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FRANCO-VIETNAMESE SCHOOLS AND
THE TRANSITION FROM CONFUCIAN TO A
NEW KIND OF INTELLECTUAL IN THE
COLONIAL CONTEXT OF TONKIN

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**Franco-Vietnamese schools
and the transition from Confucian to a new kind of intellectuals
in the colonial context of Tonkin***

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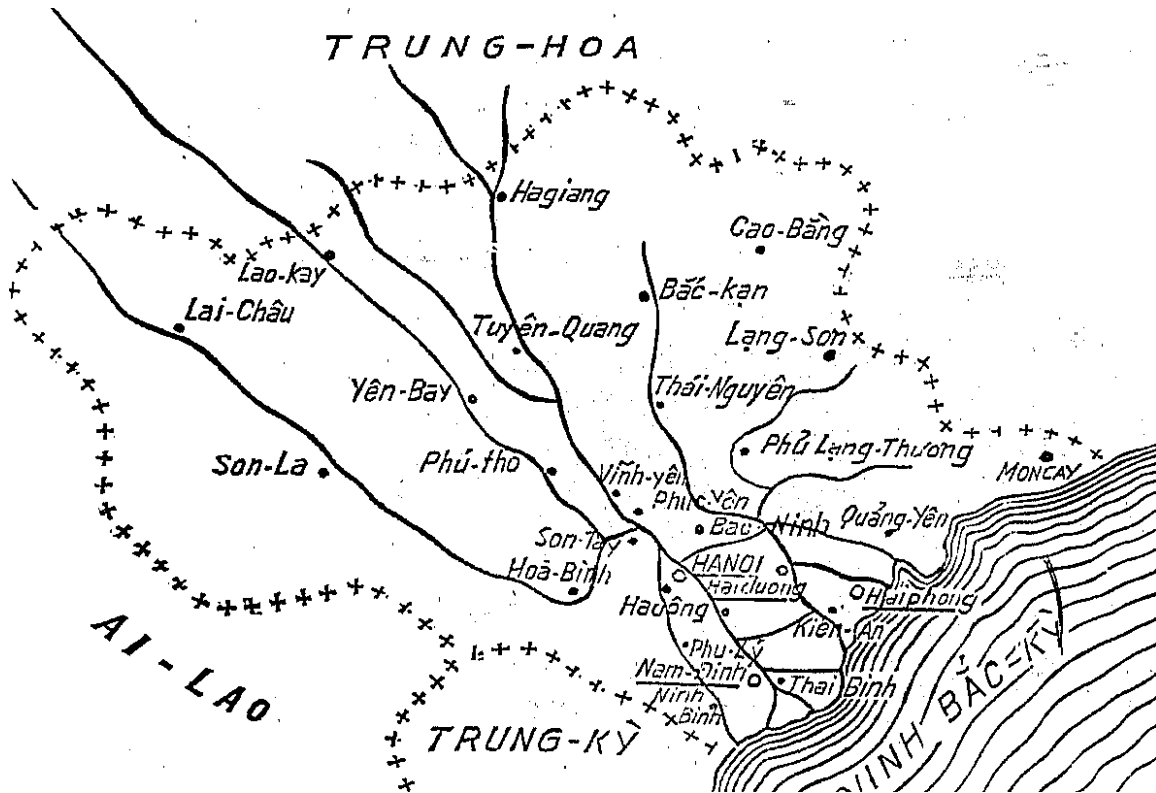
The first decades of XX century witnessed a mixed picture of the Vietnamese colonial society when its imperial background was being shaken and replaced with emerging quasi-capitalist elements. Dramatic changes took place in all aspects, including political, economic, cultural, creating one of the most turbulent times in Vietnamese history. One area where these changes found their trajectory reflection is education, which in turn, resulted in subsequent social changes. The French placed special attention to developing education, which would be a tool to realize so called ‘civilization mission’ on the one hand and to facilitate the French domination on the other hand. On Vietnamese side, the Vietnamese intellectuals utilized French schools on their purposes: to gain promotion in the clerk career, to use schools as front for propaganda of nationalism ideologies, or simply to seek a certificate to make up positions in the changing society. In Tonkin, the shift from Confucian classes to the new kind of schools that officially took place in 1906, underwent several educational reforms. This paper argues that schools with their reforms, teachers, curriculum, ethics created a new generation of Vietnamese intellectuals, whose images varied from time to time and from place to place. In Tonkin, where the Confucianism had the longest influence compared to the other two territories of Vietnam (Cochinchina and Annam), the new Western-style intellectuals were configured as early as the 1920s-1930s and grasped peaks in press, literature, arts, science. They filled up the

* This paper was presented at the Harvard Graduate Students Conference on East Asia in February 2009.

intellectual vacuum that Confucian legacy left behind and created one of the most dramatic period in Vietnamese cultural history.

I. Educational context in Tonkin late XIX-early XX century

Tonkin was one of the five territories in French Indochina (the other were Cochinchina, An Nam, Laos, Cambodia). Its area was approximately 105,000 sq km (equal to one sixth of the Indochinese total area of 720,000 sq km)[†] with the population of 6,850,000, accounting for 42% compared to 17 million of Indochina and about 44% compared to 15,580,000 of Vietnam[‡] (1922). It was the most populated region in Indochina with high residential density in Red River Delta.



