


RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Sinology in Vietnam

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## Abstract

A form of Sinology emerged in Vietnam in the early twentieth century during the period of colonial rule as Western learning came to replace the traditional curriculum of the Confucian classics. At first, scholars sought to preserve traditional learning by translating Confucian and Buddhist texts into the Vietnamese vernacular. Then in the 1930s and 1940s, scholars produced works on Chinese history, philosophy, and literature that engaged with the works of modern scholars from China and the West. The development of this body of Sinological scholarship was then disrupted by periods of revolution and war. This article traces the development of Sinology in Vietnam through these periods up to the present.

**Keywords:** Sinology; Vietnamese Sinology; Global Sinology; Vietnamese history

Sinology in Vietnam is a difficult topic to address. On the one hand, one could argue that there is little or no Sinology in Vietnam in that there are very few Vietnamese scholars who produce knowledge about China for the sake of educating others about China. At the same time, one could also argue that Sinology is very deeply rooted in Vietnam, in that there are countless aspects of Vietnamese society, culture, and history that cannot be explained without knowledge of and reference to something Sinitic, and many scholars in Vietnam possess such knowledge. This odd position that Sinology occupies in Vietnam today, as a body of knowledge that both does and does not exist, is the result of a century of intellectual developments and transformations which I will trace and examine in this article.

In the nineteenth century, Vietnamese society was firmly situated within the larger world of Sinitic learning. Literary Sinitic was the main language of written communication, and education focused on the Confucian classics and other Sinitic texts. Then, in the early twentieth century, with Vietnam under French colonial rule, traditionally trained Vietnamese intellectuals turned to Chinese and Japanese reformers to learn about the West. In the process, they came to learn about nationalism, and they started to view the texts that they had long studied as no longer simply the Confucian classics, but as the “Chinese” Confucian classics. By the 1920s, as the study of Western knowledge came to be seen as more important than the study of traditional knowledge, or what now came to be referred to as “Han learning” (*Hán học* 漢學), and as the Vietnamese vernacular came to replace Literary Sinitic as the preferred language of

written communication, some traditionally trained scholars set about translating the Confucian classics and other texts from Literary Sinitic into the vernacular to preserve the knowledge in those works for a new generation of Vietnamese educated on Western learning (*Tây học* 西學).

I would argue that this is when Sinology began in Vietnam. While some have characterized virtually everything that was written in Literary Sinitic in Vietnam in the past as a form of Sinology, I argue that Sinology in Vietnam only began in the 1920s, when Sinitic learning came to be perceived as a separate body of knowledge.<sup>1</sup> In particular, if we understand Sinology as a body of knowledge devoted to understanding the history and culture of a distinct place that we now refer to as “China,” it is only in the 1920s that Vietnamese intellectuals came to fully view the knowledge that they had previously just considered as “learning” to now be knowledge that was from and about China. That said, this divide between Vietnam and China was not, and still is not, absolute in Vietnam. The scholars who translated texts like the Confucian classics into vernacular Vietnamese in the 1920s, for instance, did so out of a belief that the information in those texts was part of the “national essence” (*quốc túy* 國粹) of Vietnam at the same time that they also recognized that those texts were ultimately Chinese in origin.

This bifurcated view of “Han learning” continues to exist today. The fact that Vietnamese recorded information in Literary Sinitic for roughly a millennium means that one cannot possibly understand “Vietnam” without knowing things that are “Chinese,” to use those modern concepts. As a result, a great deal of the scholarship about old Vietnam that has been produced in the Vietnamese vernacular over the past century contains significant Sinological information. Further, there are scholars in Vietnam today who read Literary Sinitic and who study old Vietnamese texts who possess extensive Sinological knowledge and who are trained in the skills of a Sinologist. However, these scholars put that knowledge to use in their study of Vietnam, rather than China. Meanwhile, over the past century, there have been comparatively few scholars in Vietnam who have produced knowledge about China for the sake of educating others about China.

In this article, I attempt to document the scholarship that has been produced in Vietnam to educate people about China, and particularly its history, philosophy, literature, and culture, the core concerns of Sinology. What we will find is that the development of Vietnamese Sinology, after its initial emergence in the 1920s, was deeply affected by the politics of the twentieth century in Vietnam. World War II, the August Revolution of 1945, the First Indochina War (1946–1954), the division of the country into North and South Vietnam following the Geneva Accords of 1954, the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War, and the eventual warming of Vietnam to diasporic Vietnamese and China in the 1990s are all events that have influenced the production of Sinological knowledge in Vietnam.

I will trace the production of Sinological scholarship through these periods. However, I begin this article by briefly documenting the way that Sinology emerged in Vietnam in the early twentieth century as the intimate bond with Sinitic learning that had long existed in Vietnam was severed. Finally, on a technical note, I have made an effort to include Chinese characters alongside Vietnamese names and titles

<sup>1</sup>For the view that considers virtually all writings in Literary Sinitic in Vietnam as constituting Sinology, see Tao Zhenyu 陶振譽, *Shijie geguo Hanxue yanjiu lunwenji* 世界各國漢學研究論文集 [Collected writings on Sinological research in the various countries of the world], Vol. 1 (Taipei: Guofang yanjiu yuan, 1962) and Vol. 2 (Taipei: Guofang yanjiu yuan, 1967).

for the benefit of readers with a background in Sinology. However, starting in the 1920s, some authors only wrote in Vietnamese, and therefore, we cannot know with certainty which characters corresponded to their names. For such individuals, I have not included the characters for their names. Also, some publishers, such as those in South Vietnam, continued to include Literary Sinitic titles for their vernacular publications as late as the early 1970s. When such titles are available, I include the characters alongside the Vietnamese title.

