần Chánh Chiếu—all of whom grew up in Cochinchina and received education in Franco-Vietnamese schools—emphasized that they wanted to write something “real” and deeply embedded in Vietnam’s society, as opposed to some superstitious fantasies about foreign gods (Hồ Biểu Chánh 2000[1957]; Trần Chánh Chiếu 2000[1916]; Trương Duy Toàn 2000[1910]; Võ Văn Nhơn 2007).¹⁹

To further illustrate how literary realism became a weapon used by Westernized intellectuals to keep Chinese pop fictions from tainting the nascent vernacular literature, consider the case of the prolific poet Tấn Đà (1888-1939). This case is particularly appealing, for Tấn Đà’s works were not only a far cry from literary realism, but they also exposed how porous and unstable the boundaries were between vernacular and popular literatures. Tấn Đà, real name Nguyễn Khắc Hiếu, was a younger brother of translator and writer Nguyễn Mộng Bồng. He was born and raised in a Confucian family with a proud legacy of success in the imperial examination in the Tonkin area, and in his childhood he was already famous for being a prodigy of

¹⁹ Trương Duy Toàn’s *Phan Yên Ngoại Sử* (The unofficial history of Phan Yên, 1910), Hồ Biểu Chánh’s *Ai Làm Được* (Who can do it? 1912), Lê Hoàng Mưu’s *Hà Hương Phong Nguyệt* (Hà Hương’s Love Story, 1915), and Trần Chánh Chiếu’s *Hoàng Tổ Anh Hàm Oanh* (Hoàng Tổ Anh was wronged, 1916) were among the few earliest original *quốc ngữ* prose fictions published in the 1910s. Of these works, Lê Hoàng Mưu’s *Hà Hương Phong Nguyệt* was frowned upon by intellectuals for its bold description of the protagonists’ loose life style, and Nguyễn Hào Vĩnh even declared Lê Hoàng Mưu a public enemy of Vietnam. Shortly after its publication, it was banned (Võ Văn Nhơn, http://khoavanhoc-ngonngu.edu.vn/home/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=348%3A1e-hong-mu-nha-vn-ca-nhng-th-nghim-tao-bo-u-th-k-xx&catid=63%3Avn-hc-vit-nam&Itemid=106&lang=vi, last accessed April 17, 2012).

Confucian learning. In his first prose fiction, *Giấc Mơng Con* (Small Daydreams, 2002[1916]), he narrated his imaginary journey from Cochinchina to France, America, China, India, and Australia, with assistance from several beautiful, smart, and virtuous young girls along the way who understood the true meaning of *văn minh*.²⁰ Using his dreamy, poetic narratives full of allusions to Chinese sages and stories, Tản Đà expressed both his deep attachment to and nostalgic appreciation for the Chinese model and his concerns about Vietnam's transition to Western *văn minh* in *Giấc Mơng Con* and his subsequent works (2002[1918], 2002[1919]). Underlying his comments and stories were his uncertainties about having one foot in a dying tradition of Confucian learning and another in a historically unprecedented profession of independent writing separate from a scholarly/bureaucratic career. His writing also provided a way for him to show off his Confucian knowledge, while at the same time being self-deprecating about his job as a professional writer—the latter of which seemed to be his strategy to deal with this identity crisis.

Tản Đà is widely recognized as one of the most influential writers in colonial Vietnam, and his works are still popular (Hoài Thanh 1942). Nevertheless, intellectuals at the time remained ambivalent toward his works, unsure of whether to categorize them as vernacular or popular literature. Intellectuals acknowledged that Tản Đà was one of Vietnam's first *quốc ngữ* prose writers and credited him with laying the foundation for *quốc văn*, which was still like a young plant sprouting in a vernacular literature desert in great need of intellectuals' watering and caring. But intellectuals refused to go further and say something nice about Tản Đà's works, noting that, at this early phase of the development of vernacular literature, criteria had not yet been established that enabled them to properly evaluate his literary accomplishments (Tuyết Huy Dương Bá Trạc 2002[1918]: 183-84; Phạm Quỳnh 2002[1918]: 179-82). Nguyễn Văn Ngọc (1918) called Tản Đà's works "lifeless" because readers could not find the author's own thoughts in them. Phạm Quỳnh (1917) was annoyed by Tản Đà's overt sentimentality. He reminded Tản Đà that his popularity had nothing to do with his talents; rather, it came from his well-intentioned fellow Vietnamese, who tried to show encouragement and tolerance to a *quốc ngữ* writer. Phạm Quỳnh warned that Tản Đà should never take this for granted, let alone abuse it. Vương Thục (2002[1918]: 185) even advised young readers against imitating Tản Đà's sentimental style.²¹

While his works were accepted by some as a welcome arrival to Vietnam's desperately needed prose literature, throughout his life Tản Đà frequently came under

²⁰ This plot was not unlike Phan Chu Trinh's *Giai nhân kỳ ngộ diễn ca* (year unknown).

²¹ These criticisms were to be repeated by literature critics such as Vũ Ngọc Phan. Tản Đà himself did not seem to care the least about his peers' criticism. In fact, he even included the above criticisms in the preface to his work.

fire in the cultural fields, especially during the 1930s (see Chapter Six). Both his peers and historians of Vietnamese literature have offered an individualistic explanation that maintains that his unpopularity was derived from his difficult personality, as he was notorious for alcoholism and irresponsible in his handling of money and the press (Ngô Tất Tố 1998[1939]: 102-108). I argue, however, that Tân Đà's adherence to the Chinese model and indifference toward literary realism were equally important yet oftentimes ignored factors that rendered him an object of attack in the cultural fields. In the next two chapters, I will explore how Westernized intellectuals assailed Tân Đà's works in greater detail in the subsequent decades.

4. Intellectuals in the Cultural Fields

In this section, I present the results of my analysis of the biographical data of sixty-two intellectuals who were active in the cultural fields in the time period of either the 1900s, 1910s, or both.²² These sixty-two intellectuals include the fifty *Duy Tân* activists examined in the prior chapter and twelve others who were never involved in the movement but were active in the fields in the 1910s. The following table combines the data regarding the education background and place of birth of both the *Duy Tân* activists in the 1900s—which is listed in Table 3.2 in Chapter Three—and that of the non-activists who assumed prominent positions in the cultural fields in the 1910s. In Table 3.2, since the majority of the *Duy Tân* activists were Confucian scholars who did not read French, it is meaningful to give detailed information about the degrees they earned (or failed to earn). Here, in Table 4.3, I do not group Confucian scholars according to their degrees; rather, I divide them into two groups according to *where* they earned their highest degrees to reflect the shifting power balance between the Chinese and French models that was going on during the 1910s. The Sino-Vietnamese group includes those who studied in Vietnam, China, or Japan; the Franco-Vietnamese group is comprised of those who received an education in Franco-Vietnamese schools, schools in France, or schools in other French colonies where French was the instruction language. Because I have not been able to locate the data concerning the education background of six intellectuals, the total number of the intellectuals in Table 4.4 is fifty-six instead of sixty-two.

Table 4.4: The education background and birth of places of prominent intellectuals in the

²² The information of their names, years, education background, and careers is listed in Appendix One.

1910s (N=56)

Time Period	Education	Tonkin	Annam	Cochinchina
The 1900s	Sino-Vietnamese	19	12	4
	Franco-Vietnamese	3	0	7
The 1910s	Sino-Vietnamese	6	0	0
	Franco-Vietnamese	3	1	1
	Total	31	13	12

Two things stand out in the table. First, Vietnam was moving away from the Sino-Vietnamese education model to the Franco-Vietnamese one, and Westernized intellectuals, with the assistance of a regime that desperately wanted to nurture cooperative native elites for their Franco-Vietnamese collaboration program, were moving into the leadership vacuum left by their Confucian counterparts who were demoralized by the defeat of the *Duy Tân* Reform Movement (1903-1908), getting old, and sidelined by a governmental system that required knowledge of French language. Second, in contrast to their active participation in the *Duy Tân* movement in the 1900s, no new Annamese intellectuals joined in the later vernacular literature field. As Table 4.3 shows, prolific translators-turned writers, writers, as well as translators during the 1910s were either from Tonkin or Cochinchina; two Annamese intellectuals who published original literary works, namely, Phan Bội Châu and Phan Chu Trinh, wrote in Chinese and some *chữ Nôm* rather than *quốc ngữ*. Because of their connections with Phan Bội Châu, the leader of clandestine anti-colonial struggles, the Annamese tradition of Sino-Vietnamese academic training, as well as the fact that the imperial examination was still practiced in Annam until 1918, between 1900s and the 1910s most Annamese intellectuals were active in the political fields and were more likely to gravitate toward the Chinese model than intellectuals from Cochinchina. Annamese intellectuals tended to emulate China's Republican Revolution in 1911, in which the nationalists overthrew the Qing Dynasty by force, pursuing a revolutionary path, rather than the route of pen and paper.

Table 4.5 shows how *Duy Tân* activists fared in the 1910s. I classify their paths during the 1910s into fifth categories: exiled, imprisoned, executed, collaborating, and withdrawal. First, there were intellectuals who experienced both exile and imprisonment; Phan Bội Chau and Phan Chu Trinh are two of the most notable examples, both of whom were jailed before they went to exile in China and France. But since these intellectuals spent a significantly longer time in exile than in prison—for instance, Phan Chu Trinh was behind bars for only a few months but spent nearly two decades exiled in France—I classify them in the category of “exiled” instead of “imprisoned.” Second, Confucian scholar and *Duy Tân* activist Đào Nguyên Phổ (1861-1908) from the Tonkin area committed suicide when he realized that the colonial regime was after him for his involvement in the anti-tax protest, so I

list him as one of the withdrawers. Third, Đặng Thúc Liêng (1867-1945) from Cochinchina, Nguyễn Hữu Cầu (1879-1946) from Tonkin, and Dương Bá Trạc (1884-1944) from Tonkin chose to be content with the French colonial regime after they had been imprisoned for their participation in the *Duy Tân* movement. I thus placed them in both “imprisoned” and “collaborating” categories.

Table 4.5: The career paths of Confucian scholars and Westernized intellectuals from three *pays* in the 1910s

Education	Career Paths	Tonkin	Annam	Cochinchina
Confucian Scholars	Exiled	2	3	1
	Imprisoned	8	4	2
	Executed	2	4	0
	Collaborating/complying	4 (-1)*	1	4 (-1)*
	Withdrawal	2	1	0
Westernized intellectuals	Exiled	0	0	1
	Imprisoned	1	0	2
	Executed	0	0	0
	Collaborating/complying	2	0	3
	Withdrawal	0	0	0
Total=42•		21 (-1)	13	13(-1)

•The number of *Duy Tân* intellectuals I discuss in Chapter Three is fifty. Five intellectuals, however, are not listed in this table: what became of Nguyễn Trọng Lợi, Nguyễn An Khương, Nguyễn Phương Sơn, and Hoàng Tích Phụng during the 1910s is unclear, and Lương Trúc Đàm died of disease in 1908, hence only forty-five are included here.

*Dương Bá Trạc and Đặng Thúc Liêng collaborated with the colonial regime during the 1910s after they were released from prison, and I place these two men in both the category of “imprisoned” and “collaborating,” with (-1) indicating the redundant number. Hence, the total number here is forty-two, with Dương Bá Trạc and Đặng Thúc Liêng counted twice.

Finally, the term “collaborating” requires clarification and careful handling. Sarah W. Womack (2003) in her research on Phạm Quỳnh defines “collaboration” between colonizer and colonized as “mutual accommodation and manipulation of colonizer and colonized in pursuit of separate agendas” (Womack 2003: 4). I contend that Womack’s definition is too narrow in that she assumes colonizer and colonized always had separate agendas and that it turns almost all Vietnamese intellectuals who did not pursue military rebellion in the colonial era into collaborators. The problem with this definition is that colonialism was a ubiquitous reality and a built-in ordering principle of societal activities from which no one could escape, and intellectuals would have to cognitively and behaviorally accommodate the colonial reality if they wished to pursue any agendas or simply to make ends meet.

I amend Womack’s definition of “collaboration” as the colonized’s accommodation for colonizer’s interests. Collaborators, conventionally understood, are brokers between colonizer and colonized who exploit their go-between position to serve the colonizers’ interests at the expense of native interests. “Patriots,” in contrast,

are defined as people who advance native interests, sometimes to the point of compromising colonizers' interests. It should be noted that the interests of colonizers and natives might not have always appeared mutually exclusive in the eyes of the colonized. Though the French colonial regime was perceived as a predator during the 1900s by the majority of intellectuals, in the post-*Duy Tân* era the image became more complex. More intellectuals, including former *Duy Tân* activists, began to see the French regime in a different light: France, with its passion for *mission civilisatrice*, might be an ideal tutor and a useful partner in Vietnam's fight for survival and quest for *văn minh*. Collaborating with the French government became a plausible means to a brighter future than overseas anti-colonial struggles could promise, and this was indeed what Phạm Quỳnh and Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh genuinely believed throughout their lifetime.

Whether or not intellectuals' deeds were perceived by the agents in the cultural fields as compromising native interests was the critical factor that made Phan Chu Trinh a patriot and Phạm Quỳnh a collaborator—even though both were advocates of Franco-Vietnamese collaboration who sincerely saw themselves as true nationalists. Here, I avoid following Vietnam's Marxist historiography that reads the present into the past and equates native interests with the proletarian revolution (Trần Văn Giàu 2000). Rather, in light of the fact that colonialism is a reality that requires colonized's active cognitive and behavioral accommodation, I rely on colonial Vietnamese intellectuals' intersubjective perceptions of colonial reality to identify who were deemed collaborators versus patriots by their peers in the cultural fields.

In Figure 4.1 below, I use “French interests” and “Vietnamese interests” as two reference axes to draw a coordinate of an ideal type of five possible positions intellectuals might possibly occupy in the political fields. The first quadrant is the area where intellectuals were held to be capable of satisfying the interests of both the colonizer and their country; they might be called “patriotic collaborators.” Phan Chu Trinh was the representative of this group of intellectuals. Intellectuals in the second quadrant, embodied by Phạm Quỳnh and Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh, were thought to be France's henchmen who prioritized colonizer's interests over native interests. Those who failed to satisfy both native and French interests were stigmatized as fanatical troublemakers, represented by the third quadrant. Phan Xích Long, the geomancer and leader of an uprising in 1916 who convinced people to believe that his magic potion would make people into invisible supermen, was placed by intellectuals in this quadrant. Fourthly, intellectuals who pursued native interests at the expense of the colonizers' interests were located in the fourth quadrant, manifested perfectly by Phan Bội Châu and his fellow compatriots. They totally rejected the colonial system and might be called “rebels” by collaborators—indeed, this was how Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh

described Phan Bội Châu in his *Đông Dương tạp chí*. Finally, the point (0, 0), where the two reference axes meet, represents the position of withdrawal.

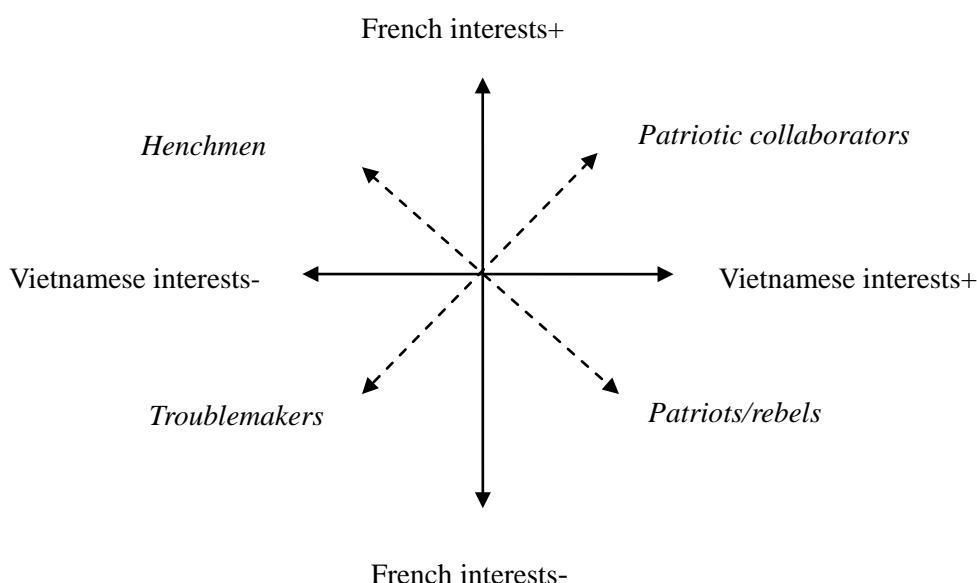


Figure 4.2: The categorization of colonial Vietnamese intellectuals' political position

Of the fourteen intellectuals who entered the cultural fields during the 1910s, with the exception of Trần Phong Sắc, who seemed to avoid committing himself to supporting either French or Vietnamese interests (a withdrawer), the other thirteen entered the fields via the route of collaboration as journalists, writers, and low-ranking civil servants. In contrast, their predecessors entered the fields largely through the route of participation in the reform movement and relying on Sino-Vietnamese herbal medicine, fortune telling, and teaching for a living.

5. Conclusion

Duy Tân Confucian scholars' attempts in duplicating Japan's modernization through China's failed experience gave birth to the vernacular cultural fields in the 1900s. During the post-*Duy Tân* decade of the 1910s, however, as the *Duy Tân* activists were absent in the fields and the colonial state was anxious to both repair its relationship with the native population and cultivate a new stratum of elites, a small group of Westernized intellectuals were promoted by the colonial state to be the leaders and gatekeepers the cultural fields. They were not unlike their Catholic-Confucian predecessors in that both groups possessed political capital derived from the rapport with the colonial state and were conversant in Chinese and

French cultures. Although these Westernized intellectuals were loyal to the French regime and enthusiastically encouraged their peers to emulate the French model so as for Vietnam to reach *văn minh* as soon as possible, they, however, were not simply henchmen of the colonial state. Not only did they believe that their support for the colonial state benefited Vietnam's progress toward *văn minh*, but they also enjoyed independence to a certain extent, which was granted by the colonial state for the purpose of advancing the Franco-Vietnamese collaboration policy.

The power struggles among intellectuals in the cultural fields took place along two questions. One was how to reassess the Chinese model and the Sino-Vietnamese *văn hiến*, and what elements should be preserved in accordance with the French model; another was what constituted real *văn minh* and who were qualified as true *văn minh* people. During the 1910s, the majority of intellectuals would like the Chinese legacy to stay in Vietnam, but as a depoliticized subject of humanities and morality for study rather than as a model for emulation and comparison. The French language became a legitimate and exclusive form of cultural capital reserved for the few male intellectuals who studied French simply because they were attracted by its beauty. These male intellectuals deemed women and commoners with knowledge of the French language dangerous for not only their prestige and the majesty of the French language, but also the future of Vietnam, because French was far too advanced for the intellectually inferior to comprehend, learning French would ruin their minds.

Chinese translated novels continued to be the dominant literary works, although during the 1910s a few French translated novels also began to appear in Vietnam. Commoners read translated fictions for literary recreation, and they particularly favored fantasies, adventure, and romance. Intellectuals who wanted to contribute to Vietnam's evolution to *văn minh*, on the other hand, read translated fictions to learn literary skills in order that they could produce national literature in the near future. Intellectuals encouraged the imitation of translated Western fictions while deriding the imitation of Chinese fictions, even though they did imitate Chinese fictions. Original works that followed the trend of literary realism were well received; Chinese novels and sentimental works constituted two undesirable subgenres in the vernacular literature field. An example was intellectuals' hostility toward Tản Đà, Vietnam's earliest popular writer of vernacular literature whose indifference toward literary realism and stick to the Chinese literary model made him an easy target of attack from intellectuals in the cultural fields throughout his lifetime.

Chapter Five

Emulating and Differentiating from *Văn Minh* and *Văn Hiến*: Searching for National Soul in the Cultural Fields in the 1920s

During the preceding two decades, colonial Vietnamese intellectuals were overwhelmed by their shocking new colonial reality and the accompanying Western *văn minh*. They became preoccupied with the daunting task of coming to grips with *văn minh* and figuring out possible ways to not only survive this new form of rule, but also increase Vietnam's own level of *văn minh*. Out of these struggles were born the cultural fields, comprised of the academic field, the journalist field, and the vernacular literature field.

Vietnam's cultural fields became more complex in the 1920s, and this complexity was reflected in the fields' agenda items, the agents' ideological allegiance, and their attitudes toward Chinese and French models. First, intellectuals in the fields were increasingly concerned to assert Vietnam's cultural uniqueness as distinct from both Chinese and French cultures. While they continued to admire and imitate the French model as they had done in the 1910s, seeds of doubt began to develop and Vietnamese intellectuals sought to evaluate the French model more objectively. Meanwhile, their attitudes toward the Chinese model became more critical. While they gradually came to acknowledge that it was impossible to culturally sever Vietnam from China, the Chinese model was increasingly delegated from an all-inclusive model to one that was only good enough to supply moral learning and popular culture. Finally, the dominance of neo-traditionalists—especially Phạm Quỳnh—in the fields began to be challenged by former *Duy Tân* activists and Confucian scholars who were released from prison during the 1920s.

1. Colonial Policies on Education and Publishing

In the late 1910s, during the First World War, the French colonial government set out to create a national Franco-Vietnamese schooling system. This education reform was multi-purpose: it was to meet Vietnamese elites' unceasing demand for a quality education (especially members of the Cochinchinese landowning and *nouveau riche* classes), cultivate a new stratum of elites that could replace the Confucian scholars—particularly those who had participated in the *Duy Tân* Reform Movement in the 1900s, deter wealthy Vietnamese parents from seeking a higher education for their children in France, replace the ubiquitous Sino-Vietnamese village schools, and instill loyalty and admiration for French civilization among Vietnamese students. The legal parameters of the reform were established by the Code of Public Instruction, issued in 1917 by Albert Sarraut, the radical General-Governor whose enthusiasm for promoting Franco-Vietnamese collaboration program made him simultaneously popular among native elites and resented by French colons.

As the figures in section 1.1 indicate, the number of the graduates of these French-Vietnamese schools grew slowly but steadily. Low-ranking civil service and teaching positions were still the best jobs most graduates could get, prompting some to either abandon their job security for professional writing or write for periodicals while working for the government. Unlike the Confucian translators of popular Chinese novels, these young graduates had more hybrid literature experiences: they were exposed to both Chinese and French literatures, and during the 1920s and the 1930s, they would emulate both literatures to produce the literary works recognized as Vietnam's first "modern" vernacular literature by their peers in the cultural fields and the vernacular literature field.

1.1. Education

The establishment of the national Franco-Vietnamese school system, despite its many shortcomings, was a significant event in Vietnam's colonial history in that it supplied prolific intellectuals and writers of vernacular literature for the cultural fields (Brocheux and Hémery 2009: 223). As I discuss in section three, quite a few active intellectuals in the 1920s received education from upper primary Franco-Vietnamese schools and secondary lycées and colleges. Among the most famous were the Lycée Albert Sarraut, an upgrade from Collège Paul Bert founded in Hanoi in 1903, attended mainly by French students; the Lycée du protectorat (Trường Bưởi), opened in Hanoi in 1909 to train French and native civil servants; the Collège Chasseloup-Laubat, the oldest school in Cochinchina that was named after Chasseloup Laubat, the Minister of Colonies who was central to France's conquest of Vietnam (Chapuis 2000), and founded in 1874 for the children of French colons; and the Trường Quốc Học in Huế, the capital of Annam, established in 1896 as an école primaire supérieure (upper

primary school) and upgraded to collège in 1915. Quite a few Westernized intellectuals active in the cultural fields were graduates from these schools.

Because the imperial examination was abolished in Tonkin and Annam in 1915 and 1919, respectively, French was displacing Chinese as the most important language for working in the government, and studying abroad was simply not economically feasible for most Vietnamese parents, Franco-Vietnamese schools became the primary mechanism producing a new generation of Vietnamese elites for the remainder of the colonial era. It is, therefore, necessary to summarize in this section how the system worked, what curriculum it offered, as well as what implicit messages about France, China, and Vietnam it conveyed through its curriculum.

While Franco-Vietnamese schools did grow rapidly in the 1920s, they failed to completely replace the universal Sino-Vietnamese village schools, and the actual attendance of school age children was much lower than during the pre-colonial period (Kelley 1976: 52, 75). But Sino-Vietnamese schools were becoming less important, since they were no longer tied to access to the government service. Table 5.1, below, compares French and Franco-Vietnamese schooling systems in 1930, and shows that students in Franco-Vietnamese schools spent more time in primary education and less time in secondary education than their French counterparts. While French students moved on to receive six-year secondary education or four-year upper primary education after they finished five-year primary cycle, Franco-Vietnamese students had to finish elementary school (three years), pass the exam for primary school (three years), and pass another exam for upper primary school (four years) before they could reach secondary school. By then, only a handful of elementary students still remained, either because the others could not afford the tuition fees or were eliminated by the exams.

Table 5.1: The organization of French schools and Franco-Vietnamese Schools, 1930

French Schools		Franco-Vietnamese Schools	
Grade			
	Universities		Universities
13	Universities		{Indochinese Baccalaureate}
12			Secondary Education
11	{French Baccalaureate} Secondary Education Lycées Collèges		{Diploma of Upper Primary Studies}
10		{Elementary Brevet} Upper Primary Education	Upper Primary Education
9			
8			
7			{Primary Certificate} Primary Education
6	{Primary Certificate} Primary Education		
5			
4			
3			
2			
1			{Elementary Certificate} Elementary Education

*Data adopted from Kelley (1975: 52)

In fact, a closer look at the student breakdown shows that most students were enrolled in the three-year elementary grades, and it was the student body at this level that largely accounted for the expansion of Franco-Vietnamese schools. Very few students were able to advance beyond primary school. As Figures 5.1 and 5.2 indicate, although the number of primary and post-primary schools did rise throughout the decade, elementary schools were still the major educational institutions. Because the number of secondary schools was tiny, in the figures below I combine its number with that of upper primary schools. All the data are from Kelley (1975: 76, 76a, 76b, 77).

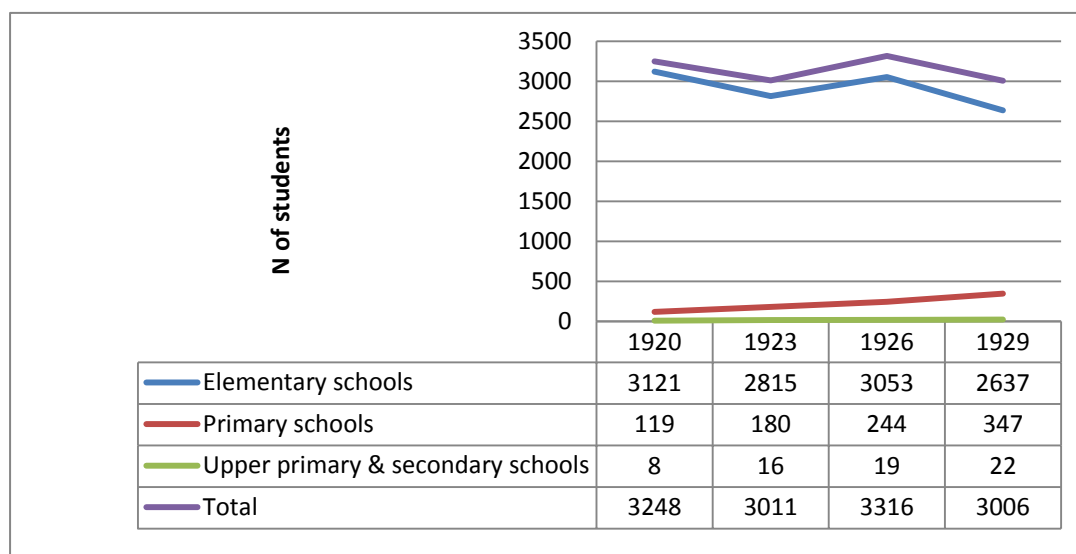


Figure 5.1: The growth of Franco-Vietnamese schools in 1920, 1923, 1926, and 1929

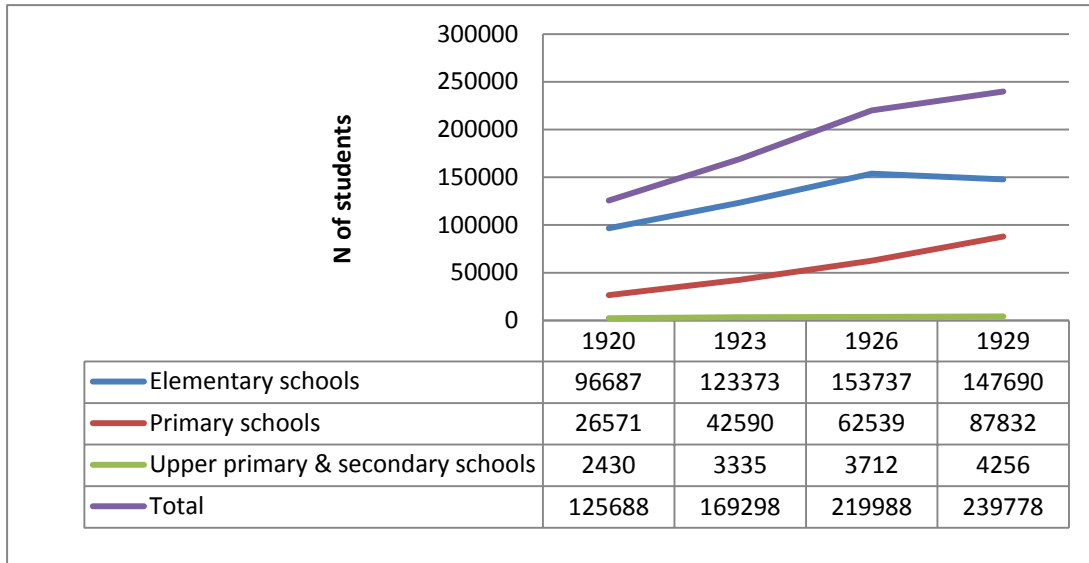


Figure 5.2: The growth of students in Franco-Vietnamese schools in 1920, 1923, 1926, and 1929

I count the number of students enrolled in different cycles of schools, and Figure 5.3 shows that the average elementary school had a very small student body compared with its counterpart at the primary and post-primary levels. This is because many elementary schools were converted from Sino-Vietnamese village schools and were thus more geographically spread out than primary and post-primary schools, which tended to be concentrated in urban areas (Kelley 1975: 50-108).

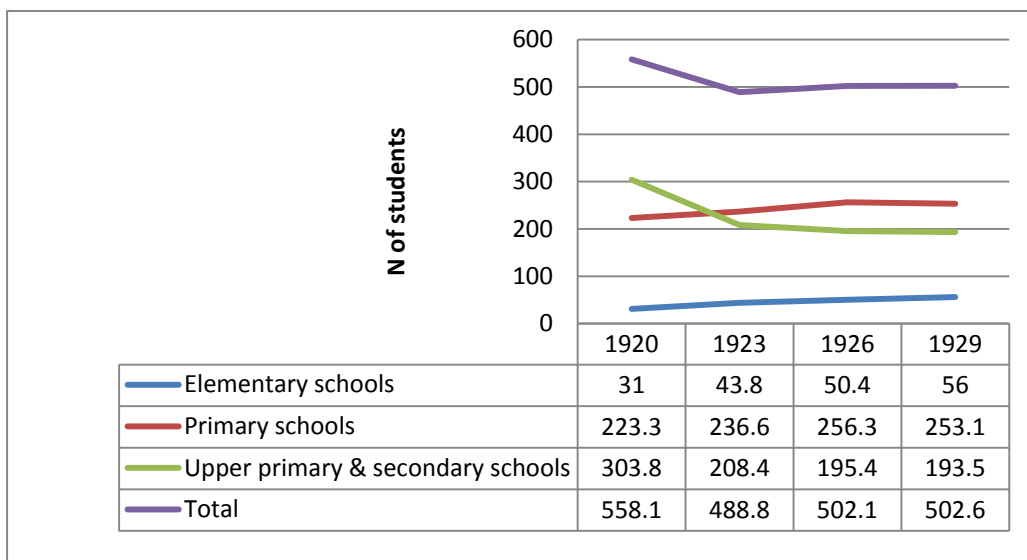


Figure 5.3: School size of elementary, primary, upper primary and secondary schools

I break down the school numbers of three cycles—elementary, primary, upper primary and secondary—along regional lines, and Figures 5.4, 5.5, and 5.6 represent

the number of Franco-Vietnamese schools in Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina, respectively. These numbers suggest that the official Franco-Vietnamese schooling system did not do particularly well in Annam: in 1926, elementary grades grew from 788 to 806, but in 1929 the number plunged to 122. Also, throughout the whole decade, not a single secondary school was established in Annam. Since I put secondary schools together with upper primary grades in a category, this total absence of secondary education in Annam is not reflected in Figure 5.5. In contrast, Franco-Vietnamese schools in Cochinchina grew steadily during the 1920s, while the number of Franco-Vietnamese schools in Tonkin fluctuated.

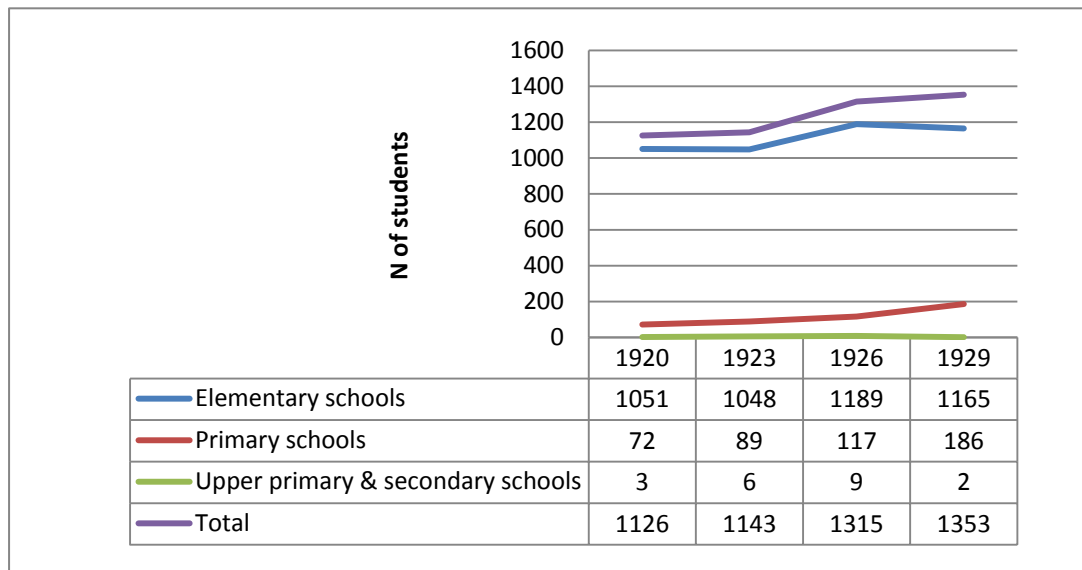


Figure 5.4: The growth of Franco-Vietnamese schools in Tonkin in 1920, 1923, 1926, and 1929

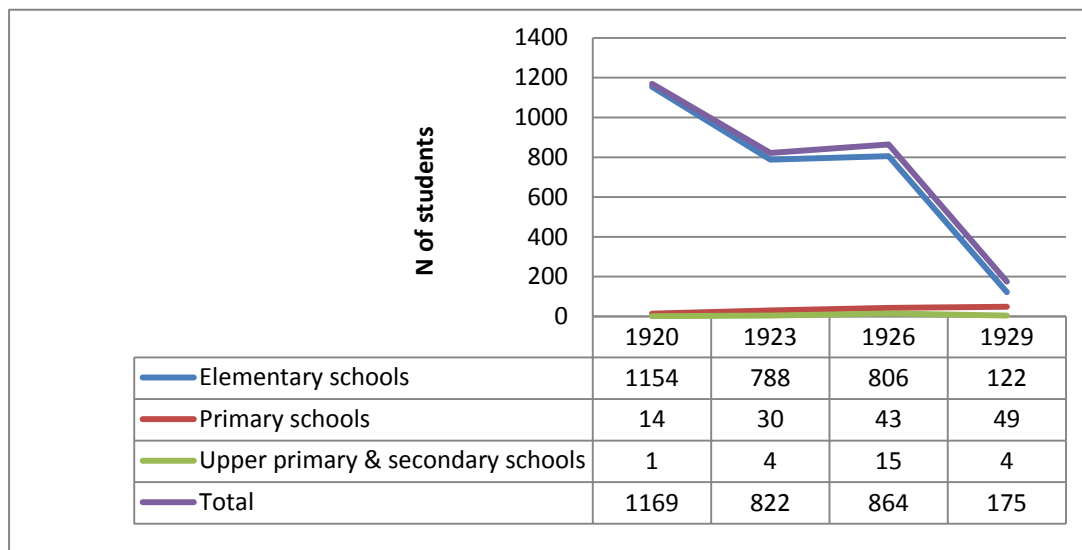


Figure 5.5: The growth of Franco-Vietnamese schools in Annam in 1920, 1923, 1926, and 1929

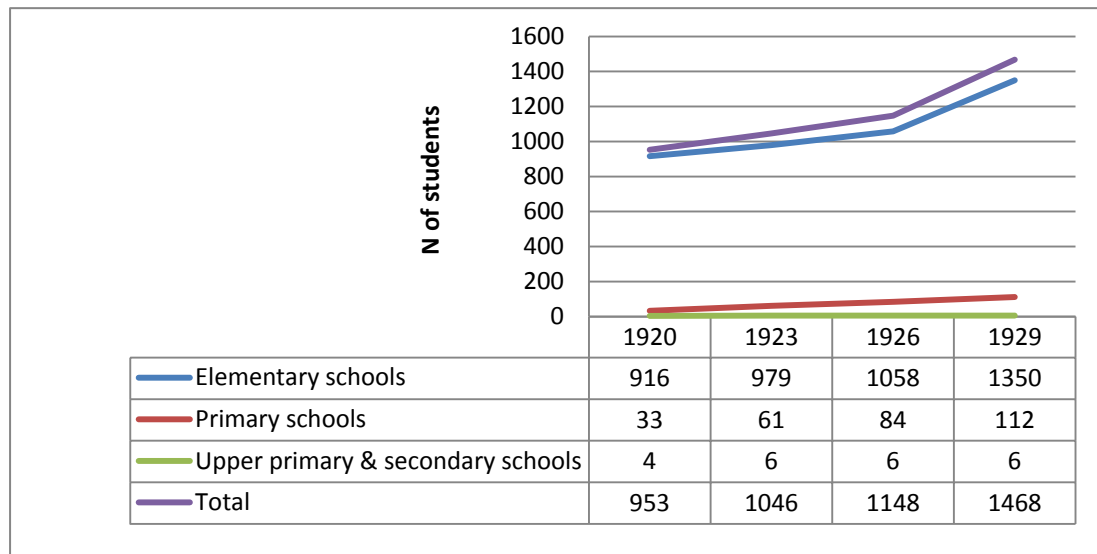


Figure 5.6: The growth of Franco-Vietnamese schools in Cochinchina in 1920, 1923, 1926, and 1929

Although the colonial regime intended to establish more primary schools after the Code of 1917 was issued, efforts stalled in 1926 for largely economic reasons. The colonial government did not have enough revenue to build primary schools to replace the widespread Sino-Vietnamese schools, and parents found the cost for primary education too high: financing a child in a primary school—a boarding institute in the capital of an urban area—for a year would cost twice the amount a peasant could earn or more than the average yearly salary of a school teacher (Kelley 1975: 54).¹ Economic feasibility was not the only problem, however; just as important were the political implications of establishing more schools. Providing jobs for all native primary graduates so that they could challenge the colonial authority on the one hand, and compete with French settlers’ interests on the other was the last thing the colonial regime wanted, but at the same time, jobless youths with primary-level education who gathered in provincial capitals were feared for their rebellious potential (Kelley 1975: 54, 59). Entrance examinations served a major attrition mechanism that eliminated 50 to 80 percent of students with certificates of elementary education who applied for primary education. A subject called “French mention” that tested students’ basic French knowledge played a critical role in eliminating students, for only a few elementary schools were located in urban areas with qualified French teachers (Kelley 1975: 81-85). Since the decree that French be the instruction language was too difficult to implement, especially in rural areas, in 1924 a new decree was issued that both released elementary schools from the obligation of teaching French and ordered that *quốc ngữ* replace French as the instruction language for elementary grades.

¹ A teacher’s yearly salary was 350 piastre, and the total of the tuition and boarding fees of a primary school was nearly 330 piastre a year (Kelley 1975: 54).

Importantly, though, this policy change did not entail the abolishment of the “French mention” test as part of the entrance examination for primary education; students from urban areas thus continued to be favored (Kelley 1975: 90).

The colonial administration was suspicious toward widespread Sino-Vietnamese village schools. These schools were outside of government control, so the state was concerned that they might be inculcating students with subversive ideas. In 1924, the colonial regime classified village schools as private schools and closed down 1,800 of them (Kelley 1975: 56). In 1926, however, the policy changed again. It was decided that these schools should be initiated and financed by villages alone, but that the government would retain the power to veto teacher appointment and ensure that the curriculum complied with that of official Franco-Vietnamese elementary counterparts, save the basic French language knowledge if teachers were unavailable. These schools were labeled neither public, nor private, nor Franco-Vietnamese: they were an “unofficial” alternative education system for rural youths whose parents had financial difficulties and were reluctant to send their children to learn the Franco-Vietnamese curriculum. French was not taught in these schools, according to the decree ordered in 1924. Table 5.2, below, includes the number of village schools, the number of students in village schools, and the percentage of students in village schools in all three *pays* in 1929. Clearly, Annam and Cochinchina formed a sharp contrast: while only 3.7% of Cochinchinese students who were enrolled in schools studied in village schools, as high as 58.3% Annamese students were in village schools. For the remainder of the colonial era, village schools would continue to expand (Kelley 1975: 78). This table shows that parents in Annam area were more averse to Franco-Vietnamese schools than their Cochinchinese counterparts. This might have been due to the fact that Chinese was still prevalent in conservative Annam and more useful than French for working in Huế, the administrative capital of Annam, where the Nguyễn throne operated.

Table 5.2: Village schools in colonial Vietnam in 1929

Area	N of village schools	N of students in village schools	% of students in village schools
Tonkin	818	25502	22.2
Annam	756	33020	58.3
Cochinchina	249	4964	3.7

The high entry bar and high cost of Franco-Vietnamese schools made an education there a luxury commodity that only children of relatively well-off elites could afford; yet, even so, during the 1920s, the education itself remained but a watered-down version of a working-class education in France. For instance, all school subjects—French, Vietnamese, Chinese, morality, geography, history, and

hygiene—taught very much the same thing at every grade level: how to behave and be loyal to France. The schools taught Vietnamese over five to six years what French children learned in three years (Kelley 1976: 190). That the diploma of the Franco-Vietnamese secondary school was not valid for entry into French universities until 1930 (Tai 1992: 33), and that the School of Commerce at the Indochina University in Hanoi was readily incorporated into upper primary courses during the Depression in the early 1930s (Kelley 1975: 71) also testified against the quality of Franco-Vietnamese schools.

What did Franco-Vietnamese schools teach about Vietnam's relation to France and China? The content of almost all subjects was dominated by a theme that blamed China for all misfortunes that had befallen Vietnam: Vietnam had been ruined for so long by Chinese rule and Confucian learning that it had little hope of catching up in the race of *văn minh*, were it not for the country's rescue by France. Textbooks made no mistake about depicting France as the envied center of the world and apex of human accomplishments and Vietnam as a backward society stuck in its tradition and naïve ethnic pride thanks to the Chinese cultural model upon which it had been modeled. The message, nevertheless, became ambivalent when it came to the question of to what extent and in what areas Vietnam should renounce its tradition in order to modernize its tradition. An example of this ambivalence was the image of Vietnamese village life depicted in textbooks. Students were taught that prior to the European presence in Southeast Asia, village life had been stagnant and full of superstition, with villagers suffering at the hands of incompetent Confucian scholars and mandarins. All this primitiveness then miraculously disappeared with the arrival of the French, at which point villages became the most comfortable, tranquil, and soothing places. At the same time, however, textbooks continued to juxtapose the backwardness of villages with the modernization of urban cities. The frequent depiction of Vietnamese villages also stood in sharp contrast to the total absence of French rural communities and folk traditions. Also missing was the French Revolution, which French officials rightfully worried would inspire radical Vietnamese youths to rebel against the colonial government (Kelley 1975: 109-202).