Map of Provinces of Tonkin (*Hoc Bao*, January 1938)

Before the French invasion of Vietnam in 1858, there had been two main kinds of education: Chinese-based or Confucian education and Buddhist education,

[†] Hoc bao, December 18, 1922, according to the first census in 1921

[‡] Hoc bao, Nov 13, 1922, according to the first census in 1921

which had the longest history in Tonkin than in any territories in Vietnam. As soon as the French conquered Vietnam, they planned to set up their educational system, starting with schools for teaching French to Vietnamese and Vietnamese to French, in addition to missionary schools, which existed much earlier to train Vietnamese for religious purposes. Not until 1870 when the Third Republic was established and returned to the assimilation principles, that were the first French schools set up in Cochinchina (as early as 1861, with the arrival of Admiral Charner), and later on in Tonkin 1886 and in Annam 1896. It means that those schools were organized prior to the establishment of the official colonial administration and any political configuration (the French Indochinese administration was officially established in 1897). ‘In addition to abstract assimilation theory, the practical need for training interpreters or government clerks made this (Annamites’ learning French) imperative’[§]. Before 1906, the Franco-Vietnamese education did not exist as a system. Traditional Confucian education still played a key role in Tonkin, though it lost its advantages as the Vietnamese elite-based dominant scholarship

1. Criticism of Confucian learning

Before 1906, there were at least two Confucian criticizing waves. The first was headed by Nguyen Truong To (1830-1871)^{**}, Pham Phu Thu (1821-1882)^{††} Nguyen Lo Trach (1853-1898)^{‡‡}, the second was provoked by Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc (Tonkin Free School Movement). They saw the narrow-mindedness, closeness, complacency and uncreativity of Vietnamese Confucianism as hindering forces toward developing the country.

After the French invaded Vietnam, Nguyen Truong To was likely the first Vietnamese Confucianism-nurtured literati who pointed out the disadvantageous

[§] Thompson V. (1937). French Indochina. New York: Macmillan Company, p.285

^{**} Truong Ba Can (ed). Nguyễn Trường Tộ con người và di thảo. Publisher of Hochiminh City, 2002; Nguyễn Trường Tộ với vấn đề canh tân đất nước/ Collection of Conference papers on Nguyen Truong To and the questions of innovation, organized by the Han-Nom Center, Hochiminh City, 1992; Hoang Thanh Dam. Nguyễn Trường Tộ, thời thế và tư duy cách tân. Publisher of Arts, Hochiminh City, 2001.

^{††} Thai Nhan Hoa (ed). Phạm Phú Thứ với tư tưởng canh tân. Association of Historian, Hochiminh City, 1994.

^{‡‡} Mai Cao Chuong, Doan Le Giang. Nguyễn Lộ Trạch, điều trần và thơ văn. Hanoi, Social Sciences Publisher, 1995.

situation of Vietnam caused by narrow-minded and complacent people “...they had known hundreds of professions, but they were relax-favored and joy- biased, they did not want to change and innovate their technology. They were confined themselves to a territory, where they found themselves the superior and nobody could be compared to them. Therefore they needed nothing more than repeating their old thinking, which they considered the best...They looked at the hostile (Western people) as ridiculous, without knowing that the former had learnt and utilized their technology but with much more sophisticated improvement”^{§§}. Nguyen Truong To also showed his doubt in literature-based exams, which was used as the only way to select mandarins as Nguyen Dynasty practiced, especially when comparing with Western tradition “They (Western) never set up examinations for mandarin selection. Because poetry could not expel the enemies, thousands words could not make up a strategy”^{***}. Nguyen Truong To himself visited France and some other European countries (he was a Confucian-scholar Catholic), where he was impressed with the Western technology. He also encountered the new literature from China, which appraised Western civilization. These two sources created his pro-Western points of view.

If Nguyen Truong To did not take the direct attack on Vietnamese Confucians, Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc people exercised much stronger criticisms. “Van minh tan hoc sach” (New Book on Civilization) published in 1904 was one of the textbook of Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc. Its very first pages depicted the shortcomings of arrogant Confucians “Some high ranking mandarins (who made career through exams) considered themselves the virtues-preservers, only know how to read poems, stick to old dogma, despise teachers and civilization. The other ones, who are even worse because the only thing they know is climbing the mandarin ranks”^{†††}. Dong Kinh

^{§§} Nguyen Truong To. Di thảo số 4- Kế hoạch làm cho dân giàu nước mạnh (tháng 5 Tự Đức 17 khoảng 20-6 đến 18-7 năm 1864)/ In Truong Ba Can (compiled): Nguyễn Trường Tộ, con người và di thảo. Hochiminh City Publisher, 2002, p. 157.

^{***} Nguyen Truong To. Di thảo số 18- Về việc học thực dụng (23 tháng 7 năm Tự Đức 19, tức 1 tháng 9 năm 1866)/ In Truong Ba Can (compiled): Nguyễn Trường Tộ, con người và di thảo. Hochiminh City Publisher, 2002, p. 223.

^{†††} Van minh tan hoc sach. In Chuong Thau (compiled). Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc va phong trào cải cách văn hóa đầu thế kỷ XX. Publisher of Culture and Information, 1997, p.119.

Nghia Thuc also disseminated poems aiming at denouncing old-fashioned scholars regarding them as elements of preventing the society from development.