### Sinitic Learning as Knowledge

In 1802, the last Vietnamese dynasty, the Nguyễn Dynasty (1802–1945), came to power. A year later, the court established educational regulations (*giáo điều* 教條) to standardize instruction across the realm. The regulations stipulated that children were to begin at the age of eight by learning the *Classic of Filial Piety* (*Hiếu kinh* 孝經) and the *Classic of Loyalty* (*Trung kinh* 忠經). At the age of twelve, students were then to study the *Mencius* (*Mạnh tử* 孟子), the *Analects* (*Luận ngữ* 論語), and then the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Trung dung* 中庸). At fifteen they could then move on to the *Classic of Poetry* (*Thi kinh* 詩經) and the *Classic of Documents* (*Thư kinh* 書經), and then, finally, they were to learn the *Classic of Changes* (*Dịch kinh* 易經) the *Record of Rites* (*Lễ kí* 禮記), the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Xuân thu* 春秋) as well as other works of philosophy and history (*tử sử* 子史).<sup>2</sup>

None of these texts were referred to as “Chinese.” They simply were the texts that contained the knowledge that the Nguyễn Dynasty believed people needed to have a mastery of so that they could eventually perform the work of a government official. At the same time, these texts were clearly in a language that was different from the language that Vietnamese spoke in their daily lives. In the nineteenth century, however, the vernacular was perceived by the educated elite in Vietnam as an inferior form of language, one that only represented “sounds” (*âm* 音) rather than the “patterns” (*văn* 文) of writing, patterns that communicated the teachings of the Sages of antiquity. Nonetheless, some scholars recognized that to effectively transmit those teachings to people who were not yet fully conversant in writing, it was necessary to translate “patterns” into “sounds.”

Before the twentieth century, many of the Confucian classics were translated into the “kingdom’s sounds” (*quốc âm* 國音). In doing so, scholars employed a demotic script based on Chinese characters called “Nôm” 喃. At times these translations were made in prose, while at others the translations took the form of poetry. These translations aided cognition, but also served as a mnemonic device to help students retain information. Did such translations constitute a form of Sinology? While nineteenth-century Vietnamese scholars learned an enormous amount about the ideas, history, and culture of the place that we now refer to as “China,” they did so with the sense that this was simply “knowledge” rather than “knowledge about a particular place.” Indeed, so faithful were Vietnamese scholars to this form of knowledge that some modern academics have claimed that premodern Vietnamese scholars did not produce original ideas about this body of knowledge, as one finds in say Japanese Nativist scholarship.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup>*Đại Nam thực lục chính biên đệ nhất kỷ* 大南寔正錄編第一紀 [Veritable records of Đại Nam, first compilation], (1848), 22/18b.

<sup>3</sup>Liu Yujun 劉玉珺, “Yuenan jingxue dianji kaoshu” 越南經學典籍考述 [Examination of Vietnamese sources for the study of the classics], in *Waiyu Hanji yanjiu jikan* 域外漢籍研究集刊 [Collected research

However, such scholars have not closely examined works like the vernacular translations in Nôm of the Confucian classics. That is a task in which Vietnamese scholars have recently started to engage.<sup>4</sup> What they have found is that while it is true that we cannot find premodern Vietnamese scholars producing clearly defined schools of thought, at a more granular level, in works like the Vernacular translations of the Confucian classics, one can detect a good deal of intellectual interaction with those works and their commentaries. Nonetheless, I still would not label such writings “Sinology,” as they were produced in an environment where the information in these texts was considered “knowledge” rather than “Chinese knowledge.” The idea that “Chinese knowledge” was a separate form of knowledge only emerged in Vietnam in the early twentieth century as Vietnamese reformist scholars who had been exposed to the Western concept of the nation began to rethink how people in Vietnam should be educated.

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on Chinese-language sources in foreign lands], edited by Zhang Bawei 張伯偉 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2010), 401–421.