The colonial regime's efforts to both prevent Vietnamese from seeking education in France and withhold substantial (and potentially radical) knowledge from its colonial subjects notwithstanding, a very tiny group of Vietnamese youths did manage to go to France to study. This "Western study" movement (as opposed to the Eastern study movement in the 1910s) started as early as the 1900s, and it is reported that before the First World War, there were more than forty Vietnamese students in Paris (Quinn-Judge 2003: 14). In 1924, the Indochinese Mutual Association (*Đông Pháp hội trợ hội*/Association mutuelle des Indochinois) was founded in Paris to assist

Vietnamese students who studied in France, and in the following year a branch association was founded in Marseille in 1925, reflecting the growth of the Vietnamese student body in France in the 1920s. Thus, a few Vietnamese intellectuals educated in France joined Confucian scholars and Franco-Vietnamese school graduates competed for power in the cultural fields, though in this decade they were more interested in introducing socialism, radicalism, and anarchism to Vietnam than in vernacular literature.

Among those pioneer Vietnamese students educated in France, the most famous was probably Phan Văn Trường (1876-1933). Born to a highly successful Confucian family in Hanoi and well-versed in Chinese, French, and *quốc ngữ* as a result of both his family education and training in the Collège of Interpretation in Hanoi, Phan Văn Trường and his two brothers opened a modern *quốc ngữ* free school in support for the *Duy Tân* movement in 1908 and went to France in the same year, shortly after the school was shut down. In France, Phan Văn Trường worked to become one of Vietnam's first doctors of law, taught Vietnamese in French universities, assisted exiled Confucian scholar Phan Chu Trinh who advocated collaboration between Vietnam and France, facilitated meetings with Vietnamese expatriates, and earned French citizenship. With Phan Chu Trinh, Phan Văn Trường also created the first association of colonial expatriates, the *Fraternité* (Hội Đồng bào thân ái). Among those who spent time with Phan Văn Trường in Paris' Latin Quarter before he returned to Vietnam with radical intellectual Nguyễn An Ninh (1900-1943) to start newspaper in 1923 was Nguyễn Sinh Cung (1890-1969), a fellow countryman from the Annam area who would go on to lead Vietnam's anti-colonial struggle in the August Revolution by the name of Hồ Chí Minh.

One of Phan Văn Trường's speeches (1925) represents this small group of intellectuals' thoughts about education. They internalized the French view that before France brought *văn minh*/civilization to Southeast Asia in the late 19th century, Vietnam had never developed an ability to think critically. This lack of critical thinking was exemplified by Vietnam's indiscriminate borrowing from Chinese cultural accomplishments, and it was Vietnam's slavish reliance on China that led to Vietnam's downfall. To prevent the Vietnamese nation from total extinction, Phan Văn Trường stressed the importance of learning to think critically, scientifically, and logically through education, and he used two examples to illustrate his point: he quoted Mencius's famous saying "better not to read at all than to believe all one reads" to advise that one should not believe everything one reads (1925: 5); he also urged people to stop idolizing holders of traditional degrees, arguing that if one observed carefully and objectively, one would realize that contrary to conventional thinking, diplomas were no guarantee of academic and moral excellence (1925: 6). Phan Văn

Trường's advocacy of critical thinking and recommendation against a superstitious belief in books and diplomas were seen as politically subversive, and he was arrested in 1928, despite his French citizenship.

Nguyễn An Ninh (1900-1943), who opened Vietnam's first radical newspaper *La Cloche Fêlée* (The Cracked Bell, 1923-1926) and *L'Annam* (Annam, 1926-1928) in Cochinchina with Phan Văn Trường, was the most famous, peculiar, and charismatic intellectual who attracted a cult following among urbanite youths. He was described by a particular French man as "the most European man," though he himself excoriated those who believed in the cultural and moral superiority of the French (Tai 1992: 72). By naming their periodical *La Cloche Fêlée*, Phan Văn Trường and Nguyễn An Ninh were paying tribute to renowned French poet Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), as it bore the same name as one of Baudelaire's poems in his masterpiece *The Flowers of Evil* (1857), which was not taught in Franco-Vietnamese schools. It was not until the 1930s that these intellectuals began to get actively involved in the cultural fields by declaring war against Confucianism and "feudalism," a label inspired by Marxism to describe the Sino-Vietnamese tradition that had been circulating among Chinese intellectuals in the early 20th century. I will discuss this cultural war in the next chapter.

1.2. Publishing

The journalistic field witnessed stable growth in vernacular periodicals during the 1920s: twelve new vernacular periodicals appeared in the 1910s, and the number peaked at 54 in the 1920s.² Both young Franco-Vietnamese graduates and Confucian scholars found that such presses were an ideal venue for participating in public affairs and voicing opinions about how to improve Vietnam's current state of *văn minh*. One witness who was less than impressed by this growth was Nguyễn An Ninh. Upon his return to Vietnam in 1923, Nguyễn An Ninh commented that the vernacular periodicals were full of young simpletons who assumed that running a periodical was the best way to express one's care for their country, and as a result of their naivety Vietnam was being bombarded by their nonsensical talks (Nguyễn An Ninh 1926 [1923]).

These young Westernized intellectuals were joined by former *Duy Tân* activist Huỳnh Thúc Kháng (1876-1947), who founded the vernacular weekly *Tiếng Dân* (People's Voice) in Annam in 1927. *Tiếng Dân* was not only the first big news organization in the Annam area (Huỳnh Văn Tòng 2000: 440; Nguyễn Thế Anh 1986) but also the first newspaper run by famous Confucian scholars. Huỳnh Thúc Kháng

² I calculate the number based on Huỳnh Văn Tòng's study (2000: 434-443).

was a man of Annam and comrade to fellow Annamese scholar-activists Phan Bội Châu, Phan Chu Trinh, Trần Quý Cáp, and Ngô Đức Kế, and he spent more than a decade (1908-1921) in prison for his involvement in the *Duy Tân* movement. Given that the publication's founder was a former political prisoner and the chief editor was Đào Duy Anh (1904-1988), a young Annamese intellectual and a member of the nationalist *Tân Việt Cách mạng đảng* (New Vietnam Revolution Party, 1928-1929), the mere fact that *Tiếng Dân* managed to last to 1943 was a surprise. The colonial state might have hoped that allowing the periodical to exist could boost the state's legitimacy, indicating the leverage the journalistic field had vis-à-vis the colonial state.

Nam Phong, the intellectual *quốc ngữ* monthly journal founded in 1917 to propagate Franco-Vietnamese collaboration was still doing well promoting *quốc ngữ* literature and its cause—so much so that Vietnamese historians agreed that the 1920s were *Nam Phong*'s golden age (Huyền Văn Tông 2000). *Đông Dương tạp chí*, on the other hand, was transformed into the professional educational bulletin *Học báo* in 1918 to meet the pedagogical needs of the expanding Franco-Vietnamese school system. But its editor in chief, Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh, was still eminent in the intellectual field during the 1920s: he was entrusted by the colonial regime with the editorship of the French-owned daily *Trung Bắc tân văn* (News from Tonkin and Annam, 1913-1941), tasked with promoting the goal of Franco-Vietnamese collaboration.

Joining with *Nam Phong* and *Trung Bắc tân văn* were several vernacular newspapers financed by native entrepreneurs, who also opened publishing houses to print periodicals and books. For instance, two Hanoi-based dailies *Khai Hoá nhật báo* (Enlightenment, 1921-1927) and *Hà Thành ngọc báo* (The Capital, 1927-1929) were published by business men Bạch Thái Bưởi (1874-1932) and Bùi Xuân Học, respectively. Bạch Thái Bưởi made a fortune in the shipping and transportation industry and was listed as one of the four richest people in Vietnam in the early 20th century. Before Bạch Thái Bưởi tried his hand in publishing, he had been a close friend of Confucian scholar and romantic poet Tản Đà (1889-1939). In 1923 he was elected to be the vice president of the Association for Annamite Intellectual and Moral Education (“l'Association pour la Formation Intellectuelle et Morale des Annamites” in French or “Hội Khai trí tiến đức” in Vietnamese; “AFIMA” hereafter). Also, daily *Hữu Thanh* (1921-1924) was the organ of *Hội Bắc kỳ Công thương đồng nghiệp* (Association of Industry and Commerce Chamber in Tonkin); although I have not been able to locate the publisher of *Thực Nghiệp dân báo* (People's paper of Development, 1920-1933), judging from its name, it seems safe to surmise that this press was in accord with the colonial regime's *mission civilisatrice*.

The most influential vernacular periodical published in the 1920s with financial

support from native entrepreneurs was *Phụ nữ tân văn* (Women's News, 1929-1935), owned by silk merchant Nguyễn Đức Nhuận (1900-1968) and his wife Cao Thị Khanh (1900-1962). After the termination of the short-lived *Nữ giới chung* (Women's Bell, 1918), this Saigon-based weekly became Vietnam's second vernacular periodical edited by female intellectuals, and thanks to the looser publishing laws in Cochinchina, *Phụ nữ tân văn* was able to carry some progressive content before it was shut down by the colonial regime (Huỳnh Văn Tòng 2000; Thiện Mộc Lan 2010). It is sufficient to suggest here that during the time period of the 1920s, the footing of Vietnam's *nouveaux riches* was firm enough to translate their economic capital into cultural capital by patronizing the agents of the vernacular literature field and the journalistic field.

During the 1910s, the theme of Franco-Vietnamese collaboration enjoyed a monopoly over the cultural fields. In this decade, however, although such collaboration still dominated vernacular periodicals, it began to encounter challenges from French educated intellectuals. Among the earliest contenders were Phan Văn Trường and Nguyễn An Ninh. Their speeches at the *Hội Khuyến học* (Association for Encouraging Learning and Education) in Cochinchina in 1923 show that they rebelled against the Chinese model by rejecting any practical and moral values that the colonial regime and neo-traditionalist Phạm Quỳnh had tried to assign to Confucianism, despite the fact that Confucianism was an essential part of both men's upbringing (Nguyễn An Ninh 1926; Phan Văn Trường 1925). They also introduced to Vietnam radical European social and political thought, which the colonial regime and Phạm Quỳnh believed would do greater harm than benefit to Vietnamese people because of their supposedly lowly stage of intellectual development. An example was Nguyễn An Ninh's (1926) translation of the first five chapters of French liberal thinker Jean-Jacques Rousseau's anti-monarchist treatise *Du Contrat Social* (The Social Contract, 1762), advocating the idea that "man is born free" to enter social contract with other men, so that a supreme Sovereign based on the general will could form.³

In terms of content, there was more variety in the 1920s than in the 1910s. In addition to intellectual journals published by the colonial government, Vietnamese entrepreneurs and radical intellectuals, famous romantic poet Tản Đà (1889-1939), the author of the well-received *quốc ngữ* prose fictions *Khối tình con* (Small Love) and *Giấc mộng con* (Small Daydreams) in the 1910s, published Vietnam's first literature periodical *Annam tạp chí* (the Annam Weekly, 1926-1933). Also during the 1920s, Vietnam witnessed the professionalization of vernacular journalism, initiated by

³ The publication of the *quốc ngữ* version of Rousseau's *The Social Contract* did not seem to suffer censorship or prohibition in the hand of the colonial regime.

Hoàng Tích Chu (1897-1933), the son of Hoàng Tích Phụng, a Confucian scholar and a minor activist in the *Đông Kinh* Free School movement in the 1910s. Hoàng Tích Chu started his career as a journalist with Phạm Quỳnh's *Nam Phong* and Bạch Thái Bưởi's *Khai Hoá* in the early 1920s, and in 1923 with the financial support of a teacher at the prestigious Lycée Albert Sarraut, he went to France to learn journalism through practical training.⁴ After he returned to Vietnam, he was invited by another Vietnamese entrepreneur Bùi Xuân Học to edit *Hà Thành* (The Capital, 1927-1929), then when *Hà Thành* discontinued, he invited his friend Phùng Tất Đắc (1907-2008), a graduate of Franco-Vietnamese school and a civil servant in CochinChina, to start the weekly *Đông Tây* (The East and the West, 1929-1932) in Hanoi.

Although Hoàng Tích Chu's journalism career was short—he died of disease in 1933, he made a lasting impression in colonial Vietnam's journalistic field in terms of both the innovative ideas concerning journalism he brought back from France and his eccentric editorial style that he himself described in 1930 as a combination of Chinese and French literary styles represented by Phạm Quỳnh and Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh, respectively. In defense of his writing style that journalist and writer Ngô Tất Tố (1893-1954) accused of damaging the young *quốc văn* (national literature), Hoàng Tích Chu (1930) justified his short and colloquial literary style by emphasizing that he rejected the old literary style in favor of a realistic editorial style that featured essays, memoirs, and chronicles (*lời ký sự*) and that was very popular among French journals.

2. Searching for Vietnam's National Soul: the Dynamics of the Cultural Fields

The issues at stake in the cultural fields in this decade, as in the 1910s, included establishing a vernacular literature that was based on an adequate *quốc ngữ* language (Nguyễn Hữu Tiến 1922; Phạm Huy Hồ 1919; Trần Duy Nhất 1921; Trần Tấn Tích 1919; Tuyết Huy 1919b; Vũ Công Nhi 1922), charting and evaluating from various angles Vietnam's history and legacy that had been so intricately intertwined with the Sino-Vietnamese cultural relationships (Nguyễn Bá Trác 1920; Nguyễn Hữu Tiến 1920-1921), and locating (and hopefully remedying) the differences between West and East—a synonym for China and, hence, by implication, Vietnam—that caused the latter to fall behind its Western counterpart in the universal process of evolution toward civilization (Hoa Đường 1924; Hoàng Ngọc Phách 1921; Phạm Quỳnh 1919e,

⁴ I have been unable to locate information regarding Hoàng Tích Chu's educational background, but judging from his connection with the teacher at the Lycée Albert Sarraut in Hanoi, it seems likely that he was one of the few Vietnamese who received secondary education from that prestigious institution.

1920, 1921; Quán Chi 1922). Many of the essays relating to these critical issues were translated from Chinese, Japanese, British, French, and American scholars and intellectuals in Chinese and French sources, indicating that Vietnamese intellectuals were interested in learning about this issue of East-West comparison from different angles.⁵

The time period of the 1920s, however, departed from the preceding “decade of imitation” of the French model in that this decade was characterized by intellectuals’ anxiety in searching for Vietnamese national character as they simultaneously emulated and sought to differentiate themselves and Vietnamese literature from both the French and Chinese models. In their effort to define a distinctive cultural identity during the 1920s, colonial Vietnamese intellectuals framed the French model as something to be emulated and, hopefully, equalled; while the Chinese model was something to be equalled and surpassed—though not completely discarded, as Confucian scholars made clear that Chinese learning was still useful in enriching young *quốc ngữ*, lending Vietnam an glow of Eastern uniqueness from the West, as well as providing a moral pillar for Vietnamese society (Nguyễn Bá Trác 1921: 189-199).

In terms of Vietnamese intellectuals’ changing views toward the French model, in the 1910s the cultural fields were dominated by Westernized intellectuals who greatly admired the French model and believed collaboration with the colonial regime was the only way to adopt Western *văn minh*/civilization, while those who opposed collaborating with France pursued their anti-colonial activities largely outside of Vietnam. But by the 1920s, collaborating intellectuals began to show signs of both skepticism towards French perceptions of Vietnamese culture and discontent with Vietnam’s uncritical adoption of the French model. Intellectuals increasingly envisioned different political prospects for Vietnam: Phạm Quỳnh advocated the institutionalization of Vietnam’s Constitutional monarchy, something that was opposed by Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh, who favored direct French rule over indirect rule. Anti-colonial intellectuals, on the other hand, were growing in number and, as a result of urbanization and Franco-Vietnamese education, they were more likely to reject both Confucianism and the possibility of Franco-Vietnamese collaboration in favor of leftism (Tai 1992). Although their involvement in the cultural fields during the 1920s

⁵ One thing is worth noting. A famous and important anti-imperialist student demonstration known as the “May Fourth Movement” took place in China on May 4, 1919 and soon evolved into a nation-wide iconoclastic new cultural movement demanding the practice of science and democracy. While colonial Vietnamese intellectuals might have borrowed the May Fourth discussion on Confucianism and “feudalism,” they did not appear to be very enthusiastic otherwise about this movement. Vietnamese historian Phan Ngọc (1998) even cites this silence toward the May Fourth Movement on the part of colonial Vietnamese intellectuals to show that Vietnam is, indeed, culturally independent from China, because Vietnam has different concerns and agenda from that of China. The question of why colonial Vietnamese intellectuals lacked interest in the May Fourth Movement remains to be answered.

was still scattered, it was not without effect.

Even stronger than Vietnamese intellectuals' growing skepticism of the French model, however, was their desire to reject the Chinese model in order to assert Vietnamese uniqueness. As in the 1910s, intellectuals in this decade celebrated Vietnam's history of resisting China by exalting the legends of the Two Trưng Sisters and General Trần Hưng Đạo.⁶ In the 1920s, in addition to establishing a bronze statue to commemorate the Trưng Sisters (Đương Đức Long 1922: 160-1), Vietnamese intellectuals went even further, claiming that *Truyện Kiều* (the Story of Lady Kiều), the most famous and popular Vietnamese love story adapted from an obscure Chinese novel, was superior to original. The claim was significant as it was made just as *Truyện Kiều* was being canonized, arousing various controversies between Confucian scholars and Westernized intellectuals. I discuss this incident further in section 2.3.2. Another example was the emergence of some critical interpretations of Confucianism, which are addressed in section 2.1.

In what follows, I discuss Vietnamese intellectuals' effort to equal the French model and surpass the Chinese model in their search to define the Vietnamese national soul during the 1920s from three angles: the new obsession with folk sayings, the continued obsession with Confucianism, as well as the emergence of a high vernacular literature and its relationships with the French and Chinese literary models. Since literature is central to my project, I discuss it in greater detail.

2.1. Searching for the Vietnamese National Soul: Discovering Folk Sayings, Reshaping Confucianism

During the 1920s, Vietnamese intellectuals in the cultural fields discovered a new venue to channel their eagerness to prove that Vietnamese was as civilized and distinctive as France and China. The venue was folk sayings in various forms of proverbs, maxims, folk songs, and so on. Unknown author Đỗ Hào Đình (1921: 302-307) and Phạm Quang Sán (1874-1932) believed that the true Vietnamese soul was to be found in folk sayings, and thus collecting and studying folk sayings would benefit the growth of young *quốc ngữ* (Phạm Quang Sán 1920: 482-497). In his speech entitled "Proverbs and folk songs" (Tục ngữ phong dao) to the Society of Mutual Instruction in Tonkin, Phạm Quỳnh (1921a: 253-271) began by recalling his conversation with a French clergyman who was conversant in both Chinese and Vietnamese languages. Phạm Quỳnh complained to him that little respect had been shown to Vietnamese language by complacent French people, who always insisted it

⁶ I discuss these historical figures in Chapter Four: the Trưng Sisters successfully rebelled against the Chinese reign between 41 and 43 AD, and General Trần Hưng Đạo expelled the invading Mongol armies three times in the thirteenth century.

was only a matter of time before a language as primitive as Vietnamese would be totally absorbed into French. The clergyman agreed with Phạm Quỳnh's observation, telling him that on the basis of the unique linguistic relationship between Chinese and Vietnamese, not only would Vietnamese survive, but it would also soon thrive as it continued to borrow from Chinese, for there was no other language than Chinese that could be so easily assimilated into Vietnamese. Phạm Quỳnh then shifted his focus to folk sayings, Vietnam's cultural treasure crystallized in time from the collective wisdom of commoners who had no contact with Chinese learning. The existence of folk sayings was a powerful piece of evidence that Vietnamese language had more than enough common language for daily uses; what it needed now was only the words of higher learning that could translate and illustrate the latest ideas and thoughts and Western learning into *quốc ngữ*. Moreover, because commoners were illiterate, they were supposed to reflect Vietnam's purest national essence. Phạm Quỳnh thus urged Vietnamese intellectuals to collect and research folk sayings and folk songs so as to show to the world that Vietnamese language was rich and wonderful and to encourage Vietnamese people to cherish this treasure. Nguyễn Hữu Tiến (1923: 353-369) further equated and elevated folk sayings to history, insisting that only through proper learning of Vietnamese history and folk sayings could Vietnamese people avoid committing the serious crime of forgetting their roots. Scholarly books on folk sayings emerged in the 1920s (Nguyễn Hữu Tiến 1922: 315-316), and the board of literature of the AFIMA, established in 1922, announced the commission of the investigation of folk sayings and asked intellectuals to join in their efforts to discover Vietnam's true national essence (*Nam Phong* 1922: 438).

Intellectuals of different political orientations agreed that compiling folk sayings was instrumental in preserving Vietnam's national soul and nourishing the vernacular *quốc ngữ* language. But there was less consensus among intellectuals regarding Confucianism. To begin with, neo-traditionalist intellectuals continued to focus on reviewing Chinese history and learning. If the enthusiasm for Greco-Roman classical learning led to the emergence of the Renaissance in Europe between the 14th and 17th centuries and transformed France from a barbarous society to a great world power, neo-traditionalists argued, an Asian Renaissance could thrive in Vietnam if Vietnamese intellectuals carefully studied and selectively preserved their classical learning, namely, Confucianism (Nguyễn Hữu Tiến [Đông Châu] 1920-1921, 1924, 1928; Phạm Quỳnh [Thượng Chi] 1924; Trần Trọng Kim 1920; Nguyễn Đôn Phục [Tùng Vân] 1924).

During the 1920s, however, neo-traditionalists increasingly began to turn against Confucianism, especially neo-Confucianism. Inspired by contemporary Chinese intellectuals' campaign against neo-Confucianism in the early 20th century (Duara

1995)—a school characterized by its emphasis on the learning of mind and heart that ascended to dominance during the Song era (960-1279),⁷ Vietnamese neo-traditionalist intellectuals similarly blamed neo-Confucianism for mystifying Vietnam’s Confucian learning into idealism at the cost of practical learning and logical thinking. The fact that neo-Confucianism was introduced to Vietnam during the Ming occupation (1407-1427), the period that officially terminated Vietnam’s golden Trần era (1225-1400) in which Confucianism thrived along with Daoism and Buddhism, made it appear even more convincing that neo-Confucianism, like the imperial examination system, was another culprit to blame for Vietnam’s backwardness (Trần Trọng Kim 2001 [1930]).

While neo-traditionalist intellectuals hoped to restore Confucian learning by cleansing it of neo-Confucian contamination, a younger generation of Westernized intellectuals, especially those who were exposed through higher education in France to various leftist ideas such as socialism, Marxism, anarchism, and Trotskyism, grew more impatient with Confucianism. The most notable example was Nguyễn An Ninh (1900-1943), whose father Nguyễn An Khương (1860-1931) was a Cochinchinese Confucian scholar, a supporter of the *Duy Tân* Reform Movement, and one of the earliest translators of the Chinese historical novel *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. After graduating from Cochinchina’s most elite Collège Chasseloup-Laubat, a school that was attended mainly by children of French colons, Nguyễn An Ninh went to Hanoi to spend a year at the Indochinese University and eventually obtained a law degree in France, where he became fascinated with the ideas of preeminent thinkers such as German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), French writer André Gide (1869-1951), and Indian writer Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) (Tai 1992).

Upon his return to Vietnam in 1923, Nguyễn An Ninh gave a speech to the Society of Mutual Instruction in Cochinchina entitled “The high ambition of Vietnamese youths” (Cao vọng của bọn thanh niên Annam), urging young Vietnamese to commit themselves to building a new learning that was authentically native. The speech immediately made him a sensation among young Vietnamese intellectuals. Contrary to neo-traditionalists’ presumption that Confucianism exerted a tremendous impact on forming the Vietnamese nation in pre-colonial times and that Vietnam’s future at least partially depended on a reformed Confucian doctrine, Nguyễn An Ninh expressed doubts as to whether Confucianism had ever been able to “adapt to Vietnam’s climate.” To him, Confucianism was a fine belief system that intended to bring peace to people via the teaching of ethics and societal order, but it was no more than that, nor was it the greatest teaching in the world as some Confucian scholars

⁷ Hence, why neo-Confucianism is also referred to as Song Confucianism.

claimed. Nguyễn An Ninh observed that it was Vietnamese Confucian scholars' ignorance that led them to make such a bold but false claim; though they called themselves Confucian scholars, they were, in fact, ignorant of both Confucianism and other doctrines. As a result, Nguyễn An Ninh lamented, Vietnam had never produced its own learning, and all of Vietnam's past cultural accomplishments paled compared to those of other nations. His conclusion: a people as spiritually impoverished as the Vietnamese should not be granted with freedom and independence, or they would be thrown into utter confusion (Nguyễn An Ninh 1926).

The solution Nguyễn An Ninh recommended to cure Vietnam's disease of spiritual impoverishment was something we might call a mixture of Buddhism and Friedrich Nietzsche's *Übermensch*: Vietnam needed as many Supermen as possible, as their creativity and passion for this-world was so intense that they had no regard for outdated ethics and morality. Apparently, Nguyễn An Ninh believed he himself was one of such Supermen. The responsibility of those ordinary commoners who had no hope whatsoever to ascend to the position of superhuman was to pray earnestly and persistently to heaven so that it might answer their prayers and send much-needed Supermen to Vietnam to deliver the people from distress. In conclusion, he argued that Vietnamese people must acquire deep knowledge of both Eastern and Western learning in order to develop their own form of knowledge. He encouraged his audience to boldly face their inherent servitude and resist the constraining familial system, base society, parochial ethics, stupid dissidents, and feeble aspirations (Nguyễn An Ninh 1926).

2.2. Searching for the Vietnamese Soul in Literature

To overcome the sense of cultural inferiority derived from the fact that Vietnam had depended on Chinese characters for millennium, colonial Vietnamese intellectuals were eager to produce a vernacular literature that could prove to the world that Vietnam, too, was a nation of *văn minh* with its national soul beautifully expressed in its own literature written in its own script. During the 1920s, Vietnamese intellectuals usually followed three paths to achieve this goal. First, they continued digesting and emulating French literature and other great Western literary traditions through French or Chinese translation, a project that had been enthusiastically promoted by Francophile intellectual Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh (1882-1936) through the government-subsidized platform *Đông Dương Tạp Chí* since the 1910s. By gravitating toward the French literary model, Vietnamese intellectuals wanted to demonstrate their determination to bid farewell to their slavish history of cultural borrowing from China. Second, while intellectuals were keen to differentiate themselves and their work that of China, they also tried to show that they were able to

surpass China as they canonized the Vietnamese epic poem *Truyện Kiều*, a remake of a romantic fiction of China in the 17th century. Third, Vietnamese intellectuals had been working on producing vernacular novels since the 1900s, and their efforts began to bear fruit by the 1920s, with the publication of the romantic novel *Tố Tâm* (Pure Heart) by Hoàng Ngọc Phách in 1925 being the most important literary accomplishment in the decade.

2.2.1. Setting the Standard for High Literature in the Vernacular Literature Field

Colonial Vietnam's vernacular literature field began to take shape during the 1900s, thanks to the popular translations of Chinese and French novels, the growing reading public in urban areas, and a few Chinese-French-Vietnamese trilingual Cochinchinese intellectuals like Gilbert Trần Chánh Chiêu (1868-1919) and Hồ Biểu Chánh (1884-1958), who decided that the reader would develop stronger feelings for Vietnam if they could produce vernacular novels for their home country. During the 1920s, the field became increasingly professionalized: writers and commentators emerged, and their means to accumulate cultural capital was printed literary works. Also, the 1920s witnessed the emergence of a wider variety of literary subgenres and long-awaited literary works of "high literature" as opposed to pop literature. Hoàng Tích Chu's article on differentiating light and possibly trivial "văn tiêu khiển" (entertainment/recreational literature) and serious "văn biện thuyết" (educational literature) in 1920, Trần Duy Nhất's essay on the writer in 1921, as well as Phạm Quỳnh's study note on the novel in 1929 provide some interesting documents that showed how vernacular literature was professionalizing during the 1920s.⁸

As part of this process, writers also began to demand recognition of their talents and autonomy. In his essay entitled "How will national literature fare?" (*Vận mệnh quốc văn về tương lai thế nào?*), Trần Duy Nhất (1921: 311-319) first separated national language (*quốc ngữ*) from national literature (*quốc văn*), emphasizing that national language was for common use in daily settings in the material world, while national literature was food for the soul and the instrument to quicken Vietnam's evolution toward Western *văn minh*/civilization. He then pronounced the standard for those who aspired to become writers: only worthy people who were gifted, experienced, observant, knowledgeable, conscientious, and virtuous would be qualified. Although Trần Duy Nhất did not mention it, obviously he assumed that Hoàng Tích Chu's light "văn tiêu khiển" would not possibly fall in the category of worthy people's worthy literature. To make his point that writers were a special group

⁸ No information about Trần Duy Nhất has been retrieved.

of people, Trần Duy Nhất hinged the worthiness of the writer on the nation: only worthy people could produce worthy works, which was the single most important factor that decided whether or not the nation would be a worthy one. Hence, a nation could last only when it produced its own literature, and it was bound to disappear if it lost this literature (văn còn thì nước còn, văn mất thì nước mất).

Trần Duy Nhất defined what works qualified as high literary works: an aspiring writer should write to benefit the nation. More specifically, the qualified writer was to narrate his stories by both following the standard laid out by the French literary model and preserving, even exalting Vietnam's national soul. An example was Đặng Trần Phát (1902-1929) and Trọng Khiêm (years unknown), two intellectuals who joined forces with their predecessors Hồ Biểu Chánh and Gilbert Trần Chánh Chiêu in producing realist fictions in the 1920s. Đặng Trần Phát wanted to tell stories alerting readers to the problem of moral decay caused by Vietnam's transition from Sino-Vietnamese tradition to Westernization (quoted from Vương Trí Nhàn 2000: 41-43), while Trọng Khiêm attempted to draw on the strengths of both Western and Vietnamese literary traditions, which were, according to his understanding, literary form and spirit, respectively (quoted from Vương Trí Nhàn 2000: 45-47).⁹

On the contrary, commercially successful romantic poet Tản Đà (1883-1939), whose works were classified as sentimental literature (văn sầu), never felt compelled to write for the nation. Tản Đà, like his older brother Nguyễn Mạnh Bồng, often made cynical remarks about his own writing career. Unlike Gilbert Trần Chánh Chiêu, Hồ Biểu Chánh, Đặng Trần Phát, and Trọng Khiêm who asserted that they wrote to answer a high calling from the nation, Tản Đà said he simply wrote to make a living on his not-so-useful Sino-Vietnamese training (Tản Đà 2002 [1927a], 2002 [1927b]). Tản Đà gained fame in the 1910s with his poems, dreamy essays, and translation of Chinese classical texts, and he continued to produce similar works in the 1920s by publishing *Thề non nước* (A solemn pledge of love, 1922), *Trần ai tri kỷ* (My soul mate in the misery here-below, 1923), *Kiếp phong trần* (Wind and dust karmas, 1923), *Giấc mộng con II* (My small daydreams II, 1927-28, the sequel to *Giấc mộng con*, 1917), as well as *Giấc mộng lớn* (My big daydreams, 1929). In *Giấc mộng lớn*, Tản Đà wrote long lamentations for Wang Zhaojun, one of China's legendary four "great beauties" in the first AD who was married to a "barbarous" king to forge a political bond between China and one of its neighboring countries. Because Tản Đà wrote sentimental works and continued to use a fading literary model, throughout his life, he was never accepted as a writer of highbrow literature by his peers. Only posthumously was Tản Đà honored as one of the great Vietnamese vernacular poets in 1942 by poet

⁹ Đặng Trần Phát's works were *Cánh hoa điểm tuyết* (The petal dotting snow, 1921) and *Cuộc tang thương* (The vicissitudes, 1923), and Trọng Khiêm wrote *Kim An lệ sử* (The tearful diary of Kim An) in 1924.

and literary critique Hoài Thanh (1909-1826). I discuss Hoài Thanh's and other intellectuals' literary criticism further in Chapter Six.

Phạm Quỳnh's *Khảo về tiểu thuyết* (A Study on Novels), which was serialized in *Nam Phong* (no. 43) and published in book form in 1929, was Vietnam's first scholarly research on the novel. The publication of a textbook-like scholarly project on the novel was indicative of the professionalization and autonomy of the art of novel writing. Phạm Quỳnh began his book by stating that since the novel had been very popular in Vietnam, it was now time to systematically review what French literature critics had to say about the novel. He consulted contemporary Léon Levrault (who authored a series of "évolution du genre" at the turn of the century) and influential literary critique Ferdinand Brunetière (1849-1906), who converted from evolutionism to Catholicism in the latter years of his life.¹⁰ In his study, Phạm Quỳnh attempted to answer the following questions: what is the novel, what are some elements in it, what are some of its subgenres, how does it evolve, how is it supposed to be written and read, and what are some of its impacts upon societies? By addressing these questions, Phạm Quỳnh hoped he could both help accelerate the development of vernacular literature and bring out the best out of the novel, which he considered to be a powerful weapon of education (Phạm Quỳnh 2000[1929]: 173).

While in the preceding decade Phạm Quỳnh advised Vietnamese intellectuals committed to constructing a respectable national literature for Vietnam to emulate the French literary model in general, and literary realism in particular, so as to counter the "absurd" fantasies found in translated Chinese novels (see Chapter Four), by the end of the 1920s Phạm Quỳnh appeared better versed in French literature history and more selective about what elements of the French literary model Vietnamese writers should emulate. The most noticeable difference was his disapproval of the movement of literary naturalism led by French novelist Émile Zola (1840-1902) on the grounds that replicating every detail of daily life would not only be too boring to read, but also practically impossible to achieve (Phạm Quỳnh 2000[1929]: 144). Phạm Quỳnh was of the same opinion as Ferdinand Brunetière, who called Zola's works gloomy, pessimistic, and calumnious (Hocking 1936). Phạm Quỳnh might also have found Zola too politically radical. Zola was an influential public intellectual who disliked Napoleon III, was actively involved in the Dreyfus Affair in 1894, and was critical of the Industrial Revolution that took root in France after the French Revolution, thus neo-traditionalist collaborating intellectual like Phạm Quỳnh might have felt highly uncomfortable recommending works of a man like Zola.

Phạm Quỳnh's change of opinion concerning literary realism must have been informed by some French opponents of literary realism, and it is highly likely that he

¹⁰ Catholic Encyclopedia, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03010a.htm>, last accessed April 15, 2013.

was aware of the French criticism against Zola's experiment with "scientific novels" (Finch 2010: 107). Instead of continuing to encourage Vietnamese intellectuals to mimic realist works as he had in the previous decade, now his advice was that aspiring writers should start with the adventure novel, because this subgenre was much easier than others to imitate as it greatly resembled Oriental novels and did not require advanced literary skills, thus befitting Vietnam's low level of literary development (Phạm Quỳnh 2000[1929]: 171).

Along with the adventure novel, Phạm Quỳnh also introduced the romantic novel and the realist novel but warned that they were too difficult for Vietnamese writers to imitate, as the former would easily slip into sentimental literature if one was not talented enough and the latter could become too cruel in exposing rampant moral decay and social injustice (Phạm Quỳnh 2000[1929]: 166-68). Phạm Quỳnh also made it clear that he disapproved of many Western romantic novels. There was nothing new about Vietnamese intellectuals' dismissing the romantic novel as a low-level, even harmful literary subgenre, but in the previous decade they had chiefly targeted Chinese and Vietnamese works. A notable example was romantic poet Tân Đà. As I showed in the previous chapter, his works were popular among readers but were frowned upon by his peers in the cultural fields. Phạm Quỳnh's analysis of novels, however, expressed serious doubts regarding Western romantic novels' tendency to overemphasize the "base" (thô bỉ) aspects of love (namely, sexuality) at the expense of its "noble" (cao thượng) aspects (for instance, caring, compassion, bounding, etc.). Phạm Quỳnh's criticism of Western writing was previously unheard of; apparently, he had been appalled by or at least shared the same horror some conservative French literary critics had expressed concerning French romantic novels' explicit description of sensational scenes, which had never been present in Vietnamese literary works. These obscene works were particularly harmful for Vietnamese women and youths, according to Phạm Quỳnh, because these two groups of people were very sensitive and gullible. Intellectuals who were interested in the career of writers, therefore, were to be advised against attempting to emulate Western romantic novels.

2.2.2. Translating French and other Western Literatures, Deifying Victor Hugo

Since 1915, Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh had been single-handedly translating some key French literary works into *quốc ngữ*, including Honoré de Balzac's (1799-1850) realist work *La Peau de Chagrin* (The Magic Skin, 1830), Victor Hugo's (1802-1855) *Les Misérables* (1861), Pierre Corneille's (1606-1684) play *Le Cid* (The Lord, 1635), Alexandre Dumas's *Les trois mousquetaires* (The Three Musketeers, 1844), and Molière's (1622-1673) comedies *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (The Bourgeois

Gentlemen, 1670) and *La malade imaginaire* (The Imaginary Invalid, 1673). Phạm Quỳnh also used *Nam Phong* since its inauguration in 1917 to introduce French literature and French literature history for Vietnamese intellectuals to imitate. As early as the 1910s, Gilbert Trần Chánh Chiếu (1868-1919), the Westernized intellectual and French citizen from Cochinchina, imitated Alexandre Dumas's *The Count of Monte Christo* (1844), serialized in *Lục tỉnh tân văn* with the title of *Tiền căn hậu báo*. Another Cochinchinese intellectual Hồ Biểu Chánh (1884-1958), one of Vietnam's earliest commercially successful writers who began his writing career by translating Chinese novels, imitated Hector Marlot's *Sans Famille* (1893), Alexandre Dumas's *The Count of Monte Christo* (1844), and Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* and published *Without Family* (Không gia đình) and *The Lord of the Ship Kim Qui* (Chúa tàu Kim Qui) in 1923 and *Playful wind blowing on the meadow* (Ngọn cỏ gió đùa) in 1926.

In April 1920, the AFIMA, the elite club and mouthpiece of the colonial government's Franco-Vietnamese collaboration program in Vietnam, adapted Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh's free translation of Molière's *The Imaginary Invalid* (1673, "Bệnh thương" in Vietnamese) and performed it on stage in Hanoi with native directors, actors, and actresses. It was Vietnam's earliest adaptation and *diễn*ing of Western *diễn kịch* (spoken dramas). A French police report conceded that Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh translated this piece to make a point of "showing the French population in Annam that the inhabitants of this country know just as well as [the French] how to appreciate the works of Molière and other famous [Western] writers" (Goscha 2004: 23). Phạm Quỳnh (1920a: 306) called the day of the performance "a day worth remembering" for the history of the AFIMA, the history of Vietnam's professional dramas and operas, as well as the history of the development of vernacular literature, because the performance of this comedy would make a significant contribution to Vietnam's outmoded *tuồng* theatre that was in desperate need of *cải lương*, which in Vietnamese means "reform" in general (whose meaning resembles "duy tân") and a form of modern theatre that made its first appearance in Vietnam in the early 1920s in particular. Phạm Quỳnh (1920a: 307) stated that because professionals of traditional performing arts were stubbornly resistant to *cải lương*, the AFIMA had difficulty recruiting professional actors for the performance of *The Imaginary Invalid*.

Phạm Quỳnh was not alone in calling for traditional *tuồng*'s *cải lương*. In 1920, a Cochinchinese theatrical company raised a banner on its stage that read "cải cách hát ca theo tiến bộ, lương truyền tuồng tích sánh văn minh" (literally "reform music in according to the rhythms of human progress; preserve the best legacy of dramas to achieve civilization). It was an acrostic couplet in which the first letters of the two verses were "cải" and "lương" respectively, indicating both Vietnamese intellectuals' strong desire for reforming traditional performing arts according to the Western style

(Đào Lê Na 2011) and the consequent emergence of the *cải lương* theatre in the 1920s, a modern form of folk opera that incorporated elements of Western spoken drama and Vietnamese classical dramas, and was based on Chinese classical Beijing opera. Vietnamese scholars have commonly accepted that *cải lương* theatre was a popular platform during the colonial era invented by Vietnamese intellectuals to express their patriotic sentiments (Đào Lê Na 2011; Trần Văn Khê 2001), but not without the inspiration from popular translated Chinese novels. It was a perfect example of colonial Vietnamese intellectuals' hybridization of Chinese, French, and Vietnamese cultural elements.

Vietnamese intellectuals' yearning to prove that Vietnam was capable of producing a vernacular literature and thus should be counted as a *văn minh*/civilized nation manifested in colonial Vietnam's obsession with pre-eminent French novelist Victor Hugo (1802-1855): he was revered by many intellectuals—especially Cochinchinese ones whose exposure to French literature was the longest among intellectuals of three *pays*, and enshrined and appropriated by a syncretistic native religion Caodaism (đạo Cao Đài; “Cao Đài” literally means “the high platform,” referring to the Supreme Being). Officially, Caodaism was established on Christmas Eve in 1925 on the occasion when the Supreme Being revealed himself through a table-moving séance performed by three Cochinchinese intellectuals who, like Nguyễn An Ninh, came from well-off families, graduated from the prestigious Lycée Chasseloup Laubat, and served in the colonial administration after graduation. Essentially, Caodaism is a syncretistic faith featuring Taoist spirit-mediumship and a Buddhist concept of salvation in a hierarchical structure modeled on the Catholic Church. It attempts to bring together Sino-Vietnamese *Tam giáo* (Three teachings), namely, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism (Smith 1970: 573). In line with the spirit of tolerance emphasized by other syncretistic East Asian religions, Caodaism teaches that all prophetic scriptures of major world religions are fulfilled in the final revelation of the Caodai Being, who creates all human beings and establishes Caodaism to unify religions so as to bring peace and unity to the mankind. As one Caodaist priest states, Caodaists “do not believe that there is only one true and uniquely sanctifying belief. The Creator has scattered the seeds of Truth throughout the centuries and the continents of the earth” (Oliver 1976: 25).

It was probably not a coincidence that Caodaism was established in 1925, the year when Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh's Vietnamese translation of Victor Hugo's masterpiece *Les Misérables* was published in Vietnam, which had been serialized in daily *Trung Bắc Tân văn* (News from Tonkin and Annam) since 1915.¹¹ Victor Hugo was one of

¹¹Undated entry to Phạm Xuân Thạch's personal website, <https://sites.google.com/site/thachpx/>, last accessed as July 2, 2012. Phạm Xuân Thạch is a professor in the department of literature at the

the most active spirits assigned by the Being to reveal the truth to peoples in the initial stage of development of Caodaism. The spirit of Hugo was reported to make frequent contacts with Phạm Công Tắc (1890-1959), a Chinese, French, *quốc ngữ* trilingual Cochinchinese intellectual, a graduate of the Collège Chasseloup Laubat in 1906, a civil servant, and an activist of the *Duy Tân* Reform Movement before he emerged as the most talented medium of Caodaism in the mid 1920s. According to Phạm Công Tắc, Hugo was a student of Nguyễn Bình Khiêm (1491-1585), a doctoral degree holder, official, and prophet in medieval Vietnam, the manager of the Holy See, and one of the three saints of Caodaism. Nguyễn Bình Khiêm was believed to reincarnate as eminent French politician Cardinal Richelieu (1585-1642) and famous French author of maxims François La Rochefoucauld (1613-1680), and one of Nguyễn Bình Khiêm's students, Nguyệt Tâm chơn nhân (literally "Moon Heart the Perfect Person"), reincarnated as Victor Hugo (1802-1855) and Nguyễn Du (1765-1820), in Vietnamese intellectuals' eyes the greatest writers of France and Vietnam respectively (I will talk about Nguyễn Du in the next section). Nguyệt Tâm chơn nhân/Hugo was canonized as another saint of Caodaism along with his mentor Nguyễn Bình Khiêm, and he told Phạm Công Tắc through séances that he was decreed by the Being to write *Les Misérables* so as to teach the doctrine of Caodaism through the deeds of the main protagonist Jean Valjean (Trần Thu Dung 2011: 61-63).

Like other East Asian syncretistic religions, Caodaism, too, has many spirits and saints in its pantheon. Caodaism distinguishes itself, however, by worshipping literary figures. Except for Nguyễn Bình Khiêm, all the other venerated literary figures are non-Vietnamese: in addition to Victor Hugo are English literary master William Shakespeare (1564-1616) and Chinese "Poet Transcendent" Li Bai ("Lý Thái Bạch" in Vietnamese, 701-762), whereas the most beloved Vietnamese poet Nguyễn Du is missing from the Caodaist altar. But Hugo appeared to enjoy special popularity among Vietnamese intellectuals, who claimed him as one of their own by transporting him into a spiritual realm of hierarchy where he was slightly beneath a Vietnamese prophet who was in charge of the Holy See (namely, Nguyễn Bình Khiêm) and an equal of a Vietnamese author (namely, Nguyễn Du). Also, Hugo is the only literary figure who is exalted as one of the three saints of Caodaism.