Regarding the Confucian classics the unique source of learning, the Vietnamese used them without any creativeness or modification. That often led to the situation when teachers read aloud the texts and students repeated without understanding. Ironically, Vietnamese writers and scholars copied the Chinese ideas and expressions, regardless of their nonexistence in Vietnamese reality. Meantime, Vietnamese life, nature, people were ignored. As a result, a poor picture of Vietnamese livings, learning, entertaining was depicted. Academically, throughout one thousand years of Confucianism penetration in Vietnam, the Vietnamese learnt Chinese books without any modification. A few adaptations were made in Tu Duc time^{†††} but in general, the conventional way of learning was that the teacher read aloud the sentence from a book (Tam Tu Kinh for children, who began learning), gave interpretation (but in some cases, the teacher himself did not understand thoroughly), then students repeated. Throughout the 1000 year of Confucianism in Vietnam, Tran Trong Kim (1883-1953) was likely the first scholar who gave the interpretation of Confucian ideas in his book *Nho Giao* (Confucianism- 1929-1933). Although some of his explanations were criticized by contemporary scholars^{§§§}, his book revealed how the Vietnamese scholars understood Confucius.

The need of replacement of Confucian learning by other kind of education was aware of by scholars. As soon as the new system was announced (although on paper) in 1906, founders of Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc submitted application to the Governor Paul Beau requesting for permission to open the school. In fact, this school could be classified as indigenous in the new system. Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc was an echo to Duy Tan movement initiated by Phan Chu Trinh, pointing out three approaching lines to reform the country “Enlightening people” (Khai dân trí), “Strengthening national spirit” (Chấn dân khí), “Improving living standard” (Hậu dân

^{†††} A book “Khải đồng thuyết ước” was compiled by Ngo The Vinh in 1853 to teach children about Confucian philosophy in a more simple way. In Tran Van Giap. *Tìm hiểu kho sách Hán Nôm*. Hà Nội: Thư Viện Quốc gia xuất bản, 1970, p. 254

^{§§§} Ngo Tat To. *Phê bình “Nho Giáo” của Trần Trọng Kim*. Thời vụ from No 80 (11/1938)- No87 (12/1938), reprinted in *Tuyển tập Phê bình văn học Việt Nam*. T4. Hà Nội: Nhà xuất bản Văn học, 1997.

sinh). The book “New learning of civilization” (Văn minh tân học sách) was introduced and became guidebook for the school where the teachers directed learners towards a European-style society with western laws, government, industry, science, and pushed forward renovating Vietnamese education. In addition to provoking patriotism, the Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc founders strongly advocated modernization process and stimulated effective economic activities. To raise the funds to run the Dong Kinh, the former Confucian intellectuals had to do business but most of their attempts led to losses as they did not have any knowledge and experiences (they even felt shy when doing trading), and eventually, all activities of Dong Kinh were donated by some rich progressive benefactors.

In 1907, in his work “The New Vietnam”, Phan Boi Chau, a brilliant Confucian scholar, who gave up his mandarin career to pursue national liberalization goals, figured out his ideas about a perfect educational system to replace the contemporary imperfect one that he referred to as “old-fashioned and conservative”****. He looked forward to modernization of Vietnamese education when

“..both the royal court and the society will devote all their efforts to education, moral as well as physical; ..we shall learn everything. Day care centers, kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, university. ..will be created everywhere from the vities to the countryside.. We shall invite teachers from Japan, Europe and America. After a while some of the teachers will still be foreigners, but some of them will be recruited from among our own people”††††

In the same year 1907, Phan Chu Trinh wrote a letter to Governor-General Paul Beau, describing “the critical situation of the Vietnamese country”, including educational problems.

Yet, Confucian learning and all its accompanying elements still took deep roots in Vietnamese society in the early decades of XX century. The appearance of French schools created a specific picture of Vietnamese society when the old learning was fading but the new was still seeking its position.

**** Phan Boi Chau. *The New Vietnam*, translated by Truong Buu Lam in *Colonial Experience-Vietnamese Writing on Colonialism, 1900-1931*, published by the University of Michigan Press, 2000

†††† Phan Boi Chau, *ibid*, p.113

2. Elements of French schools and the mixture with the Confucian factors

Primitive Franco-Annamite schools were built up first in Cochinchina and then in Tonkin. In the former, by the end of 1869, there were 126 primary schools, having 4,700 pupils out of a population of more than one million^{††††}. In the latter, the first schools were not for children. Instead, they were for training interpreters and retraining mandarins. When Paul Bert came to Tonkin as its first Superior Resident in 1886, there were 3 French schools. One year later, in 1887, at the Colonial Exhibition held in Hanoi, 42 schools sent their results, including 9 boys and 4 girls primary schools. In 1887, according to Dumoutier statistics, there were 140 Quoc Ngu schools (Romanized Vietnamese language schools) with predominantly adult students (some of them were 45, 49 or 52 years old)^{§§§§}. Being an outstanding sinologist, Dumoutier, the Franco-Annamite school organizer and inspector, a dedicated assistant to Paul Bert, pointed out the educational aims in 1887^{*****} ‘School is the most effective, strongest and most convincing tool’ and he also stressed ‘ If we (French) want to exercise our influence in these *pays*, to draw Indochinese people to follow our way, to liberate them and raise their spirit, we should deliver our ideas to them, teach them our language and everything should start from school’. Based on the Chinese philosophy that considered education to be the most important governing instrument, Dumoutier quoted Kangxi Emperor ‘200 years ago, Kangxi wrote ‘Law can regulate people in a period of time, whereas education ties people forever’^{†††††}.