<sup>4</sup>Nguyễn Tuấn Cường has written the most on this topic. See the following: “Dịch Nôm kinh điển Nho gia tại Việt Nam từ góc nhìn tư liệu, phiên dịch và thông diễn kinh điển” [Nôm translations of Confucian classics in Vietnam: From the perspectives of sources, translations, and interpretations of the classics], *Tạp chí Hán Nôm* 2016.2, 13–28; Nguyễn Tuấn Cường, “Tiếp cận văn bản học với *Tứ thư ước giải*” [A textual approach to the *Tứ thư ước giải* (四書約解)], *Tạp chí Hán Nôm* 2014.2, 27–45; “Diễn cách Chu Tử học tại Việt Nam: từ *Tứ thư chương cú tập chú* đến *Tứ thư ước giải*” [Development of Zhu Xi studies in Vietnam: From the *Tứ thư chương cú tập chú* (四書章句集注) to the *Tứ thư ước giải* (四書約解)], *Tạp chí Hán Nôm* 2012.5, 3–21; “Nghiên cứu về *Tứ thư ước giải*: Lược tả văn bản và giải đọc bài Tựa của Lê Quý Đôn” [Research on the *Tứ thư ước giải* (四書約解): A brief description of the text and an explanation of the preface by Lê Quý Đôn], *Tạp chí Hán Nôm* 2010.6, 37–49; and “Tư liệu *Kinh Thi* chữ Nôm: Lược quan về trữ lượng, đặc điểm, giá trị” [Materials on the Nôm version of the *Classic of Poetry*: Initial study of the holdings, characteristics, and values], *Tạp chí Hán Nôm* 2007.1, 48–64.

For works in Chinese, see Nguyễn Tuấn Cường 阮俊強, “Jingxue yu wenxue: *Shijing* zai gudai Yuenan de fanyi yu jieshou” 經學與文學:詩經在古代越南的翻譯與接受 [Classical scholarship and literary scholarship: The translation and reception of the *Classic of Poetry* in old Vietnam], *Shijie Hanxue* 12 (2013), 102–14; and “Wenzi, yuyan yu sixiang de bentuhua: Guanyu gudai Yuenan rujia jingdian fanyi wenti” 文字、語言與思想的本土化：關於古代越南儒家經典翻譯問題 [Localization of characters, language and thought: Regarding the issue of the translation of the Confucian classics in old Vietnam], *Zhongguo xue* 3 (2013), 103–24.

For works with co-authors, see Nguyễn Tuấn Cường and Nguyễn Thị Tú Mai, “Mục đích phiên dịch kinh điển Nho gia tại Việt Nam qua góc nhìn trong cuộc của các tác gia trung đại” [The purpose of translating the Confucian Classics in Vietnam from the perspective of Medieval Vietnamese authors], in *Nghiên cứu Nho giáo Việt Nam: quan điểm và phương pháp* [Research on Vietnamese Confucianism: Views and Methods], edited by Nguyễn Kim Sơn (Hà Nội: Đại học Quốc gia Hà Nội, 2018), 137–62; and Nguyễn Quang Hồng and Nguyễn Tuấn Cường, “*Thi kinh giải âm*: Văn bản sớm nhất hiện còn in theo ván khắc năm Vĩnh Thịnh 1714” [*Thi kinh giải âm* (詩經解音): The earliest extant manuscript based on the printing of Vĩnh Thịnh 1714], *Tạp chí Hán Nôm* 2005.3, 36–52.

For the work of other authors, see Nguyễn Kim Sơn, “Hoạt động diễn dịch Hán Nôm kinh điển Nho gia của các nhà Nho Việt Nam: Phân tích từ góc độ mục tiêu và bản chất” [Activities of Vietnamese Confucian scholars to translate the Confucian canon: Analysis from the perspectives of objective and essence], in *Kinh điển Nho gia tại Việt Nam* [Confucian canon in Vietnam], edited by Nguyễn Kim Sơn (Hà Nội: Đại học Quốc gia Hà Nội, 2012), 33–46; and Nguyễn Thanh Tùng, “*Chu Dịch giải nghĩa diễn ca* trong tiến trình diễn Nôm *Kinh Dịch* thời trung đại” [The *Chu Dịch giải nghĩa diễn ca* (周易解義演歌) in the evolution of the translation into Nôm of the *Classic of Changes* in the medieval period], *Tạp chí Hán Nôm* 2012.3, 28–47.

## The Emergence of “Chinese” Knowledge and the “Chinese” Language

Reformist Vietnamese scholars engaged in various efforts to transform education in the early twentieth century. Some of these scholars contributed to a short-lived private school in Hanoi called the Đông Kinh Free School (Đông Kinh nghĩa thực 東京義塾) and in the process produced writings that expressed new views. However, a larger transformation in how educated Vietnamese viewed knowledge was driven by reforms to the civil service examinations. In 1906 the French colonial administration compelled the Nguyễn Dynasty to reform the curriculum and format for the civil service examinations. Alongside the established track of studying the Confucian classics and taking exams in literary Sinitic, two new tracks were established, one in vernacular Vietnamese written in the Latin script (*quốc ngữ* 國語) and one in French. Further, exam candidates in these latter two tracks were to be examined on topics like Vietnamese history and Western science in addition to Confucian morality.

In new textbooks that were produced for the Đông Kinh Free school and the reformed civil service examinations, the previous association of the Confucian classics with universal knowledge was broken. Now the curriculum of the nineteenth century was viewed as foreign knowledge, and the continued study of such knowledge was presented as an obstacle to progress, as nationalism required one to be knowledgeable about one's land. In the reformist writings from the early twentieth century, we thus find many authors criticizing what they saw as the previous obsession with what they now termed “Chinese” knowledge and they lamented how little people knew about Vietnam. Hence, we find authors making statements such as the following: “Students in our kingdom obstinately hold on to the rotten writings of China [*Chi Na hủ lậu chi văn* 支那朽陋之文]. With regards to our kingdom, they are oblivious, as if having descended into a fog. Even students from the elite and high-placed; if you ask them which country's land they inhabit, they cannot answer.”<sup>5</sup> Scholars familiar with late-nineteenth-century Japanese writings will recognize the term “Chi Na” (Jpn., Shina 支那) for “China” here, a sign that this author had been exposed to reformist writings from Japan, most likely through Chinese translations. With the rise of anti-Japanese sentiment in China in the first half of the twentieth century, Chinese scholars came to argue that this term carried derogatory connotations and avoided using it. However, prior to that point it was used by such reformers as Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929) in the late nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Its appearance here thus clearly places this text in the context of the reformist writings in Literary Sinitic of that era.