Caodaism's worship of European writers, especially Hugo, is worth pondering. First, it indicates that Vietnamese intellectuals, especially those who received Franco-Vietnamese education, were quite familiar with Hugo's works and message. An example is Vũ Trọng Phụng (1912-1939), a singular social realist writer who became popular in the 1930s. In his works Hugo's name appeared quite often. Second, by incorporating Hugo as one of the students of a Vietnamese lettered man and

prophet, Caodaists reversed the power relationship between French and Vietnamese to overcome the sense of cultural inferiority (Duc Hong Huynh 2010). It reflected Vietnamese intellectuals' desire to be on par with the French. The other two Caodai saints are Hugo's mentor (in the spiritual realm) Nguyễn Bình Khiêm and Sun Yat-Sen (1866-1925), the founder of the Chinese Kuomintang (Nationalist Party) and the national father of Republic China. Nonetheless, as the below picture of three saints signing "may love and justice prevail above and under the heavens" in Chinese and French shows, it is, in fact, Nguyễn Bình Khiêm and Hugo who perform the signing, with Sun Yat-Sen standing behind to hold inkstone for them.¹² Even to this date, Hugo is still one of Vietnamese people's favorite literary figures whose popularity transcends age and political ideologies (Đặng Anh Đào 2007: 172-196; Zinoman 2001a: 29-31).



Figure 5.7: Caodaism's three saints signing an accord

2.2.3. Canonizing *Truyện Kiều* and the Conflicts between Confucian Scholars and Westernized Intellectuals

After staging Molière's comedy *The Imaginary Invalid* in 1920, the AFIMA held ceremonies on October 8, 1924 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the death of Nguyễn Du (1765-1820), the author of Vietnam's most famous epic poem *Truyện Kiều* (The Tale of Lady Kiều, 1813). It was reported that the crowd of both

¹² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Cao_Dai_three_saints_signing_an_accord.jpg, last accessed June 23, 2012.

Vietnamese and French audience members packed the multiple venues where a series of ceremonies were held, including speeches, parties, musical performances and dramas based on the story of *Truyện Kiều*. It was also reported that the commemoration ceremonies for Nguyễn Du was so well-received by Vietnamese people that the size of the audience was only topped by Albert Sarraut's inaugural address in 1917, which was given at the temple of Confucius (Văn miếu) in Hanoi when he took his second term of office as the Governor-General of Indochina (*Nam Phong* 1924: 89-90).

The appearance and canonization of *Truyện Kiều* is a richly nuanced phenomenon that speaks volumes to the complex Sino-Vietnamese cultural relationship, Vietnam's struggle for cultural uniqueness from China, as well as women's changing roles in Vietnam. It was also a battlefield through which the conflicts between Confucian scholars and Westernized intellectuals in the 1920s and the controversies between the opposing "art for art's sake" and "art for life's sake" groups played out in the late colonial period. I will discuss how Confucian scholars took up the issue of *Truyện Kiều* to attack Westernized intellectuals in this section and the debates concerning the relationship between art and society in Chapter Six. Vietnamese intellectuals' canonization of *Truyện Kiều* certainly signaled their desire to culturally distinguish Vietnam from China by arguing that the story of *Truyện Kiều*, though full of Chinese titles and place names with which Vietnamese intellectuals might have been familiar through the reading of Chinese works, vividly depicted Nguyễn Vietnam.

A. The Authors and the Story Plots of Chinese *Jin Yun Qiao Zhuan* and Vietnamese *Truyện Kiều*

To begin, the author Nguyễn Du held a *tiến sĩ* doctoral degree and was an official of the Lê dynasty (1428-1788). When the Lê was overthrown, Vietnamese scholars argue, Nguyễn Du would rather have withdrawn from the officialdom out of his loyalty to the now diminishing Lê, but the succeeding Nguyễn dynasty was in need of his literary expertise (Nguyễn Quảng Tuân 2004). In 1812, Nguyễn Du became a reluctant Nguyễn official and was sent to China as an ambassador.¹³ During his one-year service in China he came across a novel titled *Jin Yun Qiao Zhuan* (The Story of Jin, Yun, and Qiao) of an anonymous author Qingxin Cairen (literally "a green-hearted talent") that tells a tragic romantic story between a brilliant young

¹³ Vietnamese royal courts always sent the best lettered men—usually doctors—to China in order to prove that Vietnam, despite being a tribute kingdom, was capable of being equal to China in learning and civility. Similarly, Korea, China's other tribute state, also sent only the most talented scholars as Korea's embassies to China out of the same concerns (Kelley 2005).

Confucian scholar Jin Zhong, a beautiful and virtuous young lady Wang Cui Qiao, and her younger sister Wang Cui Wun.¹⁴ The story belongs to the subgenre of scholar-beauty romantic love story that features a popular narrative mode called “pretty face, poor fate,” in which beautiful, talented, and kind-hearted young ladies always fall victim to the bad luck sent by the mysterious heavenly power who envies their perfect beauty within and without. As early as the third B.C., Chinese intellectuals had been using this literary allusion to vent their frustration when they failed an exam or lost a power struggle to their rivals in the royal court. Projecting themselves as the victimized beauty, dejected intellectuals mourned the fact that the envious heavenly power not only refused to appreciate pretty women and talented men, but even went so far as to torture these poor souls and watch them languishing at its hands (Qu Yuan, 475-221 BC).

The plot of *Jin Yun Qiao Zhuan* goes as follows: thanks to the mysterious heavenly power, two teenagers from noble families, Jin Zhong and Wang Cui Qiao, are secretly in love with each other, but their families, unaware of their love affair, have arranged other marriage prospects for them. Unfortunately, Wang Cui Qiao’s father, a righteous government official, is framed by his wicked rivals in the royal court and his honorable family line is not only disgraced, but also at risk of coming to an end, as both Wang Cui Qiao’s father and younger brother could be sentenced to life unless a handsome ransom is paid to the government on time. Wang Cui Qiao, out of a sense of filial duty, offers herself up as a concubine to a wealthy middle-aged man in exchange for a fat dowry for her family. Little does she realize, however, that the man is actually a pimp. Her family gets the dowry, but it costs her dearly: she is sold into a brothel and endures many hardships and tribulations. The story ends with a stark contrast between Jin Zhong’s and Wang Cui Qiao’s fates: the former obtains a doctoral degree and marries a princess, but the latter drowns herself after her second husband Xu Hai, a notorious pirate, is killed by the Ming royal troops (Qingxin Cairen, 1985 [year unknown]).

Jin Yun Qiao Zhuan is not ranked in China’s list of literary masterpieces, yet apparently Nguyễn Du was so impressed by it that he took pains to *diễn* it into *Nôm* characters in Vietnamese six-eight couplets meter. Nguyễn Du’s version preserves the plot of *Jin Yun Qiao Zhuan*, but offers a happy ending for its readers. Whereas the Chinese Wang Cui Qiao never sees her lover Jin Zhong after she is sold to prostitution, her Vietnamese counterpart, Vương Thúy Kiều, gains favor with the same mysterious heavenly power that brings her to Kim Trọng in the first place, and the favor is such that the power not only thwarts her suicide attempt but also reunites her with Kim

¹⁴ Both Wang Cui Qiao and Xu Hai are historical figures. Wang Cui Qiao was a famous prostitute in southern China in the 16th century, and Xu Hai was the head of a pirate band in south China. Xu Hai was killed by the Ming government when his band was dissolved.

Trọng, even though their love is never consummated. Nguyễn Du published his version upon his return to Vietnam, and it became an instant hit among people of all walks of life: both kings and peasants enjoyed reading and listening to the recitation of the musical verses of *Truyện Kiều*, and young lovers used *Truyện Kiều* to practice bibliomancy to seek advice for their love lives. Nevertheless, the description of the flirting between Vương Thúy Kiều and Kim Trọng, and the former's atypical lifestyle as a prostitute and a concubine of men of disreputable background alarmed the royal court. Emperor Tự Đức (1847-1883) decreed that *Truyện Kiều* be prohibited on account of its obscenity and romanticization of prostitution. A popular saying "young girls should not read *Truyện Kiều*" testifies to both *Truyện Kiều*'s tremendous popularity and its potentials—real or imagined—to mislead impressionable young girls to desire Vương Thúy Kiều's lifestyle, which was anything but respectable (Trần Ngọc Vương 1995).

B. The Canonization of *Truyện Kiều*

As I discussed in Chapter Two, *Truyện Kiều* is not the first Vietnamese *diễn*ing of a romantic Chinese story of love between a Confucian scholar and a beautiful lady, but it is the most popular one. Since France's conquest of Vietnam in the late 19th century, more and more native intellectuals became eager to mold a Vietnamese nation according to the standard of *văn minh*, and they determined that *Truyện Kiều* should not be just a work of entertainment, it should be a badge of national pride. The transformation process began with Catholic Confucian scholar Trương Vĩnh Ký (1837-1898), who transliterated *Truyện Kiều* from *Nôm* characters into Romanized *quốc ngữ*. Westernized intellectual Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh (1882-1936) took it a step further by translating *Truyện Kiều* from *quốc ngữ* into French in 1913, so as to introduce Vietnam's crown of literature to French people and enhance the mutual understanding between French tutors and Vietnamese pupils (Nguyễn Huệ Chi 2004: 1223-6).

The process of transforming *Truyện Kiều* from a piece of folk literature to part of the national canon sped up in the 1920s, thanks to the AFIMA's institutional resources and the colonial regime's support. In December 1919, Phạm Quỳnh gave a speech on *Truyện Kiều* at the AFIMA. He compared *Truyện Kiều* with French and Chinese classic literary works such as Lamartine's (1790-1869) *La fables* and Songling Pu's *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* (1740), both of which were very popular in colonial Vietnam, and asserted that no literary works in the world could surpass *Truyện Kiều* in terms of its strong appeal to both intellectuals and commoners (Phạm Quỳnh 1919f: 481). Phạm Quỳnh further claimed that *Truyện Kiều* was an epic poem so supreme that few Chinese literary works could match it, and that its excellence was

solely derived from the sheer genius and great personality of Nguyễn Du, who, while quietly enduring the misfortune of having to switch his political allegiance from the Lê throne to the Nguyễn dynasty, expressed his frustration through the pretty-faced, but ill-fated protagonist Vương Thúy Kiều. Phạm Quỳnh argued that only through meticulously applying theories of Western literary criticism to studying *Truyện Kiều* could its hidden treasure be unearthed, and that only through recognizing and worshipping Nguyễn Du's immortality could Vietnamese pay proper homage to the literary feast (Phạm Quỳnh 1919f: 493).

Phạm Quỳnh's speech on *Truyện Kiều* stands as a watershed not only in *Truyện Kiều*'s transformative process, but also in Vietnam's vernacular literary development. First, Phạm Quỳnh's juxtaposition of *Truyện Kiều* with classic French and Chinese literary works indicated the desire of both Phạm Quỳnh and his peers in the AFIMA to prove to both Vietnam and the world that Vietnam did have a vernacular literary work that was worthy being classified as both a masterpiece of Vietnamese literature and a beautiful gift to the world. Second, Phạm Quỳnh's bold assertion that *Truyện Kiều* was better than the majority of traditional Chinese fictions indicates that while Chinese literature still served as a standard by which to gauge Vietnam's vernacular literary development during the 1920s, it was shifting from a model to emulate to a rival that could be outdone. Third, Phạm Quỳnh's Sino-Franco-Vietnamese comparison and his insistence on analyzing Nguyễn Du through Western methods shows that while French literature was taking the place of its Chinese counterpart in Vietnam's vernacular literature field to become the source of inspiration and admiration, it, too, was no longer accepted as uncritically as it once was, as I discussed in Chapter Four.

It should be noted, however, that among all the borrowed or *diễn* literary works, only *Truyện Kiều* was said to be superior to its original version. In their efforts to distinguish *Truyện Kiều* from other pre-colonial literary works, Vietnamese intellectuals liked to call *Truyện Kiều* an unprecedented and unsurpassable literary exception in human history, arguing that neither Nguyễn Du's predecessors nor his successors came anywhere near his virtue and literary genius. They meant to create an aloof, mysterious, and sacred aura around the book, but their effort also prevented them from applying the same acclaim to Vietnam's other *diễn* literary works.

Intellectuals continued to express their admiration for *Truyện Kiều* in the aftermath of Phạm Quỳnh's speech (Nguyễn Đôn Phục [Tùng Vân] 1922: 302-315). Since 1924, interest in analyzing *Truyện Kiều* in light of Western literary criticism surged. The purpose of such exercises was always to prove that the poem had a philosophically deep message, clear plot structure, great storytelling, as well as an excellent "pretty face, poor fate" narrative, and that it was a literature masterpiece of

not only Vietnam, but also the world (Đoàn Tư Thuật [Mai Khê] 1925: 225-30; Nguyễn Triệu Luật 1924). Vũ Đình Long, a Westernized intellectual who opened the profitable printing house Tân Dân in 1925, reinforced Phạm Quỳnh's assertion that *Truyện Kiều* was superior to Chinese literature by arguing that *Truyện Kiều* followed an overarching structure that was glaringly absent from most traditional Chinese and Vietnamese literature. This emphasis on narrative structure can also be found in Phạm Quỳnh's scholarly review of the novel, in which he listed the overarching narrative structure as the most important element of the novel (Phạm Quỳnh 2000[1929]: 143). Vũ Đình Long also called Nguyễn Du a patron god of poetry, not merely an artisan of verses, maintaining that Nguyễn Du's poetic prowess defied the myth commonly held by French critics that Vietnamese had never entertained high aspirations in the area of arts and literature (Vũ Đình Long 1924a, b, c, d).

The process of transforming *Truyện Kiều* reached a climax in September 1924, when the AFIMA held ceremonies to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Nguyễn Du's death, an event that Trần Trọng Kim (1883-1953), a Vietnamese historian trained in France and well-versed in Chinese learning, described in his speech at the AFIMA as testimony to Vietnam's fast progress toward *văn minh*/civilization (Trần Trọng Kim 1924: 96-109). Both Phạm Quỳnh and Trần Trọng Kim delivered addresses on Nguyễn Du and *Truyện Kiều* as part of the commemorative activities. Phạm Quỳnh's address (1924: 91-94) echoed Vũ Đình Long's point and emphasized that *Truyện Kiều*'s overarching structure led it to surpass Chinese literature, most of which was missing this element. Since *Truyện Kiều* did have a structure and was a work of both classicalism and romanticism, Phạm Quỳnh suggested *Truyện Kiều* was comparable to French literature. Not only this, but unlike French literature, which was only appreciated by intellectuals in France, Vietnamese should take pride in *Truyện Kiều*'s popularity among people of all walks of life. Trần Trọng Kim's address (1924: 96-109) emphasized Nguyễn Du's brilliance by noting how he skillfully transformed the mediocre original *Jin Yun Qiao Zhuan* to a literary masterwork that told the extraordinary story of a beautiful young woman who was perfect in all virtues. Both Phạm Quỳnh and Trần Trọng Kim called *Truyện Kiều* Vietnam's "joss stick and fire" (*huong hoả*)—meaning that he symbolized family line, the national soul (*quốc hồn*), and the national essence (*quốc túy*); both speakers also argued that even though *Truyện Kiều* originated from China, Nguyễn Du's literary prowess had turned it into a purely Vietnamese work that sociologically represented Vietnam in an amazingly accurate manner.

C. The Confucian Scholars' Challenge (or Lack Thereof) of the Canonization of *Truyện Kiều* During the 1920s

Shortly after *Nam Phong* published Phạm Quỳnh's and Trần Trọng Kim's speeches on *Truyện Kiều*, Confucian scholar Ngô Đức Kế (1878-1929) published an essay titled "Orthodox learning and heresy in our national literature" (1924b) in *Hữu Thanh* (Voice), challenging Phạm Quỳnh's canonization of *Truyện Kiều*. Ngô Đức Kế was born to a Confucian family with a long tradition of producing prominent mandarins for the royal courts in the Tonkin area. After he was conferred with the highest doctoral degree in 1901, instead of entering the Nguyễn officialdom, Ngô Đức Kế immersed himself in Chinese *Tân thư* (new books) and joined other Confucian scholars in opening shops and hotels to raise funds for the *Duy Tân* Reformation Movement in the 1900s. When the movement was crushed in 1908, Ngô Đức Kế, alongside Confucian compatriots such as Huỳnh Thúc Kháng (1876-1947) and Phan Khôi (1887-1959), was arrested and subsequently spent the entire 1910s in prison. He was released in 1922 and worked for the organ of the Hội Bắc Kỳ Công thương đồng nghiệp (Trading Association of Tonkin) *Hữu Thanh* (1921-1924) for the remainder of his life (Lê Chí Dũng 2004: 1069-1070).

Throughout his life, Ngô Đức Kế held to Confucian belief and insisted that a nation's fate ultimately rested on whether or not intellectuals upheld their responsibility to lead the nation to follow orthodox and morally pure learning (1924a, 1924b). As a Confucian scholar who was well-versed in both Chinese classical and popular texts, Ngô Đức Kế appreciated Nguyễn Du's poetic skills. Yet, he found the AFIMA's whole enterprise of commemorating Nguyễn Du and *Truyện Kiều* offensive, even insulting. He saw it as a misplaced attempt to canonize a pastime translation of a marginal and morally questionable Chinese story about a prostitute written by an obscure author.¹⁵ By claiming *Truyện Kiều* as Vietnam's national flower, national soul, and national essence, Ngô Đức Kế announced that Phạm Quỳnh was guilty of denying the great literary accomplishments that Vietnamese writers and poets had achieved prior to Nguyễn Du's time. Ngô Đức Kế believed that because Chinese learning was rapidly declining while people's understanding of Western learning was still shallow, Vietnam was in a cultural vacuum, and that vacuum gave hypocrites like Phạm Quỳnh ample opportunity to spread lies and turn the entire nation morally upside down (Ngô Đức Kế 1924b).

In his essay, Ngô Đức Kế did not specify whom he was rebuking, but apparently intellectuals in the cultural fields were all aware that he was targeting Phạm Quỳnh, one of the most influential intellectuals in Vietnam in the 1920s. While many intellectuals harbored personal enmity against Phạm Quỳnh and were unhappy about his political and cultural influence, none of them joined Ngô Đức Kế in challenging

¹⁵ Ngô Đức Kế mistook Qingxin Cairen, the penname of the anonymous author of *Jin Yun Qiao Zhuan*, as the title or original story.

the idea of making *Truyện Kiều* Vietnam's literary masterpiece during the 1920s. Phạm Quỳnh, himself, remained silent in regard to Ngô Đức Kế's criticism until 1930. In his belated response, he explained that out of his respect for a frail Confucian scholar who had sacrificed for Vietnam and spent a decade in jail, he refrained from exposing the fact that Ngô Đức Kế's bitter complaint was merely intended to make a fuss about the most influential periodical during the 1920s (and by implication, one of the most powerful intellectuals who was in charge of this periodical) so that he could draw attention to himself and stimulate circulation for the newspaper *Hữu Thanh*, for which he had worked since he was released from prison (Phạm Quỳnh 1930). Obviously, Ngô Đức Kế's strategy did not work: *Hữu Thanh* was shut down the same year that his criticism against Phạm Quỳnh was published.

D. *Truyện Kiều* and the Controversies about Gender Roles

The debates over *Truyện Kiều* between declining Confucian scholars of the *Duy Tân* generation and rising Westernized intellectuals who greatly profited from Franco-Vietnamese collaboration had to wait until the 1930s to resume, and I discuss this topic further in Chapter Six. But thanks to Ngô Đức Kế's criticism of *Truyện Kiều*'s morality, shortly after being established in Cochinchina, *Phụ nữ tân văn* (Women's News, 1929-1935), colonial Vietnam's second vernacular journal aimed at female readers, started to solicit opinions on the question of whether Vương Thúy Kiều should be complimented or chided for her deeds (Kiều nên khen hay nên chê), thus shifting the focus from whether *Truyện Kiều* qualified as canonical, to its main protagonist's character and integrity.

Readers responded to *Phụ nữ tân văn*'s question enthusiastically. Though Phạm Quỳnh and the AFIMA had put much energy and resources into exalting Vương Thúy Kiều as the supreme example of a Vietnamese woman of virtue, few readers of *Truyện Kiều* were convinced. From May to December 1929, *Phụ nữ tân văn* published thirteen readers' letters, seven of which expressed great concern that Vương Thúy Kiều, a daughter of a highly respected Confucian scholar, failed to observe Confucian teaching on women's virtues and embarrassed her family and herself by totally neglecting her duty of protecting her chastity. Readers criticized that not only was she not shy at all when she first met her soul mate Kim Trọng, but she also failed to think about other ways to save her family and foolishly rushed to sell herself to a worthless man. Some readers also believed that she should have killed herself to protect her chastity and her family's reputation instead of allowing herself to fall into prostitution (Bùi Xuân Hòa 1929; Duyệt Vân Hiến cư sĩ 1929; Ng. H. Th. 1929; Ngọc Khôi 1929; Nguyễn Thị Xuân Sơn 1929; Thạch Lan 1929). Three defenders of Vương Thúy Kiều—two of which were Hoàng Ngọc Phách (1896-1973), the author of Vietnam's

first significant *quốc ngữ* fiction *Tố Tâm* (Pure heart, 1926), and Trần Trọng Kim (1883-1953), whose *Nho giáo* (Confucianism, 1930) was Vietnam's first scholarly study on Confucianism—were regular contributors to *Nam Phong* who vindicated her from feminist, Confucian, and Buddhist perspectives, respectively. They emphasized her self-sacrifice for her family and insisted that Vương Thuý Kiều was a unique woman that her remarkable talents and character were such that conventional societal norms on gender relationships were rendered inadequate (Hoàng Ngọc Phách 1929; Melle Bích Thuý 1929; Trần Trọng Kim 1929).

Although the newly founded *Phụ nữ tân văn* stirred up Vietnam's cultural fields by inviting readers to comment on the moral quality of the most famous protagonist of one of Vietnam's most beloved story, the project of canonizing *Truyện Kiều* did not seem to slow down. In 1925, under the commission of the AFIMA, Trần Trọng Kim and Bùi Kỳ (1888-1960), both of whom were masters in Confucian learning and obtained diplomas from France,¹⁶ published Vietnam's first scholarly research on *Truyện Kiều*. In his preface, Trần Trọng Kim (2002[1925]) argued that the reason that Nguyễn Du chose to translate an ordinary work like *Jin Yun Qiao Zhuan* in the midst of a sea of Chinese fictions was because Nguyễn Du saw himself in Wang Cui Qiao: like Wang Cui Qiao, who was forced by the envious heavenly power to separate from her first lover Kim Trọng and marry other men, Nguyễn Du too was forced to serve the Nguyễn dynasty in spite of his allegiance to the previous Lê dynasty. When Nguyễn Du rendered Wang Cui Qiao into Vương Thuý Kiều and transformed *Jin Yun Qiao Zhuan* from a prose fiction into an epic poem, Trần Trọng Kim reasoned, Nguyễn Du was actually externalizing his frustration in Vương Thuý Kiều's misfortune. Because Nguyễn Du felt for Wang Cui Qiao/Vương Thuý Kiều and masterfully incorporated the *Nôm* script into his remaking, he saved Wang Cui Qiao's story from obscurity by producing an improved version that was much "cleaner" and classier than the original one. The end product, Trần Trọng Kim marveled, was a well-structured story beautifully written in a script as confusing as the *Nôm* characters. Trần Trọng Kim also indirectly opposed Ngô Đức Kế's labeling *Truyện Kiều* as an obscene and immoral book, maintaining that Vương Thuý Kiều was a loving woman whose compassion encompassed not only her lover(s) and family members, but also the whole society, and that even though Vương Thuý Kiều sadly lost her virginity to a worthless pimp, her love for Kim Trọng was still perfectly pure and clean and her fidelity intact.

Two years later, an author named Đỗ Nam (1927a: 41-50; 1927b: 150-59) made a point of comparing *Truyện Kiều* with *Jin Yun Qiao Zhuan* so as to prove that the

¹⁶ Bùi Kỳ passed the imperial examination and was conferred a degree of junior doctor (*phó bảng*) in 1910 before he was selected and sent by the French colonial regime to study at the *École coloniale* in Paris in 1913.

Vietnamese version, though a work of translation and adaptation, did, indeed, surpass the Chinese original. First, Đỗ Nam emphasized, *Jin Yun Qiao Zhuan* was a radically new fiction in “our Oriental literature” (văn học Đông phương ta) in that it did not pertain to power struggles over royal succession, nor did it tell absurd fantasies. Rather, it depicted a picture in which injustice plagued all social strata. Despite its alleged novelty in story plot, Đỗ Nam pointed out that *Jin Yun Qiao Zhuan* was told in vulgar prose that contained many redundant narratives and crude conversations. Đỗ Nam accomplished his end by painstakingly comparing *Jin Yun Qiao Zhuan* with *Truyện Kiều* paragraph by paragraph, and in so doing, he wanted to convince his readers of Nguyễn Du’s superb literary skills and *Truyện Kiều*’s greater literary achievements than *Jin Yun Qiao Zhuan*.

In March 1929, the AFIMA commissioned a bronze statue of Nguyễn Du. Bùi Kỳ, the scholar who collaborated with Trần Trọng Kim in producing Vietnam’s first scholarly research for *Truyện Kiều*, explained that the AFIMA had decided to worship Nguyễn Du because his unprecedented literary masterpiece served as a critical piece of evidence proving that “a language that has produced literature is not a mediocre language, a people that has composed excellent literature is not a mediocre people, and a country whose people are skilled in literature is not a mediocre country”; in short, *Truyện Kiều* was indispensable to the development of Vietnam’s vernacular literature (Phạm Đan Quế 2000: 213). Bùi Kỳ’s comments echoed Phạm Quỳnh’s famous statement “as long as *Truyện Kiều* lasts, our language will last; as long as our language lasts, our nation will last” (*Truyện Kiều còn, tiếng ta còn; tiếng ta còn, nước ta còn*), made in his speech in 1924 at the AFIMA on the 100th anniversary of Nguyễn Du’s death (Phạm Quỳnh 1924b: 91-94).

Doubtless, ever since *Truyện Kiều* appeared in the early nineteenth century, Vietnamese had enjoyed reading it and were proud of Nguyễn Du’s fine accomplishments. Nonetheless, whether or not *Truyện Kiều* should be canonized as Vietnam’s great national literature was controversial. Phạm Quỳnh and other neo-traditionalist intellectuals such as Trần Trọng Kim and Bùi Kỳ who had close ties with the AFIMA were enthusiastic advocates for canonizing *Truyện Kiều*. These men of letters were more familiar with French literary tradition and were more aware of the French literary canon than other intellectuals, and as a result they might have felt more compelled to show that Vietnam was capable of producing literary works of quality and was thus, like France, a nation of *văn minh*.

2.3. Producing a Native High Literature: *Tố Tâm* and Others

Having a canonical work like *Truyện Kiều* to demonstrate that Vietnam could potentially equal France and surpass China in the area of literature was thought to be

helpful in Vietnam's literary development. But nothing would be as effective as producing a body of Vietnam's own vernacular literature of satisfactory quality. As I discussed in Chapter Four, Cochinchinese intellectuals Hồ Biểu Chánh (1884-1958), Nguyễn Chánh Sắt (1869-1947), and Trần Chánh Chiếu (1868-1919) were among the first intellectuals who had, since the 1910s, been consciously emulating Chinese and French literary works in their effort to establish Vietnam's own vernacular literature. Their works belonged to realist and adventure genres: realist stories were written both to counter the widespread influence of translated Chinese novels and raise consciousness of the Vietnamese nation among readers, while adventure stories were the product of mimicking French and Chinese fiction. During the 1920s, other intellectuals joined forces with Hồ Biểu Chánh, Nguyễn Chánh Sắt, and Trần Chánh Chiếu in crafting a high literature for Vietnam. Tonkinese intellectual Ngô Tất Tố (1854-1924) followed the path charted by Hồ Biểu Chánh and started translating Chinese novels in the 1920s before he produced his own famous realistic works *Tắt Đèn* (Out of Lamp, 1939) and *Lều chõng* (Tent and Bamboo Bed [of an exam candidate], 1939-1944) by the end of the 1930s. But the most notable endeavor to craft vernacular literary works in the 1920s was made by another Tonkinese teacher, Hoàng Ngọc Phách, the author of *Tố Tâm*. Moreover, Cochinchinese leftist intellectual Phan Văn Hùm's emergence in the cultural fields through the publication of a prison diary was somehow unexpected.

To begin, 1925 was a remarkable year for the development of colonial Vietnam's vernacular literature in the 1920s: the Sino-Vietnamese literary tradition, which used to be the source of high literature in pre-colonial Vietnam, came to an end, and the vernacular novel that is now celebrated as Vietnam's first work of high literature was published. The end of the Sino-Vietnamese literary tradition was sealed by Confucian scholar Phan Bội Châu (1867-1940), whose hostility toward France and pessimism toward *văn minh*/ civilization was clear in his historical novel *Trọng Quang tâm sự* (The Confession of Trọng Quang, 1921). Written while he was in exile in China, the novel is Vietnam's last fiction that used both the Chinese and the Sino-Vietnamese literary style (Chen 2011: 278). Phan Bội Châu recounted the story of an uprising against the Chinese Ming troops in a heroic attempt to restore Vietnam's sovereignty by a group of Vietnamese patriots during the two decades of the Ming occupation (1407-1427). Unfortunately, however, after an early success the uprising failed to deliver Vietnam out of Chinese oppression. Although the story takes place in medieval Vietnam under Chinese rule, apparently Phan Bội Châu intended to allude to colonial Vietnam under the French reign so as to encourage Vietnamese people to rise up against the colonizer.

Also in 1925, the AFIMA held a nation-wide fiction contest, and the first award

went to Northern Chinese-French-Vietnamese trilingual intellectual Nguyễn Trọng Thuật's (1883-1940) *Quả dưa đỏ* (Watermelon), a fictionalization of a folktale regarding how the watermelon appeared in Vietnam. This folklore was written in Chinese and found in *Lĩnh Nam chích quái* (The Collected Strange Stories in Lĩnh Nam) that was published in the fifteenth century. Nguyễn Trọng Thuật, who might have read Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), remade this traditional folktale into a castaway's adventurous story. The protagonist of the original *Quả dưa đỏ* is a non-Vietnamese young man An Tiêm. He arrived in Vietnam as a boy with maritime trading ships during the ancient times of Hùng Vương (Hùng king), the legendary progenitor of ancient Vietnam who allegedly ruled Vietnam before Vietnam was turned into the southernmost province of the Chinese empire in the second B.C. Hùng Vương bought the boy to be his servant, named him An Tiêm, and showed favor to him. After An Tiêm reached adulthood, Hùng Vương gave him a wife and charged him with administrative power. An Tiêm grew arrogant and boasted that he personally earned all his wealth and honor, denying the favor that Hùng Vương had generously bestowed upon him. Enraged by An Tiêm's ingratitude, Hùng Vương exiled An Tiêm and his family to a sandbank in a sea so as to teach An Tiêm a lesson that he would have been nothing without the king's favor and provision. An Tiêm's wife was panicked and extremely worried, but An Tiêm was perfectly happy and comforted his wife that since heaven gave birth to him, the very same heaven would provide for him. Luckily for An Tiêm, a giant white bird emerged and spat upon the sandbank seeds that grew into fruits of huge size. Because the fruits were tasty and easily grew in abundant quantity, An Tiêm and his family not only survived, but he also retained his wealth by selling the fruit to traders, farmers, fishers, and villagers. When Hùng Vương was told that An Tiêm and his family were doing well thanks to the unknown fruit, he had to admit that An Tiêm truly did not have to rely on the king's favor. The story ends with Hùng Vương sending for An Tiêm and reinstating him in the royal court (Chen 2011).

In Nguyễn Trọng Thuật's version, An Tiêm was Hùng Vương's adopted son. Some wicked officials resented and felt envy toward him, so they set him up and forced him and his family into exile in a deserted island in the Southern Sea. Nevertheless, being a virtuous and brave intellectual with a deep faith in the ancient wisdom, An Tiêm not only prospered, but even transformed the deserted island into a prosperous *văn minh* society by carefully following all the wisdom and teaching he had learned from ancient sages and philosophers. In his preface, Nguyễn Trọng Thuật, who worked as a teacher between graduating from Franco-Vietnamese schools and joining the Vietnam Nationalist Party in 1927, explained why he was moved by *Lĩnh Nam chích quái*: he discovered in these collected strange stories a strong piece of

evidence that prior to the long era of Chinese reign, Vietnam did have its own civilization that was totally different from rigid Chinese civilization and, in fact, bore a slight resemblance to the world civilizations (“khác hẳn cả với cái khuyển sáo của văn minh Trung Quốc mà phảng phất với văn minh thế giới”). Of all the surviving strange stories, Nguyễn Trọng Thuật found *Quả dưa đỏ* particularly appealing in that he saw in the protagonist An Tiêm a perfect combination of both the modern spirit of adventure and the deep wisdom of the mystery and philosophy that heaven handed down to his forefathers. Explaining his motive in fictionalizing *Quả dưa đỏ*, Nguyễn Trọng Thuật echoed Nguyễn Trọng Quản, the Catholic-Confucian author of Vietnam’s first vernacular short story *Thầy Lazaro phiến* (The Story of Mr. Lazaro, 1886), and emphasized that he wanted the reader to be aware that the home pagoda was no less effective than foreign ones and thus people should look no further than their hometown buddhas and deities for help (Nguyễn Trọng Thuật 1926: 167-69).

Phan Bội Châu’s historical novel drew on the Chinese literary model to encourage Vietnamese people to overthrow the French colonizer; Nguyễn Trọng Thuật’s fictionalization of a folktale attempted to assert Vietnam’s distinctiveness from China by shedding light on an ancient story through the new lens of nationalism. Hoàng Ngọc Phách’s (1896-1973) romantic novel *Tố Tâm* (Pure Heart), also published in 1925, showed how intellectuals of Western education struggled with the conflicting traditions of East and West. Applauded as Vietnam’s first psychological novel (Song Vân 2000[1934]: 55), *Tố Tâm* became an instant best-seller and the talk among intellectuals. Within a few months of its publication, *Tố Tâm* had sold more than three thousand copies, and its fame even spread to Vietnamese expatriate communities in France, China, and other Southeast Asian countries (Nguyễn Huệ Chi 1989: 14). As of 1939, it had been reprinted four times, selling particularly well among young women. In 1945, Hoàng Ngọc Phách was selected by the literature critic Vũ Ngọc Phan (1902-1987) as one of the most influential novelists in Vietnam in the first half of the 20th century (Vũ Ngọc Phan 1980[1945]: 193-206). *Tố Tâm* is still considered by many—though not all—Vietnamese literary historians to be Vietnam’s first “modern” (hiện đại) novel (Nguyễn Huệ Chi 1989: 13).¹⁷

Tố Tâm is a love story with a tragic ending derived from the conflict between traditional and modern values that looked hopelessly irreconcilable to many

¹⁷ I discuss in Chapter Two that some Vietnamese scholars from the South (eg., Vũ Bằng 1992; Vũ Văn Nhơn 2010) contend that the honor of the first modern vernacular novel of Vietnam should go to *Truyện Thầy Lazaros Phiến* (1887) by Cochinchinese Catholic writer Nguyễn Trọng Quảng (1865-1911). There is no doubt that *Tố Tâm* makes a much greater impact on modern Vietnamese vernacular literature. It should be noted, however, that scholars based in Hanoi, the capital of modern-day Vietnam, seem to exhibit a tendency to downplay the accomplishments of the South. More importantly, northern scholars are not very enthusiastic about honoring a Catholic Vietnamese novel whose protagonist was collaborating with the French.

intellectuals in the 1910s and the 1920s. Hoàng Ngọc Phách chose to depict the conflicts between the old and the new by narrating how a perfect couple gave up their love for each other in order to honor the marriages arranged by their families, although in the story the family institution, the culprit of the tragedy, always remained in the background and never assumed an active role in forcing the two idealist youths to enter the arranged marriages. The story was between Đạm Thuỷ, a young Westernized intellectual, and Nguyễn Xuân Lan, a beautiful teenage girl and Đạm Thuỷ's soul mate, and it was narrated by Đạm Thuỷ to his friend in school. This couple was a colonial version of the prototypical protagonists of classical Chinese scholar-beauty literature and *Truyện Kiều*; the difference was that both the scholar and the beauty in *Tố Tâm* took delight in studying Western learning and commenting on national literature instead of memorizing Confucian doctrines. The hero Đạm Thuỷ was the embodiment of a perfect colonial intellectual: he was a young, bright, and patriotic graduate of humanities from Teacher's College in Hanoi, one of the very few Franco-Vietnamese secondary schools available to Vietnamese students in the colonial period. Đạm Thuỷ was knowledgeable in psychology, ethics, sociology, pedagogy, and French literature. No Chinese fictions were mentioned when the author described Đạm Thuỷ's impressive bookshelves: obviously knowledge in Chinese literature was no longer considered a valuable form of cultural capital in the cultural fields of colonial Vietnam. Đạm Thuỷ took pride in his deep understanding of women's vulnerability and his passion for education, with his own published essays and novels serving as his most powerful teaching materials.

It is hard not to link the author Hoàng Ngọc Phách with his leading protagonist Đạm Thuỷ. Hoàng Ngọc Phách was born to a Confucian family in the North, and his father Hoàng Mộng Căn was involved in the *Cần Vương* (Aid the King) loyalist movement discussed in Chapter Two. He spent his preschool years learning Chinese with his father, and moved on to a private school to learn French and *quốc ngữ*. Hoàng Ngọc Phách's highest degree, like that of Đạm Thuỷ, was from the Teacher's College in Hanoi, and he, too, majored in humanities. Đạm Thuỷ's personality was supposed to resemble his name, which literally means "light water" (fresh water), implying he was a humble Confucian *junzi/quân tử*, namely, the morally and academically superior ideal character that the doctrines of Confucianism hold up as the male ideal. Nguyễn Xuân Lan's name, too, signified a Confucian ideal. She was the most beautiful and possibly most intelligent teenage girl in town, and upon reading Đạm Thuỷ's essays and novels she was immediately attracted to his talent and was overjoyed when Đạm Thuỷ came to her village to teach in the village's communal school. Đạm Thuỷ gave her the secret nickname "Tố Tâm," literally "pure heart," for her name "Xuân Lan" means "spring orchid," and the *lan tố tâm* (suxin lan);

pure heart orchid) is a popular member of the orchid family in East Asia, where Confucian scholars had long looked favorably on plum blossoms, orchids, bamboos, and chrysanthemum as four floral embodiment of *junzi*. The author purposefully named his protagonists Đạm Thuỷ and Xuân Lan/Tố Tâm to imply that they were meant for each other.

The couple's relationship was led by Tố Tâm, as Đạm Thuỷ was a passive and indecisive man who allowed his feelings for Nguyễn Xuân Lan to grow while daring not to reject the marriage arranged by his family. Đạm Thuỷ repeatedly told himself that "the family is a sacred institution" but would not leave Tố Tâm even though he was well aware of her feelings for him, because he understood that women were very vulnerable and sensitive and it would kill Tố Tâm if he left her. Because Đạm Thuỷ was a humanist intellectual and Tố Tâm was a highly receptive student eager to mimic her mentor in composing poems and essays, they flirted in an intellectual way: they exchanged poems and essays, and had conversations about Vietnam's national literature and progress toward *văn minh*. Their way of courtship was not unlike that of Kim Trọng and Vương Thuý Kiều in *Truyện Kiều*, who also frequently exchanged poems and deeply appreciated each other's literary talents. What was unusual about their relationship, Vũ Ngọc Phan noted (1945), was that Đạm Thuỷ and Tố Tâm went out for dates, as dating was still not commonly practiced between men and women in Vietnam in the 1920s and *Tố Tâm* thus became Vietnam's first vernacular novel that portrayed the dating habits of a young couple. The couple went out to movies, operas, sightseeing, and even swimming, which required Tố Tâm to wear a bathing suit, a brave deed signaling that Tố Tâm was a *đàn bà mới* ("new woman") gravitating toward modernity.

Despite their strong feelings for each other, they followed the ideals of Confucian teaching regarding gender relationships and kept a respectfully proper physical distance from each other throughout the story. The most intimate occasion between them was hand holding, which occurred when heartbroken Tố Tâm became so emotional that she could not contain herself any longer and reached out her hands to Đạm Thuỷ's after she had received his letter telling her they should not see each other any longer. The story ended with Tố Tâm dying of lovesickness at a young age after she conceded to her ailing mother's will that she marry someone she did not love. Đạm Thuỷ, agonized over guilt and regret, had no choice but to live the rest of his life with his fond memories for Tố Tâm and her tear-stained dairy full of her yearning for him written on her deathbed.

Hoàng Ngọc Phách's description of Tố Tâm's passionate love and how she suffered from her love was in line with his psychological interpretation of women. He was of the same opinion as Phạm Quỳnh: specifically, that women, especially

Vietnamese women, were at a low stage of intellectual and emotional development and should thus be held back from learning intellectually sophisticated things, such as French language, as Phạm Quỳnh suggested (1918f), and reading *văn cảm* (sentimental literature), as Hoàng Ngọc Phách pointed out (1920, 1925), lest their fragile morality and intellect be damaged. In Chapter Four, I showed that in the 1910s both *văn sầu* (sentimental literature) and translated Chinese fictions—most of which were fantasies, martial arts, adventures, and historical novels—were classified by Westernized intellectuals according to the standard of literary realism as the antithesis of high literature exemplified by French literature. Now, Hoàng Ngọc Phách pushed the intellectual contempt of melancholy literature already popular in the cultural fields a step further by suggesting that because of their intellectual and emotional weakness, Vietnamese women were extremely vulnerable to the harmful effects of mournful literature. What Vietnam needed now, Hoàng Ngọc Phách stressed, was inspiring literature that would both strengthen people’s minds and hearts and encourage people to march forward toward *văn minh* instead of poems and novels full of groaning and whining. Hoàng Ngọc Phách clarified that traditional sentimental literature, such as *Truyện Kiều* and other Sino-Vietnamese works, was not as damaging as its modern counterpart, represented by romantic poems of Tân Đà (1888-1939, see Chapter Four) because it was more noble and gracious (Hoàng Ngọc Phách 1920: 379-83; Nguyễn Huệ Chi 1989).

Compared to Gilbert Trần Chánh Chiêu, Hồ Biểu Chánh, Hoàng Ngọc Phách, and Nguyễn Trọng Thuật, the writers who wrote works of high literature for their nation, the rise of Phan Văn Hùm, a comrade of iconoclast Nguyễn An Ninh and a young political prisoner (1902-1946), to prominence was not only unexpected, but also politically dangerous. Born into a peasant family in Cochinchina, Phan Văn Hùm became a teacher after he graduated from the School of Public Administration in Hanoi, an elite Franco-Vietnamese secondary school. He then lost his job in 1927 due to his involvement in encouraging students to leave schools to attend the funeral of Phan Chu Trinh, whose death in late March 1926 led fifty to seventy thousand Vietnamese men and women nation-wide to take to the streets so as to pay tribute to this patriotic hero in early April. In 1929, Phan Văn Hùm was imprisoned for a petty crime of refusing to show his identification card to the French police. While in prison, Phan Văn Hùm wrote about the unbearable physical and psychological suffering of Vietnamese prisoners at the hands of the French police and prison guards and then submitted this record to a Saigon-based progressive periodical *Thần Chung* (Morning Bell, 1929-1930), which was owned by the Annam-born, French-educated lawyer and journalist Diệp Văn Kỳ (1895-1945). Titled *Ngồi tù khám lớn* (Sitting in a Big Jail) and serialized on a daily basis, Phan Văn Hùm’s work became Vietnam’s first prison

diary and the first literary work to expose the colonial regime's cruelty against the native population—a subgenre of its own that would emerge to dominate Vietnam's literature during the revolutionary era between the 1950s and 1970s (Zinoman 2001b: 21-45). Not surprisingly, after several issues, the diary was banned, and *Thần Chung* was soon shut down on the charge of breach of the peace (Nguyễn Q. Thắng 2003: 7-38). Although his work did not disturb the cultural fields during the 1920s, in the next decade he would be joined by more leftist intellectuals to politicize the cultural fields.