But Dumoutier criticized educational plan imposed to Cochinchina when Chinese learning was totally eliminated and replaced by French, referring as ‘hasty, awkward schooling policy’. Two reasons leading to Dumoutier’s reproach of French education policy in Conchinchina were ‘elimination of Chinese means elimination of moral lessons since the French do not have any ideas of what will be taught (to Vietnamese) in moral classes’ and the French could not immediately be the language

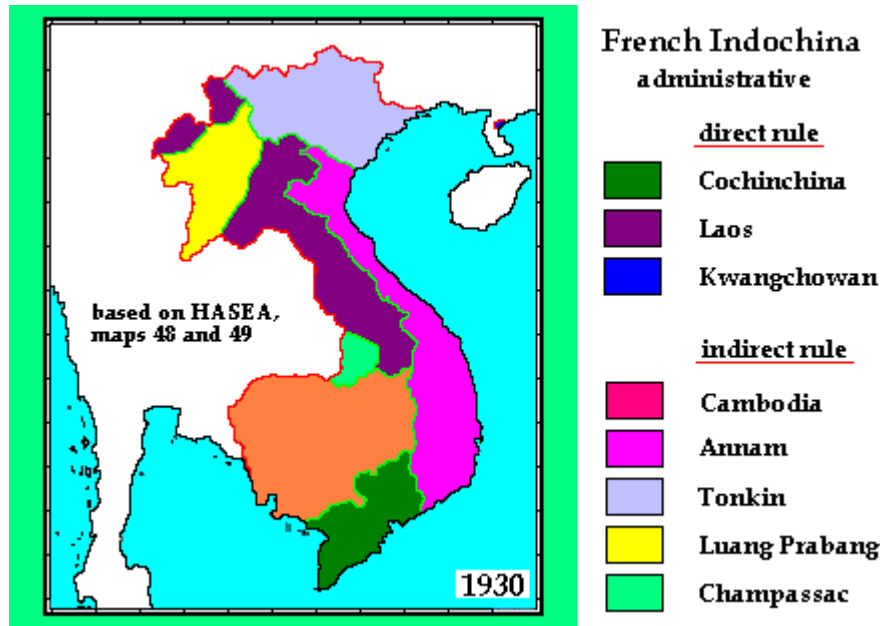
^{††††} Thompson V. *ibid*

^{§§§§} Dumoutier M.G. (1887). *Les Débute de l’Enseignement Français au Tondin*, p.1

^{*****} Dumoutier M.G. (1887). *ibid*. p. 1

^{†††††} Dumoutier M. G. (1887). *ibid*. p.1

of instruction in schools since there were financial and personal shortages when budget for education was 15p (xu)^{****} per person.



Map of French Indochina (1930)- Historical Atlas of Southeast Asia

By the end of the XIX century, French education had only one function of supplying a small number of interpreters and retrained mandarins for the colonial administration. Few schools were newly built. Few people learnt French and Quoc Ngu. Common people still rushed to old style of examinations, though they knew that Confucianism would soon be of no use under French-control administration.

In 1882, the French burned the Hanoi Examination Square (the place is now the Hanoi National Library). Since then all candidates of Hanoi and Hanam should take exams together in one exam square. Tran Te Xuong (Tu Xuong), a contemporary distinguished satirical poet who took 8 exams in this life (1870-1907), was thought not to learn French and Quoc Ngu. Although the question if he learnt or not is still controversial, it is clear that he did not have any enthusiasm toward 'new kind of learning'. He several times expressed his opinion about this.

Không học văn Tây

I won't learn Western (French) language

**** Dmoutier M. G. (1887). *ibid.* p.9

Mợ bảo vắn Tây chẳng khó gì	You say Western language is not difficult
Cho tiền đi học để chờ thi	And you will give me money to learn
‘Thôi thôi lạy mợ xanh-căng lậy	‘No, no, I beg you with ‘cinquante’ bows
Mả tổ tôi không táng bút chì’	My ancestors had never used a pencil

In 1894, Tu Xuong gained his first title *Tu tai* among 11 thousands examinees (60 *tien si*, 200 *tu tai* to be selected), compared to 9 thousands of 1891 exam^{§§§§§}. In 1897, Tu Xuong ironically described the scene when the General Governor Doumer and his wife came to the ceremony

Nhà nước ba năm mở một khoa	The State holds exams every three years
Trường Nam thi lẫn với trường Hà	Nam Dinh and Ha Noi candidates sit together
Lôi thôi sĩ tử vai đeo lọ	Slovenly examinees carrying pots
Âm oẹ quan trường miệng thét loa	Mandarins-supervisors announce loudly on
Cờ kéo rợp trời quan sứ đến	speakers
Váy lê quét đất mũ dầm ra	There he goes, Governor General with flags
Nhân tài đất Bắc nào ai đó	There she goes, with her long dress
Ngoảnh mặt mà trông cảnh nước	Where are talents of the North?
nhà	Look back at the Fatherland’s situation

Tu Xuong took exams until 1906 but neither Quoc Ngu nor French tests had been done by him, according to his poetry memoir.

By the end of the XIX century, the Vietnamese society faced a critical cultural situation inherited from one thousand years of Chinese learning. What we called Confucianism left extremely poor legacy, which could only be found in scholastic dreams, all ending in exams. “Confucian ideology was weak and incompetent...It did

^{§§§§§} According to Nguyen Tuan, he by chance got this information on a newspaper which delivered news about examination of 1897. Nguyen Tuan (1961). *Thời và thơ Tú Xương/ Văn nghệ*, May/1961, republished in *Tú Xương- Thơ, Lời bình và Giai thoại*. Hà Nội: Văn hoá thông tin, 2000.

nothing but deepening the feeble mind’^{*****}. There was no identical philosophy, no national scholarship (Quoc hoc). Vietnamese language was neglected and looked down. National literature did not depict the real picture of the contemporary society, but took exotic themes. The country needed a new generation of intellectuals, who would fill up that vacuum.