While such texts were written in Literary Sinitic, the educational reforms of 1906 promoted the use of the Vietnamese vernacular written in the Latin script, as well as French. With the termination of the civil service examinations in 1919, the French transformed the existing multi-lingual approach to education into a system of “franco-annamite” schools where instruction was in the Vietnamese vernacular and French. Literary Sinitic gradually lost its position of centrality, although it took several more years for the vernacular to fully develop into a language that could be used widely in professional life. Nonetheless, by the early 1930s, we can find modernizing educator (Nguyễn Phúc) Ứng Quả (1905–1951) declaring that the vernacular was experiencing a renaissance. This rebirth, according to Ứng Quả, was made possible by the massive

<sup>5</sup>Anonymous, *Cải lương môn học quốc sử giáo khoa thư* 改良蒙學國史教科書 [National history textbook for reformed elementary education], National Library Manuscript No. R.1946, 1b.

<sup>6</sup>Joshua A. Fogel, “New Thoughts on an Old Controversy: *Shina* as a Toponym for China,” *Sino-Platonic Papers* No. 229 (2012), 1–25.

infusion into the language of terms from French, and from reformist Chinese writings, as neologisms that had been created in Japan in the late nineteenth century and had passed into reformist Chinese writings in the early twentieth century, all made their way to Vietnam, and eventually into the vernacular.<sup>7</sup>

As new life was injected into the Vietnamese vernacular, Literary Sinitic gradually lost much of the special, even sacred, status that it had long enjoyed.<sup>8</sup> While many began to refer to Literary Sinitic as “Han” 漢, in vernacular writings in the 1920s we can also find Vietnamese authors referring to the language by using “Tàu,” a colloquial name for “China.” One can find, for instance, articles published in vernacular Vietnamese at this time on such topics as the origin of Chinese characters (*chữ Tàu*), Chinese grammar (*mẹo văn Tàu*), and types of Chinese prose writing (*các lối văn Tàu*).<sup>9</sup>

That said, Literary Sinitic was not completely abandoned, nor was it entirely “desacralized.” Instead, it was still taught in some schools, and textbooks that were developed for teaching the language reveal that it was still seen to be connected to Vietnamese society. For instance, in 1928, educators Lê Thuốc and Nguyễn Hiệt Chi produced a work called *A New Textbook for Han Prose* (*Hán văn tân giáo khoa thư* 漢文新教化書) and in their introduction they put forth three reasons for the continued importance of learning Literary Sinitic. First, they argued that it contributed to the preservation of ethics (*bảo tồn luân lý* 保存倫理). The second was that it enhanced one’s knowledge of “national prose” (*quốc văn* 國文). The third was that it enabled one to perform certain daily tasks, as there were still official documents, like contracts, that were written in Literary Sinitic, and the final section of this book was dedicated to teaching students how to read such a document.<sup>10</sup>

Lê Thuốc and Nguyễn Hiệt Chi thus pointed to ways in which Literary Sinitic still played a role in Vietnamese life, albeit a limited one. However, their pedagogical approach to teaching the language was novel and emulated Western methods of teaching and learning foreign languages. As Lê Thuốc and Nguyễn Hiệt Chi explained in the introduction to their textbook, whereas traditionally teachers initiated instruction by getting students to read texts, their approach was to begin by teaching single words, and then move on to sentences, and finally paragraphs.<sup>11</sup> This approach was promoted by others at the time, such as journalist and scholar Phan Khôi (1887–1959) who

<sup>7</sup> Ứng Quà, “Việt Nam ta cũng đương có một thời kỳ phục hưng (một bài diễn văn của ông giáo sư Ứng Quà),” *Phụ nữ tân văn* [Women’s News] No. 165 (25 August 1932), 9–13.

<sup>8</sup> John Duong Phan, “The Twentieth-Century Secularization of the Sinograph in Vietnam, and its Demotion from the Cosmological to the Aesthetic,” *Journal of World Literature* 1 (2016), 275–93.

<sup>9</sup> Đông Châu [Nguyễn Hữu Tiến], “Xét nguồn gốc chữ Tàu lúc mới phát âm ra làm sao” [Examining the origins of Chinese characters at the time they were first pronounced], *Nam Phong* [Southern Breeze], 55 (1921), 37–46. This is a translation of Liang Qichao 梁啟超, “Cong fayin shang yanjiu Zhongguo wenzi zhi yuan” 從發音上研究中國文字之源 [Examining the origins of Chinese characters from the perspective of pronunciation], *Dongfang zazhi* 東方雜誌 [Eastern Miscellany] 18.21 (1921), 111–17. Nguyễn Hữu Tiến also translated from Chinese the following works: “Khảo về nguyên lưu chữ Tàu” [Origin and development of Chinese characters], *Nam Phong* 70 (1923), 299–04; “Lược thuật về mẹo văn Tàu” [Brief account of Chinese grammar], *Nam Phong* 71 (1923), 395–99; and “Khảo về các lối văn Tàu” [Examination of the various types of Chinese writing], *Nam Phong*, published in six installments from 72 (1923) to 76 (1923).