2.4. The Chinese Model as an Intimate yet Implicit Model: Chinese Popular Literature and *Cải Lương* Dramas

In his autobiography, Hoàng Ngọc Phách (1989) stated that he always wanted to make a contribution to Vietnam's national literature, and he saw French literature as a worthy example for Vietnamese intellectuals to imitate. In an interview with Lê Thành (1989), Hoàng Ngọc Phách explained how he wrote *Tố Tâm* as follows: “I arranged the storyline in accordance with France's latest literary form. In the areas of storytelling and description of contexts and circumstances, I entirely follow the examples of French literature. I also followed the latest ideas, thoughts, and psychoanalysis widely employed by contemporary [Western] novelists to present and analyze the psychological states of my protagonists.”

Tố Tâm's plot, however, resembled greatly *Xue Hong Lei Shi* (The Tearful Diary of Xue Hong, 1914), a popular Chinese romantic novel by Hoàng Ngọc Phách's Chinese contemporary Xu Jenya (1889-1937), which was translated by Confucian scholar Đoàn Tư Thuật under the different pen names of M.K., Mai Khê, and Đoàn Hiệp and published in *Nam Phong* from number 77 (November 1923) to number 84 (June 1924), with a postscript in number 86 (August 1924). Xu Jenya, like Hoàng Ngọc Phách, was a graduate of Teacher's College, and he fell in love with one of his student's widowed mother, but ended up marrying his lover's niece, who died at a young age several years after they were married. Brokenhearted Xu Jenya wrote down his love story in *Yuli hun* (The Spirit of Yuli, 1913) as a way of grieving the loss of his wife and lover, and to his own surprise, it was so well received that within a year he found himself rewriting this story in diary form. He named it *Xue Hong Lei Shi*, which, like its preceding version, was very popular.

Yuli hun and *Xue Hong Lei Shi* are called the pioneer works that start an important modern “Mandarin ducks and butterflies” (yuan yang hu die) romantic literature subgenre, with mandarin ducks and butterflies symbolizing pairs of lovers. According to Perry Link (1981), these “butterfly” novels were a product of China's Westernization. The subgenre began to emerge between the late 19th and early 20th

century in Shanghai, China's first Westernized city, and its "old style" love stories appealed to urbanite readers, the petty bourgeoisie, and workers from inland areas alike, all of which were confused, insecure, and politically conservative, yet also curious and excited about the uncertainty and novelty of Westernization. During the 1920s, the May Fourth intellectuals began to use "Mandarin ducks and butterflies" to refer disparagingly to old-style popular stories while elevating the May Fourth literature to the elite status. Link also argues that *Xue Hong Lei Shi* is China's first work of diary literature, and that it is profoundly influenced by China and France's literary masterpieces, namely, Cao Xueqin's *Dreams of Red Chamber* in 1784 and Alexander Dumas fils's *The Lady of the Camellias* in 1848, which was translated into literary Chinese in 1896. Xu Jenya's protagonists mimicked the eccentric behaviors of those in *Dreams of Red Chamber* (for example, burying and weeping for fallen petals), but he adopted the diary form used by Dumas in *The Lady of the Camellias*.

Before *Xue Hong Lei Shi* made its appearance in Vietnam as *Tuyết Hồng lệ sử* in 1923, Vietnam's market for popular literature had been dominated by Chinese martial arts novels, adventure stories, and fantasies. Translated Chinese fictions were especially popular in Cochinchina, so much so that Cochinchinese people were said to value loyalty and justice above everything else, just as the characters in Chinese martial arts novels did (Vương Trí Nhàn 2006). *Xue Hong Lei Shi* was the first work of modern Chinese "Mandarin ducks and butterflies" subgenre introduced to Vietnamese readers, and it was particularly popular in Tonkin.¹⁸ The "butterfly" novels' use of an old style to tell stories pertaining to urban lives and Westernization might have appealed to Tonkin, the northernmost protectorate where Chinese and French influences were equally strong. Annam would have been too conservative to appreciate the theme of Westernization in the butterfly fictions, but why Cochinchina did not show interest in the butterfly fictions is difficult to discern.

I refer to Chinese literature as an "intimate yet implicit model," a model that had lost much of its glory since the French colonial reign began in Vietnam in the late 19th century, but still exerted an impact upon Vietnamese literary development due to its long-standing familiarity, thanks to Vietnam's history of cultural borrowing from China and the heavy linguistic influence of Chinese on Vietnamese. The intimate and implicit nature of the Chinese literary model in Vietnam's literature manifests in the fact that, during the colonial period, Chinese fictions were able to provide a quick answer to the expanding reading public's growing thirst for recreational reading and thus came to dominate the area of popular literature. As I discussed in Chapter Four, during the 1910s, intellectuals in the vernacular literature field had formed an

¹⁸ Undated entry to Phạm Xuân Thạch's personal website, <https://sites.google.com/site/thachpx/>, last accessed as July 2, 2012.

unspoken consensus that translated Chinese novels were cheap commodities of bad quality meant for mass consumption and should be monitored with extra caution for the harm they could inflict upon their readers, especially women and youths who were particularly vulnerable to the charms of Chinese novels due to their immature personalities and inferior intellect. Some intellectuals also claimed that translated Chinese fictions did great harm to Vietnam because their subject matters were lurid and meaningless, and as a result their readers tended to become dishonest (Quán Chi 1922; Trần Hữu Khánh 1922). On the other hand, however, Vietnamese intellectuals themselves enjoyed reading those “worthless” Chinese fictions and freely appropriated elements from the fictions as they saw fit without feeling obligated to give credit to them. Their attitude toward Chinese literature formed a sharp contrast to their view of French literature, which was seen as increasing the value of intellectuals’ cultural capital and the credibility of their works.

Vietnamese colonial intellectuals’ apprehension about Chinese novels is also demonstrated by the apologetic gesture that Đoàn Tư Thuật, the translator of *Xue Hong Lei Shi*, adopted to justify his translation of yet another Chinese sentimental fiction.¹⁹ To this end, Đoàn Tư Thuật employed the literary device of inventing an imaginary translator and an imaginary note of Xu Jenya, the author of *Xue Hong Lei Shi*. This device was found in Catholic writer Nguyễn Trọng Quảng’s *Thầy Lazaro Phiền* (The Story of Mr. Lazaro, 1887), in which the narrator reported that he received the deceased protagonist’s letter confessing how he avenged his wife’s alleged cheating on him by killing the adulterous couple (see Chapter Two). In his invented translator’s note, Đoàn Tư Thuật claimed that he happened to come across the translated *Tuyết Hồng lệ sử* by an anonymous translator, who, because of his reservations about the original work, decided not to make the translation public. In Đoàn Tư Thuật’s own narration, he stated that after reading this translated work, even though he was not sure whether the protagonists’ deeds were morally appropriate (đổi với bản phận người trong truyện chưa chắc đã hợp vào đạo lý), given the fact that it was a story of a “new intellectual” (một người học giới mới buổi này) narrated in a new literary style, he felt Vietnamese readers were entitled to the chance to read it (Đoàn Tư Thuật 1924a: 421).

In the postscript, in addition to the translation of the original ten prefaces to *Xue Hong Lei Shi*, Đoàn Tư Thuật made up an autobiographical note from Xu Jenya to explain how Xu Jenya got hold of the diary of Mengxia/Mộng Hà, the protagonist of *Xue Hong Lei Shi*: a certain Mr. Hoàng on his trip of sightseeing saw a young man groaning mightily on the ground. The man motioned Mr. Hoàng to come to him and

¹⁹ I have not been able to locate Đoàn Tư Thuật’s biographical data except that he was born in a Confucian family and was involved in the *Duy Tân* Reform Movement in the 1910s.

told him with great difficulty that he had been fatally wounded during his involvement in the 1911 Chinese Republican Revolution. He then gave him a diary, telling him that he was lucky to meet a man like Mr. Hoàng and asking him to help him deliver his diary to his lover. The man died immediately after he finished speaking. It turned out that this young Chinese man was Mengxia/Mộng Hà. So, Mr. Hoàng passed the diary to Xu Jenya, who took the liberty of publishing it.

Another example that demonstrated the intimate yet implicit nature of the Chinese literary model in colonial Vietnam was *cải lương* (literally “reformed”) theatre. Starting in Cochinchina in the 1920s, *cải lương* is reformed folk drama that combines elements from Vietnamese traditional *tuồng* drama and Western spoken drama. A review of *cải lương* scripts in Cochinchina during the colonial era indicates that eighty out of the total 137 scripts that appeared between 1920 and 1945 were based on Chinese stories: seventy-three of them were adaptations of Chinese novels that had been translated into Vietnamese since 1900, four were Chinese folk tales, and the remaining three were Chinese allusions. The three allusion-based *cải lương* scripts drew on the stories of Xi Shi/Tây Thi and Wang Zhaujun/Vương Chiêu Quân, two of ancient China’s legendary great beauties during the Warring States period from the fifth to the second century B.C. and the Han dynasty (206 B.C.–220 A.D.), respectively. The kingdom where Xi Shi was born was defeated by its enemy, the king thus sent Xi Shi to his rival as a gift to be a spy and to keep his rival too busy to pay attention to political affairs. Wang Zhaujun, the beauty to whom romantic poet Tản Đà dedicated his novel *Giấc mộng lớn* (1929), was married to the head of a northern nomadic tribe that was threatening the Han Dynasty’s territory. Both stories had been popular and performed on stage in pre-colonial Vietnam, and during the colonial era the playwrights highlighted these two beauties’ patriotic self-sacrifice for their countries (Đào Lê Na 2011: 71-76). That a high percentage of *cải lương* scripts were based on translated Chinese fictions indicates how easily and often Chinese literature was assimilated and appropriated by Vietnamese intellectuals, so much so that after two decades of wide translation, many of Chinese fictions became an important component of Vietnam’s popular culture.

3. Intellectuals in the Cultural fields

Colonial Vietnam’s cultural fields began to emerge in the 1900s, thanks to those Confucian scholars who were devastated culturally and politically by the arrival of the French colonial regime. Distressed, these scholars made use of their knowledge of

literary Chinese and delved into Chinese new books in order to understand the societal crises that had wracked Vietnam since the 19th century. They also responded to this unprecedented crisis with the country-wide *Duy Tân* Reform Movement. This reform movement was a product of East Asian transculturation: it was inspired by both Japan's successful *Meiji* Renovation in 1868 and China's failed Hundred-Day Reform in 1898, and it aimed at cultural renovation that sought to instantly transform Vietnam from a backward colony into a modern *văn minh*/civilized society. The movement was crushed by the colonial regime in 1908, dealing Confucian scholars a serious blow, yet out of this political and cultural fermentation were colonial Vietnam's cultural fields born.

During the 1910s, as dissident scholars-activists were either being jailed or going into exile, a group of collaborating Westernized intellectuals—Vietnam's earliest intellectuals who received French language training in the Collèges of Interpretation in Hanoi and Saigon, well before Franco-Vietnamese schools were officially installed in Vietnam—together with some Confucian scholars who believed that the colonial regime was the only agent capable of delivering *văn minh*/civilization to Vietnam, responded to the colonial regime's call for Franco-Vietnamese collaboration and rose to fill the leadership vacuum in the cultural fields. They had acquired a great deal of cultural capital since the last decade and continued to be the leaders and agenda setters in the cultural fields in this decade. They were friendly toward the Constitutionalist Party founded by political elite Bùi Quang Chiêu and were supportive of native entrepreneurs. A number of them were able to translate their cultural capital into political capital and vice versa. Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh, the advocate of autonomy for Vietnam, was one of the most gifted intellectuals in this area: in addition to the elite club of AFIMA, he networked himself with various organizations such as the non-governmental League of Human Rights (Ligue des droits de l'homme) and the Freemasonry (Franc Maçonnerie/Hội Tam điểm Quốc tế), as well as the governmental Advisory House of Tonkin (Hội Đồng Tư Văn Bắc Kỳ) and the Indochinese Grand Counsel of Economy and Finance (Hội đồng Kinh tế và Tài chính Đông Dương/Grand Conseil des Intérêts économiques et Financiers de l'Indochine). His friend Phạm Duy Tồn, a writer and journalist, and his rival Phạm Quỳnh, a supporter of constitutional monarchy, were also able to translate their cultural capital into political capital, but in a less impressive manner. Phạm Duy Tồn was a senator of the Chamber of Representatives of People in Tonkin (Chambre des Représentants du Peuple du Tonkin), and Phạm Quỳnh was selected into the Indochinese Grand Counsel of Economy and Finance. Together, Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh, Phạm Quỳnh, and Phạm Duy Tồn went to France to attend the Colonial Exhibition in Marseille in 1922.

This tiny group of collaborating Westernized intellectuals very much

monopolized Vietnam's cultural fields during the 1920s. They had the upper hand in their relationship with their Confucian peers, most of whom did not read French and continued to rely on Chinese new books to understand Western learning. These Westernized intellectuals possessed a neo-traditionalist outlook, and their vision was one of selectively preserving the legacy of Chinese learning and reconciling it with Western learning. The resources and the power bestowed on them by the colonial regime enabled them to act as gatekeepers and arbiters of symbolic capital in the cultural fields, as more intellectuals were becoming professional translators, writers, playwrights of *cải lương* dramas, and journalists. These professional writers were a group of "cultural workers" who generally possessed little political capital and competed for recognition in the cultural fields by publishing their works either in major media outlets or in book form. During the colonial era, periodicals were the most powerful media outlets, and Phạm Quỳnh's *Nam Phong* and Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh's *Đông Dương* and *Trung Bắc tân văn* were the most prestigious vernacular periodicals during the 1910s and the 1920s. Understandably, these actors were thus in a position to decide who could be qualified to move upwardly within the cultural fields and who should be eliminated from the power competition.

The emergence of professional translators, writers, playwrights, and journalists during the colonial era was unprecedented in Vietnamese history.²⁰ Of them, the population of Confucian scholars-turned translators of Chinese fictions was the biggest, as the growing *quốc ngữ* reading public's need for popular literature was rising and the supply of capable translators who no longer had to sit in the imperial examination en route to societal prominence was abundant. Compared to translators of Chinese fictions, translators of French and other Western fictions through French texts were still few during the 1920s. Also from among Vietnam's last generation of Confucian scholars emerged colonial Vietnam's earliest professional writer Tản Đà (1889-1939), a poet from Tonkin who was talented and popular enough to make a living solely on his literary works. His peers had other means to fall back on: Gilbert Trần Chánh Chiếu was born to a wealthy landowning family, Hồ Biểu Chánh worked as a civil servant, Nguyễn Tử Siêu was a Sino-Vietnamese medical practitioner, and Hoàng Ngọc Phách was a teacher. Tản Đà further distinguished himself by his lukewarm attitude toward the development of *quốc ngữ* and vernacular literature, a patriotic commitment widely shared by intellectuals during the 1910s and the 1920s.

Tản Đà was a commercially successful writer. Many of his Confucian peers authored quite a few literary works during the 1920s, yet many of their works were classified as popular literature, sentimental literature, or Sino-Vietnamese traditional works, and were not as highly regarded as that of those of graduates of

²⁰ See Appendix One for the intellectuals who were active in the 1920s.

Franco-Vietnamese schools, who increasingly populated the vernacular literature field and the cultural fields. Brocheux and Hémery report that upper primary education generated the lower middle class of civil servants, employees, and professional revolutionaries, while the secondary grades tended to produce writers, journalists, or civil servants of a middle or superior rank (2009: 223). A demographic analysis of active agents of the cultural fields shows that during the 1920s, graduates of secondary Franco-Vietnamese schools filled both the emerging anti-colonial political parties and the maturing literary field (see Appendix One). It should be noted that although the intellectuals involved in organizing political parties to carry out anti-colonial struggles were not generally very keen on advancing the cause of *quốc ngữ* or national literature during the 1920s, they, together with their preceding anti-colonial Confucian scholars-activists, were able to upset the cultural fields through scattered, yet effective (and mostly unplanned) intervention. They constituted a real threat to the dominating power of the neo-traditionalist intellectuals in the 1930s, and they would become the backbone of the anti-colonial revolution between 1945 and 1975.

In the political fields, in addition to collaborating intellectual Bùi Quang Chiêu's Constitutional Party, the most active political parties of the 1920s included the *Tân Việt Cách mạng đảng* (the Revolutionary Party of New Vietnam, *Tân Việt*, 1928-1929), the *Việt Nam Quốc dân đảng* (the Vietnamese Nationalist Party, VNQDD, 1927-1975), the *Tâm Tâm Xã* (the Like Heart Society), and the Indochinese Communist party. These groups did not see cultural renovation as the solution that would deliver Vietnam from suffering as the neo-traditionalists did, and their anti-colonial struggles were more ideologically sophisticated than those of the *Duy Tân* activists. Some younger members of Phan Bội Châu's *Việt Nam Quang Phục Hội* (1912-1925) were dissatisfied with the league's conservative spirit and decided to leave the league and found a more radical *Tâm Tâm Xã* in China in 1923. A year after its failed assassination of Governor-General Martial Henri Merlin (1922-1925), the *Tâm Tâm Xã* was merged with *Việt Nam Thanh niên Cách mạng Đồng chí hội* (the Revolutionary Youth Corps), which was led by Hồ Chí Minh and was the predecessor of the Vietnamese Communist Party (Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam). When the *Tâm Tâm Xã* was incorporated into the Communist Party in 1925, a new party called *Tân Việt Cách mạng đảng* (the Revolution Party of New Vietnam, 1925-1930) was founded in Annam, with scholar Đào Duy Anh as its General Secretary. Also, the *Việt Nam Quốc dân đảng*, founded in Hanoi in 1927 was inspired by Sun Yat-Sen's "Three Principles of the People" and appealed to intellectuals in Tonkin area. It perpetrated the killing of a notorious labor recruiter Henri Bazin, and was dealt a severe blow by the French police after its *Yên Bái* uprising in 1930.

Except for the Indochinese Communist Party, which was closely connected to its French, Chinese, and Russian counterparts, *Tân Việt*, VNQDD, and *Tâm Tâm Xã* were all regional nationalist organizations before they were absorbed into the Communist Party. The ten founding members of *Tân Việt* were all Annamese; seven of them were born in Confucian families, and all of them received secondary education at prestigious Franco-Vietnamese schools and became teachers after graduation. The founding members of *Tâm Tâm Xã*, too, were all Annamese. But unlike their counterparts in *Tân Việt*, who still kept their jobs and participated in political activities largely during off-duty hours, *Tâm Tâm Xã* activists were risk takers: they invited each other to stow away together to Hong Kong or Thailand and made their way to Southern China to join Phan Bội Châu, and their disappointment with the then defunct *Việt Nam Quang Phục Hội* led them to found *Tâm Tâm Xã* (Tai 1992). The Tonkin-based VNQDD members shared a similar profile with their peers in *Tân Việt* in that the majority of them were also teachers. Therefore, *Tâm Tâm Xã* activists were never involved in the cultural fields in the 1920s, whereas Đào Duy Anh (1904-1988) of *Tân Việt*, and Nguyễn Triệu Luật (1903-1946) and Trần Huy Liệu (1901-1969) of VNQDD were active writers for various periodicals. In fact, VNQDD started from a small publisher *Nam Đồng thư xã* in Hanoi, which published books on revolutions and ideas of socialism, Marxism, and feminism. The Vietnamese Communist Party's leading ideologist Trần Huy Liệu, too, imitated the Chinese Reform Movement and found a *Cường Học thư xã* (self-strengthening and learning publisher) in Cochinchina in 1928 to publish progressive books. Both *Nam Đồng thư xã* and *Cường Học thư xã* relied on Chinese sources in selecting and introducing books to Vietnam.

Former Confucian scholars-*Duy Tân* activists whose sacrifice for the country was still greatly respected by the Vietnamese people were another group of intellectuals who constituted neo-traditionalist intellectuals' main rival during the 1920s. In the 1910s, some of the scholars-activists upset neo-traditionalists' Franco-Vietnamese collaboration program either with assassinations plotted in China or with essays published in France and China calling into question the *văn minh* brought by the French colonizer. During the 1920s, returning from abroad or freed from jails, these scholar-activists, notably sons of prominent mandarin families in Annam, such as Phan Bội Châu (1867-1940), Phan Chu Trinh (1872-1926), Ngô Đức Kế (1878-1929), Huỳnh Thúc Kháng (1876-1947), and Phan Khôi (1887-1959), entered the cultural fields to compete with neo-traditionalists for leadership. They were not connected with the AFIMA, but their involvement in the *Duy Tân* Reform Movement provided them with sufficient political capital to enter either professional politics (e.g., Huỳnh Thúc Kháng) or become professional journalists (e.g., Ngô Đức Kế).

While Confucian scholars as well as intellectuals in *Tâm Tâm Xã*, *Tân Việt*, and VNQDD still retained some cultural and political connections with the Chinese model, the Cochinchinese intellectuals who were vocal in the cultural and political fields in the 1920s, such as radical Nguyễn An Ninh (1900-1943), teacher and civil servant Phan Văn Hùm (1902-1946), and lawyer and journalist Diệp Văn Kỳ (1895-1945), were inspired more by the French model. Nguyễn An Ninh and Diệp Văn Kỳ had obtained college diplomas in France before they returned to Vietnam, and Phan Văn Hùm went to France for higher education after he was released from the prison.

4. Conclusion

During the 1910s, a small group of collaborating Westernized intellectuals decided that imitating the French model was the most important task to be completed in order for Vietnam to become a *văn minh* nation. During the 1920s, intellectuals continued their effort to imitate the French model, and some of them invented the native religion Caodaism, which deifies many foreign writers and poets, including French novelist Victor Hugo, English playwright William Shakespeare, and Chinese poet Li Bai. At the same time, however, intellectuals also became more objective toward the French model, and increasingly sought to define Vietnam's uniqueness and prove that Vietnam was as *văn minh* as France and China. This desire was manifested in the surging interest in collecting folk sayings, folklores, and folksongs, which were supposedly free of the contamination of Chinese culture, and canonizing the *Nôm* poem *Truyện Kiều*, which was a remake of the Chinese novel *Jin Yun Qiao Juan*.

By canonizing *Truyện Kiều*, Vietnamese intellectuals, especially those who were associated with the Francophile AFIMA, tried to emphasize that Vietnam was capable of not only equaling France, but also surpassing China. They also stressed that only through Western literary criticism could *Truyện Kiều*'s extraordinary literary value be unearthed and truly appreciated. Nevertheless, the canonization of *Truyện Kiều* was a contentious process in which one former *Duy Tân* activist challenged the position of the collaborating Westernized intellectuals within the cultural fields by objecting to the AFIMA's effort to celebrate a poem derived from an obscure Chinese novel as the masterpiece of Vietnamese literature. Other *Duy Tân* activists, though unhappy about collaborating intellectuals' prestige, remained silent with regard to the latter's loud promotion of *Truyện Kiều* until the 1930s. The controversies around *Truyện Kiều* also indicated the changing perception of proper gender roles. During the pre-colonial period, it was widely held that girls from decent families were not supposed to read

Truyện Kiều, or they would go astray like the heroine of the poem. Some intellectuals feared that once *Truyện Kiều* was canonized, it would be read by more girls, putting their chastity and virtue at risk.

After the previous decade's imitation and translation of Chinese and French novels, Vietnamese intellectuals began to produce their own original works during the 1920s. The most notable and influential was *Tố Tâm*, a tragic love story that recounted how the traditional family system killed the perfect love between two innocent young Westernized intellectuals. The author stressed that his motive in composing *Tố Tâm* was to contribute to national literature, and to this end, he had completely followed the French literary model and borrowed the latest thoughts and ideas from psychology, philosophy, and sociology. But the plot of *Tố Tâm* also resembled Chinese "Mandarins and butterflies" romantic novels popular in urban cities between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, even though the influence of the Chinese literary model was not recognized. During the 1920s, the Chinese model was losing its political credibility, but its cultural appeal was still strong, though now in a more implicit form. In addition to *Tố Tâm*, whose plot was similar to contemporary Chinese romantic stories, the reform *cải lương* theatre that drew on many popular Chinese novels also testified to the fact that the Chinese model became an intimate yet implicit model for Vietnam's vernacular literary development.

Chapter Six

The Art of Becoming Vietnamese: Emulation and Differentiation in the Cultural Fields in the 1930s

In the past we were Chinese. Gradually we became Westerners. Now we have to become Annamese. Only then can we contribute to the human race's common progress toward the Truth and Beauty.

–Hà Nội báo (The Hanoi Newspaper), January 17, 1936

Currently, the world's situation can be compared to a huge and noisy meeting, and we Vietnamese are not allowed to say even a word. What a disgrace to a nation of four-thousand-year history! The reason why we have to put up with this disgrace is because we have not had our own culture. That is right—the Vietnamese nation never has had its own culture. From thoughts and ideas to religion, to arts and literature, we Vietnamese, commoners and intellectuals alike, only have lived with whatever that came from China. Our ancestors idolized Chinese culture to the point that they just sat by and watched our national spirit paralyzed and eventually merged into that great culture. What happened then is that our nation became a group of people without character, personality, and position in the world's history, and we were said to be nothing more than pupils of China. All of a sudden, bad luck struck down and broke the ancient tree of Chinese culture, and Vietnam, this tree's parasitic branch, was also swept and broken, then, accidentally, found itself grafted to another tree. Currently, we are interacting intimately with a culture whose richness and delicacy know no bounds, and that is French culture. This change entails both good and bad things: it made us aware of the painful mistake we made before, and it gives us a glimpse into the future. Yet at the same time it also threatens to engulf us with something damaging to our spirit. Therefore, now that we are done with the life of a parasitic branch, we

should not be consent to a parasitic life forever. Once we understand this, we understand that we urgently need to establish ourself a culture, a Vietnamese culture. And this is a question of life and death for our whole nation of twenty-five millions souls.

–Tao Đàn (The Literary Society), no. 1, 1939

The two quotes above, one from the weekly *Hà Nội báo* in 1936 and another from the intellectual journal *Tao Đàn* in 1939, revealed Vietnamese intellectuals' hunger for their country to be recognized as a distinctive and respectful culture in which its people could rightfully take pride and their deep distress about the lack of such a culture. During the 1920s, Vietnamese intellectuals began to search for Vietnam's "national soul" while continuing to emulate both France and China. They began to question the very nature of their nation and what it meant to "be Vietnamese." The cry for an authentically Vietnamese culture was heard repeatedly throughout the 1930s, and intellectuals offered suggestions and advice on how to locate and establish Vietnam's uniqueness. Even Marxist theory, a theory deeply hostile to nationalism, was appropriated by historian Đào Duy Anh (1904-1988) as a tool to separate non-Vietnamese cultural elements from Vietnamese ones (Đào Duy Anh 2002).

On the other hand, however, since the mid 1930s, taking advantage of the new freedom of speech granted by the leftist Popular Front government in Paris, Vietnam's Marxian intellectuals in the Indochinese Communist Party also surfaced from their underground activities and began to infiltrate into the cultural fields by challenging the obsession with identifying a national soul and establishing national uniqueness. By starting a debate over whether arts and literature were ends to themselves or means to other ends, these Marxian intellectuals also challenge the independence of the cultural fields. Other political parties, such as the Vietnam Nationalist Party (the VNQDD), the New Vietnam Party (the *Tân Việt*), and the Like-Minded Society (the *Tâm Tâm Xã*) I mentioned in Chapter Five, set up small publishers to translate and publish radical books from Chinese into Vietnamese, yet these parties never sought to intervene into the cultural fields; nor did they present a coherent political ideology other than overthrowing the French colonizer. The Marxian intellectuals, also known as "sociologists" ("nhà xã hội học" in Vietnamese) and armed with historical materialism, differed from these other parties in that they were eloquent speakers who introduced a new form of political capital into the cultural fields—namely, the relationship with "common people" ("bình dân" in Vietnamese). Only through liberating common people from the oppressive relations of capitalism would Vietnam progress, they argued; obsessing with the independence of the cultural fields was thus not only stupid, but also a harmful preoccupation for commoners.

This chapter discusses the search for Vietnamese uniqueness in the 1930s, the most intellectually vibrant time period in Vietnam during the colonial era. During this decade, four major and two minor intellectual debates took place, far outnumbering those in the earlier decades; the number of vernacular periodicals and novels that appeared in the 1930s also surpassed the sum of those published from 1868 to 1929. This outpouring of intellectual and literary expression can be attributed to two factors. First, the left-winged Popular Front won legislative election in France in 1935, thus fueling Vietnamese intellectuals' hopes for colonial reformation and greater, even if only superficial room to openly debate issues previously limited to underground materials in the preceding decades, including radical thoughts such as socialism and historical materialism. Second, intellectuals who were far more comfortable with the French cultural model than the Chinese one were now fully established as the native elite class in place of Confucian scholars. These intellectuals included graduates of Franco-Vietnamese schools and intellectuals who had returned Vietnam from study in France. They became the major contenders of the cultural fields, revolted against their predecessors' model of what constituted civilization and uniqueness, and competed with each other over their mastery of the French model.

1. Colonial Policies on Education and Publishing

1.1. Education

Figure 6.1 below compares the evolution of Franco-Vietnamese schools and village schools during the 1920s and the 1930s. By 1939, the number of elementary schools dropped from 3,121 in 1920 to 2,309 (812 less); by contrast, the number of village schools grew from 1,823 in 1929 to 2,742 (819 more) in 1939, indicating that Franco-Vietnamese schools not only failed to replace Sino-Vietnamese communal schools, but also failed to meet the native need for education. Some of the elementary schools that had disappeared were upgraded to primary schools, the only Franco-Vietnamese school cycle that experienced growth throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Upper primary schools and secondary schools hit their highest numbers in 1929, and then remained pretty steady in the 1930s (Kelley 1975: 76-78).

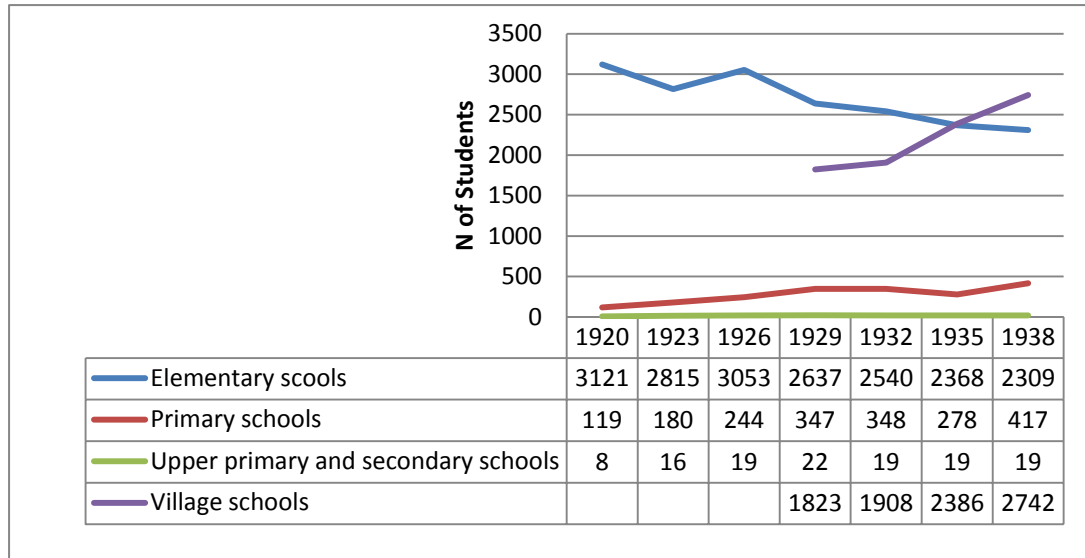


Figure 6.1: Growth of Franco-Vietnamese schools and village schools in 1920, 1923, 1926, 1929, 1932, 1935, and 1938

The regional breakdown shows that Annam had the most Franco-Vietnamese schools in 1920 (1,169), but this number decreased drastically in 1929, and by 1939 there were only 200 official schools left in Annam. Conversely, Cochinchina had the fewest Franco-Vietnamese schools in 1920 (953), but the number here swelled so much that by 1939 Cochinchina had the most Franco-Vietnamese schools among the three *pays* (1,350). Unsurprisingly, Annam, the most culturally reserved *pays* where the imperial exam was the last abolished among the three *pays* in 1919, had the largest student body in Sino-Vietnamese village schools among the three *pays*, even though it had fewer village schools than Tonkin, as Table 6.1 and Figure 6.3 show, respectively. In other words, the level at Annam’s education need was met was the lowest among the three *pays*.

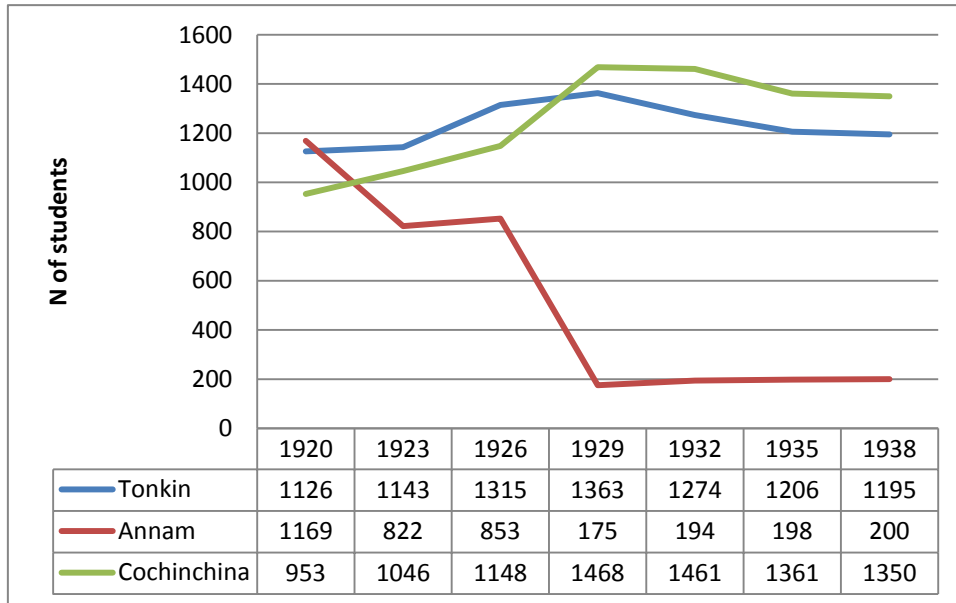


Figure 6.2: Growth of Franco-Vietnamese schools in three pays in 1920, 1923, 1926, 1929, 1932, 1935, and 1938

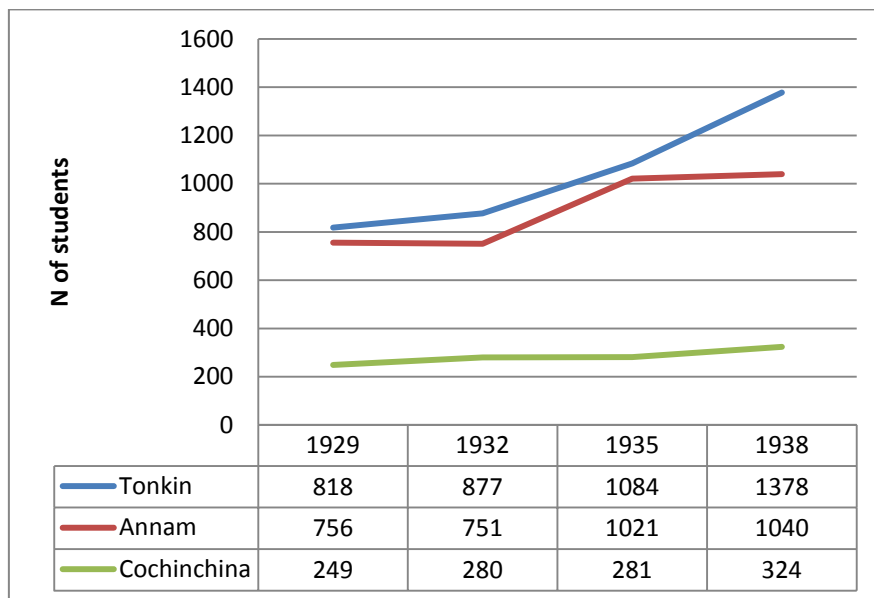


Figure 6.3: Growth of Sino-Vietnamese schools in three pays in 1929, 1932, 1935, and 1938

Table 6.1: Village school growth in three pays in 1929, 1932, 1935, and 1938

	1929	1932	1935	1938
Tonkin				
Schools	818	877	1,084	1,378
Students	25,502	29,060	42,414	59,555
% of students in village schools	22.2	24.9	30.6	36.0
Annam				
Schools	756	751	1,021	1,040
Students	33,020	31,416	52,642	62,430
% of students in village schools	58.3	53.3	64.4	61.0
Cochinchina				
Schools	249	280	281	324
Students	4,964	5,596	6,319	7,960
% of students in village schools	3.7	4.1	4.9	5.3
Three <i>pays</i>				
Schools	1,823	1,908	2,386	2,742
Students	63,489	66,072	101,375	129,945
% of students in village schools	20.9	21.2	29.0	31.2

In the 1930s, Franco-Vietnamese schools underwent some measure of “Vietnamization” both in terms of their teaching staff and curriculum. The indigenization of teaching staffs was prompted by the Great Depression, which made French teachers and staff too expensive for schools to support. Consequently, more Vietnamese teachers were recruited into Franco-Vietnamese schools, and fewer schools taught French in 1932 than in 1925 (Kelley 1975: 92). The Vietnamization of the curriculum was a result of the coming to power of the left-winged Popular Front in May 1936. The Popular Front government promised reforms for French colonies, and a new course on Vietnamese culture was one of the reform programs carried out by the administrative body. I turn to this new course in the following discussion on the dynamics of the cultural fields.

1.2. Publishing

Thanks to relatively liberal measures adopted by the colonial state toward colonial subjects’ freedom of speech, the decade of the 1930s witnessed an unprecedentedly drastic growth of vernacular periodicals. From 1930 to 1939, there were 394 quốc ngữ periodicals published in Vietnam. The total number of published vernacular periodicals from 1862 to 1929 was 93, but over the following decade this number tripled. In Figures 6.4 and 6.5 below, I use Huỳnh Văn Tông’s (2000) data to show the growth of vernacular periodicals throughout the colonial era. Figure 6.4 shows the number of new published vernacular periodicals by year, and Figure 6.5 breaks down that number by decade. This growth stopped abruptly in the 1940s, as the Second World War broke out in 1939. Of these nearly four hundred vernacular

periodicals, twenty-six of them were literary ones.

Compared to the 1920s, when there was only one literary periodical, namely, *Tân Đà's An Nam tạp chí* (1926-1933), the growth of literary periodicals in the 1930s was impressive, not to mention the fact that almost all periodicals carried serialized novels, indicating that both the vernacular literature and the vernacular reading public in Vietnam were maturing. Another sign of the maturity of vernacular literature was the emergence of works of literary criticism, the first of which was published during the 1930s. Thiều Sơn, the author of *Phê bình và thảo luận* (Criticism and Essays, 1933) explained in the preface that he had been aware of the lack of literary criticism in Vietnam's vernacular literature, and he deliberately set out to fill this lacunae (Thiều Sơn 1933). In the book, Thiều Sơn argued that while other nations started journalism on the foundation of their literary accomplishments, Vietnam would not have its own literature without vernacular periodicals (Thiều Sơn 1933). Ten satirical periodicals also emerged that used humor to comment on news, trends, and current situations, reflecting the influence of French satirical literature on Vietnamese intellectuals.

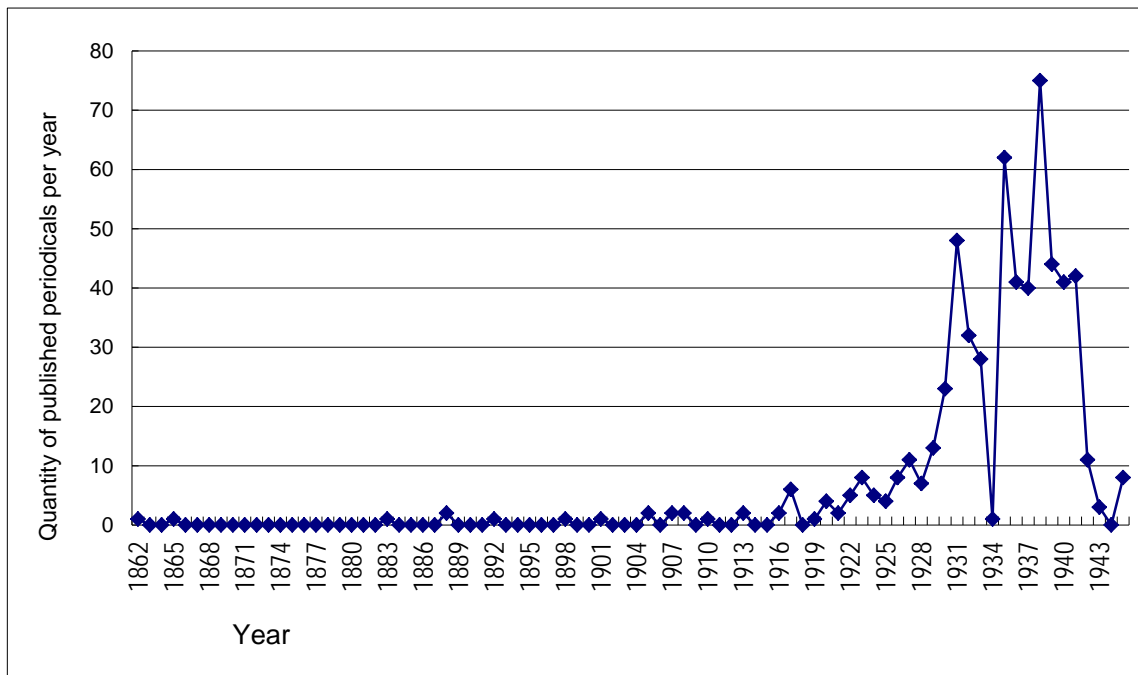


Figure 6.4: Yearly growth of vernacular periodicals in colonial Vietnam from 1862 to 1943

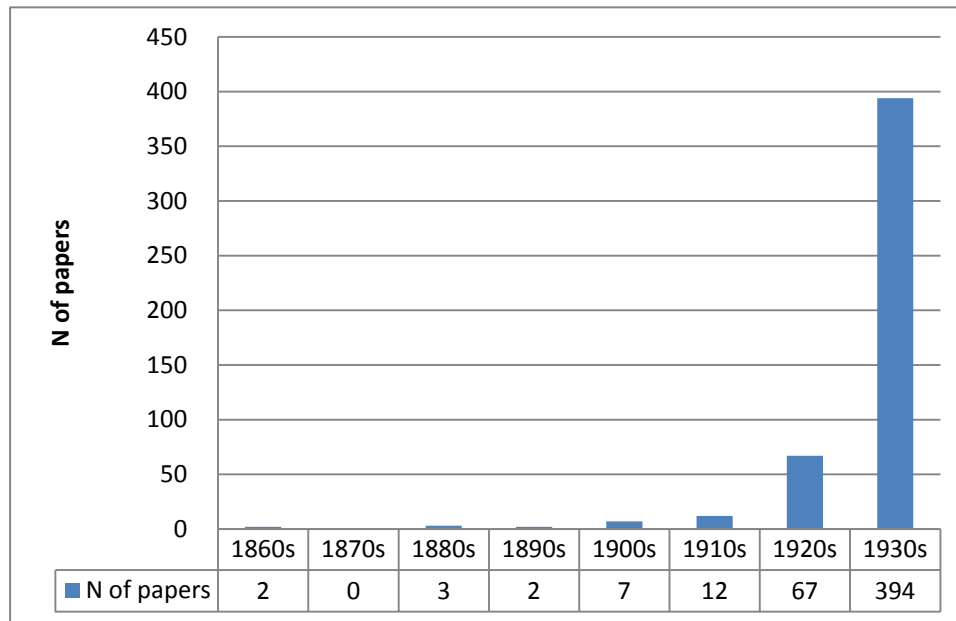


Figure 6.5: Growth of vernacular periodicals in colonial Vietnam in the 1860s, the 1870s, the 1880s, the 1890s, the 1900s, the 1910s, the 1920s, and the 1930s

During the 1930s, *Nam Phong*, the intellectual journal sponsored by the colonial state and run by famous collaborating intellectual Phạm Quỳnh, was no longer able to dominate the cultural fields as it did in the 1920s; in fact, it ceased publication in 1934. Instead, The crown of the most influential vernacular periodicals in the 1930s were Vietnamese businessman Nguyễn Đức Nhuận's (1902-1968) *Phụ nữ tân văn* (Women's News, 1929-1934) in Cochinchina, the Self-Reliance Literary Group's two organs *Phong Hóa* (Ethos, 1932-1935) and *Ngày Nay* (Today, 1935-1941) in Hanoi, as well as dramatist Vũ Đình Long's *Tiểu thuyết thứ bảy* (Novels on Saturdays, 1934-1944) in Hanoi, all of which were weeklies. Of these periodicals, *Tiểu thuyết thứ bảy* catered to the reading public's interests, while *Phong Hóa* and *Ngày Nay* served the purpose of establishing a national literature for Vietnam, and *Tiểu thuyết thứ bảy* had been *Phong Hóa*'s and *Ngày Nay*'s fierce competitor. I talk more about *Phong Hóa* and *Ngày Nay* in the following section.