When the French invaded Vietnam, French soon took dominating position as an official language and a medium at schools. And again, Vietnamese were forced to be “a reluctant, but great borrower, imitator”. “Before we were Chinese, now we are French, and we have never been ourselves, Vietnamese”^{†††††}, poet Luu Trong Lu bitterly groaned. It was not only violence with military force, it was language and education that the French rulers wanted to assimilate Indochinese in general and Vietnamese in particular. Along with the French- controlled administration, French education, followed by the French culture, found the way to spill over. It took decades for them to penetrate into Vietnamese society, doing which the Chinese had spent almost 2000 years.

II. School reforms (1906-1945), new curriculum and its intension of building a new man

School reforms

General Governor Paul Beau’s reform in 1906 started the process of restructuring school system which underwent three main phases. The first phase was to maintain the indigenous section in the educational system which could be divided into three parts: the French schools, the Franco-Indigenous schools and the Indigenous schools; the second phase (1917-1924) was associated with the General Regulation of Education, which promulgated by Governor Albert Sarraut who based the centralized binary educational system on the French and the Franco-Indigenous schools and the third phase (1924-1945) was associated with Governors Merlin and Varenne who decided to expand Franco-Vietnamese education by opening indigenous elementary schools in villages and communes.

^{*****} Tran Van Giau (2003). Tác phẩm được giải thưởng Hồ Chí Minh. H.: Khoa học Xã hội, p. 527.

^{†††††} Luu Trong Lu (1939). Một nền văn chương Việt Nam – Tao đàn, số2, ra ngày 16/3/1939. In lại trong Luận về Quốc học. Nxb Đà Nẵng và Trung tâm Nghiên cứu Quốc học, 1998.

The new educational system officially took shape in 1906 when the Council for the Improvement of Indigenous Education was established. The Indochinese Direction Public Education was also founded, headed by M. H. Gourdon, under which there were Services of Education in all parts of Indochina. In Annam particularly there was Ministry of Education under the Court of Hue, headed by the Minister Cao Xuan Duc. In 1881 the French authority required that Quoc Ngu (Romanized Vietnamese language) should be used officially in Cochinchina and 30 years later this requirement was applied to Tonkin (1910). However, only clerks and mandarins were motivated to learn Quoc Ngu as it was related to their promotion. The common people found no need to learn Quoc Ngu because there was nothing to do with it as few books, newspapers written in Quoc Ngu this time. Meanwhile Franco-Vietnamese schools developed slowly. Until 1917 there were only 67 schools of this kind in Tonkin with 1 primary superior^{*****} (Tonkin had 22 provinces).

The virtual educational reform actually took place after the General-Governor Albert Sarraut promulgated the General Regulation of Education in 1917, which aimed at creating a centralized system of education in Indochina. French and Franco-Indigenous schools were the two major entities of the whole system, where French was the medium. However, this Regulation was criticized by both French and Vietnamese by different reasons^{§§§§§§}. The French colons in Vietnam were afraid that the French medium used in schools might cause ‘deracination and revolt’ and create favourable conditions for Vietnamese to attend French schools and universities. Vietnamese, especially the Vietnamese monarchy in Annam, was not interested in the new Regulation of Education, as Annam was a part under the King, at least in term of education. Whereas the Vietnamese urban elites greeted the Regulation with mixed feelings. On the one hand they worried about the methods and resources to fulfil the Regulation as it was quite far-reaching ambitious for French to be the instrument of instruction at schools. On the other hand, they criticized that the Regulation was aiming at rudimentary education with emphasis on primary, not post primary

^{*****}Le Tonkin Scolaire, Hanoi: Impr d'Extr^ame-Orient, 1931

^{§§§§§§} Kelly G. (2000). Educational Reforms and Re-reform: Politics and the State in Colonial Vietnam/ in French Colonial Education. Ed. by David Kelly. New York, AMS Press. p.51

education in spite of the re-institution of the university in Hanoi^{*****}, which was in fact a conglomerate of existing colleges. If Paul Beau's system was unlikely put into realization and remained a tentative design, the ambitious Albert Sarraut's Regulation was pushed more forward with gradual completion of 10 year primary cycle (the first level) and the establishment of 3-year secondary schools by 1924.

The attempt to expand Franco-Vietnamese schools by opening village, communal and cantonal schools from 1925 to 1927 were subject to criticism. These poorly refurbished schools with one teacher (sometimes covered all three levels- infant, preparatory, elementary) showed the trend of localization of French school model. The new mass- oriented educational policy was in fact a process of simplifying program, degrading schooling standard. Although it was interpreted as horizontal development, education in Indochina in general and in Tonkin in particular was not for wide mass. In 1930, in Tonkin, only 1,400 students were given Certificate of Franco-Indigenous Primary Study among 4,700 candidates, the number of students received Primary Superieur Education was 250 and 400 respectively^{††††††}. According to General-Governor office statistics, by 1940, the children of school age in Indochina was 3.5 million, whereas the students of all public and private primary schools were 605,000^{*****}, that means of 100 school age children there were 18 going to school.

New curriculum

The new subjects were gradually introduced since 1897 when the Governor Paul Doumer stipulated that calculation, French test and Quoc Ngu test be included in the exams, in addition to traditional Confucian learning requirements, which based on Four Books and Five Classics. However, the new curriculum was officially promulgated in 1910 for both primary and complementary schools. In the total weekly school time of 27.5 hours, apart from moral lessons (1 h for the first two years and 2 hours for the last two years), mathematics, science (6 hours), this 3-language

***** Kelly G. (2000). *ibid.* p.55

†††††† Le Tonkin Scolaire, Hanoi: Impr d'Extr^ame-Orient, 1931, Graphs No 11&12.