<sup>10</sup> Lê Thuốc and Nguyễn Hiệt Chi, *Hán văn tân giáo khoa thư: Lớp sơ đẳng* 漢文新教化書, 初等級 [A new textbook for Han prose: elementary level], 3rd ed. (Hanoi: Nhà Học chính Đông Pháp, 1933). The preface that I cite dates from 1928.

<sup>11</sup> Lê Thuốc and Nguyễn Hiệt Chi, *Hán văn tân giáo khoa thư*.



published a series on “Han prose through self-study” in 1932 in a newspaper called *Women’s News* (*Phụ nữ tân văn* 婦女新聞).<sup>12</sup> Finally, in 1932, historian Đào Duy Anh 陶維英 (1904–1988) produced a Chinese–Vietnamese dictionary, providing a key tool for the modern study of Literary Sinitic.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, in the first third of the twentieth century, what had previously been regarded as simply “knowledge” and “writing” now became identified as “Chinese” knowledge and writing. It is with this sense of separation that I argue Sinology, as the study of a separate place that we now call “China,” emerged in Vietnam. Nonetheless, what was now regarded as “Chinese” knowledge and writing was still not entirely separate from Vietnamese life. Instead, many regarded it as essential knowledge for understanding Vietnam. As a result, what emerged in this period was a bifurcated form of Sinology, where “Han learning” was simultaneously viewed as the product of another land and an essential element of Vietnamese life both in the past and to some extent still in the present.

### *Nam Phong* and the Preservation of Han Learning

This bifurcated view of Han learning was enthusiastically promoted in a journal called *Southern Breeze* (*Nam Phong* 南風), which ran from 1917 to 1934. The journal contained sections in vernacular Vietnamese and Literary Sinitic, as well as a section on vocabulary which explained neologisms used in the journal, most of which were adopted from reformist writings in Literary Sinitic. Later, in 1922, a French section was added as well. While this journal is most closely associated with the editor of the Vietnamese and French sections, a Western-educated scholar by the name of Phạm Quỳnh 范瓊 (1892–1945), in the early years of the journal the editor of the Literary Sinitic Section was particularly important. This man’s name was Nguyễn Bá Trác 阮伯卓 (1881–1945). Traditionally educated, before establishing *Nam Phong* with Phạm Quỳnh, Trác had journeyed to Japan, Korea, and China to seek out modern knowledge.

Nguyễn Bá Trác shared his modern knowledge starting from the first issue, where the opening essay in the Literary Sinitic section of the journal was a long article that he wrote on nationalism. Nguyễn Bá Trác wanted traditionally trained scholars to acquire new knowledge. He made this point directly in another article, written and published in Literary Sinitic but later translated into the vernacular, entitled “Some Words of Loyal Advice to Our Confucian Scholar Friends.” This essay notes that in Japan and China traditionally trained scholars had learned new concepts from the West and had transformed their thinking. As a result, he argues, they went from writing poetry and erudite prose to writing about history, philosophy, science, politics, and the arts.<sup>14</sup> This is what Nguyễn Bá Trác wanted to see the traditionally trained scholars in Vietnam do as well.

At the same time, Nguyễn Bá Trác was aware that many scholars would not make this transition. However, he hoped that such people would at least make the effort to

<sup>12</sup>Phan Khôi, “Hán văn độc tu 漢文獨修 (Chinois sans maître)” [Han prose through self-study (Chinese without a teacher)], *Phụ nữ tân văn* 164 to 183, 18 August 1932 to 29 December 1932.

<sup>13</sup>Đào Duy Anh, *Hán-Việt từ điển giản yếu* 漢越詞典簡要 [Abridged Chinese Vietnamese dictionary] (Hanoi: Imprimerie Lê Văn Tân, 1932).

<sup>14</sup>Nguyễn Bá Trác, “Mấy lời trung cáo với các bạn nhà Nho” [Some Words of Loyal Advice to Our Confucian Scholar Friends], translated by Nguyễn Đôn Phục, *Nam Phong* 51 (1921), 190–91. The original essay in Literary Sinitic was published in *Nam Phong* 49 (1921), 1–12. In the digitized version of this journal, the first eight pages of the Literary Sinitic version are missing.

preserve traditional learning, or what he called “Han learning.” While Nguyễn Bá Trác defined Han learning as teachings that had come to Vietnam from China beginning in the Han Dynasty, he did not see this body of knowledge as “Chinese.” Instead, he saw it as the heritage of his land; and just as Europeans preserved the learning of the Greeks and Romans, so, he argued, should the Vietnamese preserve the Han learning of the past.<sup>15</sup>