2. The Dynamics of the Cultural Fields in the 1930s

After the Popular Front government came to power in May 1936, it promised reforms in French colonies, and one of the measures it took was to decree that Franco-Vietnamese schools start teaching a class on Vietnamese culture in the upper primary cycle. The colonial state entrusted Đào Duy Anh, a native of Annam and a

graduate of the Collège Quốc Học at Huế, Annam's only secondary school, with the task of textbook compilation. During the 1920s, he was a member of the New Vietnam Revolutionary Party (the *Tân Việt Cách Mạng Đảng*), which was based in Annam area and comprised mainly of intellectuals graduated from the Collège Quốc Học. In 1929, Đào Duy Anh and other party members were arrested and briefly imprisoned. After he was released the following year, he committed himself fully to the academic field and the journalistic field: he helped his senior countryman and Confucian scholar Huỳnh Thúc Kháng run Annam area's first *quốc ngữ* periodical *Tiếng Dân* by translating its articles into French in entirety and submitting them forty-eight hours before publication to the political Sûreté for censoring (Nguyễn Thế Anh 1986)¹; he single-handedly compiled two influential dictionaries, namely, *Chinese-Vietnamese Dictionary* (Hán-Việt Từ Điển) in 1932 and *French-Vietnamese Dictionary* (Pháp-Việt Từ Điển) in 1936; he also founded a publishing house and translated books from Chinese to introduce Marxism and historical materialism to Vietnam. He was convinced that the light of Marxism could “discover the cultural capital (vốn văn hóa) of our nation and select the best of it to contribute to the transformation of our nation's culture” and that only through studying Vietnam's history could the cultural elements be separated from the foreign ones” (Đào Duy Anh 2002: 48).²

After he finished compiling the *French-Vietnamese Dictionary*, Đào Duy Anh started working on the textbook for the new course, and the product was *An Outline of Vietnam's Cultural History* (Việt Nam văn hoá sử cương), published in 1938. This book presented for the first time the “resistance against foreign invasions” theme, which was widely accepted by Vietnamese intellectuals during this decade and is still central to present-day Vietnam's official historiography. In this book, Đào Duy Anh argued that the Vietnamese nation existed since remote antiquity, and Vietnamese people were a hybrid race of Malaysian, Indonesian, and Mongolian racial stock. Đào Duy Anh argued for the antiquity of a distinctive Vietnamese national identity, which he believed was evidenced in local elites' repeated uprisings ever since Vietnam was incorporated into the Chinese map. This national identity grew stronger and stronger over the course of time until China was no longer able to control the troubled area. After Vietnam's independence in the tenth century, China tried to reclaim its lost

¹ According to Nguyễn Thế Anh (1986), only *Tiếng Dân* was subjected to this regime. Other vernacular newspapers did not have to turn in their articles in entirety forty-eight hours ahead of publication.

² The Vietnamese word “vốn văn hóa” literally means “cultural capital” and is the coinage modern Vietnamese sociologists use to translate Pierre Bourdieu's concept “cultural capital.” Yet, during the colonial time “vốn văn hóa” designated cultural heritage, rather than Bourdieusian cultural capital. Only after the *đổi mới* economic reform took place in the 1980s did “vốn văn hóa” begin to be tied to Bourdieusian sociological analysis. <http://www.viet-studies.info/THDung/VonVanHoa.htm>, last accessed April 29, 2013.

territory over and over again, only to humiliate itself and actually strengthen the national identity of the Vietnamese people.

In addition to the persistent resistance against the North, Đào Duy Anh also discussed Vietnam's long history of *Nam tiến* (Marching to the South). Because Vietnam enjoyed a higher level of civilizational development in Southeast Asia, Đào Duy Anh pointed out, it was able to continue extending its territory until it finally concluded its long march southward by annexing the whole Champa Kingdom in the eighteenth century. Đào Duy Anh justified this march on the grounds that Vietnam had been densely populated, and it simply did what it had to do to survive. That pre-colonial Vietnam was able to destroy an ancient kingdom seemed to offer some comfort to Vietnamese intellectuals. A traditionalist Confucian scholar Ngô Văn Triện (1901-1947) in Tonkin area wrote a book entitled *The History of Our Nation's Marching to the South: The Stories of How Our Nation Destroyed Champa and Siem Reap* (Lịch sử nam tiến của dân tộc ta: Truyện nước ta giết Chiêm Thành lẫn Chân Lạp) in 1929.³ In his interview with Lê Thanh (1943), Ngô Văn Triện said he had always wondered why Vietnam did not have the “glory” (“vinh quang” in Vietnamese) of annexing other countries as France and China did, until he discovered, to his delight, the history of *nam tiến*. He explained that he decided to put this history together to encourage his fellow Vietnamese.

During the pre-colonial period, China was the standard against which Vietnamese intellectuals anxiously measured themselves in their effort to assure that Vietnam, too, was a *văn hiến chi bang* and deserved its respect. China as the standard and source of *văn hiến* began to shatter in the late nineteenth century with the arrival of the French, and the glory of *văn hiến* paled in comparison to Western *văn minh*. A new understanding of China and Sino-Vietnamese relationships was badly needed and had been heatedly debated, and Đào Duy Anh's book offered an excellent summary of the role of China that Vietnamese intellectuals had painted in the emergence and consolidation of Vietnamese national identity.

That China's role in Sino-Vietnamese history was settled in a textbook did not necessarily mean that Vietnamese intellectuals' anxiety to prove their nation's worthiness was abated. As the lengthy passages quoted at the outset of this chapter show, Vietnamese intellectuals were very concerned during this decade with proving to the world that Vietnam, like other nations, had a distinctive and sophisticated culture. During the 1920s, Vietnamese intellectuals had been concerned to define Vietnam's national essence, and they did not mind emulating France and appropriating French and Chinese cultural elements as necessary, even as they began

³ The Siem Reap Kingdom was annexed by Champa in the fifteenth century, which was absorbed by Vietnam in the eighteenth century.

to harbor some doubts about the applicability of the French model. The era of the 1930s departed from the preceding decade in that while intellectuals in the 1920s compared their cultural accomplishments with French and Chinese cultures in order to assert that Vietnam, too, was unique and civilized, in this decade they wanted to show that Vietnam was unique and civilized on its own terms, and they took offense at intellectuals' unabashed imitation in previous decades and in the pre-colonial period. To some Vietnamese intellectuals, Vietnamese culture had become so hybrid as a result of emulating first China and then France that the authentic Vietnamese cultural elements were now obscured or even in danger of disappearing. Determining what these pure Vietnamese cultural elements were and restoring them became one of the most debated topics of the 1930s.

2.1. The Debates over National Uniqueness

The cultural fields in the early 1930s were very much dominated by reformed Confucian scholar and writer Phan Khôi (1887-1959), who initiated almost all debates in this time period. Phan Khôi inherited Chinese cultural capital from his family, and managed to hybridize his cultural backgrounds when he learned French and acquired some political capital from his involvement in the *Duy Tân* Movement. He was born to a prominent, high-ranking mandarin family in the conservative Annam area, and his family's anti-French record was so impressive that it is still recounted in Vietnamese pupils' history textbooks today. Phan Khôi's maternal grandfather was Hoàng Diệu (1829-1880), governor of Hanoi of the Nguyễn royal court who committed suicide when Hanoi fell under the military attacks of the French troops. His father Phan Trân was a junior doctor and served briefly for the French administration. Phan Trân angrily ended his career with the French when he was shocked by a "savage" scene in which a French woman caressed her pet dog in a French banquet (Phan Thị Mỹ Khanh 2001). Following the convention of well-to-do Confucian families in pre-colonial Vietnam, Phan Trân sent his son to learn Chinese and classical texts with the best private tutor he could find in his village, in order to prepare his son for the imperial examination. The tutor was Trần Quý Cáp (1879-1908), who was only eight years older than Phan Khôi and one of the prominent leaders of the *Duy Tân* Reform Movement. Influenced by his teacher, Phan Khôi left for Hanoi in the early 1900s both to participate in the movement and to learn French, a language that was still considered barbaric in his hometown. Phan Khôi's first journey to *văn minh* did not end well: his teacher was executed by the French power at age twenty-eight for his involvement in the peasants' anti-tax movement in the Annam area; Phan Khôi, at twenty, was jailed for the same crime along with Huỳnh Thúc Kháng (1876-1947) and Ngô Đức Kế (1878-1929), two prominent Confucian scholars and Phan Khôi's senior

comrades in Annam.

After he was released from prison, Phan Khôi went to Hanoi to work for Phạm Quỳnh's *Nam Phong* for a brief time. He then went on to write short stories, poems, and scholarly comments on Chinese and Sino-Vietnamese literary works in both Chinese and Vietnamese for various vernacular periodicals in Tonkin and Cochinchina. Phan Khôi was a scholar with great intellectual curiosity, which he satisfied largely by reading Chinese newspapers and books. Equipped with his broad knowledge of the Chinese model, French language, and the latest intellectual debates in China, Phan Khôi proclaimed himself the “royal supervisor of the cultural field” (ngự sử văn đàn), and insisted that only through honest exchange and debate among intellectuals could truth be uncovered and Vietnam liberated from chronic darkness and stupidity.⁴

Phan Khôi's primary concern was to advance Vietnam's progress into *văn minh* by means of open intellectual debates, and he buried himself in archives in order to find out what his ancestors had achieved, in this way seeking to establish a marker of Vietnam's potential for *văn minh*. He was never hesitant to make known how disillusioned he was that his long and hard search in Vietnam's past—especially in the areas of national learning, Confucianism, and literature—found only few and mediocre cultural accomplishments. This kind of frustration with Vietnam's possibly slim hope of laying claim to cultural excellence had been unheard of in the past few decades. In the 1900s, intellectuals, most of them Confucian scholars, dreaded the doom that awaited Vietnam if it failed to reform itself into a *văn minh* nation in conformity with the Western standards, which to their eyes were represented by the French cultural model. In the next two decades, intellectuals continued to work on exposing, purging, and correcting every element of Vietnamese tradition that appeared “uncivilized” or detrimental to the progress to civilization. At the same time, they were also eager to prove to China and France that Vietnam was, or at least had the potential to be, as *văn minh* as the West and as unique as both the West and China. Intellectuals who were keen to prove Vietnam's civility, especially those who were Westernized, made a point of demonstrating that they were as capable of understanding the French cultural model as their colonizer. Others, especially Confucian scholars and neo-traditionalist Westernized intellectuals who could master Chinese texts, turned their eyes to dusty historical documents and illiterate commoners in the hope that they would locate some glorious cultural accomplishments to boast and celebrate. In their search, however, some intellectuals came to entertain serious doubts about and even contempt for Vietnam's past, which looked like anything but the proud heritage of a nation of *văn hiến* for four thousand

⁴ In imperial China, the royal supervisor (“Yu shi” in Chinese) functioned both as a historian and an inspector of the empire to prevent the Son of Heaven and his officials from abusing power.

years. Phan Khôi was one of those who expressed such disappointment and skepticism.

2.1.1. Debates on Confucianism

Phan Khôi was very consistent and passionate in insisting that in the era of imitating the West, Vietnamese people, both intellectuals and commoners, were in urgent need of thorough and accurate knowledge about Confucianism, including its beliefs, precepts, and how it had deteriorated in China and Vietnam. In his long essay “The Influence of Confucianism in Our Country” (1929) published in twenty-one issues of the periodical *Thần Chung* (The Morning Bell), Phan Khôi suggested that in contrast to the deep and far-reaching influence of Confucianism on Vietnam, Vietnamese people’s knowledge about Confucianism was shattered and impoverished. The illiterate worshiped Chinese characters (*chữ*) as if they were not mere words but incarnation of sages; the barely literate confused books written in Chinese with Confucian texts; and even the best literati had a very narrow understanding of Confucianism and saw it as a doctrine of ethics. Their superficial understanding led to the common misperception that Confucianism upheld rigid, hierarchical relationships in which kings, parents, and husbands had absolute authority over their servants and subjects, children, and wives, respectively. The imperial examination in China and Vietnam further aggravated and promulgated this distorted understanding of Confucianism when, in actuality, this emphasis on submission to hierarchical relationships was a far cry from what Confucius, the founder of Confucianism, taught in the fourth BC.

What, then, did Confucius teach? Phan Khôi argued that if logic, the science of reasoning and the only tool he believed would penetrate beyond the surface, was carefully applied to the investigation of Confucian texts, any reasonable person would arrive at the conclusion that Confucianism was, in fact, about democracy and equality based on altruistic benevolence. He blamed Confucian scholars in the Song Dynasty (960-1270) for turning Confucianism into dogmatism and watering it down with superstitious elements of Buddhism and Daoism. He urged intellectuals to employ the science of reasoning to discern those Confucian elements that had been absorbed into Vietnam’s collective identity from those corrupted ones that would hinder Vietnam’s progress to a new era of prosperity and dignity, a bright future that could be achieved only when the former were properly preserved and the latter discarded.

Phan Khôi was not the least interested in determining what “truth” was or whether or not Confucianism was truth. He simply assumed that whatever schools of thought existed in human history must contain at least a grain of truth (Phan Khôi 1929). His reflections of Confucianism were inspired by the debates on Confucianism

among contemporary Chinese intellectuals, who had been haunted by the sociological question of why China failed to create an endogenous form of industrial capitalism since the nineteenth century and had been trying to prove that Chinese cultural accomplishments were not incompatible with their Western counterparts.⁵ His arguments were in line with patriotic Confucian scholar Phan Bội Châu (1867-1940), who wrote *The Lamp of Confucianism* (Khổng Học Đẳng, 2001c [year uncertain]) after he was seized by the French police in China and sent back to Vietnam under house arrest in 1925. In *The Lamp of Confucianism*, as in his many short stories, Phan Bội Châu sought to expose the ironic barbarity inherent in French “civilization” by showing that Confucianism was a philosophy of humanitarianism, benevolence, and equality. But unlike Phan Bội Châu, French colonization was never Phan Khôi’s target, for he believed that it was not France, but Vietnam that was responsible for its own downfall.

Both Phan Bội Châu’s book and Phan Khôi’s essay were little noticed despite the fame of their authors, especially the former. When neo-traditionalist scholar Trần Trọng Kim (1883-1953) published his influential *Confucianism* (Nho Giáo) in 1930 to “restore the truth of Confucianism as it was unfolded in history” (Trần Trọng Kim 1992 [1930]: viii), Phan Khôi got his chance both to propagate his idea and illustrate what he considered to be illuminating exchanges via logical reasoning among intellectuals. The author of Vietnam’s first scholarly project to employ Western methodology to analyze the evolution of Confucianism in Chinese history, Trần Trọng Kim was an eminent teacher and scholar in the academic field. Like Phan Khôi, Trần Trọng Kim was born to a Confucian family, though in northern rather than central Vietnam. After he received some basic knowledge of Chinese learning at home, he went on to learn French at the Collège of Interpretation in Hanoi and then received a university diploma in education in France. Since completing his higher education, he had been teaching, writing for Phạm Quỳnh’s *Nam Phong* and Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh’s *Đông Dương tạp chí* (Indochina Review), and compiling history textbooks and pedagogical manuals for Franco-Vietnamese schools.

In the preface to *Confucianism*, Trần Trọng Kim modestly acknowledged that because he was not a Confucian scholar and might not be the best candidate to launch an enormously difficult project about a classical set of teachings that had so profoundly impacted all of East Asia. The reason he was attempting the task in spite of his inadequacy, Trần Trọng Kim explained, was that Confucianism in Vietnam was

⁵ Chinese intellectuals are not the only ones who have asked this question, Western social scientists also find it interesting. The fact that China and the West were at equivalent levels of technical development in the 1500s makes this question all the more intriguing. Both Karl Marx and Max Weber have attempted to use the case of late pre-modern China to test their materialist hypotheses and their approach to the value system, respectively.

facing the most serious crisis since people began rushing to embrace the trend of Westernization in the late nineteenth century. Confucianism was brushed aside at best in this process and deeply misunderstood at worst. It was tragic, Trần Trọng Kim lamented, because Vietnam had always been a deeply Confucianized nation wherein Confucian doctrine had shaped moral thoughts, customs, politics, and nearly every other social domain. Unfortunately for Vietnam, since the followers of Confucianism in the past were merely interested in using it to pass the imperial exam so as to gain fame and wealth, they had only studied belles-lettres and totally missed its essence. It was little wonder since the arrival of Western *văn minh* that Vietnamese people had been increasingly impatient with this shallow and false version of Confucianism, and even Confucian scholars who used to be hostile to Western learning now all turned their back on Confucianism.

In order to cure people's misunderstanding of Confucianism, Trần Trọng Kim put Confucianism in the context of the history of China and painstakingly offered a detailed overview of its historic development. While Phan Khôi and Phan Bội Châu drew their inspiration from the Chinese model, Trần Trọng Kim was more influenced by famous French orientalist Édouard Émmanuel Chavannes (1865-1918) in dissecting Confucianism into two parts: one was the metaphysical component, which discussed the genesis of the world and the relationships between Heaven, Earth, and Humanity; the other was the physical component, which dealt with how society as a whole should be organized and managed so that people in different roles and positions would interact with each other graciously and live a peaceful and prosperous life together. Trần Trọng Kim argued that in terms of the metaphysical realm, Confucianism's teaching was simple and very much akin to Buddhism and Daoism in believing that Heaven, Earth, and Humanity were all born out of mystical *Taiji* (the Great Ultimate) forces. Confucianism was more sophisticated in terms of the physical realms than the other two religions though, as it emphasized that people should live out the talents and potentials that Heaven bestowed upon them and make every effort to contribute to society's collective welfare so as to fulfill their obligations toward their home countries. This idea of man as a living blessing for everyone around him was embodied in the doctrine of the "gentleman" ("quân tử" in Vietnamese and "junzi" in Chinese), an ideal character that could be cultivated through moral education and the benevolent leadership of kings, fathers, and husbands that engendered loyalty, filial piety, and virtue in their servants and subjects, children, and wives, respectively.

Phan Khôi and Trần Trọng Kim shared some similarities in their critiques of Confucianism: both tried to restore "authentic" Confucianism through Western scientific methods; both hoped to preserve the "best" elements of Confucianism for Vietnam; and both blamed the imperial examination for the deterioration of the

original teachings of Confucius over the course of history. After Trần Trọng Kim's book was published, Phan Khôi published several commentaries from May to August 1930 both to praise Trần Trọng Kim for using scientific methods to study Confucianism, and to criticize some of his arguments. The first disagreement lay in their understanding of what Confucianism taught about hierarchical relationships. Phan Khôi insisted that Confucianism was about equality and altruistic love, whereas Trần Trọng Kim argued that a Confucian hierarchical relationship and a Confucianism-inspired monarchy rule were desirable. As a result, while Phan Khôi was critical of the influence of Song Confucianism, Trần Trọng Kim was not at all troubled by it. His neutral view toward Song Confucianism was unconventional among Vietnamese intellectuals, who as early as the 1900s had been criticizing Song Confucianism for deteriorating Vietnam's spirit. Second, while Phan Khôi sought to cleanse Confucianism of Daoist and/or Buddhist influence, Trần Trọng Kim had no problem with the Daoist influence on Confucianism. He maintained that Confucianism, like all other philosophies, always incorporated other schools of thought as it evolved (Trần Trọng Kim 1929, 1992 [1930]). Third, Trần Trọng Kim acknowledged that Eastern civilization, with its emphasis on stillness, was the opposite to its Western counterpart, which always valued motion and moving, yet he was optimistic about the possibility of Confucianism being incorporated into Western model. Phan Khôi, on the contrary, insisted that the differences between East and West were too huge and radical for the former to be absorbed into the latter, reasoning that Confucianism advised people of what to do and think without really telling them why and how. For Phan Khôi, Confucianism was no more than a legacy that defined Vietnamese people as an East Asian nation, and it was not compatible with Western scientific ways of thought, and hence the neo-traditionalists' dream of grafting Confucianism onto the Western model so as to create a new learning for Vietnam was just a bad joke.

Trần Trọng Kim responded to Phan Khôi's critiques once (Trần Trọng Kim 1929), expressing his appreciation for Phan Khôi's effort to facilitate open and candid debate among intellectuals. He also repeated the points he made in his book. Compared to Trần Trọng Kim, Phan Khôi was far more eager to use *Confucianism* as an example to demonstrate what scientifically sound scholarship was supposed to be. For instance, he used *Confucianism* to contrast some Vietnamese intellectuals' sloppiness in handling *quốc ngữ* script (Phan Khôi 1930b). He warned that since *quốc ngữ* was still young and immature, if intellectuals were not careful in choosing the right words and spelling them correctly, *quốc ngữ* would always remain too primitive to carry out advanced scientific and philosophical thinking.

After the exchange with Trần Trọng Kim, Phan Khôi continued to criticize many

harmful influences of the diluted, distorted version of Confucianism on Vietnamese society, such as arranged marriage, familial arrangements and obligations, and women's lowly status in family and society (Phan Khôi 1931b, 1932a, 1932c, 1932d, 1932e). Phan Khôi's straightforward and aggressive style and his low regard for the "bad" Vietnamese version of Confucianism turned him into the most high-profile intellectual in the cultural fields in the early 1930s. Confucian scholar and romantic poet Tấn Đà was so irritated that he described the controversies created by Phan Khôi in the journalistic field as "havoc," and he even called for a campaign to "eliminate Phan Khôi the scoundrel in Cochinchina," asking that Phan Khôi be sentenced to death because he insulted ancestors of the Vietnamese nation (Tấn Đà 1932b, c).

2.1.2. Debates on National Learning

The second major debate that took place in the 1930s concerned Vietnam's national learning, and it was set in motion when Phan Khôi again quoted *Confucianism* to criticize intellectuals in the cultural fields. This time, Phan Khôi's target was Phạm Quỳnh, the most powerful intellectual in colonial Vietnam and Phan Khôi's former colleague at *Nam Phong* magazine. In his article entitled "Be warned, all you scholar-autocrats" (Cảnh Cáo Các Nhà Học Phiệt, 1930e), he cited Trần Trọng Kim as an exemplar of a true scholar, in order to contrast the arrogance of Phạm Quỳnh when he did not respond to (since) deceased Confucian scholar Ngô Đức Kế's criticism of his promotion of *The Tale of Lady Kiều* in 1924. As I discussed in Chapter Five, Ngô Đức Kế was Phan Khôi's senior countryman from Annam and fellow prisoner in the 1910s after the French power crushed the *Duy Tân* Reform Movement. Ngô Đức Kế published the article "Orthodox and Heterodox in National Literature" (1924b) to pronounce Phạm Quỳnh guilty of insulting writers, poets, and scholars in pre-colonial times by promoting an obscene and morally corrupt *Truyện Kiều* as the epitome of Vietnam's national literature. Phạm Quỳnh did not respond to Ngô Đức Kế's attack. Years later, after Ngô Đức Kế passed away, Phan Khôi picked up the topic and accused Phạm Quỳnh of being a "scholar autocrat" who, in order to promote his self-interest, monopolized and policed the intellectual field ("giới trí thức" in Vietnamese; the cultural fields in my study), which had long been desolate, and Phạm Quỳnh's silence in response to Ngô Đức Kế's criticism was proof of this. Phan Khôi called this silence a snobbish and cowardly thing, as it discouraged Vietnamese intellectuals from freely exchanging thoughts and ideas and hence caused great damage to Vietnam's intellectual field.

Phan Khôi seemed to make a mountain out of molehill by suggesting that Phạm Quỳnh's failure to respond to Ngô Đức Kế would slow Vietnam's intellectual progress, but his harsh words successfully forced Phạm Quỳnh to break his silence,

and his belated response (1930) unexpectedly triggered a new thread of debates. Phạm Quỳnh's responses could be divided into two parts. In the first part, he explained that he had never intended to refuse to have a friendly and scholarly discussion with Ngô Đức Kế, whom he held in high esteem for the heavy sacrifice he had made for the nation. Nevertheless, Phạm Quỳnh surmised, probably because Ngô Đức Kế was jealous of the success of both *Nam Phong* and the commemoration ceremony for Nguyễn Du held by the AFIMA (the Association for Annamite Intellectual and Moral Education) in which Phạm Quỳnh and Trần Trọng Kim gave speeches, Ngô Đức Kế wrote the article to attack Phạm Quỳnh and stimulate the sale of *Hữu Thanh*, the paper for which he worked. When faced with personal attacks, Phạm Quỳnh explained he would always remain silent, and he did the same with Ngô Đức Kế. He denied Phan Khôi's charge of being a "scholar-tyrant," asserting that he was just a follower of nationalism and he completely committed himself to promoting Vietnamese *quốc ngữ* and national literature in order to promote nationalism culturally, rather than politically.

It was the second part of Phạm Quỳnh's response that triggered the debates over Vietnam's national learning. In this part, Phạm Quỳnh echoed Phan Khôi's complaints that Vietnam's cultural horizon was desolate, and he offered his diagnosis of the real problem: the imperial examination, which demanded all educated men's time and energy for memorizing and mastering belles-lettres, and cultivated a mindset among intellectuals that viewed learning and education as no more than a means to fame and material gain. Phạm Quỳnh noted that he did not mean to be disrespectful of or ungrateful to Vietnam's preceding literati, but the truth was, sadly, they had failed to leave any worthwhile cultural legacy. The reason was that no one, not even those legendary scholars who were said to master Confucianism, had ever produced any original theories. On the contrary, scholars in Japan, which like Vietnam had long been China's pupil, were able to discover what their contemporary Chinese intellectuals failed to observe and proceed to propose new theories because they did not have to waste their time and energy on tedious and meticulous exam preparation. This stark contrast resulted from Vietnamese intellectuals' obsession with the imperial examination and their slavish mindset of emulating everything Chinese. The solution Phạm Quỳnh proposed was to establish an "association for reviving national learning" ("hội chấn hưng quốc học" in Vietnamese) and invite Confucian scholars and Westernized intellectuals to work together to create a national learning that was "neither Western nor Confucian" ("không Tây không Nho"), but that "had special characters that represented the spirit of Vietnamese nation" (Phạm Quỳnh 1930).

Phạm Quỳnh's idea was quickly vetoed by Phan Khôi, who gave two reasons for his opposition. First, since Vietnam had never produced its own form of national

learning, there was nothing to be revived. Second, given the fact that Vietnamese intellectuals had never understood the importance of truth-seeking, creating an association to unify different thoughts under one authority would only stop the free flow of ideas and thoughts. National learning, stated Phan Khôi, could only be built on a healthy aggregation of tested thoughts and ideas through open discussion and free exchange among intellectuals of different schools and camps.

Although Phan Khôi mocked Phạm Quỳnh's idea of establishing an organization to "revive" national learning, both men agreed that the lack of national learning, which was believed to be resulted from Vietnamese intellectuals' overtly pragmatic attitude toward learning, was one of the gravest problems for Vietnam's evolution. Both were also very honest about their huge disappointment at being members of a nation without its own learning. But what constituted national learning? It seems that both men equated national learning with high culture that required rigorous training in tastes and manners, and learning that involved classical rather than vocational or technical studies. To begin, Phạm Quỳnh (1931a) defined it as ideas and thoughts of a nation that exerted impact on scholars and intellectuals of the nation in question, had distinctive characteristics from those of other nations, and was manifested in printed works. Strictly speaking, Phạm Quỳnh argued, only a few ancient world civilizations such as China, India, Egypt, Rome, and Greece had produced original learning. Broadly defined, however, with its capability of absorbing and assimilating foreign cultures, every nation should be able to develop its own learning, at least theoretically, and Germany and France were two excellent examples. But sadly, Vietnam was an anomaly. Vietnam used to be part of China; northern Vietnam in particular, the area bordered with southern China, was nothing but a Guangdong province lost in the south.⁶ surviving wave after wave of invasions from a powerful and culturally advanced neighbor nearly exhausted all of Vietnam's resources, little time and energy was left for the Vietnamese people to refine their cultural accomplishments. This geographical proximity with China was compounded by ethnic affiliation, as both Vietnamese and southern Chinese were descended from the same Hundred Yue/Bách Việt family. As a result, Phạm Quỳnh concluded, Vietnamese people were thoroughly immersed in a slavishly dependent mentality that was absent in Japan, where the "evil" imperial examination was never allowed to take root. Phạm Quỳnh's solution to the problem was twofold: one had to selectively assimilate Western science and technology without abandoning Eastern moral philosophy, and develop Romanized Vietnamese writing script and national literature so that the future national learning would have an adequate means to express itself. This "cultural assimilationist nationalism" was the cause to which Phạm Quỳnh dedicated himself throughout his

⁶ Guangdong is the southernmost province of China.

life (Phạm Quỳnh 2007). It should be noted that even though Phạm Quỳnh used the term *đồng hóa*/assimilation, what he advocated was partial, rather than total, assimilation. As Francophile as he was, he never wanted his people to become French; he still wanted to preserve the “pure” Vietnamese cultural elements that he believed would soon be uncovered if careful observation and wise discernment were applied.

For his part, Phan Khôi (1931a, 1931b) followed contemporary Chinese intellectuals’ “new” definition of national learning as opposed to the “old” one: while originally *guo xue* (“quốc học” in Vietnamese) meant “national schools,” since the late 19th century intellectuals in Japan and China had increasingly used this term to refer to “the learning of a nation.” To Phan Khôi, it was fitting that Chinese intellectuals adopted the new definition of *guo xue*, because China did produce its own teachings and philosophies. As for Vietnam, Phan Khôi derided, its people were never interested in acquiring knowledge for knowledge’s sake, not to mention developed any systems of learning that were distinctively Vietnamese.

Phan Khôi gave several examples to illustrate his point. In a report on Sinology in France (1931a), Phan Khôi vented his frustration that students of a nation that boasted a four-thousand-year history had to travel all the way to France to study the true and original Chinese learning, which had long been lost in Vietnam as Vietnamese scholars had always been so narrowly focused on utilizing Chinese learning only to pass the imperial exam and ascend to social prominence. Interestingly, Phan Khôi was not particularly appreciative of French Sinologists’ statements regarding East Asia, which he found foolish at best and outrageous at worst.

In another essay that aimed to expose the poor quality of Vietnam’s traditional literature written in Chinese characters (1939a), Phan Khôi recalled how he came to realize the painful reality of Vietnam’s inadequate performance in culture after searching high and low in vain for anything worth being categorized as “national learning” in Vietnam’s traditional literature and historical documents. The most painful moment of disillusionment came when Phan Khôi discovered Liang Qi Chao’s comments on patriotic Confucian scholar Phan Bội Châu’s influential book *The History of the Loss of Vietnam* (Việt Nam Vong quốc sử, 1905, written in Chinese). As I discussed in Chapter Three, Liang Qi Chao was a famous Chinese reformed intellectual between late 19th and the early 20th centuries whose discussion of Japan’s successful *Meiji* Reformation and China’s failed attempt to duplicate it inspired the *Duy Tân* Reform Movement and the trend of studying in Japan in the 1910s. Phan Bội Châu, too, was on the list of Vietnamese pilgrims to Japan. During his stay in Japan, he got a chance to meet Liang Qi Chao, who published and wrote the foreword for his much-anticipated *The History of the Loss of Vietnam*, which other Vietnamese intellectuals in Japan smuggled into Vietnam. In his foreword to this book, Liang Qi

Chao asked Chinese readers to be patient with some unclear and unrefined languages they might occasionally come across throughout the book, which was purposefully left unedited in order to avoid distorting the author's original intention. Phan Khôi stated he was "dumbfounded" to find out that Phan Bội Châu's writing was still considered not polished enough by Liang Qi Chao. If one of Vietnam's best scholars and skilled writers like Phan Bội Châu was still unable to write decently in a writing script that had circulated among Vietnamese literati for millennia, Phan Khôi wondered, how awfully shabby Vietnam's other so-called literary masterpieces really were? Although Phan Khôi was resentful of Phạm Quỳnh's power and prestige in the cultural fields, the diagnosis and solution he offered were not radically different from that suggested by his enemy: the reliance on a foreign language and writing script impeded Vietnamese intellectuals in the past from fully expressing themselves, not to mention developing any systems of knowledge or philosophy. The Vietnamese people should thus admit their own inferiority and take immediate action to cultivate a mature and adequate written language.

Some intellectuals applauded Phan Khôi's candor; but others, especially Confucian scholars, were offended by his blatancy. Among them, Phan Khôi's brother-in-law Lê Dư (?-1967) and Nguyễn Trọng Thuật (1883-1940) were his fiercest opponents. All of these men were well versed in Chinese and *quốc ngữ* and had some knowledge of French language. All of them were well informed about Chinese debates and drew heavily on the similar controversies that had emerged first in Tokugawa Japan in the late 18th century when cultural elites attempted to resist the authoritative Song Confucianism by appealing to "restoring Japan's national learning," and next in Qing China a century later when China was struggling to survive the onslaught of Western imperialism. Lê Dư seemed to be one of Phan Khôi's childhood friends, and they accompanied each other in their trip from Annam to Hanoi to support the *Duy Tân* movement in the early 1900s. They, nonetheless, headed in different directions when the cultural fields were born out of the *Duy Tân* movement: Phan Khôi stayed in Vietnam to support the movement, while Lê Dư went to Japan to learn the latest military technology. Lê Dư's time in Japan was brief: together with his fellow Vietnamese students, was expelled by Japan in 1908 as a result of a treaty between Japan and France. Lê Dư went into exile in China and did not return to Vietnam until 1925, the year when reformed Confucian scholar Phan Chu Trinh also returned from France to Vietnam. Lê Dư then wrote for *Nam Phong* and found a job at the *École française d'Extrême-Orient*, where *Nam Phong's* editor-in-chief Phạm Quỳnh had also worked briefly before taking up his editorial position.

For Phan Khôi and Phạm Quỳnh, only the most valuable cultural, moral, and

intellectual accomplishments could be counted as national learning. For Lê Du, however, Vietnamese language, literature, history, and tradition were all included in the package of national learning, as they were cultural and symbolic representations of the Vietnamese nation's collective soul (Lê Du 1931a, 1931b). Phan Khôi (1931a) criticized Lê Du's definition as loose and confusing, lumping literature together with national learning. Lê Du defended his definition by showing that Japanese intellectuals in the Tokugawa period also had a very broad definition of national learning that included everything not Chinese. He further pointed out that Japanese intellectuals had been very passionate about identifying and promoting their learning for more than a century, and he was convinced that once the same level of enthusiasm and effort was applied to discover, treasure, and promote Vietnam's national learning, it soon would bear fruit.

Apparently, originality and universal impact were what Phan Khôi and Phạm Quỳnh were looking for when they evaluated what cultural representations qualified as national learning. Lê Du, on the other hand, saw national learning as no different from the Herderian sense of cultures in the plural form and insisted that every nation, including Vietnam, had its own viable culture. Yet, Lê Du was not aware of the German philosopher Herder, and he attributed the difference between himself and his brother-in-law and the most powerful collaborator to the mindset of idolizing the West: he contended that because Phan Khôi and Phạm Quỳnh were allegedly idolaters of everything Western and inevitably suffered self-depreciation and lived in denial, they were totally blind to the certain existence of Vietnam's national learning, even though it was not inferior to Japan at all. The reason why Vietnam's national learning seemed pale in comparison to Japan's was because it was either stolen away by the Chinese Ming troops after their brief reign in Vietnam from 1407 to 1427 or was destroyed by endless wars initiated by Chinese (Lê Du 1931a).

Lê Du suggested that both men might as well become Chinese, Egyptians, Greeks, or Romans, as they saw fit, if they were so ashamed of being Vietnamese. He then related a story about Sun Yat-Sen to show how mistaken their self-loathing was. Sun Yat-Sen is the national father of modern China and one of the three saints of Vietnam's native religion Caodaism (Cao Đài) founded in the late 1920s. The story told an exchange between Sun Yat-Sen and some Japanese politicians that took place when the former visited Japan after the Republican Revolution in 1911. When asked about his opinion of the future of Vietnam, it was reported that Sun Yat-Sen was not very optimistic. His concern was that Vietnamese people were too slavish to win independence. Certain Japanese who was familiar with Vietnamese history contradicted Sun Yat-Sen's evaluation by pointing out that its ethnic affiliation with people in Guangdong, Guangxi provinces notwithstanding, Vietnam managed to

develop into an autonomous kingdom in spite of China's repeated invasion, while Vietnamese people's ethnic kin in China had long been absorbed by Chinese civilization (Lê Dư 1931b).

The debate between two reformed Confucian scholars and in-laws caught the attention of Nguyễn Trọng Thuật, another Confucian scholar and former member of the Vietnam Nationalist Party (the VNQDD). Nguyễn Trọng Thuật was also a regular contributor to *Nam Phong*, and his novel "Watermelon" (Quả Dưa Đỏ, 1925), an adaptation from a medieval short story that recounted the mystical origins of watermelon in ancient Vietnam, was awarded with the best *quốc ngữ* novel by the AFIMA. He gave a talk entitled "Mediating the case of national learning" ("Điều đình cái án quốc học") for the *Hội Trí Tri* (la Société d'Enseignement Mutuel du Tonkin; the Society for Mutual Learning in Tonkin) in late 1931. In this talk, Nguyễn Trọng Thuật drew on Japan's debates on national learning that were translated and introduced by contemporary Chinese intellectuals, and he divided human knowledge into two parts: global and local, with the former referring to natural science and the latter history, geography, language, politics, laws, and arts born out of individual societies.⁷ Global knowledge was the common heritage of the world to which every nation and person could both access and contribute and, therefore, could be called "knowledge without borders." Local knowledge, on the other hand, was what constituted national learning: it belonged to and could only be fully appreciated by a particular nation. But local knowledge made significant contributions to the progress of global knowledge by testing it in local settings so that it could be verified, falsified, corrected, and improved. After defining national learning as local knowledge as opposed to global knowledge, Nguyễn Trọng Thuật made two inventories, one of Vietnam's cultural heritage and another of Japan's. He juxtaposed these two inventories and assured his audience that Japan's cultural accomplishments were, in fact, not particularly impressive and there was nothing to feel ashamed about Vietnam's national learning. In fact, Vietnamese people should be proud of their ancestors, particularly once they understood that Japan during the pre-modern era was spared the pains of the imperial examination, the suffocating Song Confucianism, and the frequent wars China had waged against its southern neighbor (Nguyễn Trọng Thuật 1931).

Phan Khôi (1931c, 1932) lost no time in rejecting Nguyễn Trọng Thuật's attempt at "mediating" between himself and Lê Dư even before he set eyes on the transcript of Nguyễn Trọng Thuật's talk. Phan Khôi called mediation one of Vietnamese Confucian scholars' "bad habits," which was derived from Confucian golden mean philosophy

⁷ The term I translate as "global knowledge" is 世界公學 and is of Sino-Japanese origin. Literally, it means "the universal learning of the world."

and had killed pre-colonial Vietnam's intellectual development by preventing open debates from happening in the name of harmonizing conflicts. Nguyễn Trọng Thuật deemed Phan Khôi's criticism as foolish, because "a nation without a learning" was oxymoron (1932). He also backed up Lê Dư's observation by referring to Lê Dư's position in the *École française d'Extrême-Orient*, which Nguyễn Trọng Thuật believed enabled Lê Dư to discover Vietnam's hidden treasure.

Their debates were put in theoretical perspective in Đào Duy Anh's (1904-1988) two scholarly books, *An Outline of Vietnam's Cultural History* (Việt Nam Văn Hoá Sử Gương, 1938) and *What is Culture?* (Văn Hoá Là Gì?, 1946). Both Đào Duy Anh and the participants in the debates followed Social Darwinism in their understanding of culture, civilization, and national learning. In *What is Culture?*, Đào Duy Anh defined culture as "what human beings achieve through their constant struggles to gradually break away the oppression of hostile nature" (văn hoá là thành tích của sự gắng sức không ngừng của loại người để thoát ly dần dần sự áp bách của tự nhiên) (1946: 7). Civilization was defined as "advanced culture" (một trình độ văn hoá khá cao) as opposed to "barbarian culture," with cultures of America, Europe, China, and India in the first category and Africans and American Indians in the second (1946: 6). In light of Đào Duy Anh's definition, "national learning" for Lê Dư and Nguyễn Trọng Thuật was just another term for culture, whereas for Phan Khôi and Phạm Quỳnh it referred exclusively to civilization, i.e., advanced culture. Đào Duy Anh's book was the first systematic investigation into the elusive term "culture" in colonial Vietnam's academic field and the nationalist cultural field.

After the late 1930s, it was generally agreed by intellectuals that whereas a viable culture with distinctive characters did exist in Vietnam that merited recognition and required great care, the existence of high culture, namely, a national learning, was problematic at the least (Bùi Công Trùng 1939; Hoài Thanh 1939; Vũ Ngọc Phan 1941). Thiều Sơn, the author of colonial Vietnam's first work of literary criticism, reviewed the controversy among the aforementioned four intellectuals and made some insightful remarks (Thiều Sơn 1933). He quoted a Chinese scholar's discussion of the relationship between knowledge and "nhân cách," a Sino-Vietnamese transliteration of "ren ge," which literally means "human differentiation" and is the Chinese translation of "personality," "integrity," and "dignity." According to Thiều Sơn's interpretation of this Chinese scholar's statement, the first step of developing knowledge ("xue wen" in Chinese and "học vấn" in Vietnamese) was "nhân" (ren), i.e., becoming human through imitating the strengths of others; the second step was to acquire "cách" (ge), i.e., develop differences on the basis of resemblance with others. Thiều Sơn then commented that Vietnam did not have national learning, since it borrowed all its knowledge from China and never generated any differences from

Chinese learning, remained true even after Sino-Vietnamese ties were severed, because Vietnamese intellectuals had to model after France so as to differentiate Vietnam from China.

2.2. The Competition between Westernized Intellectuals and Confucian Scholars in the Debates on the New Poetry

In the midst of arguing over the quality of Vietnam's cultural and intellectual achievements, Phan Khôi shook off his scholarly temperament somewhat and wrote a poem on love that, probably to Phan Khôi's own amazement, would be credited as "Vietnam's first new poem (thơ mới) in history" by both Phan Khôi's contemporary youthful Westernized peers and historians of Vietnamese literature (Phạm Thế Ngũ 1986 [1961]). Yet, it was the Self-Reliance Literary Group (Tự Lực văn đoàn) that really set in motion the debate and the "New Poetry Movement" (Phong trào Thơ mới) in 1932, changing Vietnam's literary horizon forever. Phan Khôi did not intend to start a debate, nor was he involved when the debate began.

Phan Khôi's poem was entitled "Love of an aged couple" (Tình già), and it appeared in March 1932 in Cochinchina's *Women's News* (Phụ nữ tân văn), to which Phan Khôi was a regular contributor at the time. Before I delve into Phan Khôi's poem and its innovation, it is necessary to explain briefly Vietnam's traditional poetry. Compared to prose, especially fictional prose, verse was a developed and well-received narrative mode in pre-colonial Vietnam. Popular verse forms included poetry, ballads, and songs, and among them poetry was held in the highest regard. Poetry generally followed one of three styles: the Chinese Tang style (Đường luật), a highly polished and complex poetic style developed in the Chinese Tang Dynasty (618-907 A.D.) that retained an elitist aura and was composed largely by Vietnamese literati; the Sino-Vietnamese six eight ("Lục bát") and double-seven-six-eight ("Song thất lục bát") meters, both of which were native variations of the Tang style, usually written in *Nôm* and more accessible than the Tang style, hence popular among both the literati and illiterate commoners. The legendary *The Tale of Kiều* is written in this character-based script. One of pre-colonial Vietnam's most famous Đường luật poets was Hồ Xuân Hương, a concubine and one of the few female poets in the 18th century. Below is Hồ Xuân Hương's seven-metered work entitled "Autumn landscape" (Cảnh thu), translated by John Balaban (2000: 18-19):

Thánh thốt tầu tiêu mấy hạt mưa, (Drop by drop rain slaps the banana leaps,)
Khen ai khéo vẽ cảnh tiêu sơ. (Praise whoever sketched this desolate scene:)
Xanh om cỏ thụ tròn xoe tán, (the lush, dark canopies of the gnarled trees,)
Trắng xoá tràng gian phẳng lặng tồ. (the long river, sliding smooth and white.)