***** Võ Sĩnh Hsè. Thanh nghĐ-Hải ký.H.: Văn hăc, 1999, tr.332

curriculum (French, Quoc Ngu, Chinese) gave main hours to French instruction (15 hours).

Table 1: Curriculum of schools in Tonkin from 1917- 1945

Schools	Length of study (years)	Students age	Subjects	Decree
Elementary	3	7-9	Moral, Vietnamese, French ¹ , Chinese characters ² , History and Geography of Tonkin and Indochina, Hygiene and Physical education, Arithmetic, Rudiments of Manual Skill.	Certificate of Elementary Studies
Primary	3	10-12	French, Vietnamese, Chinese Characters ² , Moral, Arithmetic, Elements of Geometry, Basic Physical and Natural Sciences, Geography of Indochina, Vietnamese History, Hygiene and Physical Education, Manual Skills.	Certificate of Primary Studies
Higher Primary	4	13-16	French, Vietnamese, Chinese characters ² , Morals and Psychology, History and Geography of Indochina and France, Natural History, Hygiene and Physical Education, Maths, Technology	Diploma of Franco-Vietnamese Higher Primary Education
Secondary	4		French, Vietnamese, Morals and Psychology, History and Geography of Indochina and France, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Natural History, Drawing, Technology	Local Baccalaureate ³
1. French is optional in village and communal schools, facultative in infant course and compulsory in preparatory and elementary courses of schools <i>de plein exercice</i>				

2. From 1933, Programs of Primary and Higher Primary Schools in Tonkin included Chinese characters (3h/week), but from 1938, Chinese became facultative in all levels
3. From 1930, local baccalaureate was recognized equal to French baccalaureate and the holder can compete in the Metropolitan universities and at job market with other counterparts who held French baccalaureate

The 1910 extremely demanding curriculum which had short life and mostly existed on paper was replaced by the new one, stipulated by the General Regulation of Education in 1917. As a supplementary to 1910 curriculum, the 1917 curriculum gave more details to programs contents of *Primary and Higher Primary*^{§§§§§§§§}. Since 1917, indigenous education was eliminated (Confucian exams were abolished in Tonkin in 1915 and in Annam in 1919). The village or commune schools turned into official elementary schools (3 class schools), schools of main towns or provinces became primary schools *de plein exercice* (6 class schools). Elementary courses were preparing students with sufficient French knowledge so that from the Course of *Moyen* onward, French became the medium. Vietnamese occupied a minor place at schools (3 hours as maximum in the total 28 school weekly hours)^{*****}.

The French-control Government put a major target of education at creating a genuine indigenous modern elite^{††††††††}. Since the early school years, the moral lessons were focusing on training personality of this new elite. The mixed Confucian and Western aesthetics were aiming at moulding a moral individual with strong sense of duty, submissive characters on the one hand and building an economic individual with good organizing habits on the other hand.

Schools planned to develop a moral man

Confucian morals still played a key role in Franco-Vietnamese schools, especially schools of the first level. In the context of lack of textbooks, when students owned only a reading book, other materials were mostly supplied by the teachers,

^{§§§§§§§§} According to Albert Sarraut's General Regulation of Education, there are 3 Degrees : First (Primary, including Elementary cycle and Primary Cycle); Second (Complementary- or Higher Primary and Secondary); Third (Superior- University/College)

^{*****} Le Tonkin Scolaire, Hanoi: Impr d'Extr^ame-Orient, 1931, p. 46.

^{††††††††} L'Instruction Publique en Indochine/ Học báo, July 1938, p.368

Hoc Bao, a special pedagogical periodical, provided teaching materials for teachers of elementary classes included infant, preparation, elementary. It was a main reference for moral lessons. The first and foremost moral lesson of the all three classes was duties. Family duty was considered the most important virtue. A man should show obligation towards all family members: parents, grandparents (obedience, respect, gratitude), brothers, sisters (love and defend each other), uncles, aunts, cousins, siblings (politeness, kindness). In addition, he must have obligation to teachers (obedience, respect), friends, colleagues (friendship, helpfulness). Moreover, he was supposed to have obligation to his servants, maids (politeness, kindness). A man was placed in a matrix of relations and he was trained to behave well and correctly. The moral contents occupied much of Vietnamese-instructing materials (the other were mathematics, history, geography, science, drawings). Except the moral lessons, the reading, writing materials also had elements of moral implication.

Yet one of the typical virtue of the Vietnamese- patriotism- was omitted in the school program. The word “Vietnam” had never been mentioned in Hoc Bao. All territories were referred to as parts belonging to “French Indochina”: Tonkin, Annam, Cochinchina. Throughout the period from 1922 to 1939, in Hoc Bao, there were two short pieces of reading named “Patriotism” and ironically, one referred to a story in the Chinese classic novel “The warring states”^{*****}, and the other was translated from a French text^{§§§§§§§§}. The former told a story of an ambassador whose Kingdom was invaded. This man spent 7 days and nights staying up to insist that the King of the third country lead army to save his Kingdom. The ambassador’s persistence was considered patriotism. Whereas the French text gave several characteristics of the genuine patriot who was supposed to be aware of his duties, be ready to fulfil those duties, try to make the society more prosperous, be patient and tolerant to others. Patriotism of the Vietnamese in the Vietnamese history was blurred. More critically, the French were described as wise rulers, who managed to make Indochina more prosperous.