During the 1920s and 1930s, some scholars accepted the task of preserving Han learning by translating into vernacular Vietnamese texts of Chinese and Vietnamese origin that were originally written in Literary Sinitic. Two scholars who published regularly in *Nam Phong*, Nguyễn Đôn Phục 阮盾复 (1878–1954) and Nguyễn Hữu Tiến 阮友進 (1875–1941), played an important role in this process, and among other contributions, they translated and serialized in that journal the *Mencius* and the *Analects*.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, beyond *Nam Phong*, in the 1920s and early 1930s, other scholars translated such works as the *Classic of Poetry*, the *Great Learning*, the *Analects*, the *Mencius*, the *Doctrine of the Mean*, and the *Classic of Filial Piety*.<sup>17</sup> Also during this period, revolutionary Phan Bội Châu 潘佩珠 (1867–1940) compiled a long work on early Confucian texts and another on the *Classic of Changes* while living under house arrest in Hue; these works appear to have initially circulated among friends before being published years later.<sup>18</sup>

Traditionally trained Confucian scholars were not the only people in 1920s Vietnam who felt the need to translate texts originally written in Literary Sinitic. Buddhist scholars also contributed to this trend. By the 1920s, there was a sense among Buddhists in Vietnam that the religion was in decline,<sup>19</sup> and this led to a movement to “revive Buddhism” (*chấn hưng Phật giáo* 振興佛教).<sup>20</sup> One of the causes for this sense of decline was the fact that as fewer people learned Literary Sinitic, there were fewer people who could read religious texts as, for centuries, Buddhist texts in Vietnam had been

<sup>15</sup>Nguyễn Bá Trác, “Bản về Hán học” [On Han learning], *Nam Phong* 40 (1920), 324–36.

<sup>16</sup>Đông Châu [Nguyễn Hữu Tiến] and Tùng Văn [Nguyễn Đôn Phục], “Mạnh tử quốc văn giải thích” [The *Mencius* explained in the national prose], *Nam Phong*, published in 40 installments from 78 (1923) to 158 (1931) and “Luận ngữ quốc văn giải thích, có bài tiểu sử đức Khổng phu tử” [The *Analects* explained in the national prose, with a biography of Confucius], *Nam Phong*, published in 10 installments from 165 (1931) to 187 (1933). Their translation of the *Mencius* was subsequently published in book form: Đông Châu Nguyễn Hữu Tiến and Tùng Văn Nguyễn Đôn Phục, trans., *Mạnh tử quốc văn giải thích* [The *Mencius* explained in the national prose] (Hanoi: Trung Bắc tân văn, 1932).

<sup>17</sup>Listed in the order in which they were published, these works are as follows: Nguyễn Văn Hiếu, Nghiêm Thượng Văn, and Đặng Đức Tô, trans., *Đại học* [Great Learning] (Hanoi: Imprimerie Tonkinoise, 1922); Dương Bá Trạc, trans., *Luận ngữ* [Analects] (Hanoi: Imprimerie Vinh Thanh, 1922); Nguyễn Văn Hiếu, Nghiêm Thượng Văn, and Đặng Đức Tô, trans., *Kinh thi* [Classic of Poetry] (Hanoi: Imprimerie Nghiêm-Hàm, 1924); Trần Tuấn Khải, trans., *Mạnh tử* [Mencius] (Hanoi: Imprimerie Tonkinoise, 1926); Lương Văn Can, trans., *Hiếu kinh* [Classic of Filial Piety] (Hanoi: Imprimerie Long Quang, 1929); Hà Tư Vị and Nguyễn Văn Đang, trans., *Trung dung* [Doctrine of the Mean] (Hanoi: Tân dân, 1933).

<sup>18</sup>Phan Bội Châu, *Khổng học đăng* [Light of Confucianism] (Hue: Anh Minh, 1957) and *Chu dịch* [Changes of the Zhou] (Saigon: Khai Trí, 1969).

<sup>19</sup>See, for example, the preface to Tịnh Quang Cư Sĩ, trans., *Phật học dị giải* [Buddhist learning easily explained] (Sàdec: n.p., 1932), 2. This work is a translation of Jia Fengzhen 賈豐臻, *Foxue yijie* 佛學易解 [Buddhist learning easily explained] (Shanghai: Shangwu, 1926).

<sup>20</sup>For an overview, see Elise Anne DeVido, “Buddhism for This World: The Buddhist Revival in Vietnam, 1920 to 1951, and Its Legacy,” in *Modernity and Re-enchantment: Religion in Post-Revolutionary Vietnam*, edited by Philip Taylor (Singapore: ISEAS, 2007), 250–96.



recorded in that language. Hence, just as Confucian scholars translated the Confucian classics into vernacular Vietnamese in the 1920s and 1930s, so did Buddhist scholars translate various texts at that time.<sup>21</sup>

While numerous scholars thus sought to translate texts from Literary Sinitic into the vernacular to preserve for a new generation the knowledge that they contained, they did so at a time when ideas about that knowledge were changing in the broader world of East Asia. In the case of Confucian learning, for instance, as scholars in East Asia adopted the Western concept of the nation, some scholars then argued that Confucian morality constituted the “national essence” (*quốc túy* 國粹) of their country, or that it should serve as the core morality for the teaching of ethics (*luân lý* 倫理), another Western concept, in a national curriculum. Japanese and Chinese scholars were the first to address these topics; however, their writings were translated into Vietnamese and influenced the way that Vietnamese scholars thought and wrote about these issues as well.