Bầu dốc giang sơn say chấp rượu, (I lift my wine flask, drunk with rivers and hills,)
Túi lưng phong nguyệt nặng vị thơ. (My backpack, breathing moonlight, sags with poems.)
Ồ hay, cảnh cũng ưa người nhi, (Look, and love everyone,)
Ai thấy, ai mà chẳng ngẩn ngơ. (Whoever sees this landscape is stunned.)

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, intellectuals still stuck with the Chinese literary model for poetic parameter. For instance, Confucian scholar Trần Tế Xương (1870-1907) wrote a Tang *Qijue*, i.e., a style featuring four seven-charactered phrases, to mock those Vietnamese collaborators who feasted on milk and champagne—the new indicator of social status and wealth—as a result of turning away from the Chinese model so as to profit from the French way. It was widely recited in the colonial era:

Nào có ra gì cái chữ Nho? (What good are Chinese characters?)
Ông nghề, ông cống cũng làm co. (All those PhDs are out of work.)
Chi bằng đi học làm ông phán, (Much better to be a clerk for the French,)
Tối rượu sâm bang, sáng sữa bò. (You get champagne at night and milk in the morning.)

—Trần Thu Dung (2011: 10); translated by Jamieson (1993: 55)

Phan Khôi, like his many Confucian peers, was skilled in composing traditional Tang-styled poetry, and he even published a literary criticism of traditional poems entitled *Chương Dân Thi Thoại* (Chương Dân’s criticism of poetry, 1936; Chương Dân was Phan Khôi’s pen name). Yet, there was a pause in his poetry career: prior to “Love of an aged couple,” he had lost his appetite for composing poems for years, in spite of his love for reading and writing poetry. Phan Khôi blamed his apathy on traditional Chinese and Sino-Vietnamese prosodies, which in the past centuries had unfortunately stopped poets from pouring out their hearts into verses freely and honestly. The product of pre-colonial poetic composing was a corps of poems that looked nearly identical to each other to such a degree that readers could not help but wonder whether plagiarism was a common practice among poets or all the works were written by a single author. “Go for reformation! Go for change!” (*Duy tân đi! Cải lương đi!*) Phan Khôi thus urged his peers and offered his experimental “Love of an aged couple” as an example of what he called “new poetry” to demonstrate what a poem freed from jargon and strict rules of versification could accomplish (Phan Khôi 1932b).

As the translation below indicates, Phan Khôi's poem reads like a short story narrated in prose, not verse, and is radically different from the two Tang-styled traditional poems cited above. The theme is the tragedy of a couple unable to get married. His poem was consistent with his attack against Confucianism:

Hai mươi bốn năm xưa, một đêm vừa gió lại vừa mưa. (Twenty four years ago, in a windy and rainy night.)
Dưới ngọn đèn mờ, trong gian nhà nhỏ, (under a dimly lamp, in a small house,)
Hai cái đầu xanh kề nhau than thở: (two youngsters sat side by side, sighing:)
- Ôi đôi ta, tình thương nhau thì vẫn nặng, (“Oh, look at us—how we love each other,)
Mà lấy nhau hẳn là không đặng, (“But we can't consummate our love with marriage,)
Để đến nỗi, tình trước phụ sau, (“So despite our love, we will end up deserting each other,)
Chi cho bằng sớm liệu mà buông nhau. (“So why don't we just break up, the earlier, the better.)
- Hay! mới bạc làm sao chớ? (“Ah! Isn't it all ironic?)
Buông nhau làm sao cho nổi! (“We should break up, but can we really?)
Thương được chừng nào hay chừng này, (“We can't, so we better hold on to our passion no matter what.)
Chẳng qua ông Trời bắt đôi ta phải vậy! (“It's all because the Heaven forces this strong feeling upon us but forbids us to enjoy the rest of our life together!)
Ta là nhân ngãi, đâu phải vợ chồng. (“We are just lovers, not husband and wife.)
Mà tính việc thủy chung? (“How can we think of life-long commitment?”)
Hai mươi bốn năm sau. Tình cờ đất khách gặp nhau. (Twenty four years later. This ex-couple came across with one another in a foreign land.)
Đôi cái đầu đều bạc. (Their hair had turned grey.)
Nếu chẳng quen lung đố nhìn ra được. (If they were not in love back then, they certainly would not recognize one another.)
Ôn chuyện cũ mà thôi. Liếc đưa nhau đi rồi, (They recollected some old stories. But after a brief eye contact, the two went separate ways.)
Con mắt còn có đuôi. (Off they went, they still couldn't stop glancing back at one another.)

At first, Phan Khôi's experiment received little attention. A month after the publication of Phan Khôi's work, an article by an unknown Văn Bểng entitled “I am disappointed about Mr. Phan Khôi” (1932) appeared in *An Nam Magazine* (An Nam

tạp chí), a conservative literary journal edited by Tản Đà, the poet who was orchestrating a campaign against Phan Khôi in 1932. This author joined Tản Đà and portrayed Phan Khôi's insistence on logical reasoning, his reckless feuding with some big names in the cultural fields, as well as his experimental poem in a negative light. Vân Bả̀ng claimed that Phan Khôi's careless experiment had broken the hearts of many nostalgists, leaving them to wonder whether they were still allowed the small pleasure of reciting and composing traditional poems when many pleasant things of the past had disappeared for good.

Thanks to the emergence of a commercially successful vernacular literary weekly *Phong Hóa* (meaning "Ethos") in September 1932 and the founding of the phenomenal Self-Reliance literary group in March 1933, which was a small group of highly talented Westernized intellectuals behind *Phong Hóa*, Phan Khôi's poem began to receive recognition, and soon it was transformed from an unnoticed work to an object to be saluted in the midst of the New Poetry Movement. In its initial issue, *Phong Hóa* (1932) called for "throwing away prosodies, couplets, classical examples, hackneyed old sayings—in a word, stop slavishly imitating the ancient" on the grounds that "our poetry is in desperate need of a complete makeover—styles and ideas alike." Shortly before the Self-Reliance group announced its existence, some young poets responded to Phan Khôi's experiment and *Phong Hóa*'s statement by making public their own free-style poems (*Cô Liên Hương* 1933; *Lưu Trọng Lư* 1933; *Tân Việt* 1933; *Thanh Tâm* 1933). And so, the New Poetry Movement was kicked off.

Tản Đà, the leading figure of colonial Vietnam's traditional poems and sentimental literature, became the Self-Reliance group's main target of attack because of his fame as the most talented traditional poet in the cultural fields and his attachment to traditional poetry. In contrast, Huỳnh Thúc Kháng, the famous patriotic Confucian scholar who spent more than a decade in Poulo Condor's penitentiary and founded Annam's first vernacular periodical *Tiếng Dân*, was never a target, despite his loyalty to traditional poems and fierce opposition to the new poetry movement (Nguyễn Thế Anh 1986). In an essay entitled "My thoughts on our nation's poetry," Tản Đà (1932c) argued that although Vietnam was inferior to France, Japan, and China in nearly every area from industrial development to cultural accomplishments to military skills, Vietnamese still could take comfort in their great poetic accomplishments. For Tản Đà, poetry was one genre of the fine arts that not only surpassed other fine arts genres, but also contained the strengths of both painting and music. Since sound and verse were the essence of poetry, Tản Đà argued, Vietnamese people were lucky to have a language that was richer and clearer in sound and verse than either Chinese or French. As a result, the Vietnamese language was capable of producing poetry superior to its Chinese counterpart. Although quite a few

intellectuals complained that Vietnamese words were deficient in their number and would hinder the development of science, Tản Đà argued that this insufficiency in words was a blessing and an advantage for poetry, as it enabled existing words to carry multiple meanings, thus enriching Vietnamese poetry.

Not surprisingly, *Phong Hóa* took delight in satirizing Tản Đà, especially his heavy drinking. In 1935, a cartoon appeared in *Phong Hóa*, in which Tản Đà is depicted as a red-nosed drunkard dressed in a traditional outfit, symbolizing his traditional outlook. He is teaching students the secret to successful poem composition, saying “soak yourself in alcohol and poems will just flow out of you naturally” (“tửu nhập thi xuất”), while standing in a classroom with a map of Vietnam on the wall, a small wine cup in his hand, and a bottle of wine on the platform. Most students in the cartoon, like their teacher, are dressed in traditional outfits and look bored and disengaged.⁸



Figure 6.6: The sarcastic cartoon of Tản Đà

In summer 1933, a young female graduate of Franco-Vietnamese schools in Cochinchina Nguyễn Thị Kiêm (1914-2005, a.k.a., Nguyễn Thị Mạnh Mạnh) gave a speech on new poetry for the Society for Encouragement of Learning in Sài Gòn. It was reported that the venue was packed by a crowd that was either curious about the first female speaker in the Society’s twenty-five year history or passionate about the New Poetry Movement (Phụ nữ tân văn 1933). Her speech rephrased the points Phan Khôi raised in the essay in which he publicized Vietnam’s first new poem: Vietnam’s three major poetic styles had long straitjacketed poets’ imagination and emotion, draining life out of their works as they were forced to observe the strict prosodies of traditional styles, thus producing only mediocre, spurious imitations of preceding

⁸ The person on the left, a man with a high hairline and goatee who is shown clapping his hands, seemed to be Nhất Linh, the chief editor of *Phong Hóa*. It is possible that Nhất Linh drew this cartoon.

masterpieces. Nguyễn Thị Kiêm encouraged poets to shift their attention away from following traditional versification systems to focus instead on searching for new, promising styles that would allow them to freely express themselves. She found Phan Khôi's experiment with free-styled versifying liberating, even though it had not been particularly well-received. She emphasized that French poets and French literary criticism had been hugely influential for her. Ultimately, she argued that rather than competing with other intellectuals or bragging about their own work, new poets like herself simply wanted Vietnamese intellectuals to be aware that there existed a style that would empower people to honestly and clearly sing their poems out of their hearts.

In response, the supporters of traditional poetry argued that crafting poems under certain prosodic rules was a serious and challenging enterprise that only a combination of talents and noble personality could earn an aspiring would-be poet a much coveted spot in the literary field. Since the so-called new poets were not capable of pursuing a vocation in poetry, the traditionalists argued, the new poets demolished those rules and replaced them with a versification system so loose that it rendered their works into anything but poems. In so doing, these new poets reduced poem composition to some sort of casual and easy sport so that they could enter the literary field even though they lacked the gifts and personality required of true poets (Đương Tự Quán 1933a, 1933b, 1933c; Hoài Thanh 1941; Huấn Minh 1933; Thương Sơn 1933). Tản Đà once called the poems written in the Phan Khôi-inspired free style “bad poetry” and attributed the flooding of the field with this new poetry to the absence of a great poet as genius as Li Bai (701-762), the Chinese “Poet-Transcendent” during the Tang era (Tản Đà 1934).

In 1942, Hoài Thanh (1909-1982) concluded in his well-known literary critique *Vietnam Poets 1932-1941* (Thi Nhân Việt Nam, 1942) that new poets had triumphed over traditional poets. This Movement of New Poetry signaled the emergence of a new literary consciousness and form of self-awareness that was sweeping Vietnam's cultural fields and was manifested in first-person narrative (Lockhart 1996). This modern, active “I” refused to be buried in traditional literature; neither was it willing to continue to be submit to vertical, traditional moral hierarchy. I will turn to this subject in greater detail in the following discussion. The New Poetry Movement also signaled the further retreat of the Chinese cultural model in the cultural fields. This retreat was illustrated by Hoài Thanh's recounted conversation between himself and a doctor of the now abolished imperial examination in 1937, in which the latter told him plainly that “we have relinquished control of the domain of science and technology to you (Westernized intellectuals); you guys should respect us and stop encroaching into the realm of literature” (Hoài Thanh 1942).

Interestingly, quite a few poets on Hoài Thanh’s list were from the Annam area: twenty-one were from Tonkin, twenty-two were Annamese, and four were from Cochinchina (See Appendix One). In the previous decades, Annamese intellectuals’ contribution to the *quốc ngữ* national literature had been negligible; in this decade, however, they thrived in poem composition. Their Tonkinese counterparts, on the other hand, were equally interested in verse and prose, and the members of the famous Self-Reliance literary group, the subject of the next section, were all from the Tonkin area.

2.3. The Competition between the Self-Reliance Literary Group and the Social Realist Writers

In Chapters Four and Five, I pointed out that vernacular literature was not respected during the “decades of emulation” of the 1910s and 1920s. During the 1930s, however, vernacular literature climbed to the highest level of taste, a place that had previously been reserved only for French literature. Table 6.2 shows that during the 1930s, even the culturally conservative Annamese enjoyed reading vernacular literature, and civil servants and businessmen were fond of reading vernacular novels and translations of dramas and French novels. Chinese translated novels remained the object of mass consumption for women and housewives, the poor creatures whose intellect was deemed by male intellectuals too low and immature to appreciate anything more sophisticated.

Table 6.2: Clientele of central Vietnam bookstores

Male customers	
Schoolboys	Livres roses* and volumes from the collection “Best classical authors”
Employees of French and Annamese government, traders-people	Vernacular novels, <i>quốc ngữ</i> translations of drama works or of French novels
Workers and coolies	Some popular poems
Female customers	
Schoolgirls	Livres roses and volumes from the collection “Best classical authors”
Wives of native bureaucratic, trades women	Mostly <i>quốc ngữ</i> translation of Chinese novels

This table is adopted from McHale (1995: 153).

* “Livres roses” probably was the shorter form for “Des livres roses pour la jeunesse,” a French periodical for schoolchildren from 1909 to 1939. McHale does not specify what it really was.

In explaining the novelty of the literary consciousness of the active “I,” Greg Lockhart (1996) situates this “I” in the changing concepts of literature, writing, and

books in colonial Vietnam. In pre-colonial times, Confucian doctrines taught that authors wrote to convey the way and the truth, therefore, their written works served as an example or a model for readers to follow and use to evaluate their conduct. In colonial times, however, while some as authors still wrote to convey the truth, professional writers also wrote to sell their works so as to make a living, a fact with which they had difficulty coming to terms, as they now had to subject their talents to the force of market economy, and their written works served as a mirror that reflected readers' self-image and self-awareness.

During the 1930s, there were two different literary trends that manifested this emergence of "I." One of them embraced *văn minh* and advocated individual liberation from the Confucian past in favor of Westernization, represented by the Self-Reliance literary group. It also encouraged the pursuit of distinctiveness on both national and individual levels. Another trend aimed to expose the struggles of wretched individuals—more specifically, the down-and-out of the society—in the midst of the sweeping *văn minh*. It found its expression in the emergent semi-fictional reportage, social realist fictions, and autobiography; Phan Văn Hùm's *Ngồi tù khám lớn* (Sitting in a Big Jail) in 1929 was the pioneer work here. The authors of this camp were not so much concerned about distinguishing Vietnam from other nations and individuals from one another as they were about correcting injustice and suffering, and they were easily attracted by Communist activities that began to make themselves heard in the cultural fields after the Popular Front took control of the French government in 1936. Both groups of writers were inspired by French literature. Names of renowned French writer, from the author of the classic novel *Les Misérables* Victor Hugo to self-identified lesbian journalist Maryse Choisy (1903-1979), who in the late 1920s disguised herself as a maid and worked in a brothel in order to write a book about prostitution, were cited and quoted frequently in these professional writers' works. Literary social realism became much more popular in the 1930s than it had been in the previous decade. Phạm Quỳnh encouraged aspiring writers to emulate Western realist literary works, he gave his advice with caution, as he did not like literary realism's association with social realism and its interest in exposing the darkness and wickedness of a society.

Let me begin with the Self-Reliance group. In 1933, when the Self-Reliance group formally announced its founding, it published a manifesto to make it clear that the group waged war not only against traditional poetry, but against everything that had been restraining the true Vietnamese spirit from expressing itself (Hà Minh Đức 2007: 9-10). The manifesto is translated below:⁹

⁹ The original Vietnamese version is in Appendix Two.

1. Instead of translating foreign literature, we will make every effort to produce a worthy body of Vietnam's literature so as to enrich our nation's literary legacy.
2. We will edit and translate books that are attentive to social thoughts so as to benefit our people and society.
3. We stand for the cause of common people, and we edit books for the people and encourage the commitment to the people.
4. We write in a simple, easy-to-understand style with as less Chinese characters as possible, as we are convinced that this is the literature style of the true Vietnamese spirit.
5. We will always try something new and fresh, love our life, be determined to strive, and believe in progress.
6. We will sing praise to the beauty of our nation and stir patriotism in ways to which common people could relate. We want to avoid using the lofty styles, which were the favorite styles of nouveau riche and aristocrats.
7. We cherish individual freedom.
8. We want to make it perfectly clear that Confucianism is a thing of the past.
9. We will employ Western scientific methods to produce literature for our nation.
10. It would be fine to just follow any of the above nine statements, provided that doing so would not contradict any one of our statements.

According to this manifesto, the unique culture of Vietnam was embodied in an entity called the "common people," who had been held hostage in the dark past by Confucianism, aristocrats who were the advocate of Confucianism, literature that was written in Chinese characters and hence was out of touch with everyday reality, and literature that was written in pretentious styles favored by snobbish aristocrats and showy nouveau riche. To restore the Vietnamese spirit, "the people" had to be emancipated by means of Western scientific methods and faith in individual freedom, human capacities, and human worth. In other words, the Self-Reliance group believed that only through the free expression of individual distinctiveness could the distinctiveness of Vietnamese nation be nurtured.

To achieve their goal, the Self-Reliance group published the literary weekly *Phong Hóa* (Ethos) between 1932 and 1936 and also the weekly *Ngày Nay* (Today) between 1936 and 1946 as vehicles to disseminate their ideas and publish the literary works of the members of the group. In their journals, they used a heavy dose of comedic satire to playfully attack rival periodicals, well-known literary figures such as Tản Đà, and native subjects whose shallow understanding and awkward attempts to acquire things of *văn minh* exposed not only their naivety and backwardness, but also

the cruelty and absurdity of *văn minh*. This fondness of satire was not surprising, as the group’s leader Nhất Linh had briefly edited a satirical weekly *Cười* (Laughter) in 1930 and published humorous semi-fictional first-person travelogue *Đi Tây* (Going to France) between 1935 and 1936. An example of such a native subject was a clownish cartoon figure Lý Toét, a traditional village chief and a regular visitor to an unspecified big city. The cartoon below depicts how Lý Toét came up with his own version of *văn minh* after watching two *văn minh* girls (“gái văn minh” in Vietnamese) dressing in bathing suits on the beach. The caption below the left panel reads: “It’s totally so not difficult to get this *văn minh* thing—all we need are a square kerchief, a whore’s bra, boy Cu’s trousers, and a woolen blanket, and we are good to create a neat bathing suit!” (“Văn minh thì khó gì—Cái khăn vuông, cái yếm của mẹ đi, cái quần của thằng Cu và cái chăn chiên này là đủ bộ quần áo tắm khá lịch sự.”). Lý Toét proudly showed off his improvisation on a river bank—not on a beach, and a duck and several fishes in the river are watching Lý Toét, apparently find him pretty amusing (*Phong Hoá* no. 109: 14, 1943).

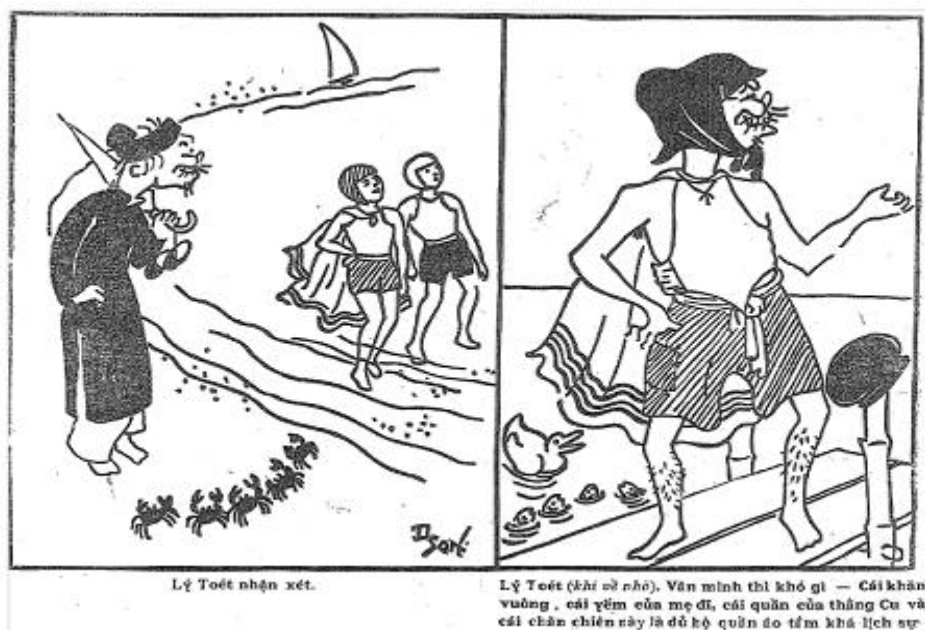


Figure 6.7: The sarcastic cartoon of Lý Toét

In 1935, *Phong Hóa* went further to assert that its purpose was to introduce the new and eradicate the old. To this end, it vowed to relentlessly and even mercilessly mock and ridicule conservative elements and “false” progressive intellectuals. The conservative elements *Phong Hóa* identified included Confucianism, for it stopped Vietnam from progressing; mandarins and elders, both of whom had been agents of Confucianism; women writers; China, an aging but puerile youth who was unbearably

arrogant about his own seniority; and appeals to merge the old and new, as such efforts would lead Vietnam nowhere. *Phong Hóa*'s contempt for women writers did not seem very progressive, and during the 1930s there were not many women writers in the culture fields. The most famous ones were new poet Nguyễn Thị Kiêm, who gave a speech on the New Poetry Movement in Cochinchina in 1933, and poet Tương Phố (real name Đỗ Thị Đàm, 1896-1973), whose famous mournful poems were written for her husband who died of lung disease after returning from the First World War in France, and were translated into French by French translators (Nguyễn Huệ Chi and Lê Chí Dũng 2004). *Phong Hóa* also named fifteen “conservatives” who pretended to be progressive intellectuals, all men who had been well-known public figures in the cultural fields since the decade of the 1900s and the 1910s.¹⁰ This was not just a war between the old and the new; it was also a generational war between old Confucian scholars and Westernized intellectuals versus younger Westernized intellectuals.

Phong Hóa's preference for satire was not just an indication of the influence of French satirical literature on the Self-Reliance group. It was also in line with the group's emphasis on nourishing the spirit of “joyfulness and youthfulness” (“vui vẻ trẻ trung”). This satirical spirit, however, did not seem to be consistent with the banner of promoting “the common people” that the group also raised. Nevertheless, a vernacular paper specializing in satire was unheard of in colonial Vietnam. Urbanites in big cities such as Hanoi and Saigon—the target audience of the Self-Reliance group—loved the satire, and *Phong Hóa* turned out to be a huge hit: it was so profitable that the group was able to establish the printing house *Đời Nay* in 1933 to print the literary works written by the group's members in book form after they had been serialized in *Phong Hóa* and later *Ngày Nay*. A survey of the existent 168 items of *Đời Nay* publications available in Vietnam's National Library indicates that the group was true to its word: the majority of them were the original works of the group, with a few translated works of some renowned Western authors such as Hans Christian Anderson, Daniel Defoe, Rudyard Kipling, and Leo Tolstoy. Not surprisingly, no translated Chinese novels were published by *Đời Nay*.

In 1937, the Self-Reliance group founded *Hội Ánh sáng*, literally “the Enlightenment association,” in order to reform Vietnamese society in a legal way. The goal was detailed in the optimistic and forward-looking “Ten wishes” (“Mười điều tâm nhiệm” in Vietnamese) in an article:

1. We will completely follow the new.

¹⁰ The list included neo-traditionalists Phạm Quỳnh and Trần Trọng Kim; Confucian scholars Dương Bá Tạc, Nguyễn Trọng Thuật, Nguyễn Hữu Tiến, Huỳnh Thúc Kháng, Nguyễn Đôn Phục, Hoàng Thăng Bí, Phan Khôi, all of whom were involved in the *Duy Tân* Movement; Francophile Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh; Nguyễn Văn Tố, Ngô Tất Tố, Dương Tự Quán; poet Đông Hồ.

2. We believe in making progress one day at a time.
3. People should follow their dreams.
4. We encourage civic engagement.
5. In addition to enjoying their newfound rights, women should take up their responsibilities.
6. We should work on developing scientific literacy among people.
7. People are encouraged to increase their energy and vitality.
8. Physical exercise is encouraged.
9. People are encouraged to develop skills in organizing and arranging.
10. We need entrepreneurship, not fame and position.¹¹

In addition to satire, the group was also famous for creating romantic stories and poems to advance the cause of individual freedom from suffocating moral constraints in society. The most famous work that illustrated the theme of individuals refusing to succumb to social pressure was *Break Off* (Đoạn Tuyệt), a novel written by the leader of the Self-Reliance group Nhất Linh (1906-1963). It appeared in serial form in *Phong Hóa* from 1934 to 1935 and then was published as a whole in 1935. Nhất Linh, real name Nguyễn Tường Tam, was a versatile prodigy whose talents ranged from writing to translating to painting. He created the caricature of Lý Toét, who symbolized the clash between Vietnam and West, the old and the new, and *văn minh* and tradition, for instance. Nhất Linh was the third child of a civil servant in the Tonkin area, and two of his younger brothers, Nguyễn Tường Long (1907-1948) and Nguyễn Tường Vinh (1910-1942), were also writers and the founding members of *Phong Hóa* and the Self Reliance group. Nguyễn Tường Long had the pen name of Hoàng Đạo, under which he wrote the “Ten Wishes” I listed above. Nhất Linh’s career as a journalist began when he was only sixteen. After studying briefly in the Medical School and the Academy of Fine Arts in Vietnam, he went to France in 1927 both to pursue higher education and learn journalism and publishing. In 1930, he returned to Vietnam with a bachelor’s degree in science education for physics and chemistry. He was famous for writing both satire and romantic stories.

The hero and heroine of Nhất Linh’s *Break Off* are Dũng and Loan, two young intellectuals who are classmates in Franco-Vietnamese schools in Hanoi. Dũng is disowned by his father because he refuses to take heed of his father’s career advice; Loan is a school teacher living with her widowed mother who wants her daughter to marry “well.” Dũng and Loan are painfully affectionate toward each other, but since Loan’s mother has arranged a marriage with the son of a well-to-do family, the two

¹¹ 1. Theo mới, hoàn toàn theo mới; 2. Tin ở sự tiến bộ mỗi ngày một hơn; 3. Sống theo một lý tưởng; 4. Làm việc xã hội; 5. Luyện tình khí; 6. Phụ nữ ra ngoài xã hội; 7. Luyện lấy bộ óc khoa học; 8. Luyện tập thân thể cường tráng; 9. Cần có óc tổ chức, trí xếp đặt; 10. Cần sự nghiệp, không cần công danh.

never confess their feelings for one another. Dũng believes he should disappear from Loan's life, as he thinks himself as an unworthy fellow and is afraid that his love for this betrothed young woman would result in confusion and a miserable marriage. Loan is likewise determined to give up her happiness so as to fulfill her obligation of filial piety to her mother. She construes Dũng's withdrawal as a sign of his lack of romantic interest in her. Heartbroken, Loan abandons her virginity to a man she despises, while Dũng slips away and finds a job in another city. Loan's husband does not understand her as she is such a "new woman" ("cô gái mới" in Vietnamese), and their relationship sours, not helped by an abusive mother-in-law who loathes Loan and other "new women." Tragedy ensues: an everyday quarrel between the couple takes an unexpected turn and Loan's husband ends up dead. Loan is arrested and tried, and the news that a "new woman" has killed her husband is in all the newspapers and attracts a lot of spectators, including Dũng, who returns to his hometown to see what will become of Loan. Without knowing that her beloved is present, Loan is calm and able to speak for herself in French while being tried, and is subsequently acquitted. But her reputation is ruined, and she is deserted by her neighbors, her colleagues in school, and the parents of her students. Only two of her friends who are also school teachers and who understand what Loan had gone through in her marriage sympathize and remain loyal to her. The story ends when Loan's friends gave her a letter from Dũng, written after Loan is cleared of the murder charge. In the letter, addressed to Loan's friend, Dũng expresses his love for Loan. He also says he takes full responsibility for the tragedy, as he had done nothing to help Loan even though he was fully aware how Loan was suffering in her marriage. Only then does Loan learn that their feelings were mutual, but it is all too late.

Nhất Linh's sympathetic depiction of Loan, a female intellectual who finds herself stuck between the old and the new, shows little resemblance of the "women writers" ridiculed in *Phong Hóa*. Nhất Linh used the characters Dũng and Loan both to illustrate the threat that traditional morals posed to individual happiness and to urge his readers—mostly urbanites who received Franco-Vietnamese education—to "break off" from tradition and embrace modernity. It is worth comparing Nhất Linh's *Break Off* with Hoàng Ngọc Phách's *Tố Tâm* (1925), another famous romantic novel that depicts the unconsummated love between two young Westernized intellectuals. Both *Break Off* and *Tố Tâm* have passive male characters and active female characters. The two male protagonists choose to ignore their feelings and avoid the girls because they think that their love will go nowhere. The two female characters, by contrast, take the initiative and fight for the love, but despite being armed with intelligence, modern education, talents, and kind hearts, the girls are still unable to get themselves out of the snare of oppressive traditional norms about gender relationships. What separates

Loan in *Break Off* from *Tố Tâm* in *Tố Tâm* is that while *Tố Tâm* in 1925 dies devastated and desperate, Loan in 1935 defends herself in court and is not hesitant to make public how she had to give up her happiness to accommodate to her family of origin and the family with her husband and mother-in-law.

Break Off was well-received, so much so that writer Nguyễn Công Hoan (1903-1977) produced a novel with a similar story plot entitled *Schoolmistress Minh* (*Cô Giáo Minh*) that was serialized in *Phong Hóa's* rival literary weekly *Tiểu Thuyết Thứ Bảy* ("Fictions on Every Saturday") from late 1935 to 1936, generating polemics between Nguyễn Công Hoan and the Self-Reliance group. In *Schoolmistress Minh*, Minh, the counterpart of Loan in *Break Off*, explicitly states several times in the story that "breaking off from one's traditional family is selfish" and would achieve nothing but pitting the conservative against the modern. The Self-Reliance group accused Nguyễn Công Hoan of plagiarism, and Nguyễn Công Hoan explained that he used a plot similar to *Break Off* to show that "breaking off" was not really a solution: Loan decided to marry someone she did not love, yet her decision was halfhearted and, ultimately, it was her inability to forget about Dũng and her indecisiveness that caused such tragedy. Minh, on the other hand, in order to serve the cause of promoting modernity, decides to bid farewell to her ex-lover and appeases the fearful and confused people who are stuck in the past by committing herself to serve her husband and her new family.

Like Nhất Linh, Nguyễn Công Hoan, too, was a gifted satirist who was particularly fond of making fun of those native subjects who were obsessed with *văn minh*, and his short story "Miss Kếu, the new woman" ("*Cô Kếu, gái tân thời,*" year uncertain) was about a young girl Kếu who is born and raised in Hàng Đào, a historic street in Hanoi that specialized in retail sale of fabric and cloth. Miss Kếu is an angry teenage girl who is ashamed of her rustic name ("Kếu" means crane) and her parents, who failed to give their daughter a name as beautiful and romantic as those of her classmates at the Franco-Vietnamese school. Even after she changes her name to "Bạch Nhạn" (literally "White wild goose"),¹² however, she is still distressed, as her parents insist that she dresses in plain, modest clothes to preserve the respectful family tradition and refuse to buy her any fashionable and colorful clothes. Nguyễn Công Hoan comically relates Miss Kếu's lament: "Oh, why did the heaven beget me and make me a girl? Why did the heaven make me a girl in the Hàng Đào Street? Why did the heaven make me a girl in the Hàng Đào Street with great beauty? Why did the heaven make me a girl in the Hàng Đào Street with great beauty that only a rich family

¹² Nhạn, or Yen in Chinese, is from a Chinese idiom *Chen yu luo yen, bi yu shiou hoa*, which literally means "fishes descend into the deep of water, wild geese fall from the sky, moon shuts down, and flowers are put in shame" when they encounter the astonishing beauty of a particular legendary beautiful woman.

deserves to have? I am a young girl in my prime—youthful and fresh, but I am not allowed to grow up in a family where I can enjoy the freedom to dress whatever suitable for everything I own that makes me so distinguished from the crowd.”¹³

Nguyễn Công Hoan departed from Nhất Linh (and by extension, the Self-Reliance group) in that while both combined satire and social realism and produced hilarious works such as Nguyễn Công Hoan’s “Miss Kếu, the new woman” and Nhất Linh’s Lý Toét, Nguyễn Công Hoan was sometimes more serious and employed short stories and semi-fictional reportage to depict the suffering of commoners under the institution of French colonization, a subject the Self-Reliance group never wrote about. One of the most notable works addressing this suffering was “The actor Tư Bền” (“Kép Tư Bền,” 2003 [1935]). The plot of the short story is rather simple: Tư Bền was a popular actor known for his talents in comedy; he was also a filial son of a dirt-poor family with an aging father in his sickbed. In order to take care of his father, Tư Bền has to borrow money from the boss of his troupe, thus entering into debt bondage. When his father is dying, Tư Bền’s boss visits his home and asks him to go to work. Tư Bền has no choice but to oblige. He leaves his dying father, puts on heavy makeup, and entertains the audience with his funny performance. His father dies in the midst of the audience’s roaring laughter, while Tư Bền acts humorously on the outside, but weeps silently on the inside.

In addition to Nguyễn Công Hoan, Vũ Đình Chí (Tam Lang, 1900-1986) and Vũ Trọng Phụng (1912-1939) were also well known for their social realist literary works and creative nonfiction in the early 1930s. Tam Lang Vũ Đình Chí was born to a Confucian family in the Tonkin area and entered the prestigious Teachers’ College. His first-person reportage “I pulled a rickshaw” (Tôi kéo xe) in 1932 was hailed as Vietnam’s first work of investigative journalism by literature critic Vũ Ngọc Phan (1980 [1942-1945]). Vũ Đình Chí had written some romantic, melancholy novels before “I pulled a rickshaw,” but when a newspaper colleague reminded him that “the era of investigating journalism is upon us” and gave him a list of “others in your profession [who] are going all over the world, investigating events and interviewing people,” he converted to social realism on the spot and decided that he wanted to mimic Maryse Choisy and work as a coolie for rickshaw trade, a business that was flourishing in Hanoi. The result, “I pulled a rickshaw,” is not only Vietnam’s first reportage, but also the first work whose well-educated author identified with a lowly class of rickshaw coolies by plunging into their daily life (Lockhart 1996).

Vũ Đình Chí had to temporarily conceal his identity as a writer and intellectual

¹³ “Sao trời đã sinh ra cô là con gái; con gái phố Hàng Đào; con gái phố Hàng Đào có nhan sắc; con gái phố Hàng Đào có nhan sắc của một nhà giàu; đương thì đào tơ môn môn, mà không được sinh trưởng vào một cái gia đình được ăn mặc tự do, để được xứng đáng với từng ấy cái mà cô được hơn người”.

to transform into one of the dirt poor country men and women who swarmed into big cities looking for jobs, although literature critics wondered how he managed to pull this off, as his big belly—his biggest giveaway—would betray that he had never been a worker (Vũ Ngọc Phan 1980 [1942-1945]). Vũ Trọng Phụng, the “king of reportage” (vương phóng sự), on the contrary, did not really have to disguise himself to perform his duty. Born into a poor family and struggling with poverty, illness, and addiction to opium throughout his short life, Vũ Trọng Phụng himself was one of the less fortunate individuals he covered in his novels and reportage. He was obsessed with describing the “unwanted” elements of society: prostitutes, Vietnamese “wives” of Western legionaries, household servants, rapists, gamblers, opium addicts, venereal patients, and so on. He either described in great detail the audacious crimes committed by the powerful and wealthy class against poor peasants, or used a semi-fictional style to report hilariously the absurdity of how “deviant” people responded to *văn minh*. For instance, in *The Industry of Marrying Europeans* (Kỹ nghệ lấy Tây, 1999 [1934]), one of Vũ Trọng Phụng’s celebrated works of reportage, he told his readers in first-person narrative that he became interested in investigating “the industry of marrying Europeans” after witnessing a twenty-five year old attractive, but vulgar woman with high heels proudly and humorously declaring that her occupation was “marrying Europeans” in a courtroom. His story plots were usually simple, but his language was shrewd.

Vũ Trọng Phụng’s peculiar literary style and preference for writing about social taboos shocked his readers and his peers in the cultural fields. His works, especially his semi-fictional reportage, became a sensation and invited attacks from the Self-Reliance group. Vũ Trọng Phụng and the group held radically different views toward *văn minh*: whereas the Self-Reliance group believed that it was worthwhile to enter a *văn minh* world no matter the price and encouraged people both to stay as optimistic as possible about the prospect of Vietnam becoming a *văn minh* nation and to adopt Western fashion, hairstyle, makeup, dancing, and physical exercises, Vũ Trọng Phụng, like the patriotic Confucian scholar Phan Bội Châu, was determined to publicize the bitter consequences of *văn minh*. The Self-Reliance group complained that Vũ Trọng Phụng’s detailed descriptions of sex scenes were too obscene, and his writing about audacious crimes committed against “the people” was too dark and pessimistic. The group also accused Vũ Trọng Phụng of trying to deceitfully impress the world and steal a spot in the literary field even though he only finished a few years in primary school, implying that his educational certificate was not impressive enough to be qualify him as a writer (Le Thanh 2005 [1937]; Vũ Trọng Phụng 1937).

In response to the group’s accusation that he was a “pornographic” writer, Vũ Trọng Phụng revealed that he was, in fact, very conservative concerning issues of

gender and sexuality. He stressed that he did not feel sympathetic at all with “new women,” the young urbanite women educated in Franco-Vietnamese schools and the heroines of some of the Self-Reliance group’s most notable literary works, such as Nhất Linh’s aforementioned *Break Off*. Questioning the Self-Reliance group’s celebration of these women abandoning their husbands and mothers-in-law as a brave deed of “liberation,” Vũ Trọng Phụng blatantly stated “new women” were “uneducated, repulsive, rotten to the core, disrespectful, difficult, and full of bacteria” who, rather than being the victims of their mothers-in-law as Nhất Linh described in *Break Off*, were actually bullies of their mothers-in-law. Vũ Trọng Phụng noted that he refused to write “just novels” to deceive readers with some entertaining stories; rather, he wanted his novels to record the “fact and truth” of life (Le Thanh 2005 [1937]; Vũ Trọng Phụng 1937).

2.4. The Competition between Marxists and Nationalists

The debates between social realist writers and the Self-Reliance group were derived from the two groups’ different orientations toward *văn minh*: the former aimed to expose the dark, undesirable, horrible side of *văn minh* that had been plaguing Vietnam, and the latter wanted people to focus on the beauty of *văn minh* and believed that once Vietnam was liberated from Confucianism and the traditional moral system, individual uniqueness would shine and eventually blossom into national uniqueness. But in the mid-1930s, Marxian intellectuals emerged to challenge this emphasis on individual uniqueness in the cultural fields by arguing that this concern was irrelevant and even unethical, as the majority of people were so poor that they could not care a bit about individual uniqueness. More importantly, these Marxian intellectuals challenged the independence of the cultural fields, indicating the Communist takeover of the cultural fields in the August Revolution.

In 1930 and 1931, communist militias in the Annam area, many of whom were radicalized members of the New Vietnam Revolutionary Party (“*Tân Việt cách mạng đảng*”) Party based in Annam (Đào Duy Anh, the author of *An Outline of Vietnam’s Cultural History*, was among them), organized popular uprisings known as *xô viết nghệ tỉnh* (the Soviets of Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh provinces). Tens of thousands of workers and peasants in Annam went on strikes, and communist militias, many of whom were intellectuals, quickly followed the Chinese-Soviet model and organized local *xô viết* to guide the massive rebellions. The uprisings were put down by the colonial state, and all the central and local communist leaders were either executed or thrown into prisons (Brocheux and Hémery 2009: 317-320). But the communists managed to pull it off and were able to expand their influence from the political fields to the cultural fields. On the other hand, the Vietnam Nationalist Party (“*Việt Nam*

Quốc dân đảng”) organized the Yên Bái Uprisings in 1930 under the leadership of Nguyễn Thái Học (1902-1930), a native of Tonkin and a graduate of the Teacher’s College. The Yên Bái Uprisings, like the *xô viết nghệ tỉnh*, were quickly put down by the colonial state, and Nguyễn Thái Học was put to death by the state at age twenty-eight. But the Nationalist Party did not manage to emerge as the dominant force in the cultural fields; nor was it able to participate in the cultural fields with its own ideology and theory like the Communist Party did.

Despite the Nationalist Party’s defeat, prior to the 1930s the overwhelming concern among Vietnamese intellectuals was clearly nationalistic, even though the term “nationalism” was rarely explicitly used in intellectuals’ discussions during this period.¹⁴ Questions such as how to emulate and differentiate from French and Chinese cultural elements, how to identify Vietnam’s national soul and uniqueness, how to push Vietnam forward in its path toward progress and *văn minh*, and so on, dominated the agenda of the cultural fields prior to the 1930s. But by the 1930s, Marxian intellectuals began to emerge in the cultural fields to challenge the idea of nationalism and to further politicize the fields. They did not really share their predecessors’ concerns about identifying Vietnam’s cultural uniqueness and pursuit of *văn minh*; rather, these Marxian intellectuals tried to shift the focus to class struggle.

Over the previous decades, the cultural fields had gained some autonomy from the colonial state and the market economy, and intellectuals earned their power and recognition in the fields through their contribution to Vietnam’s progress toward *văn minh*. During the 1930s, Communist intellectuals would try to replace the colonial state and seize complete control of the cultural fields, and they developed a new form of political capital for the cultural fields in the future: it was no longer solely defined by intellectuals’ relationships with the colonial state, whether rapport or hostility or somewhere in between; rather, as my discussion below displays, it was defined by intellectuals’ relationships with *bình dân*, the common people.

2.4.1. The Debate on Historiography

Marxian scholar Đào Duy Anh’s *An Outline of Vietnam’s Cultural History* in 1938 exhibits intellectuals’ agreement on how to understand China in the complicated millennia-long Sino-Vietnamese cultural relationship. This book, however, probably presents the only agreement on how to write Vietnam’s history that intellectuals were able to reach during the colonial period. Marxian intellectuals more radical and more politically oriented than Đào Duy Anh rose to start debates with some famous

¹⁴ The Sino-Vietnamese translation *chủ nghĩa dân tộc* was not commonly used during the colonial period, and Phạm Quỳnh would claim that he followed *chủ nghĩa quốc gia*, literally “statism,” instead of *chủ nghĩa dân tộc*.

intellectuals so as to win attention from their peers and to promote both themselves and the political ideology they advocated.

As I showed earlier, reformed Confucian scholar Phan Khôi, equipped with his knowledge about Chinese learning, intellectual curiosity, and French language, initiated three major intellectual debates on Confucianism, national learning, and the New Poetry Movement in the early 1930s. By the mid-1930s, however, he began to lose his credibility as the knowledgeable “royal counselor” of Vietnam’s cultural fields, as his understanding and perception of Western learning—which he had acquired largely through Chinese sources—were challenged by a younger generation of Westernized intellectuals, especially young Marxists, who had been both secretly and openly disseminating Marxism among Vietnamese intellectuals.