Schools attempted to build a newly economic and industrial man

^{*****} Hoc Bao, January 1, 1926, p. 572

^{§§§§§§§§} Hoc Bao, March 8, 1926, p.327

Except creating a moral man, schools took responsibilities to train men of various professions, including commercial and industrial. In Vietnamese society, there had likely been two kinds of man: intellectual (si) and peasant (nong). Although the former was put higher than the latter, sometimes he was considered useless (*Dài lưng tốn vải ăn no lại nằm*- *With long back, that costs cloth to make an outfit, he is one who lies down after eating* ^{*****}). In early XX century new professionals were required to fill up the vacancies in administrative offices, commercial companies, civil works institutions, factories. To meet the rising demands of human resources, schools put forward the two-fold training aims: to develop economic thinking and to train new jobs.

Hygiene, physical study and mathematics were the first Western-style subjects to be imported to Indochinese schools. Students were exposed to the study of man body for physical development, which their predecessors had never experienced. Arithmetics, which was unfamiliar to Confucian scholars, now became one of the main subjects at school. Students were prepared for practical life with budget management, shopping, household financing, where economical living style was encouraged.

In Paul Beau's educational system, vocational training occupied a significant place. Since the early school years, students of elementary classes had lessons introducing rudiment of manual work such as carpentry, moulding, .. for boys; sewing, broidery.. for girls. In the second level (primary), in parallel with popular education there was a separate vocational section, which developed after the General Regulation of Education promulgation in 1917. Students of the 2 vocational schools in Tonkin (one in Ha Noi and the other in Hai Phong), who may apply after graduation of elementary schools (students with Certification of Elementary education had more advantages), were given priorities as they were exempted from school fee, provided with meals, learning facilities and an annual allowance of 6-8 dong ^{†††††††††} (whereas the tax per head in Tonkin was 2.7 dong a year). During the 3 year program, vocational schools offered various skill training of carpentry, moulding, lathing,

***** It was a traditional image of an intellectual who lies when reading.

††††††††† An announcement of the vocational course of 3 years in Hai Phong city to enroll 50 students, Hoc Bao, Sept 18, 1922.

electricity, car repairing (6-7 hours/day) and general education (2 hours/day). Especially, the traditional professions were paid attention (copper moulding, handicraft, fine art). In addition, schools of agriculture also provided students with modern agricultural knowledge and skills.

The gap between urban and rural schools, teachers, students

In spite of holding more than 95% of population (in 1926, according to the second census carried out by the French authorities, the population of Tonkin was 7,600,000, whereas the population of the four biggest cities- Hanoi, Hai Phong, Nam Dinh, Hai Duong- totalling 254,780) ^{*****}, rural areas accommodated only elementary schools (village, communal or cantonal). Some townships (district centre-huyen)- had schools of *de plein exercice* (with primary courses). The number of this kind of schools in Tonkin was 194 (1930). To get higher primary education, students should go to provincial schools, the number of which was 11 in Tonkin (1930). And there was only 1 secondary Franco-Vietnamese school (College of Protectorate), which located in Hanoi.

In contrast to urban schools, which run by state budget, official elementary and village elementary schools had problems with infrastructure, facilities, teachers and students. Some official elementary schools were supported by state budget, but a majority was run by local budget, whereas all village schools operated on local budget and sometimes on individual donors, resulting in unstable financial situation. These schools often had a few classes, in most cases only 1 class with one teacher who covered all three levels- infant, preparatory, elementary. Village teachers were subject to discrimination in term of salary and working hours. Moreover, they faced difficulties such as students' playing truant and heavy curriculum.

In the countryside, not all families could afford to pay for their children to go to schools. The annual expenses of approximately 400 dong to pay for teachers, to provide facilities (to accommodate 10-60 pupils) was contributed by each village. Although parents did not have to pay tuition fee for children, they should spend money on clothes, books, that accounted for a significant part in their in-kind income.

^{*****} Figures collected by Nguyen The Hue in *Bước đầu tìm hiểu về dân số nông thôn Việt Nam thời Cận đại* in *Nông dân và Nông thôn Việt Nam thời Cận đại*. Hà Nội: Nhà xuất bản Khoa học Xã hội, Viện Sử học, 1992, tr.251

Moreover, as most population in the countryside were peasants, whose work ran almost the whole year around, child's labour was required. Some parents preferred their children to do housework rather than "wasting time going to school". Hoc Bao depicted the upset of teachers whenever they took roll-call because sometimes there were only 6-7 students showed up. Reasons for mass truanting, in addition to those listed above, were also "they (parents, students) do not know where to use knowledge learnt at schools- Quoc Ngu (writing Vietnamese language) was not often used in villages)^{§§§§§§§§§§}. Furthermore, countryside parents, who were adapted to sublime and enigmatic of the Confucian knowledge, found new learning too simple and rude ^{*****}

Not only students' unenthusiastic learning attitude that made village teachers' work "thankless", poorly refurbished schools and unfair treatment caused his life more desperate. Village teachers, who ranked the lowest in the 8-level range of teachers, were paid much lower than their colleagues in cities or main towns (if schools were run by local budget, a salary of 10 dong a month was common, compared to average 30 dong a month for state teachers), but should work more hours as one village teacher may cover students of 3 classes^{††††††††††}. Very often unhygienic village conditions, diseases, village hooligan created more challenges for "rural" teachers. Moreover, in the village, where the Confucian study still deeply rooted, "people have never seen a textbook, never read newspaper", teachers, who were mostly young, would have felt isolated.

III. Responses of the Vietnamese toward the new learning

By 1943, after 37 years of existence, the Franco-Vietnamese schools gained some results. In Tonkin, its system completed in 1925 with all schooling levels ranging from elementary to secondary and university as the highest. By 1930, local baccalaureate was recognized equal to French baccalaureate. In 1943, the population

^{§§§§§§§§§§} Hoc Bao (1923). One thing that prevents village school activities (students play truant). 22 January, 1923.