In the case of ethics, for instance, in 1920, Nguyễn Hữu Tiến translated and serialized Cai Yuanpei’s 蔡元培 (1868–1940) 1910 *History of Chinese Ethics* (*Zhongguo lixue shi* 中國倫理學史).<sup>22</sup> Then in the early 1930s, he translated and serialized part of Miura Tōsaku’s 三浦藤作 (1887–1960) 1923 *History of Asian Ethics* (*Tōyō rinrigakushi* 東洋倫理學史), by relying on a Chinese translation of this work by Zhang Zongyuan 張宗元 and Lin Ketang 林科堂.<sup>23</sup> Cai Yuanpei’s text was again translated and serialized in the 1930s in a journal called *Overseas Studies* (*Du học báo* 遊學報). This journal was part of an initiative that was established by the Nguyễn Dynasty in 1926 to send talented students to study in France. While the purpose of this initiative was to train young Vietnamese in Western subjects, the journal was used to remind these students of the moral values that they were expected to uphold.<sup>24</sup> We can see here an example of this larger East Asian effort to utilize Confucian morality for modern nation-building, a development that Vietnamese learned from Chinese writings and then employed in their society.

In the introduction to their translation of the *Mencius*, Nguyễn Hữu Tiến and Nguyễn Đôn Phục make this point explicit. They recognized that they were living in a new age when the emphasis was on national prose (*quốc văn* 國文), that is, writing in the vernacular. At the same time, however, they stated that the classics of the sages and commentaries of the wise (*thánh kinh hiền truyện* 聖經賢傳) contributed to the national essence (*quốc túy* 國粹). By translating those works into national prose, Nguyễn Hữu Tiến and Nguyễn Đôn Phục said their purpose was to take the spirit of Confucian writing (*chữ Nho*; *Ruzi* 儒字) and transfer it to the national language (*quốc ngữ* 國語) so that anyone who sought to understand the way of the sages could apprehend it in the vernacular.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup>To take two of many possible examples, see Đoàn Trung Cồn, trans., *Diệu pháp liên hoa kinh* [Lotus sutra], 2 vols. (Saigon: Editions Đoàn Trung Cồn, 1936) and Cù Ma La Thập, trans., *Phật di giáo kinh* [Bequeathed teachings sutra (*Fo yijiao jing* 佛遺教經)] (Saigon: Imp. de l’Union, Ng. Van Cua, 1937).

<sup>22</sup>Đông Châu [Nguyễn Hữu Tiến], “Khảo về lịch sử luân lý học nước Tàu” [Examination of the history of ethics in China], *Nam Phong*, published in eight installments from 34 (1920) to 45 (1921).

<sup>23</sup>Đông Châu [Nguyễn Hữu Tiến], “Khảo về luân lý học sử nước Tàu” [Examination of the history of Chinese ethics], *Nam Phong*, published in 17 installments from 168 (1932) to 210 (1934).

<sup>24</sup>Nguyễn Nam, “A Local History of Vietnamese Sinology in Early 20th Century Annam: The Case of the Bulletin *Du học báo* 遊學報,” *East Asia* 31 (2014), 139–56.

<sup>25</sup>Đông Châu and Tùng Văn, “Mạnh từ quốc văn giải thích,” *Nam Phong*, 78 (1923), 487.

## Reformulating “Chinese” Knowledge

While we can see the translations of the Confucian classics in the 1920s and 1930s as an effort to preserve the core moral teachings in those works for people living in a new age, as the comments above about such issues as the national essence indicate, it would be inaccurate to see these translations as the work of conservative individuals who were stuck in the past. The scholars who translated texts such as the Confucian classics possessed new ideas and adopted new approaches. In translating the *Mencius* and the *Analecs*, for instance, Nguyễn Hữu Tiến and Nguyễn Đôn Phục also provided brief historical biographies of Mencius and Confucius and discussed how these philosophers were evaluated by Song Dynasty scholars. This provision of biographical and historical information so that these works could be contextualized was a new practice. Vietnamese scholars who translated the Confucian classics into Nôm in the nineteenth century had not done this. Instead, we can see this practice emerging in the 1920s as traditionally trained Vietnamese scholars sought to introduce knowledge to readers educated in Western learning. Hence, a scholar writing under the name of An Khê published general articles in *Nam Phong* in the 1920s on the teachings of Confucius and Mozi, while in the 1930s, Nguyễn Đôn Phục published a series of short biographies of famous Confucian scholars, namely, Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒, Fan Ning 范甯, Wang Tong 王通, Xue Shou 薛收, Han Yu 韓愈, Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤, Shao Yong 邵雍, Cheng Hao 程顥, Cheng Yi 程頤, Zhang Zai 張載, Xie Liangzuo 謝良佐, Hu Anguo 胡安國, Zhu Xi 朱熹, Lu Jiuyuan 陸九淵, Zhao Fu 趙復, Xu Heng 許衡, and Xu Qian 許謙.<sup>26</sup>