In August 1933, after Phan Khôi was recognized as the author of Vietnam’s first new poem, he published an article criticizing the binary opposition between “material civilization” and “spiritual civilization” that Vietnamese intellectuals commonly applied to Western and Eastern civilizations (Phan Khôi 1933a). Phan Khôi first commented that uncritical use of this binary in Vietnam was further proof of Vietnamese intellectuals’ slavish dependence on foreign models, as these terms were, in fact, borrowed from China, where they had been circulating among Chinese intellectuals for more than a decade. He then opposed the rigid division between the material and the spiritual and noted that this division was invented by Orientals who were humiliated by Western civilization—which was superior to its Eastern counterpart in every single area—in order to overcome their burning sense of shame. Phan Khôi made a linear argument that civilizations differed not in kind, but in level of evolution. The material and the spiritual were not mutually exclusive; they were two integral parts of every civilization. Material civilization originated from science, and science, Phan Khôi held, belonged to the sphere of the spiritual/ideal. It should be noted here that Phan Khôi and other Vietnamese intellectuals used a Sino-Vietnamese loanword “tinh thần” (“jing shen” in Chinese) to translate “spiritual,” which can be used to translate both “spiritual” and “ideal.” The problem of Eastern civilization lay in its weak and selfish spirit, and Phan Khôi urged Vietnamese people to admit that in the race of human evolution, they were merely at the level Europeans had reached in medieval times. The reason Japan was not only able to escape the doom that befell other members of Eastern civilization, but even became a rival of the West was that Japan was keenly aware of where it had stood in human evolution and had been determined to emulate the West with all its might. Even though Phan Khôi was appreciative of Confucianism in its “original” Chinese version—not the corrupted and diluted Vietnamese version, as his debates with Trần Trọng Kim show, he certainly was not nostalgic about Confucianism and the good old days of *văn hiến*.

Two months after the appearance of Phan Khôi's article, a young Marxist Nguyễn Khoa Văn under the pen name Hải Triều (1908-1954) published an article announcing that Phan Khôi and many other Oriental scholars were all idealists, as they believed that the spirit/ideal gave birth to the material. Hải Triều was born to an Annamese Confucian family as prominent as Phan Khôi's: his father Nguyễn Khoa Tùng was a Confucian scholar in the Annam area, and like Huỳnh Thúc Kháng, the founder of Annam's first vernacular periodical *Tiếng Dân*, was a member of the Chamber of the Representatives of the People of Annam ("Viện Trung Kỳ Dân Biểu" in Vietnamese); his mother Đạm Phương was granddaughter of Emperor Minh Mạng of the Nguyễn Dynasty and the editor-in-chief of colonial Vietnam's first women's newspaper *Nữ giới chung* (Women's Bell). After he was kicked out of Annam's only secondary school and most privileged Collège Quốc Học on account of his participation in a students' strike for the purpose of participating in famous Confucian patriot Phan Chu Trinh's funeral in 1926, Hải Triều joined the New Vietnam Revolution Party in 1927, and later became a member of the Indochina Communist Party when the New Vietnam merged with the Communist Party in 1930 (Nguyễn Hoàng Khung 2004: 567-8). Since then, Hải Triều taught himself the theories of Marxism, translated Marx's masterpiece *Capital*, and actively promoted historical materialism in various vernacular periodicals. In addition to Phan Khôi, between 1936 and 1939 Hải Triều also confronted the writers who were associated with the well-known Self-Reliance literary group with the question of whether arts were complete in and justified by their own artistic and aesthetic values without having to serve moral or other utilitarian functions. I will discuss this topic later.¹⁵

In Hải Triều's response to Phan Khôi, he argued that the spiritual/ideal realm was merely the reflection of the material realm, and the spiritual would, in turn, change the shape of the material. What trapped China and Vietnam in a feeble and infirm spirit was their semi-feudalist economy, which Hải Triều argued was to blame for the scarcity in both production and consumption in both countries. Hải Triều explained that he wrote the article out of his respect for Phan Khôi, because he saw in him a courageous man who committed himself to constant progress and evolution (Hải Triều 1933a). Phan Khôi (1933b) rejected the label of idealist. He argued that things could be divided into the objective, examinable phenomena on the surface and the subjective, unobservable underlying structures. The binary categories of the material civilization and the spiritual civilization was merely a device he employed to discuss social phenomena, rather than an idealist account of the underlying structure that gave rise to this binary. Hải Triều (1933) then published another article to oppose Phan

¹⁵ Hải Triều, nevertheless, did not challenge the Self-Reliance group directly, even though the group was the most prominent and powerful group in the cultural fields in the 1930s. I imagine that they would likely have zealously defended the independence of the arts and literature.

Khôi's division between the phenomenal and the structural, arguing that materialism was not only a philosophy, but also a scientific method, for philosophy was "the science of sciences" (la philosophie est la sciences des sciences).

In 1934, Phan Khôi, the "royal counselor" of the cultural fields, flew in the face of the popular assault on feudalism advanced by many intellectuals, especially "sociologists," and argued that Vietnam had never actually been a feudalist society. He used ancient China's Warring States period (475-221 B.C.) as an example of a feudal society, in which seven major and some minor feuding states ruled over the inhabitants of their estates, paid tributes to the Son of Heaven, and militarily cooperated with the Son of Heaven when threatened with enemies. This proto feudalism ended when the Qin state annexed other kingdoms (and the northernmost part of today's Vietnam) and established a unified and centralizing Chinese Empire in 221 B.C. After comparing pre-colonial Vietnam to the proto feudalist society found in ancient China, Phan Khôi concluded that feudalism never took place in pre-colonial Vietnam. Vietnamese emperors did grant lands and titles to those who assisted them to found royal courts as a form of compensation, yet since no exchange for pledged service was involved, their giving did not lead to enfeoffment.

Once again, it was Hải Triều (1935) who engaged in the debate with Phan Khôi. He insisted that pre-colonial Vietnam was a thoroughly feudalist society. Hải Triều quoted an unknown French scholar Patris to argue that Vietnam had, indeed, formed feudalist relationships with its neighbors. With its Southeast Asian neighbors, Vietnam was the lord; with China, Vietnam was one of the vassals. Vietnamese rulers also exercised feudalism with their subjects: there were two prominent political figures during the later Lê Dynasty (1428-1788) who received fiefs, recognition for their rule, and even the power to manufacture coins from emperors. All of these pieces of historical evidence proved that Vietnam was a feudal society. Hải Triều cited Marx and Italian philosopher Vico and made a teleological argument not unlike Phan Khôi's: all nations in the world had been evolving along the same Social Darwinist path, and individual nations' levels of economic evolution determined their levels of social, political, and cultural progress. Hải Triều also provided an anecdote of feudalism: he once disguised himself as an illiterate commoner and hired himself out as a tenant to a landlady, who demanded that Hải Triều pay her a sticky rice cake, two ducks, two bottles of honey, and a cash gift twice a year in addition to the regular job of attending farmland. Hải Triều observed that this landlady's requirement was no different from what a serf was required by his or her master and that since serfdom existed, the feudal system, too, had existed in Vietnam.

Several months before the left-wing Popular Front came to power in France in May 1936, Hải Triều published a book entitled *Idealism or Materialism?* ("Duy tâm

hay duy vật?” in Vietnamese) to further champion the philosophy of historical materialism. It was colonial Vietnam’s first treatise on Marxist theories written by a native intellectual, and it was welcomed by the younger generation of leftist Westernized intellectuals. A writer with the pen name Hải Vân claimed that the publication of this treatise was the best evidence that idealism would soon pass away and be buried in history (1936). Phan Văn Hùm (1902-1946), a famous Trotskyite who authored the first prison diary *Sitting in Big Jail* (Ngồi tù khám lớn) in Vietnam in 1929 and *An Introduction to Dialectics* (“Biện Chính Pháp Phổ Thông”) in 1937, wrote the forward for Hải Triều’s book. In it, Phan Văn Hùm (1935) declared Hải Triều the winner of his debate with Phan Khôi over the question of whether materialism or idealism was the best approach to understand history and society. He also praised Hải Triều’s braveness in declaring war against religious superstition and romantic literature, both of which distracted young men and women from cruel reality and encouraged them to indulge in escapism instead. Another unknown author, Hồ Xanh (1936), even asked Phan Khôi to bow his head and admit that he was wrong and that he had lost his debate with Hải Triều. Even though Phan Khôi acknowledged that materialism was correct, Hồ Xanh argued, his idealist Confucian background not only held him back from fully converting to materialism, but also turned him into a deceptive sophist at the service of the well-to-do.

Hồ Xanh then made two bold arguments. First, the difference between Eastern and Western civilizations lay not in characteristics or in levels, but in how well they organized their societies, and clearly the West was superior to the East because it outdid the latter in this area. Second, prior to the eighteenth century, the whole world was dominated by idealism and thus was under the spell of feudalism. Vietnam was no exception: the hierarchy of royal family, nobility, and commoners still existed, and the classes of landlords, capitalists, petit bourgeoisie, peasant, laborers, poor peasant, tenants, and proletariat were entrenched in society. It was only when the new philosophy of materialism arose to challenge idealism was the spell of feudalism gradually broken.

2.4.2. The Debate over “Art for Art’s Sake” vs. “Art for Life’s Sake”

After his arguments with Phan Khôi, Hải Triều shifted his focus to professional writers and literature critics and started another controversy. All the participants in this debate were from a younger generation of Westernized intellectuals who were far better versed in French than in Chinese. Had the Second World War not started in Europe in 1939 and Japan not invaded Indochina in early 1940, the controversy might have continued into the 1940s.

Historian Hue-Tam Ho Tai (1984) and literary theorist Ben Tran (2012) put this

debate in an international context and argue that participants on both sides of the debate were eager to become part of the international intellectual scene—especially in France and Russia, as seen through the French lenses—where the issue of whether art should be independent of politics had been vehemently debated for more than two decades before a similar controversy exploded in Vietnam.¹⁶ This eagerness shows Marxian intellectuals’ desire to emulate the West, even though they did not explicitly talk about it and they did not mean to emulate in order to create a marker to point to Vietnam’s uniqueness. Participants particularly liked to evoke Western names to lend authority to their arguments. The opportunity for Hải Triều to promulgate the Marxist theory of literature by attacking intellectuals who did not share his view arose when Thiệu Sơn (1908-1978) expounded “two different concepts about literature” in February 1935 to promote the value of a pure and autonomous literature. Thiệu Sơn, real name Lê Sĩ Quý (1908-1978), was born to a Confucian family and educated in a Franco-Vietnamese school. He was the author of Vietnam’s first book of literary criticism, *Essays on Criticism* (“Phê bình và thảo luận” in Vietnamese, 1933). In the preface, Thiệu Sơn explained that he understood that while literary criticism was a mature genre in Western literature, it was still missing from Vietnam’s national literature. Although Vietnamese intellectuals had been trying to fill this lacuna, it was still relatively empty. Therefore, Thiệu Sơn decided to follow the step of his predecessors and peers by applying Western theories of literary criticism to comment on twelve intellectuals who had made significant contributions to Vietnam’s national literature.

Two years after the publication of *Essays on Criticism*, Thiệu Sơn’s “Two Perceptions of Literature” (“Hai cái quan niệm về văn học”, 1935a) appeared in *Tiểu thuyết thứ bảy* (Fictions on Saturdays), one of the most successful literary periodicals and a competitor of the Self-Reliance group’s weekly *Phong Hóa*. Thiệu Sơn’s article was indicative of the independence of the literature field. He started the article by quoting neo-traditionalist Phạm Quỳnh and Confucian scholar Nguyễn Bá Học (1857-1921), both of whom had worried that “plaything-y” literature like novels and poems would far outnumber scholarly works and serious works like textual criticism. Thiệu Sơn used their complaints to introduce the first perception of literature, namely, that the worthiness of literature was based on the service it rendered for life and society, rather than its own aesthetic and literary value. According to Thiệu Sơn, this perception was quite popular among previous generations of Vietnamese intellectuals and could be traced back to the Confucian principle of “literature/writing as a vehicle that carries the way” (“văn dĩ tải đạo” in Vietnamese and “wen yi zai dao” in Chinese).

¹⁶ It is worth nothing that contemporary China did not have similar debates on the purpose and independence of arts. These Marxian intellectuals had moved away from the Chinese model.

He then introduced a contrasting perception of literature, which originated from the West and held that a literary work should enjoy autonomy without having to submit to any criteria other than literature itself. He concluded that as long as Vietnam kept following the law of evolution, literature would stay and textual criticism would disappear, and people would eventually acknowledge that the excellence of a literary work need not be proved by its social or political functions.

Thiếu Sơn was not unaware of the calls to establish “people’s culture” and “people’s literature” that emerged out of the debate between Hải Triều and Phan Khôi. An example of this kind of call was Hoàng Tân Dân’s essay (1935a, 1935 b) that advocated the establishment of a theoretical foundation for “people’s culture” on the grounds that “the people” (“bình dân”), i.e., the lowliest and most wretched commoners in a society, constituted the only power that would set in motion social evolution. To counter this plea for politicized “people’s literature,” Thiếu Sơn in another essay (1935b) cited French journalist Jules Vallès and argued that while writers would agree that they should not neglect commoners, they did so not because they wanted to incite class struggles, as “sociologists”—a derogative term usually applied to Marxists and socialists in the 1930s—liked to do, but because they were keenly aware that their description of truth in society would suffer incompleteness unless they included and addressed commoners. Thiếu Sơn (1935c) insisted that “sociologists” should not mix literature with politics, for the only purpose of literature is to seek and illustrate beauty.

While Vietnamese Marxists were circulating the terms “people’s literature” and “historic materialism” via some underground pamphlets and periodicals either published in Vietnam or smuggled in from France, it was through Hải Triều’s challenges against first Phan Khôi in 1933, then Thiếu Sơn in 1935 that their radical ideas caught the attention of the cultural fields. To Hải Triều, Thiếu Sơn’s strategy of lumping together advocacy of a politically committed literature with Confucian doctrine on the one hand, and quoting a French journalist to claim that Western intellectuals supported pure literature on the other probably looked politically dangerous, and he called Thiếu Sơn “cunning.” To argue the opposite and demonstrate his credibility, Hải Triều evoked a long and impressive list of Western intellectuals that included Russian Marxist Nicolai Boukharine, Russian writers Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoyevksy, English writer Charles Dickens, French writers Victor Hugo, Henri Barbusse, and Romain Rolland (Hải Triều 1935a). He quoted Boukharin and Tolstoy and argued that humanity had progressed to a level where art was functioning as a means to socialize and transmit feelings and sentiments. Anyone who went against this historical trend, Hải Triều announced, was selfish and reactionary (Hải Triều 1935a). Thiếu Sơn (1935e) later responded by adding Rousseau and Balzac to

his arsenal and once again asserting that Western intellectuals favored pure literature over politically committed writing. These two men competed with one another through their literacy in Western literature and philosophies.

After Hải Triều formally declared battles against Thiệu Sơn, the controversy between intellectuals who argued for “art for life’s sake” and those for “art for art’s sake” rapidly expanded to involve more than twenty Vietnamese intellectuals, two pieces of Vietnamese literature, and most notably André Gide, a renowned French Nobel-prize-winning novelist. The literary works that were involved in the debate were satire writer Nguyễn Công Hoan’s social realist short story “The actor Tư Bền” (“Kép Tư Bền,” 1935) and Nguyễn Du’s epic *Nôm* poem *The Tale of Kiều*. Both Hải Triều and his enemies were equally eager to recruit Nguyễn Công Hoan to their camps, even though Thiệu Sơn and other intellectuals who refused to subject literature to political standards never accepted the label of “a bourgeoisie group of writers who wanted art for art’s sake at the cost of commoners” imposed by Hải Triều and other leftists. While Hải Triều extolled Nguyễn Công Hoan for successfully exposing the sufferings of commoners at the hand of exploiting classes—landowners, wealthy peasants, collaborators, bourgeoisie (quoted from Hoài Thanh 1935c), Thiệu Sơn (1935d) emphasized Nguyễn Công Hoan’s skillful use of the literary device of contrast and likened him to French novelists. Hoài Thanh (1909-1982), the literature critic who published the famous *Vietnamese Poets* (*Thi Nhân Việt Nam*) in 1942 to conclude the New Poetry Movement, opposed Hải Triều’s comments sarcastically, noting that if Vietnamese people needed to read “The actor Tư Bền” in order to know commoners’ sufferings, they were as good as half-witted (Hoài Thanh 1935c). Hoài Thanh (1935c) pointed out that Nguyễn Công Hoan himself was working as a civil servant when he wrote “The actor Tư Bền.” Hoài Thanh (1935f) also quoted André Gide’s speech at the International Writers’ Congress for the Defense of Culture in 1935, at which Gide defended the Herderian sense of “the sum of the particular cultures of each nation” that was under the threat of rising fascism (quoted from Tran 2012: 370). Gide (1869-1951) was a distinguished French writer, a defender of creative individuality through self-expression, an activist for various causes ranging from homosexuality to anti-colonialism, and a “fellow traveler” for communism. By quoting Gide, Hoài Thanh discredited Hải Triều by showing that he was just parroting everything emitted from Western intellectuals’ mouths without knowing that even a sympathizer for communism actually favored the stand of “art for art’s sake” and valued “I,” the center of human creativity, imagination, inspiration, dream, and ambition.

Contrary to their praise for Nguyễn Công Hoan’s work, the leftists came extremely critical of *The Tale of Kiều*, the epic poem that had been so enthusiastically

hailed by Phạm Quỳnh and the AFIMA as both the epitome of Vietnam's classical literature and the great hope for Vietnam's literary future. Ironically, this harsh criticism from leftist intellectuals during the colonial period against *The Tale of Kiều* formed a sharp contrast to the Vietnamese Communist regime's constant effort to canonize it in the postcolonial era, which in fact echoed what Phạm Quỳnh had been trying to do since the 1920s. The leftists used *The Tale of Kiều* as an example to make a point that content and form should not be separated when one read a literary work. Lady Kiều, the protagonist of the epic poem, was a gloomy and passive character who did nothing but tearfully submit to the fate befalling her and her family. As such, the content of *The Tale of Kiều* was capable of distracting unsuspecting readers like commoners from the cruel reality of the Great Depression that was plaguing the world at the time. Worse yet, the literary form of the *Tale of Kiều* was sufficiently superb that it could easily engross readers and fool them into buying into the permissive philosophy that permeated the book. In conclusion, writers either helped social evolution by producing works that would awaken commoners to engage in class struggle, or wrote some shallow, sentimental works to indulge commoners and thus turned themselves into enablers of injustice (Khương Hữu Tài 1936).

But much to the dismay of the “art for life's sake” group, the “art for art's sake” group was greatly emboldened by André Gide's explosive book *Return from the USSR* (*Retour de l'USSR*) in 1936, a collection of his reflections on his tour to the Soviet Union, the object of his admiration before the tour for its potential to carry the whole human race toward utopia. Gide had been an admirer for the grand socialist experiment that had been underway in the Soviet Union since the success of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, and he gladly accepted the invitation to attend the funeral of Gorki in Russia. Unfortunately, this trip was not as satisfying as either the Soviets or Gide had hoped it would be. Gide was greatly disturbed by the backwardness and oppressiveness he witnessed in Russia, and upon returning to France, he wrote the book to express his disappointment and criticism against the rigid, dogmatic “art for life's sake” philosophy of literature. Lưu Trọng Lư (1939a, 1939b) seized Gide's “betrayal” of Marxism to argue for the cause of “art for art's sake.”

In response to the Marxist demand for politically committed literature and Hải Triều's theoretical treatises on *Marxism Idealism or Materialism?* that appeared in 1936, Hoài Thanh, together with Lê Trảng Kiều (1912-1977) and Thiều Sơn, coauthored a book entitled *Literature and Action* (“Văn chương và hành động”) in the same year that Hải Triều's book was published. Contrary to the Marxist claim that writers and literature were products of circumstances, the three authors insisted that literature was complete in itself and could have transcendent value and universal

appeal if writers were talented and observant enough to use their imagination to both capture the beauty of nature and describe the emotions that readers sensed when they encountered this beauty but were, themselves, unable to put into words. A literary work should deepen readers' experiences, stretch their imagination, and help them to understand the meaning and purpose of their life. Hence, writers' talents and personalities, instead of their class origins, were what really mattered in producing good literary works. Only very few people were kissed by mysterious Heaven with the blessings of literary talent, and even though a society might look down on these natural-born writers as a bunch of eccentric parasites, the society should allow them to freely and honestly express what they saw, heard, thought, and felt, knowing that its tolerance for the individuality of these seeming good-for-nothings would eventually benefit readers (Hoài Thanh, Lê Tràng Kiều, Thiệu Sơn, 1936).

These authors stressed that they, too, sympathized with commoners, and agreed that writers should make their societies a better place. But they pointed out that writers were not journalists: while the latter desired immediate changes of specific circumstances, the former wanted to have a lasting impact on their societies through nurturing people's aesthetic sensitivities. The criticisms against *The Tale of Kiều* appeared to them too harsh and unfair, and they argued that it was only because those "sociologists" intended to promote Nguyễn Công Hoan's socialist realist work that they deliberately attacked Lady Kiều, a poor but virtuous woman. Indulging in its compelling stories, reciting its melodious sentences, and empathizing with the tragedy the beautiful lady Kiều suffering at the hand of jealous Heaven, accompanied with occasional tears—this was one of the most innocent recreational activities a commoner could enjoy after a day's hard work. Paranoid leftists would only do commoners a disservice if they insisted on depriving commoners of the freedom of reading *The Tale of Kiều*. Even if the philosophy of *The Tale of Kiều* seemed to be immature and not particularly encouraging, commoners would neither care nor remember much about it, as they were not as sophisticated as urbanites (Hoài Thanh, Lê Tràng Kiều, Thiệu Sơn, 1936). Commoners were just ordinary people; they would not be interested at all in the dry and fancy theoretical jargon thrown out by so-called defenders of commoners (Lê Tràng Kiều 1936a, b).

3. Intellectuals in the Cultural Fields

Colonial Vietnam's cultural fields emerged out of the political-cultural *Duy Tân* Reform Movement led by Confucian scholars in the 1900s. In the 1910s and the

1920s, collaborating intellectuals Phạm Quỳnh and Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh were the most prominent men in the cultural fields, thanks to the hybrid cultural capital and political capital they derived from their rapport and collaboration with the colonial state. They enjoyed influential positions in the fields, but they were also vulnerable, because their legitimacy looked suspicious to their peers and Confucian scholars, many of whom were behind bars in the 1910s for their involvement in the struggles against the colonial state.

During this decade, Westernized intellectuals finally won the recognition that the majority of the earlier generations of Westernized intellectuals had not been able to attain.¹⁷ These younger Westernized intellectuals did not acquire their positions and influence in the fields through their relationships with the colonial state; rather, they achieved prominence through their literary works, as was the case for the Self-Reliance group and some social realist writers, or through their challenge to Sino-Vietnamese literary tradition, as was the case with the New Poetry Movement. The huge success of the Self-Reliance group and social realist writers—and the fact that none of them had to go through an “intern” stage of translating Chinese or French novels as their predecessors did in the previous decades—shows the maturity of Vietnam’s vernacular literature, which reached the peak of cultural distinction during this decade. Reading vernacular literature became a tasteful and patriotic cultural activity, and writers of these works held the greatest volume of cultural capital and became fierce fighters for the cultural fields’ independence against the encroachment of the Marxian agents in the political fields. Marxian intellectuals’ participation in the cultural fields was unprecedented because none of the political parties that were active in the political fields in the previous decades had ever tried to politicize the cultural fields.

In Appendix One, I list ninety-four active intellectuals in the cultural fields and three agents in the political fields who entered in the cultural fields by starting the “art for art’s sake vs. art for life’s sake” debates during the 1930s. Forty-six of them were listed in Hoài Thanh’s influential *Vietnamese Poets* (Thi nhân Việt Nam, 1942), and twenty-four of these poets came from Annam, an area where the first vernacular periodical was not published until 1927 and from which few *quốc ngữ* writers had emerged in the previous decades. Annamese men’s great interest in and capacity for poem composition may have resulted from the fact that poetry was a much more developed literary genre than prose in the pre-colonial period, and Annam had been the most culturally conservative area where Sino-Vietnamese village schools thrived throughout the whole colonial era, as Figure 6.2 indicates. Of the remaining poets, eighteen were from Tonkin, and three from Cochinchina.

¹⁷ See Appendix One for the list of the active intellectuals in the 1930s.

While Annamese men were flourishing in poetry, Tonkinese intellectuals excelled at prose writing and constituted the majority of writers, essayists, reporters, literature critiques, and dramatists. Of the fifty-one intellectuals who were not listed in Hoài Thanh’s *Vietnamese Poets*, five of them were scholars and researchers, and two were poets whose works did not receive Hoài Thanh’s recognition. Of the remaining forty-three intellectuals, thirty-three were from Tonkin, six were from Annam, and four from Cochinchina. Although the *quốc ngữ* literature and reading public started in Cochinchina, the center of the *quốc ngữ* literary development had shifted to Tonkin in the 1930s. Both the Self-Reliance group and rival social realist novelists were also based in the Tonkin area. The group included seven key members and four associates. Three members of the group also appeared on Hoài Thanh’s list of *Vietnamese Poets*. Six of them were children of civil servants, three were born to Confucian families, one was from a wealthy business family, and one’s father was a worker.

Table 6.3: Regional distribution of poets, writers, and scholars in the cultural fields in the 1930s

	Tonkin	Annam	Cochinchina	Total
Poets	20	24	4	48*
Prose writers	33	6	4	43
Scholars	2	3	0	5

*The total number of the poets includes forty-six acknowledged by Hoài Thanh and two who were not.

The majority of these ninety-seven intellectuals were either civil servants, Franco-Vietnamese school teachers, or reporters, or worked in all three kinds of jobs, while their fathers were more likely Confucian scholars from the previous generation, as Table 6.4 shows below; this was especially the case for poets. Less than ten of these intellectuals were well-to-do: there were two medical doctors trained in Western medicine, one lawyer, one official in the Nguyễn court, and the daughter of a prominent politician, namely, Nguyễn Thị Manh Manh, the female poet and speaker for the New Poetry Movement in Cochinchina in 1933. There were also some who were less fortunate: one worked as a driver, and another was a painter. Among them were also two professional writers, Lê Văn Trương (1906-1964) and Vũ Trọng Phụng, both of whom wrote to survive and pay debts. Vũ Trọng Phụng was born to a worker’s family and had only a primary school certificate under his belt when he entered the cultural fields to make ends meet and later pay for opium when he was told opium could cure his lung disease (Tranviet 2006). Lê Văn Trương wrote the most vernacular novels during the whole colonial period, though he occupied the bottom of the vernacular literature field as an industrial writer. He also undertook commercial writing after he went bankrupt in Cambodia—also part of French Indochina—as a result of his investment in land buying and plowing. He started his

career in 1932, and he authored nearly two-hundred novels before his death (Nguyễn Huệ Chi 2004: 844-45).

Table 6.4: Family background of the writers in the cultural fields in the 1930s

	Confucian	Civil servant	Business	Worker/peasant/handicraft	Politician	Royal	Other professions
Overall	30	14	5	9	3	3	1
Poets	14	5	3	2	3	2	0

*There were thirty-one intellectuals whose family background could not be located.

In terms of education, except for eleven intellectuals whose educational background could not be specified, the majority could be categorized into two groups: thirty-two graduates of Franco-Vietnamese collèges (the equivalent of modern America's junior high schools), and thirty-six graduates of lycées (the equivalent of modern America's high schools) and professional schools such as the Teacher's College. Three of them went to universities and studied law or medicine. Nguyễn Giang, son of one of the prominent collaborating intellectuals, Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh, studied in France. Bùi Công Trùng, a Marxian intellectual and a friend of Hải Triều, went all the way to Moscow and received revolutionary training at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East. Ngô Tất Tố and Phan Khôi were the only two intellectuals who sat for the imperial examination before they entered the cultural fields. None of these intellectuals went to either China or Japan for study.

Table 6.5: Educational background of the writers in the cultural fields in the 1930s

	Primary schools	Collèges	Lycées	Professional schools	Universities	Others
N	5	33	18	18	3	5

4. Conclusion

During the 1930s, the search for national uniqueness became the main concern in Vietnamese intellectuals' march toward Western *văn minh*, but it encountered serious challenge from Marxian intellectuals. The search for uniqueness was manifested in the debates over whether pre-colonial Vietnam had developed a unique and respectable form of national learning that was suitable for Vietnam's claim to be a proud *văn hiến chi bang* with a four-thousand-year history. It could also be seen in the emphasis on individual uniqueness, evidenced in the New Poetry Movement and the literary style advocated by the Self-Reliance Literary Group, the first of its kind in Vietnam.

During the 1930s, the *quốc ngữ* writing script and vernacular literature were maturing. The graduates of Franco-Vietnamese schools supplied an army of professional writers, along with low-ranking civil servants and school teachers, for the cultural fields. These writers produced many original literary works, especially prose fiction, the literary genre that Vietnamese intellectuals had most wanted to develop since the cultural fields took shape in the 1900s. These writers' literary styles could be categorized into two groups. One of them, represented by the Self-Reliance group, embraced the Western *văn minh*, demanded the total Westernization of Vietnam, and advocated individualism and optimism. This group of writers believed that only by overthrowing Confucianism and the traditional oppressive familial system could individual happiness be achieved and individuality liberated, which would, in turn, lead to the emergence of national character. Their advocacy of *văn minh* and individuality was sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly opposed by writers who were loosely grouped by their social realist literary style and their devotion to depicting the lives and suffering of the lowest strata in Vietnamese society. These writers were not involved in the political fields during the 1930s, but some of their works attracted the attention of Marxian intellectuals and were deemed to be correct literary works beneficial for "the people" in the controversies over whether arts should be allowed independence or should serve the interest of "the people" as opposed to the feudalist elite, the wealthy, and the bourgeoisie.

The Tale of Kiều, a popular epic poem that generated quite a few debates over the character of its protagonist whilst being canonized in the previous decade, once again provoked controversies with regard to whether it was proper for "the people" to read such the story of a passive woman who submitted to the injustice that befell her family out of obligation to the feudal familial system. Poetry in general, the most developed and beloved literary genre during the pre-colonial era, underwent a radical transformation. Initiated by a reformed Confucian scholar and carried forward by a younger generation of Westernized intellectuals, a new form of poetry that was inspired by Western literature and was close to verse emerged in the cultural fields and became a battle cry against the traditional poetic styles.

The cultural fields in the 1930s faced a new form of challenge from the political fields. Prior to the 1930s, the colonial state was the only form of political domination that impinged upon the cultural fields. During the 1930s, however, in addition to the colonial state were Marxian anti-colonial activists who tried to politicize the cultural fields and challenged the quest for a distinctive *văn minh* nation as the most important cultural goal. In so doing, Marxian intellectuals introduced a new form of political capital into the cultural fields. Before the 1930s, one's political capital was derived from one's relationship with the colonial state, be it a relationship of rapport or

opposition; during the 1930s, Marxian intellectuals introduced the concept of historical materialism and the concept of “the people” to the cultural fields and decided that aiding “the people’s” liberation from the oppression of capitalism was the only legitimate political capital.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

My dissertation is driven by the following research question: how did Vietnam, a French colony whose culture had been deeply shaped by China for millennia, transform into a nation, even though it did not have an independent state until the end of the August Revolution? Both the French and the Chinese models were at stake in this process of identity formation, because Vietnamese men of letters (and a few women) during the colonial period constantly compared their society with that of France and China in order to figure out how to become a nation and what are required of a nation. Vietnamese intellectuals selectively imitated, differentiated from, and syncretized cultural elements from both old and new models in the process of developing three cultural institutions they saw as necessary to becoming a civilized nation: the vernacular written language *quốc ngữ*, the national learning *quốc học*, and the vernacular literature *quốc văn*. These three institutions were seen as critical to the future of Vietnamese nation because Vietnam had relied on Chinese characters for millennia, and Vietnamese intellectuals found their ancestors' literary and intellectual accomplishments did not live up to the proud claim of Vietnam being a four-thousand-year-old domain of civility, or *văn hiến chi bang*.

Using Pierre Bourdieu's field analysis, I seek to understand how Vietnamese intellectuals in the cultural fields engaged in the creation of the above three cultural institutions in the hope of giving their society a national culture that made it recognizably similar to, but still distinguishable from other nations, especially China and France. The cultural fields included the vernacular literature field, the academic field, and the journalistic field, all three of which were crucial in the creation of *quốc ngữ*, *quốc ngữ*, and *quốc văn*. These cultural fields were subfields of the intellectual field, or *giới trí thức* in Vietnamese, which also included the political fields, such as the colonial state and the anti-colonial movements. To keep my writing as concise as possible, I have simply used the phrase "the cultural fields." In these fields, intellectuals with different configurations of cultural and political capital struggled for

recognition and for independence of the fields from the domination of the colonial state and the forces of the market economy.

1. Research Findings

Intellectuals' actions in these cultural fields were regulated by their *habitus*, which were, in turn, shaped to a large degree by their educational background—whether Sino-Vietnamese, Franco-Vietnamese, French, or Chinese, or some combination of the four models of education. Between 1900 and 1940, intellectuals' goals with regard to and understandings of the nation shifted, as did their perceptions of and relationships with the French and Chinese cultural models. Early in the colonial period, priority was placed on establishing Vietnam as a civilized nation and the question of its uniqueness received less attention. Intellectuals sought to familiarize themselves with the French cultural model, using it to critically appraise the Chinese model and eliminate any elements that had rendered pre-colonial Vietnam uncivilized. Yet, the Chinese model was not simply discarded, as it continued to provide vocabulary about modernization, a frame of reference for understanding the Asian experience of emulating the Western model, and popular literature for the growing reading public. Gradually, the quest for uniqueness grew stronger after several decades of emulation, and Vietnamese intellectuals began to re-examine their past attitudes toward the two models. The French model retained its lofty aura, yet some intellectuals developed a critical eye toward it and began to emulate elements of it, using it, paradoxically, to resist it. Meanwhile, other intellectuals launched an iconoclastic assault on the Chinese model, even as it remained a key resource for Vietnamese intellectuals to claim distinctiveness vis-à-vis the French model.

I emphasize that cultural models are not simply inert, static resources used for emulation and differentiation. Rather, they are rival discourses with loyal followers and barriers to entry of varying levels of difficulty, and they are capable of conferring different forms and amounts of cultural capital upon their supporters. They are also constantly transformed by the interpretations of their followers. I trace struggles amongst different groups of Vietnamese intellectuals as a pre-colonial intellectual world gave way to vernacular cultural fields, shifting the value and distribution of various forms of capital and the forms of *habitus* necessary to gain position within, and define the contours of the field. Confucian scholars, Westernized neo-traditionalists, radical Westernized intellectuals, and professional writers and journalists competed with one another over time to determine how various forms of

habitus, literature, and cultural models would be valued within Vietnam's cultural fields. I analyze how the modern vernacular novel was born out of Vietnamese intellectuals' strong desire for a civilized and unique nation, and how its literary styles, contents, and paths of development were defined by competing intellectuals' changing relationships with French and Chinese literary models.

2. Chapter Summaries

In the introductory chapter, I reviewed the literature on nationalism and argued that we need to look more carefully at the dual processes of emulation and differentiation in the institutionalization of national states. I also suggested that hybridization or syncretization, i.e., the mixing of cultural elements from different hegemonic models in the process of emulation and differentiation, is important in the formation of national culture. I reviewed Pierre Bourdieu's field theory and proposed to analyze colonial Vietnamese intellectuals' efforts to emulate, differentiate from, and syncretize Chinese and French cultural models in the cultural fields, where intellectuals strived for recognition within the fields and independence of the fields from the colonial state and the market economy.

Chapter Two discussed the transition from the pre-colonial Sino-Vietnamese intellectual world, or *văn hiến*, where educated men wrote in Chinese, communicated to villagers with *chữ Nôm*, and practiced *diễn* to participate in the Sinocentric East Asian cultural realm, to the modern vernacular cultural fields, where evolving into a *văn minh* nation was the new norm. When the old intellectual world was disrupted by the imposition of a new model in the late nineteenth century, many Confucian scholars put up a fight, while some exceptionally talented Catholic-Confucian scholars were instrumental in utilizing both Chinese and French literature to give birth to the earliest secular vernacular literature written in *quốc ngữ*, a writing script that dates back to Catholic missionaries' evangelizing efforts in the mid-seventeenth century. The cultural fields were not born yet, as cultural affairs were not given high priority during this time period.

Chapter Three discussed the birth of the cultural fields in the 1900s in the midst of Vietnam's first cultural reform movement, the *Duy Tân* Movement, a Vietnamese version of the East Asian cultural modernization movement that began with Japan's *Meiji* Renovation in 1868. The evidence shows that the emergence of both the cultural fields and vernacular literature in Vietnam was shaped by intellectuals' simultaneous mirroring and rejecting the Chinese model: intellectuals drew upon the model to

understand *văn minh*, but some also began to call the model into question, as some of its elements, such as the imperial examination and orthodox Confucian doctrines, actually seemed to hinder Vietnam's progress toward *văn minh*. Intellectuals were also divided in terms of their views toward the French colonizer: some opted for armed uprising and were pessimistic about *văn minh*, while others wanted the mentorship of the French and favored incremental cultural renovation over political violence.

Chapter Four analyzed the dynamics of the cultural fields in the 1910s, an era of fervent literary imitation. Franco-Vietnamese collaboration policy was advocated, and Francophile intellectuals who possessed the political capital derived from their rapport with the colonial state and the cultural capital of both Chinese and French dominated the cultural fields, with few challenges from other intellectuals, as those who helped to develop the cultural fields in the first place were either in jail, in exile, or perished during the colonial repression of the *Duy Tân* Reform Movement. The French model gained prominence, while the Chinese model underwent critical reassessment. Intellectuals translated and imitated Chinese and French novels so as to acquire the literary skills deemed necessary to produce “real” and “authentic” Vietnamese national literature.

In the time period of the 1920s, the focus of Chapter Five, Vietnamese intellectuals grew more assertive vis-à-vis both cultural models: with the canonization of *The Tale of Kiều*, they tried to prove demonstrate their *văn minh* to the world by showing that they had a literary work that not only surpassed the original Chinese version, but was also equal to French literary masterpieces. Intellectuals also became more interested in identifying the uniqueness of Vietnamese culture, a task that had previously been less important when the goal was simply gaining recognition as a *văn minh* nation. The dominance of neo-traditionalists began to be challenged by Confucian scholars who had spent the decade of the 1910s either in jail or exile. The first vernacular novel celebrated by Vietnamese intellectuals as a significant, modern work that complied with the standards of French literature was also published in the 1920s.

Finally, as discussed in Chapter Six, the decade of the 1930s was the most dynamic time period for both the cultural fields and the vernacular literature. Westernized intellectuals completely replaced Confucian scholars and competed among themselves for symbolic capital within the fields; vernacular literature witnessed a development boom at the hand of professional writers in this decade; and the cultural fields came under attack from political activists who challenged the very goal of establishing Vietnam as a unique and civilized nation by insisting instead that literature should be at the service of class struggle.

3. Contributions and Implications

My research studies the Southeast Asian manifestation of East Asian nationalisms in the context of encountering the West. The dissertation makes contributions to the study of nationalism, the sociology of intellectuals, and the sociology of literature, and highlights the dual-faceted nature of nation-formation—specifically, its constant tension between processes of emulation and differentiation. In doing so, it illustrates the benefits of Bourdieu’s field-level analysis. Instead of simply attributing Vietnam’s nation-formation to either macro-level factors such as anti-colonial movements or international politics, or to micro-level ones such as individual men and women’s brave and patriotic deeds, field analysis shifts our attention to the meso level and allows us to see how Vietnam’s national identity was constructed by intellectuals whose agency in selecting how and when to emulate, differentiate from, and syncretize the two cultural models was regulated by their *habitus*, which in turn was shaped by Vietnam’s complex relationships with France and China. The dissertation also expands Bourdieu’s field analytic approach: whereas Bourdieu only emphasizes the significance of differentiation in field power struggles by examining agents’ desire for distinction, my project suggests that emulation is equally important for intellectuals to earn symbolic capital in the cultural fields.

4. Limitations

I started my project in 2006 and Vietnamese language training in 2007, and I began compiling my research findings about colonial Vietnam into a dissertation in 2011. My knowledge of French language and French imperialism is limited, and as a result, while I was writing, I unconsciously relied on my first-hand, intimate knowledge of Chinese history to compensate for my unfamiliarity with the French model by analyzing the impact of the Chinese model in greater depth. Even though the influence of China on colonial Vietnam’s creation of national written language, national literature, and national learning is significant and has received little discussion in the existing scholarship in both the United States and France, my analysis might be skewed, and the Chinese model might look all too powerful in comparison with the French model. Also, I am aware that the comments of French anthropologists and Sinologists on “Vietnam being culturally inseparable from China” and their efforts to culturally differentiate the two societies must have played a crucial role in Vietnamese intellectuals’ desire to create a distinctive national culture from China. In future research, I plan to further examine the colonizer’s role in Vietnamese

elites' efforts to create the three cultural institutions, namely, national written script, national literature, and national learning.

5. Future Research

This project also highlights many opportunities for future research. In the following two years, I plan to sharpen my focus on the evolution of national written language, national literature, and national learning in colonial Vietnam and situate my analysis in Bourdieusian theorization of the cultural fields. Vietnamese intellectuals' fierce desire to create a national literature, especially in prose fiction, during the colonial period is a fascinating phenomenon, as it involved the canonization of a *diễn*ed Sino-Vietnamese epic poem *The Tale of Kiều*, a remake of an obscure Chinese romantic novel in the seventeenth century; the deification of world-famous French novelist Victor Hugo via the native religion of Caodaism; the selective and conscious translation, imitation, and rejection of the Chinese and French novels; and the birth of the modern cultural fields that struggled for independence from the colonial state and the market economy.

I also plan to expand and publish my research on the pre-colonial *diễn* technique. More specifically, I will study the relationship between Chinese stories and *truyện Nôm* (short stories written in the *Nôm* characters, usually in verse form), investigating how the former were *diễn*ed into the latter. I will focus on *The Tale of Kiều* and *The Plum Blossoms in Full Again*, as these two *truyện Nôm* originated from Chinese novels and are the two all-time most popular *truyện Nôm* in Vietnam to this day. I will examine the intermediary role played by pre-colonial Vietnamese intellectuals in the *diễn* process, which took place in the daily life of villages and was conducted in face-to-face settings. I will compare, in particular, how embedded Chinese and Vietnamese intellectuals were in their own societies, respectively.

In addition, I also plan to study how colonial Vietnamese Confucian scholars expressed their desire for *văn minh* in adventure novels between the 1900s and 1920s. Written by Confucian scholars, the Vietnamese male characters of these adventure novels either traveled to the West and encountered *văn minh* there, or exiled to deserted islands and transformed them into peaceful and prosperous *văn minh* societies free of wars, competition, oppression, and greed. These Vietnamese adventure novels differed from the Imperial Western ones written between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which were full of the depiction of exotic places and customs of colonized peoples. They also differed from the adventure

novels written by Westernized intellectuals in the 1930s, as the latter were usually disenchanted and sarcastic about *văn minh*.