^{*****} Nguyen Xuan Chu in his memory told that some parents stopped their children going to school as they heard simple translation from French into Vietnamese such as I eat with sticks, I eat two meals a day. In *Hồi ký Nguyễn Xuân Chử*. USA: Văn Hóa, 1996

^{††††††††††} Each village school often had 1 teacher to cover 1 class, which comprised students of different ages and levels. Hoc Bao, May 14, 1923.

of Tonkin was 9,851,000. The total number of students attending Franco-Vietnamese schools during the period from 1906-1943 was 285,130, of which 244,000 going to elementary cycle, 35,700 to primary cycle, 3,880 to higher primary cycle and 1,550 to secondary cycle^{*****}.

Facing the expansion of French education, intellectuals in Tonkin had mixed responses. The status of being colonized pushed Vietnamese scholars into a struggle within themselves between nationalism and desire to modernize, between patriotism and attempt to westernize the country. Deeply absorbed in Confucian ethics, nationalists such as Phan Boi Chau, Phan Chu Trinh early saw the progressive forces derived from Western (and much from French) civilization and wanted to employ it to modernize Vietnam. They also attached great importance to education (Duy Tan movement and Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc as its follow-up activities). The establishment of Franco-Vietnamese schools, with focus on the combination of French and Vietnamese language and at times with Chinese language, and the inclusion of Vietnam-related subjects such as morals, history, literature, geography, inspired intellectuals welcome the new Western-style learning, seeing it a good approach to enlighten the people, develop the country, and consequently step towards to national liberalization.

Franco-Vietnamese schools, in fact, produced a golden generation of intellectuals of various professions in the 20s, 30s, 40s: talented journalists, who put foundation to press in Tonkin, writers and poets- who inspired a new wave of thinking into Vietnamese literature, distinguished artists- who brought Vietnamese fine art to the world. Many doctors, teachers, scientists, engineers. Recently, in an online newspaper of the Vietnam Ministry of Science and Technology, Professor Hoang Tuy claimed

“Looking back at the history of the Vietnamese intelligentsia, I wonder why among the intellectual generations in the last 80 years the most distinguished were those who received education from Franco-Vietnamese or French schools. In the period of 1930- 1945 they made up a new national cultural wave in poetry, arts,

***** France. Ministère de la France d’outre-mer. Service des statistiques.Renseignements statistiques sur l’Indochine, 1946

music, science. They were people of great personality, talent. And many of those intellectuals were involved in anti-French movement and devoted themselves to national liberalization, opposing the concept that Franco- Vietnamese or French schools only trained lackeys”^{§§§§§§§§§§}.

Schools were “safe” destination for many Vietnamese intellectuals. Earning a living at schools was considered “least slavery” compared to other professions in the colonial society^{*****}. Vo Nguyen Giap (the first General of Vietnamese Army), Nguyen Cong Hoan (famous writer), Nguyen Manh Tuong (earned two PhD degrees from France at the age of 22) once chose teaching as their career.

Schools also created opportunities for Vietnamese of different opinions and ideologies to get in their frontiers. A French with his memory as a student in Hanoi in late 30s, early 40s was impressed by the contemporary revolutionary atmosphere in the pedagogical environment:

Most of the Indochinese students at school were obviously Nationalists, some with Communist tendencies, and among my contemporaries at school were some of Vietnam’s future independence leaders and top party officials. There were would-be revolutionaries not only among the students, but among the staff. Two teachers at my school- Maurice and Yvonne Bernard, a French husband and wife- would later disappear over the border into China. They were openly members of the Communist Party and would discuss their political beliefs with anyone who would listen. They said the Communist Party, as part of the politically legitimate Front Populaire, was very strong in France. My history teacher, who also taught at the Lycée Thang Long, was rumoured to be a Communist with a police record for subversive activities. But I could not think of Professeur Giap as a subversive. I felt a real rapport with him;...Many students, including myself, had leftist tendencies, socialist sympathies, for the colonial system in Indochina did nothing to encourage native capitalism^{††††††††††}.

Schools in urban areas, especially higher institutions such as College of Protectorate, where students from all corners of Tonkin (and some from Laos and Cambodia) came to study, were likely places for meetings, exchanging ideas,

^{§§§§§§§§§§} Hoang Tuy (2008). Để có lớp trí thức xứng đáng. Retrieved at <http://www.tiasang.com.vn> on December 6, 2008.

^{*****} Nguyen Cong Hoan (1992). Chân dung văn học. Hà Nội: Trường viết văn Nguyễn Du. P.6.
^{††††††††††} Mandaley Perkins (2005). Hanoi, adieu- a bittersweet memoir of French Indochina. Harper Collins Publisher, Australia. p. 34

propagandizing revolutionary ideologies. Not surprisingly, activists of different political trends used schools for creating groups of common interests and exerting their influence to broader audience.

Franco-Vietnamese schools in Tonkin, whose establishment and development was related to the names of two French Governors-General: Paul Beau and Albert Sarraut- who were known as developers of the association policy, played a crucial role in forming the new generation of Vietnamese intellectuals. The new Western-style intellectuals still maintained in themselves Confucian morals (Jules Ferry disciplines were to a great degree similar to Confucian virtues), but they developed new approaches toward life in industrial, economical, commercial perspectives. They were more practical, more scientific. Consequently, they represented forces to diversify, modernize and liberalize the Vietnamese society.

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