Appendix One

Active Intellectuals in the Cultural Fields from 1910 to 1940

Table 1: The active intellectuals in the 1910s

	Name	Year	Place of birth	Family and Education	Jobs and Activities	Overseas experiences
1	Luong Văn Can	1854-1927	Tonkin	Confucian family; master (or higher)	President of Đông Kinh Nghĩa thục; sent his sons to Japan; was thrown into prisons twice; new books	
2	Nguyễn Bá Học	1857-1921	Tonkin	Educated in Chinese but transferred to Western learning after failing the exam twice	Teaching, writing short stories, translating, participating in Duy Tân, but not explicitly political	
3	Lưu TỰ Khiết	1857-1908	Annam	Confucian family with degree tradition; master; the Nguyễn official	Participated in Duy tân by opening a medicine store; was involved in anti-tax movement and was executed by the French	
4	Nguyễn Bá Loan	1857-1908	Annam	Born to a mandarin family, was an âm sinh	Participated in Cần Vương, later in Duy tân; one of the leaders of anti-tax movement and was executed by the French	
5	Nguyễn Thân Hiến	1857-1914	Cochinchina	Born to a mandarin family; learned Chinese with Chinese teacher; made a living on herbal	Supported Đông Du by establishing Khuyến Du Học Hội in 1907 and donating a lot of	Thailand, Hong Kong, China

				medicine and teaching	money	
6	Nguyễn An Khương	1860-1931	Cochinchina	Well-versed in Chinese and quốc ngữ	Supported Duy tân by opening a hostel; translated Chinese novels for Nông Cổ mìn đàm	
7	Đào Nguyên Phổ	1861-1908	Tonkin	Doctor	The Nguyễn official, teacher, administrator; in 1907 wrote for the Chinese section of <i>Đăng cổ tùng báo</i> in Hanoi; one of the leaders of Đông Kinh nghĩa thực; committed suicide	
8	Lương Khắc Ninh	1862-1943	Cochinchina	Father was a scholar and herbal medicine practitioner; read Chinese, French, and quốc ngữ; graduated from Le Myre De Vilers	Interpreter; chief editor for <i>Nông cổ mìn đàm</i> ; member in the Hội đồng Nam Kỳ and Hội đồng tư vấn Đông Dương; founded a hát bội troupe; cultural renovation	Went to France to attend the Expose in 1922
9	Nguyễn Phương Sơn	1862-1960	Tonkin	Chinese education; failed the exam; made a living on herbal medicine	Participated in Đông Kinh Nghĩa thực, married Lương Văn Can's daughter	
10	Nguyễn Thành	1863-1911	Annam	Born in a mandarin family, was an <i>ám sinh</i> , had prepared for the exam but was prevented from taking the exam because of the French aggression against Huế	Cần Vương activist, later enlightened by Tân thư and established Duy tân hội in 1904; financially supported Đông Du; thrown into prison in 1908	
11	Nguyễn Thị Ngọc Khuê	1864-1922	Cochinchina	Born in a prominent mandarin family; taught Chinese in villages to make a living	Sold property to support Đông Du; chief editor of <i>Nữ Giới Chung</i> in 1918	
12	Đặng Nguyên Cẩn	1866-1923	Annam	Born in a mandarin family; master, junior doctor; education administrator	Opened Triều Dương thương quán with Ngô Đức Kế, Lê Văn Huân in 1907; jailed in Côn đảo from 1908 to 1921 with Huỳnh Thúc Kháng, Ngô Đức Kế	Japan
13	Phan Bội	1867-1940	Annam	Born in a mandarin family; first	Inspired by Cần Vương; organizer	Japan, China,

	Châu			candidate of the second degree exam	of Đông Du movement, established Duy tân hội in 1904, Việt Nam Quang phục hội, Việt Nam quốc dân đảng, jailed several times in both China and Vietnam; exiled to China	Thailand
14	Đặng Thúc Liêng	1867-1945	Cochinchina	Father was Ân sát Đặng Văn Duy who won battles against the French troops in Chí Hòa in 1862; learned Chinese, quốc ngữ, taught himself French	Supported Duy tân by opening Minh tân công nghệ and medicine store Nam Thọ Xuân; wrote for various newspapers; jailed in 1908 and spent 3 months in jail; after release opened another medicine store Bắc Phước Hưng Đông and established a rạp hát to encourage hát bội art.	
15	Nguyễn Thượng Hiền	1868-1925	Tonkin	Born in a prominent scholar/mandarin family; master; practiced herbal medicine as a transitional career	Inspired by Chinese reformist writings; supported Đông Du; founded Việt Nam Quang phục hội with Phan Bội Châu in China;	China
16	Trần Chánh Chiếu	1869-1919	Cochinchina	trung học D'Adran (Catholic school); French citizen; published <i>Minh tân tiểu thuyết</i> , imitated <i>Comte de Mount Cristo</i> and wrote <i>Tiền Căn hậu báo</i> in 1907, wrote <i>Hoàng Tổ Anh hàm oanh</i> in 1910, translated <i>Ba người ngự lâm pháo thủ</i> in 1913	teacher, interpreter, administrator, chief editor of <i>Lục tỉnh tân văn</i> ; founded Nam kỳ Minh tân công nghệ xã to support Đông Du, was arrested in 1908; 1917 was arrested again	Hong Kong, Japan
17	Nguyễn Chánh Sắc	1869-1947	Cochinchina	Chinese teacher Trần Hữu Thường; graduated from Franco-Vietnamese school Châu Đốc	Worked for Côn đảo and knew Confucian scholars in prison; taught in Franco-Vietnamese schools; translated Chinese novels; opened Nam Kỳ kỹ nghệ	

					công ty to support Đông Du and compete with Chinese captial; chief editor of Lục tỉnh tân văn; wrote Nghĩa hiệp kỳ duyên in 1920; founded Nam Kỳ nhật báo ái hữu hội in 1916	
18	Nguyễn Quyền	1869-1941	Tonkin	Baccalaureate; herbal medicine practioner	Opened Đông Kinh Nghĩa thực, advocated short hair; opened a shop Hồng Tân Hưng; was jailed between 1908 and 1910, and was under house arrest with Dương Bá Trạc, Võ Hoành in Bến Tre until 1920	
19	Trần Quý Cáp	1870-1908	Annam	Doctor	Inspired by K, L; participated in Duy tân and opened Liên Thành thư xã, Liên Thành thương quán, Dục Anh học hiệu; opened French class while worked as a giáo thụ in Thăng Bình, Quảng Nam but was opposed by senior Confucian scholars; executed by France	
20	Phan Chu Trinh	1872-1926	Annam	Wealthy scholarly family; his father participated in <i>Cần Vương</i> but died of partisian hostility; phó bảng junior doctor; argued “without overthrowing Chinese characters we cannot save Vietnam”	One of the main leaders of Duy tân, inspired by K, L; impressed by Japan’s modernization; and disagreed with Phan Bội Châu’s armed struggle appraoch and acknowledged the necessity; was thrown into prison in 1908 but was released as a result of the intervention of some French figures; cultural renovation	Japan, France
21	Nguyễn	1872-1944	Cochinchina	Education unclear	Administrator in the government;	

	Viên Kiều				participated in Minh tân công nghệ; debated over thơ Đường with more than ten scholars in Nông Cổ mìn đàm in 1904	
22	Bùi Quang Chiêu	1872-1945	Cochinchina	Confucian family; studied in Algeria and then France, graduated from <i>École Coloniale</i>	French citizen; politician	Alegeria, France
23	Võ Hoàn	1873-1946	Tonkin	Failed exam taker	One of the founding members of Đông Kinh Nghĩa thực; jailed from 1908-1912, and under house arrest since then; made a living on herbal medicine and teaching	
24	Hoàng Trọng Mậu	1874-1916	Annam	Father was a master and a supporter of the Cần Vương movement; education unclear, but said to be fluent in Chinese; studying in Japan	A member of Quang Phục Hội; implicated in Emperor Duy Tân's khởi nghĩa; executed by France	
25	Lê Đại	1875-1951	Tonkin	A minor degree; his father was a kép; made a living on nghệ đồ; edited quốc ngữ textbooks;	A member of Hội Duy tân; taught in Đông Kinh Nghĩa thực; jailed from 1908 to 1925; translated Phan Bội Châu's Hải ngoại huyết thư	
26	Nguyễn Hữu Tiến	1875-1941	Tonkin	Bacclaureate	Was a member of Đông Kinh Nghĩa thực's translation board; translated for Đông kinh ấn quán; wrote for Nam Phong for 17 years and produced scholarly works on Vietnam's classical literature; wrote tuồng on Trần Hưng Đạo and Phạm Ngũ Lão in 1916	
27	Lê Văn	1876-1929	Tonkin	Was born in a prominent	Participated in the Duy tân hội	

	Huân			scholar/mandarin family; giải nguyên, first candidate of the second degree exam	and opened Triều Dương thương điếm; was thrown into prison in 1908 and was released in 1917; made a living on herbal medicine and teaching after jail; established Hội Phục Việt in 1925; committed suicide in prison	
28	Huỳnh Thúc Kháng	1876-1947	Annam	Doctor	One of the leaders of Đông Kinh Nghĩa thực; was in prison from 1908-1921; establishing Tiếng Dân with the assistance of Đào Duy Anh; was the Nghị trường of the Hội đồng	
29	Phan Văn Trường	1876-1933	Tonkin	Confucian education at home, studied law in France and was Vietnam's first Law PhD	Supported the Duy Tân; French citizen; lawyer; interpreter; lecture; founder of La Fraternité des compatriotes; advocate for <i>quốc ngữ</i> literacy; journalism; arrested for his connections with the Quang Phục Hội	France
30	Ngô Đức Kế	1878-1929	Tonkin	Born in a prominent scholar family; doctor; after passed the exam he spent two years reading Chinese new books	Participated in Duy tân by opening Triều Dương thương dịch with Đặng Nguyên Cẩn; arrested and jailed in Côn đảo between 1908 and 1921; was a chief editor for the <i>Hữu Thanh báo</i> in Hanoi from 1922 to 1926; opened Giác quần thư xã in 1926	
31	Nguyễn Đôn Phục	1878-1954	Tonkin	Born in a mandarin family; bacclaureate	In Đông Kinh Nghĩa thực's translation board; worked for Nam Phong; admired Đường luật and advocated Nam luật	

32	Nguyễn Hải Thân	1879-1959	Tonkin	Baccalaureate; teacher was Lương Văn Can; graduated from Tokyo Shinbu School in Japan and Hwang-pu Military school in China	Went to Japan with Phan Bội Châu; had plotted to assassinate Albert Sarraut between 1912 and 1913; exiled and died in China	Japan, China
33	Nguyễn Hữu Cầu	1879-1946	Tonkin	Born in a prominent scholarly family; master; translated Hoàng Hán Y Học	Inspired by Chinese reformist writings; was in charge of editing board in Đông Kinh Nghĩa thực; jailed from 1915-1920; after release he made a living by herbal medicine and teaching; wrote in Chinese, Nôm; refused to work for Nam Phong with Dương Bá Trạc	
34	Lương Trúc Đàm	1879-1908	Tonkin	Father was Lương Văn Can; Confucian scholar with cử nhân master degree	Gave a speech with Dương Bá Trạc; demanded the state to open more universities with Đỗ Chân Thiết	
35	Nguyễn Quang Diêu	1880-1936	Cochinchina	Sino-Vietnamese education; not a degree holder; learned quốc ngữ at 10	His duy tân activities were closely tied with Phan Bội Châu; jailed twice, one was in French Guyane, but escaped to British Trinidad Island in 1913 and went to Washington D C in 1920; returned to Saigon in 1926 to get in contact with revolutionaries	China, Hong Kong, French Guyane, British Trinidad, the States
36	Phạm Duy Tồn	1881-1924	Tonkin	Born in a well-off merchandise family; graduated from Thông ngôn Hà Nội	Interpreter; teacher in Hội Trí Tri; was in charge of submitting the request for opening Đông Kinh nghĩa thực with Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh; opened a restaurant and a jewelry shop; looked down on	China, for work

					Confucian scholars	
37	Nguyễn Bá Trác	1881-1945	Annam	Master	Went to Hanoi to learn French to support Đông Kinh nghĩa thực; went to Japan for Đông Du, then exiled in China until 1914; worked for Nam Phong until 1932 and worked as a Tá lý for Huế; was executed by Việt Minh	Japan, China
38	Nguyễn Trọng Lợi	1881-1911	Cochinchina	Father was a prominent scholar; education unclear	Opened Liên Thành thư xã, Liên Thành thương quán, Dục Thanh học hiệu, Hội thanh niên thể dục, tư thực Dục Anh	
39	Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh	1882-1936	Tonkin	Ordinary family; graduated from College of Interpretation; ardent Francophile	Worked as a secretary; teacher of Hội Trí Tri, Đông Kinh Nghĩa thực; opened Hanoi's first printing house in 1907; was a member of Ligue des droits de l'homme and asked for amnesty for Phan Châu Trinh; translated many French literary works; opened Âu Tây tư tưởng publisher with Vayrac; active in both translation and political area	Went to France for three times
40	Hoàng Thăng Bí (major)	1883-1939	Tonkin	Master	Was in charge of editing, teaching, lecturing in Đông Kinh Nghĩa thực; jailed in Hue in 1910; devoted lover for tuồng	
41	Dương Bá Trạc	1884-1944	Tonkin	Master; Father Dương Trọng Phổ, brother Dương Quảng Hàm, teacher Đinh Gia Trấn	Inspired by Kang and criticized the exam system; opened Đồng Lợi Tế, Đông Thành Xương, Hồng Tân Hưng to financially support the Đông du movement;	

					was jailed from 1908 to 1917 (was under house arrest from 1910 to 1917); was a member of the Hội Khai Trí Tiến Đức and Hội Phật giáo Bắc Kỳ and Đuốc Huệ	
42	Lương Ngọc Quỳnh	1885-1917	Tonkin	Father was Lương Văn Can; graduate of Chinese military school	Went to Japan to study but ended up graduating from a military school in China; a member of the Quang Phục Hội; was jailed in 1915, died of the revolt of Thái Nguyên	Japan, China, Hong Kong, Thailand
43	Hồ Văn Trung/Hồ Biểu Chánh	1885-1958	Cochinchina	Father was a hương chủ; Learned Chinese in village school, graduated from Chasseloup-Laubat; was a clerk/functionary in the French administration from 1906 to 1941; was a nghị viên from 1941	Was attracted by Minh tân, wished to support Minh tân by literary works, but realized that a thorough knowledge of Chinese was a necessity; spent a few years reading Chinese classics and translating Chinese novels in the 1900s; began composing Vietnamese stories and imitating French literature in the 1910s; received financial support from the French government and therefore was	
44	Trương Duy Toàn	1885-1957	Cochinchina	Learned Chinese in village school and French and quốc ngữ in Franco-Vietnamese school in Cochinchina	Participated in Hội Minh tân, went to Japan to support Đông Du and exiled in China; went to France with Cường Để and was arrested; under house arrest from 1917 to 1919; worked for newspapers and wrote <i>tùng ca ra</i>	Cambodia, Japan, China, France

					bộ	
45	Phan Khôi	1887-1959	Annam	Baccalaureate; born in a prominent scholar/mandarin family; his father quitted his service for the colonial government; Trần Quý Cáp's student; taught himself French in prison	Participated in Đông Kinh Nghĩa thục and anti-tax movement; worked for <i>Đảng Cổ tùng báo</i> ; was arrested in 1908 and jailed until 1914; wrote two short stories in Chinese in 1908	
46	Nguyễn Háo Vĩnh	1893-1941	Cochinchina	Father supported the Minh Tân movement; graduated from the Collège of Chasseloup Laubat then went to Japan in 1905 and went to Hong Kong to study at St. Joseph's College in 1908	Involved in the Minh Tân movement, opened shops to support it; arrested in Hong Kong; journalism	Japan, Hong Kong, the UK
47	Lê Dư	?-1967	Annam	? Knew Chinese	Went to Japan for study but withdrew shortly and was criticized by Phan Bội Châu as lacking loyalty to the organization; traveled in Japan and China until 1925; was a member of <i>Hội Phật học Bắc Kỳ</i>	Japan, China
48	Hoàng Tích Phụng	?	Tonkin	Scholar	Minor supporter of the Duy Tân movement	
49	Đỗ Chân Thiết	?	?	Unclear	A supporter of the Đông du movement; executed by France; opened <i>Đông Lợi Tế</i> with Nguyễn Phương Sơn and Dương Bá Trạc	
50	Mai Lão Bạng	?-1942	Annam	Born in Catholic family; studying in Japan	A member of <i>Quang Phục Hội</i> ; exiled in China; jailed from 1913-1917	

Table 2: Intellectuals who were active in the cultural fields in the 1910s

	Name	Year	Place of birth	Family and Education	Jobs and Activities	Overseas experiences
1	Nguyễn Bá Học	1857-1927	Tonkin	Failed the imperial exam for tú tài twice and shifted to learn Western learning	Teacher, writer for essays, short stories, and political commentaries for <i>Nam Phong</i>	
2	Phan Kế Bính	1875-1921	Tonkin	Confucian scholars with cử nhân/master degree;	Sympathetic for the Duy Tân but not involved; compiling and translating classical Chinese and Sino-Vietnamese texts	
3	Trần Phong Sắc	1878-	Cochinchina	Confucian scholar	Teacher of Chinese; translator of Chinese novels	
4	Lê Hoảng Mưu	1879-1941	Cochinchina	Father was interpreter; education unclear	Writer, journalism	
5	Nguyễn Đỗ Mục	1882-1951	Tonkin	Confucian scholar with tú tài degree, father was a degree holder;	Writer, translator of Chinese texts and novels	
6	Trần Trọng Kim	1883-1953	Tonkin	Born in a Confucian family; learned Chinese in family, graduated from “Trường Thương mại” in Lyon	Teacher, scholar	
7	Nguyễn Tử Siêu	1887-1965	Hanoi	Confucian family with degree tradition; got minor degree in the last year’s imperial exam	Sino-Vietnamese herbal medicine practitioner; writer of historical novels; translator of Sino-Vietnamese herbal medicine; teacher	
8	Nguyễn Mạng Bồng	?	Tonkin	Tân Đà’s older brother; Confucian family	Industrial writer, translator of Chinese novels, journalism Nam Phong	
9	Tân Đà Nguyễn	1889-1939	Tonkin	Confucian family with degree tradition; a child prodigy in	Poet, writer, essayists; journalism; translator of Chinese novels and	

	Khắc Hiếu			Chinese literature	texts	
10	Nguyễn Văn Ngọc	1890-1942	Tonkin	Graduated from the Collège of Interpretation	Teacher, scholar of Sino-Vietnamese legacy	
11	Phạm Quỳnh	1892-1945	Tonkin	Graduated from the Collège of Interpretation	Editor-in-chief of Nam Phong; attended the Colonial Exhibition in Marseille in 1922 as a representative of the AFIMA; politician	France
12	Diệp Văn Kỳ	1895-1945	Annam	Father was a teacher, mother was a member of the Nguyễn royal family; Studied law in France	Participated in the Constitutionalist Party; organized Hội Khuyến học; founded Đông Pháp thời báo and Thân Chung	

Table 3: Intellectuals active in the cultural and political fields in the 1920s

	Name	Year	Place of birth	Family and Education	Jobs and Activities	Overseas experiences
1	Phan Mạnh Danh	1866-1942	Tonkin	Mandarin family		
2	Phạm Quang Sán	1874-1932	Tonkin	Confucian family	Teacher, scholar, translator of Sino-Vietnamese and Chinese texts	
3	Nguyễn Đôn Phục	1878-1954	Tonkin	Confucian scholar with a tú tài degree	Journalism; translator of Chinese and Sino-Vietnamese texts	
4	Nguyễn Trọng Thuật	1883-1940	Tonkin	Chinese at home; French and Vietnamese at schools	Teacher; journalism; writer	
5	Đoàn Tư Thuật	1886-1928	Tonkin		Translating Xu Jenya's romantic novels	
6	Bùi Kỳ	1888-1960	Tonkin	Phó bảng; École coloniale	Scholar	
7	Nguyễn	1889-1960	Cochinchina	Prominent landowning family;	Opened Trường Nguyễn Phan	France

	Phan Long			studied in the Lycée Albert-Sarraut and France	Long; editor for La Tribune Indigène, chief editor of Echo Annamite	
8	Ngô Tất Tố	1894-1954	Tonkin	Chinese at home; French briefly; one of the last exam takers	Confucian scholar; journalist; writer of social realist style	
9	Hồ Tùng Mậu	1896-1951	Annam	Father was an activist in the Cần Vương movement and was killed by the French police; education unclear	Tâm Tâm xã; communist; teacher	
10	Hoàng Ngọc Phách	1896-1973	Tonkin	Confucian family; father Hoàng Mộng Cầm participated in Cần vương; Teacher's College	Writer, teacher	
11	Phạm Hồng Thái	1896-1924	Tonkin	Father was government official Phạm Thành Mỹ; education unclear	Revolutionary	
12	Hoàng Tích Chu	1897-1933	Tonkin	Confucian family; father was Hoàng Tích Phụng; probably graduated from the Lycée Albert Sarraut; Studied journalism in France	Journalism, founded Hạ Thành ngộ báo and Đông Tây	France
13	Nguyễn Thế Truyền	1898-1969	Tonkin	Father was an án sát official; studied physics and literature in France	Revolutionary; founder of periodical Việt Nam hồn in France in 1926	
14	Đào Trinh Nhất	1900-1951	Annam	Father Đào Nguyên Phổ; maternal grandfather was Lương Văn Can; Chinese at home; French and quốc ngữ in Hanoi; studied in France from 1926 to 1929	Journalism: Hữu Thanh and Thực nghiệp; founded báo Mai in 1936	
15	Nguyễn An Ninh	1900-1943	Cochinchian	Confucian family, father was Nguyễn An Khương; studied in the Lycée Albert-Sarraut and	Radical activist	France

				France		
16	Ngô Văn Triện	1901-1947	Tonkin	Peasant family; Chinese at home, quốc ngữ at school, self-taught French	Printer of Thực Nghiệp publisher; reporter of Thực Nghiệp dân báo since 1927; founded Trúc Khê thư cục in 1928; translated Xu Jenya's romantic novels	
17	Đặng Thai Mai	1902-1984	Annam	Confucian family; father phó bảng Đặng Nguyên Cẩn participated in Duy Tân with Phan Bội Châu etc; Chinese at home; Cao đẳng sư phạm Hanoi	Teacher; revolutionary	
18	Đặng Trần Phát	1902-1929	Tonkin	Confucian family; father Đặng Trần Vỹ was a giải nguyên; Chinese at home; Trường Albert-Sarraut	Civil servant in Laos and Paksé; writer	
19	Nguyễn Thái Học	1902-1930	Tonkin	Father was an án sát official; Chinese in village, quốc ngữ in schools; Teacher's College	The Vietnam Nationalist Party; executed by France	
20	Nguyễn Triệu Luật	1903-1946	Tonkin	Confucian family ; Teacher's College	The Vietnam Nationalist Party; jailed for the involvement in Yên Bái Uprising	
21	Đào Duy Anh	1904-1988	Annam	Collège of Quốc học	Secretary of the New Vietnam Party; historian and linguist; journalism	
22	Phạm Tuấn Tái	1905-1937	Tonkin	Unclear	Founded of Nam Đồng thư xã; the Vietnam Nationalist Party	
23	Nguyễn Tiên Lãng	1909-1976	Tonkin	Confucian family, Tân Đà's brother; the Lycée Albert-Sarraut, Law school in Hanoi University	Civil servant, journalist, teacher	
24	Hồ Hữu Tường	1910-1980	Cochinchina	Lyon university	Troskyte, Revolutionary	France

Table 4: Intellectuals in the 1930s

	Name	Year	Place of birth	Family and Education	Jobs and Activities	Overseas experiences
1	Biển Ngũ Nhy	1886-1973	Cochinchina	Real name Nguyễn Bính; Collège Le Myre de Vilers Mỹ Tho, trường thuốc Hà Nội;	Poet of Đường luật; translating foreign detective novels for Công Luận báo and then composed Vietnam's first one in 1917, which was influenced by Arsene Lupin; wrote sexology	
2	Võ Liêm Sơn	1888-1949	Annam	Confucian family; Chinese then French; Quốc Học Huế; cử nhân in the imperial exam in 1912	Teacher in Quốc Học Huế; Tân Việt Cách Mạng Đảng; read New Books; started Tân văn nghệ tùng thư in 1934; jailed with his son in 1930	
3	Nguyễn Văn Tố	1889-1947	Tonkin	Pen name Ứng Hoè; Confucian family; Chinese at home, trường Thông Ngôn	Trưởng Viện Đông Bắc Cổ; hội trưởng Hội Trí Tri; teacher of French language; scholar of ancient Vietnamese culture	
4	Trần Tuấn Khải	1895-1983	Tonkin	Pen names Á Nam, Đông Minh, Đông Á Thị; poor Confucian family; Chinese at home	Teacher; published <i>Duyên Nợ Phù Sinh I</i> in 1921; editor in chief of báo Khai Hóa; <i>Bút Quan Hoài I</i> was published in 1927 but was banned; published <i>Chơi Xuân</i> in 1932 but was banned again; poet of patriotic poems in traditional style, playwright, novel, translator of Chinese novels The Dream of Red Chamber. Jailed in 1932	
5	Vũ Đình Long	1896-1960	Tonkin	Father was a businessman; Chinese at home; trường Paul Bert, studied Pharmacology briefly and became a teacher	Playwright, his <i>Chén thuốc độc</i> was published in 1921, hailed as Vietnam's first national drama; <i>Tây Sương tân kịch</i> in 1922, Toà	

					án lương tâm 1923, civil servant; owner of Tân Dân: Tiểu Thuyết thứ bảy (1934-42), Phổ thông bán nguyệt san (1936-41), Ích hữu, Tao Đàn (1937-1938)
6	Khái Hưng	1896-1947	Tonkin	Real name Trần Khánh Giu; civil servant family; trường trung học Albert Sarraut	Teacher; writer Hồn bướm mơ tiên
7	Dương Quảng Hàm	1898-1946	Tonkin	Confucian family; brother was Dương Bá Trác; Chinese at home; Teacher's College	Teacher at trường Bưởi; published Quốc Văn Trích Diễm in 1925, Việt Nam Văn Học Sử Yếu in 1941, and Việt Nam Thi Văn Hợp Tuyển in 1942
8	Vi Huyền Đắc	1899-1976	Tonkin	Father was a businessman, mother's father was a doctor of the imperial exam; Chinese at home and Ecoles Superior Fine arts	Driver, inherited his father's business but failed; poet, playwright, established Thái Dương văn khố; his plays were awarded by the Self-Reliance group and France's Académie de Nice; imitated some Chinese plays and translated J J Bernard's play Martine and Chinese novels
9	Trần Tiêu	1900-1954	Tonkin	Khái Hưng's younger brother; thành chung	Opened school to teach; writer of a few novels on the subject of villages
10	Vũ Đình Chí	1900-1986	Tonkin	Civil servant family, Teacher's college	Wrote romantic novels <i>Giọt Lệ Sông Hương</i> and <i>Đời Hoàng Oanh</i> in 1930. Reportage <i>Tôi kéo xe</i> (1932); Journalism; playwright
11	Tú Mỡ	1900-1976	Tonkin	Real name Hồ Trọng Hiếu; worker's family; Chinese at home; trường Bưởi	Civil servant and satirical poet; admirer of René Buzelin; his works were not new poetry, but

					was popular	
12	Đào Trinh Nhất	1900-1951	Tonkin	Chinese at home; Franco-Vietnamese school; father Đào Nguyên Phổ; mother Lương Ngọc Quyển's daughter Lương Thị Hoà	Journalism: Hữu Thanh, Thực nghiệp dân báo, Đông Pháp (Trần Huy Liệu?); wrote books on Vietnamese history and anti-colonial movements; wrote novels in the 1940s; translated some Chinese books	Studying in France 1925-1929
13	Phú Đức	1901-1970	Cochichina	Real name Nguyễn Đức Nhuận; teacher's family; Teacher's college	Teacher; journalism (Trung Lập, Công Luận); writer of popular, modern, adventurous, unusual martial art novels and detective stories with martial art and adventurous elements in the 1920s	
14	Vũ Ngọc Phan	1907-1987	Tonkin	Pen name: Chi Qua Thị; Confucian family; tú tài	Teacher; journalism; translator of foreign literature from French; author of Nhà Văn Hiện Đại	
15	Bửu Đình	1903-?	Annam	Real name Nguyễn Phúc Bửu Đình, pen names Hà Trì and Liên Chiểu; descendent of Minh Mạng; Chinese at home, Quốc Học Huế	Teacher, civil servant; Máng Trăng Thu was a popular martial art and detective novel written in 1930 serialized in Phụ nữ tân văn; exiled in Lao Bảo for 9 years then Côn Lôn	
16	Nguyễn Công Hoan	1903-1977	Tonkin	Confucian family; Teacher's college	Kiếp Hồng Nhân was published by Tân Đà thư điểm in 1923; Phạm Quỳnh called his works "hay như Tây;" civil servant	
17	Bùi Công Trùng	1905-1986	Annam	Revolutionary; studied in Russia's Stalin University		Russia
18	Nhất Linh	1905-1963	Tonkin	Civil servant family	Civil servant; teacher; founded đảng Hưng Việt in 1938, later	1927-1930 studied in

					renamed as Đại Việt Dân Chính Đảng	France; exiled in Khmer and China
19	Lê Khánh Đồng	1905-1976	Annam	Trường Y Khoa Đông Dương in 1931; the descendant of the Lê family	Medical doctor	
20	Lan Khai	1906-1945	Tonkin	Father was a Cần Vương activist; trường Bưởi, trường Cao đẳng Mỹ thuật Đông Dương	Teacher; translator; writer; folklore collector; VNQDDĐ; journalism (Tiểu thuyết thứ bảy; Tao Đàn; Tân Dân); actor (for Hội Trí tri and Hội truyền bá quốc ngữ); jailed twice	
21	Từ Ngọc	1906-2003	Annam	Real name Nguyễn Lân; Teacher's college	Teacher in Quốc Học Huế; his novel Cậu bé nhà quê in 1925 was translated into French Le petit campagnard by Alfred Baughet	
22	Lê Văn Trương	1906-1964	Tonkin	Kicked out of trường Bưởi;	civil servant at Cambodia; went to do contractor and business in Southeast Asia; went bankrupt in 1931-1932 and returned to Vietnam to do journalism (Tân Dân group)	
23	Nam Đình	1906-1978	Cochinchina	Real name Nguyễn Thế Phương	Journalism (L'Opinion); advocated for thống nhất báo chí and đất nước; writer of social realist novels, detective story, and history; Caodaist	
24	Đông Hồ	1906-1969	Cochinchina	Real name Lâm Tấn Phác; read Nam Phong; education unclear; family unclear	Writer, poet, established Trí Đức học xã (1926-1934); in 1935 started periodical Sống; playwright; researcher, literature history; passionate about quốc	

					văn
25	Phùng Tất Đắc	1907-2008	Tonkin	Expelled from Trường Bưởi	Journalism Hoàng Tích Chu's Đông Tây
26	Phan Trần Chúc	1907-1946	Tonkin	Unclear	Writer of reportage and historical novels
27	Nam Trân	1907-1967	Annam	Real name Nguyễn Học Sỹ; Quốc học Huế, trường Bưởi	Poet (Đường luật); civil servant for the Nguyễn court
28	Lưu Kỳ Linh	1907-1974	Annam	Quốc học Huế; Confucian family; younger brother was Lưu Trọng Lư	Teacher; poet; translator of some Chinese thơ Đường
29	Phan Văn Dật	1907-1987	Annam	High mandarin family; relative of the Nguyễn Court; Chinese at home; Quốc Học Huế	Civil servant; teacher; poem Băng Khuông, novel Diễm Dương Trang was awarded by the Self-Reliance group
30	Hoàng Đạo	1907-1948	Tonkin	Real name Nguyễn Tường Long, pen names Tứ Ly, Tường Minh; civil servant family; Cao đẳng tiểu học	Civil servant, with monthly salary of 140 đồng; novelist, reportage writer, and essayist, with an emphasis on society; đảng Đại Việt Dân Chính; jailed from 1940 to 1943
31	Thế Lữ	1907-1989	Tonkin	Real name Nguyễn Thứ Lễ, pen name Lê Ta; civil servant family, mother was Catholic; Chinese at home; Cao đẳng Tiểu học Bonnal	Writer, actor, director, playwright, journalism (Tân Dân); Nhật Linh of the Self-Reliance group called him "Lamartine của Việt Nam;" in 1936 founded Tinh Hoa theatre troupe with Đoàn Phú Tứ, Nguyễn Lương Ngọc, Phạm Văn Hanh, Trần Bình Lộc, Nguyễn Đỗ Cung, Vũ Đình Liên to compete with French dramas
32	Hải Triều	1908-1954	Annam	Prominent Confucian family; Quốc Học Huế	Marxian theorist; jailed between 1931 and 1932

33	Thiếu Sơn	1908-1978	Tonkin	Confucian family; graduated from collège	Literature critic	
34	Hằng Phương	1908-1983	Annam	Real name Lê Hằng Phương; daughter of Lê Du, husband Vũ Ngọc Phan; Chinese at home, tiểu học;		
35	Tchya	1908-1969	Tonkin	Real name Đái Đức Tuấn; mandarin family; secondary school	Civil servant; from 1940-1945 resided in Kun Ming	
36	Nguyễn Tiêng Lãng	1909-	Tonkin	Confucian family; brothers Nguyễn Mạng Bông, Tân Đà; educated in trường Bưởi, lycée Albert Sarraut, Luật khoa Hà Nội	Journalism; writer; civil servant	Studied in France
37	Hoài Thanh	1909-1982	Annam	Chinese at home; tú tài;	Printer in publisher Đắc Lập in Huế; journalism; jailed for six months	
38	Nguyễn Tuấn	1910-1987	Tonkin	Confucian family; father was âm sinh and củ nhân	Writer of essays and short stories, his works were of chủ nghĩa xê dịch and how his uniqueness could not fit in the society; jailed because of sitting in	
39	Thái Can	1910-1988	Tonkin	Trường Bưởi, trường thuộc Hà Nội	Medical doctor; poet, <i>Những Nét Đan Thanh</i> was published in 1934	
40	Quách Tấn	1910-1992	Annam	Chinese at home; Quốc Học Quy Nhơn	Civil servant; his work Một Tâm Lòng was prefaced by Tân Đà and Hàn Mặc Tử	
41	Đoàn Phú Tứ	1910-1989	Tonkin	Trường Bưởi, trường Albert Sarraut, studied law for 2 years at Indochinese Universty	Dramas; Xuân thu nhã tập	
42	Nguyễn Giang	1910-1969	Tonkin	Father was Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh; studied in France	Journalism: Âu Tây tư tưởng; Đông Dương tạp chí; translator of	Studied in France

					European literature and poems, especially Shakespeare; painter
43	Thạch Lam	1910-1942	Tonkin/ Annam	Civil servant family; Cao đẳng Canh Nông; Trung học Albert Sarraut (dropped out) tú tài	
44	Ngọc Giao	1911-1997	Annam	Real name Nguyễn Huy Giao; gia đình trung lưu; thành chung	Writer of short stories for Tiểu thuyết thứ bảy; novelist; liked to write sentimental literature
45	Thanh Tịnh	1911-1988	Annam	Real name Trần Thanh Tịnh. Chinese at home; went to Catholic school Pellerine	Teacher, civil servant; journalism; influenced by Alphonse Daudet and Maupassant; romantic poet, short story writer
46	Hàn Mặc Tử	1912-1940	Annam	Real name Nguyễn Trọng Trí, pen names Lê Thanh, Phong Trần; Catholic family; father was a civil servant/interpreter; Quốc học Huế; suffered leprosy	Journalism, poet, civil servant; could write in Đường Luật
47	Bàng Bá Lân	1912-1988	Tonkin	Real name Nguyễn Xuân Lân; trường Bảo hộ, i.e., trường Bưởi	Teacher; journalism, photography;
48	Lưu Trọng Lư	1912-1991	Annam	Confucian family; Quốc học Huế	Writer; Ngân Sơn tùng thư in Huế; poet, playwright,
49	Thanh Châu	1912-?	Tonkin	Real name Ngô Hoan; secondary school	The main short story writer in Tiểu Thuyết thứ bảy; liked to write trung lưu urbanites and the poor residing around the urban areas
50	Lê Tràng Kiêu	1912-1977	Tonkin	Thăng Long school	Journalism; literary critique
51	Vũ Trọng Phụng	1912-1939	Hanoi	Father was an electrician; learned Vietnamese and French in primary school	Not a civil servant

52	J Leiba	1912-1941	Tonkin	Real name Lê Văn Bái; trường Bưởi, spent a year “giang hồ” and then returned to hometown to learn Chinese	Journalism; civil servant; poet
53	Nguyễn Vỹ	1912-1971	Annam	Pen names Tân Phong, Lê Chi, cô Diệu Huyền, Tâm Trí; revolutionary (Confucian) family: older brother Nguyễn Nghiêm was persecuted by France in 1931 on account of his involvement in Soviet Nghệ-Tĩnh; Quốc Học Quy Nhơn	Poet (1934), but was opposed by Lê Ta; journalism Franco-Vietnamese newspaper Le Cygne (Bạch Nga) with Trương Tửu in 1937; jailed for his criticism against the colonial policy
54	Trương Tửu	1913-1999	Tonkin	Pen names Nguyễn Bách Khoa, Mai Viên, T.T.; Confucian family; expelled from trường Kỹ Nghệ thực hành, self-taught	Writer, critics, loved theories and literature criticism
55	Lê Thanh	1913-1944	Tonkin	Real name Nguyễn Văn Thanh; both parents were y tá	Works: Trương Vĩnh Ký, 1943, Cuốn Sổ Văn học, 1944
56	Vũ Bằng	1913-1984	Hanoi	Real name Vũ Đăng Bằng; Confucian family; secondary school trường Albert Sarraut; mother had a bookstore	Journalism; published Lọ Vãi in 1931; editor in chief of Tiểu Thuyết thứ bảy and secretary of Trung Bắc chủ nhật; writer of social realist short stories
57	Phạm Cao Cung	1913-	Tonkin	Confucian family; 4 years in Thành Chung failed the exam and transferred to trường Kỹ nghệ thực hành ; Chinese was bad; father was Cù nhân and younger brother of poet Tú Xương’s wife; wife was Huyền Nga	Writer of detective stories; writer of 50 martial art novels, adventurous novels but claimed they were translated from Chinese works for publisher Mai Lĩnh’s Tiểu Thuyết nhật báo; influenced by Sherlocke Holmes, Allan Poe, Gaston Leroux (the Phantom of

					the Opera), Maurice Leblanc, George Simoenon;	
58	Vũ Đình Liên	1913-1996	Hanoi	Trung học	Teacher, civil servant, minor new poet	
59	Trần Huyền Tran	1913-1989	Hanoi	Real name Trần Kim; pen name Cô Vân Anh, Lê Dân; business family; trung học not finished	Poet, Tân Dân; participated in Ban Kịch Hà Nội	
60	Vũ Đình Liên	1913-1996	Hanoi	Family was thợ kim hoàn; Tú Tài	Teacher; civil servant; wrote poems occasionally	
61	Đoàn Văn Cừ	1913-2004	Tonkin	Peasant's family; education unclear	Teacher; realist poet	
62	Nguyễn Nhược Pháp	1914-1938	Hanoi	Father was Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh; trường Albert Sarraut	Published Ngày xưa (1935) and Người học vẽ (1936)	
63	Nguyễn Thị Mạnh Mạnh	1914-2005	Cochinchina	Real name Nguyễn Thị Kiêm; graduated from trường Áo Tím; father was a Tri huyện and senator	Teacher; activist; actress; editor; feminist; politician: Ủy Ban Lâm Thời Tổ Chức Đông Dương, 1936	Died in France
64	Mộng Thuyết	1914-2005	Cochinchina	Real name Thái Thị Sửu or Thái Thị Út; pen names Hà Tiên Cô, Thắt Tiêu Muội, Nàng Út, Bách Thảo Sương. Tiểu học.	Husband was Đông Hồ; was mentioned with honor by the Self-Reliance group; poet, essayist; translated Baudelair's poems.	
65	Đỗ Huy Nhiệm	1915-	Tonkin	Trung học	Civil servant; poet, liked 杜甫屈原; works Khúc ly tao (1934) and Thiên diễm thuyết (1936)	
66	Nguyễn Xuân Huy	1915-2000	Tonkin	Civil servant family; thành chung	Journalism, poet	
67	Thúc Tề	1916-1946	Annam	Quốc học Huế	Poet; journalism; nghệ thuật vị nhân sinh	
68	Phạm Huy Thông	1916-1988	Tonkin	Merchant family; Law graduate of Indochinese University	Activist; lawyer	Studied law PhD in France

					from 1937 and was expelled in 1951
69	Xuân Diệu	1916-1985	Annam	Confucian family; University law degree	Teacher; poet; civil servant
70	Yến Lan	1916-1998	Annam	Real name Lâm Thanh Lang; Minh Hương Confucian/business family;	Teacher; journalism; poet, his poetic style was thơ loạn (or thơ điên)
71	Xuân Tâm	1916-2012	Annam	Real name Phan Hạp; Quốc học Huế	Civil servant
72	Phan Khắc Khoan	1916-1998	Annam	Confucian family; education Thành chung	Wrote “Kịch thơ”, like Phạm Huy Thông; teacher; playwright; translator; tried to use literature to mobilize
73	Bích Khê	1916-1946	Annam	Real name Lê Quang Lương; Confucian family; grandfather refused to collaborate with the French, father participated in Đông Du	Opened a private school with his sister in 1934; poet of ca trù and đường luật before started composing thơ mới
74	Phan Thanh Phước	1916-1947	Annam	Mandarin family; Catholic school Pellerin	Official in the Nguyễn court
75	Vũ Hoàng Chương	1916-1976	Tonkin	Chinese at home; Albert Sarraut school, secondary school in 1937, a year in Law school, math degree	Civil servant; poet and playwright; established Ban Kịch Hà Nội with Nguyễn Bính
76	Hồ Dzếnh	1916-1991	Tonkin	Father was Chinese; secondary school	Poet, journalism, teacher

77	Hồ Văn Hào	1917-	Cochinchina	Trung học	Won the first prize of French poem writing in 1934; poet; civil servant; resurrected Women's news in 1935 to no avail because they criticized Phạm Quỳnh (thượng thư then)
78	Nguyễn Đình Thu	1917-?	Annam	Quốc Học Huế	Civil servant
79	Nguyễn Bính	1918-1966	Tonkin	Father was teacher, mother was daughter of a rich family; education unclear	Poet "Vua thơ tình;" work Tâm Hồn Tôi was awarded by the Self-Reliance group; teacher; playwright;
80	Nguyễn Hồng	1918-1982	Tonkin	Real name Nguyễn Nguyên Hồng; Catholic family	Illegal teacher, social realist novelist, good at writing the unfortunate people
81	Thâm Tâm		Tonkin	Real name Nguyễn Tuấn Trình; father was a teacher; tiểu học	painter
82	Cù Huy Cận	1919 (1917) -2005	Annam	Poor Confucian family; trường Cao Đẳng Canh Nông	Poet, influenced by French poetry, Đường luật, and Vietnamese folklore
83	Nguy Mộng Huyền	1919-1997	Annam	Cao đẳng tiểu học; tú tài	Civil servant

84	Phạm Hữu Hầu	1920-	Annam	Confucian family; father was a doctor; Quốc học Huế; trường Mỹ thuật Đông Dương; suffered epilepsy	Unclear
85	Chế Lan Viên	1920-1989	Annam	Real name Phan Ngọc Hoan; thành chung upper primary; civil servant family	Teacher; in 1937 published <i>Điêu Tàn</i> and announced a new style called “trường thơ loạn.” “kinh dị, thần bí, bẻ tắc của thời Điêu tàn vợi xương, máu, sọ người, với những cảnh đổ nát, với tháp Chàm
86	Anh Thơ	1921-2005	Tonkin	Real name Vương Kiều Ân; Confucian family, elementary school unfinished	Poems <i>Bức Tranh Quê</i> (1939) was awarded by the Self-Reliance group
87	Tế Hanh	1921-	Annam	Real name Trần Tế Hanh; father was teacher and Sino-Vietnamese medical practitioner; Quốc Học Huế	Nghệ Ngào was awarded by the Self-Reliance group
88	Tôn Nữ Thu Hồng	1922-1948	Annam	Member of the Nguyễn royal family; trường Đồng Khánh	Published poems in 1940, with preface from Đạm Phương
89	Vân Đài	?-1964	Tonkin	Real name Đào Thị Nguyệt Minh; education unclear	Chinese Tang style poet
90	Phạm Minh Kiên	?	Cochinchina	Buddhist family	Writer of historical novels and one detective novel in traditional style

Appendix Two

The Manifesto of the Self-Reliance Literary Group

1. Tự sức mình làm ra những sách có giá trị về văn chương chứ không phiên dịch sách nước ngoài nếu những sách này chỉ có tính cách văn chương thôi: mục đích là để làm giàu thêm văn sản trong nước.
2. Soạn hay dịch những cuốn sách có tư tưởng xã hội. Chú ý làm cho người và cho xã hội ngày một hay hơn lên.
3. Theo chủ nghĩa bình dân, soạn những cuốn sách có tính cách bình dân và cổ động cho người khác yêu chủ nghĩa bình dân.
4. Dùng một lối văn giản dị, dễ hiểu, ít chú nho, một lối văn thật có tính cách An Nam.
5. Lúc nào cũng mới mẻ, yêu đời, có chí phấn đấu và tin ở sự tiến bộ.
6. Ca tụng những nét hay vẻ đẹp của nước mà tính cách bình dân, khiến cho người khác đem lòng yêu nước một cách bình dân. Không có tính cách trương giả mà quý phái.
7. Trọng tự do cá nhân.
8. Làm cho người ta biết đạo Khổng không hợp thời nữa.
9. Đem phương pháp khoa học Thái Tây ứng dụng vào văn chương Việt Nam.
10. Theo một trong chín điểm này cũng được miễn là đừng trái ngược với những điều khác.

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