In presenting summaries of the lives and works of various Chinese historical figures, the authors of these texts often translated from contemporary Chinese writings. For instance, Nguyễn Đôn Phục and Nguyễn Hữu Tiến introduced readers to the life and teachings of Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529) in articles in *Nam Phong* by translating part of a work that Chinese scholar Sun Yuxiu 孫毓修 (1871–1922) had published earlier in the century.<sup>27</sup> Nguyễn Đôn Phục, meanwhile, translated some of the contributions that Sun Yuxiu had made to a book series called the “Collected Works for Young People” (*Shaonian congshu* 少年叢書), to produce articles about the fifth-century poet, Tao Yuanming 陶淵明, and Song Dynasty scholar-officials Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086) and Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101).<sup>28</sup> Finally, Nguyễn Hữu Tiến published an

<sup>26</sup>An Khê, “Khảo về học thuyết của các môn đồ Khổng Tử” [Examination of the teachings of the disciples of Confucius], *Nam Phong* 89 (1924), 383–92; “Khảo về học thuyết Mặc Tử” [Examination of the teachings of Mozi], *Nam Phong* 91 (1925), 29–37 and 93 (1925), 253–61; “Danh nho nước Tàu” [Famous Chinese Confucian scholars], *Nam Phong*, published in nine installments from 136 (1929) to 151 (1930).

<sup>27</sup>Tùng Văn [Nguyễn Đôn Phục], “Lịch sử Vương Dương Minh” [History of Wang Yangming], *Nam Phong* 108 (1926), 143–53; “Học thuyết Vương Dương Minh” [Teachings of Wang Yangming], *Nam Phong* 109 (1926), 245–57; and Đông Châu [Nguyễn Hữu Tiến], “Một nhà đại triết học đời Minh, Vương Dương Minh” [A great philosopher of the Ming period, Wang Yangming], *Nam Phong* 145 (1929), 589–96 and No. 146 (1930), 52–67. These articles contained translated passages from Sun Yuxiu 孫毓修, Wang Yangming 王陽明 [Wang Yangming] (Shanghai: Shangwu, 1917).

<sup>28</sup>Tùng Văn [Nguyễn Đôn Phục], “Một nhà cao sĩ nước Tàu: Ông Đào Uyên Minh” [An esteemed Chinese scholar: Mr. Tao Yuanming], *Nam Phong* 179 (1932), 560–78; “Lịch sử và sự nghiệp Tư Mã Quang” [History and career of Sima Guang], *Nam Phong* 147 (1930), 173–84; and 148 (1930), 237–50; and “Lịch sử và sự nghiệp Tô Đông Pha” [History and career of Su Dongpo], *Nam Phong* 149 (1930), 344–57; and 150 (1930), 462–77.

article on the poet, Qu Yuan 屈原 (340–278 BC), by translating excerpts from Liang Qichao's essay, "Research on Qu Yuan" (*Quyuan yanjiu* 屈原研究).<sup>29</sup>

Just as Nguyễn Đôn Phục and Nguyễn Hữu Tiến sought to address an audience beyond the world of traditional scholar-officials, so had Sun Yuxiu and Liang Qichao sought to do the same in their writings. In particular, Sun and Liang were concerned with developing a sense of nationalism among the Chinese, and as such, they presented information about historical figures in new ways for a general educated audience. Indeed, the series that Sun contributed to was alternately called "Abbreviated Accounts of Great Chinese" (*Zhongguo weiren de zhuanlüe* 中國偉人的傳略). In translating these works into Vietnamese, Nguyễn Đôn Phục and Nguyễn Hữu Tiến not only introduced information about important figures in Chinese history, but they also exposed their readers to these new ways of writing about the past.

In addition to these biographical works, Chinese scholars in the early twentieth century also created texts that surveyed the history of certain topics, such as literature or philosophy. Some of these works were translated into Vietnamese in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1922, Nguyễn Hữu Tiến translated Wang Mengzeng's 王夢曾 (1873–1959) 1914 *Reference Book for the History of Chinese Literature* (*Zhongguo wenxueshi cankaoshu* 中國文學史參考書).<sup>30</sup> In 1926, he published a translation of Zhang Liangcai's 張亮採 (1870–1906) *History of Chinese Customs* (*Zhongguo fengsu shi* 中國風俗史), posthumously published in 1911.<sup>31</sup> Then in 1931, Tiến translated and published Liang Qichao's essay, "On the Main Trends in the Changes in Chinese Scholarly Thought" (*Lun Zhongguo xueshu sixiang bianqian zhi dashi* 論中國學術思想變遷之大勢).<sup>32</sup> Finally, in 1933, he translated Chen Binhe's 陳彬龢 (1897–1945) 1927 *Small History of Chinese Buddhism* (*Zhongguo Fojiao xiaoshi* 中國佛教小史).<sup>33</sup>

Such works by Chinese authors were often based on, or inspired by, late-nineteenth-century Japanese books which sought to conceptualize Chinese literature, culture, and religion in the same way that Western scholars wrote about their own, and other, societies. The Chinese works then influenced how Vietnamese scholars conceptualized certain bodies of knowledge. For instance, in the late nineteenth century, Japanese scholars produced histories of Buddhism that centered on a narrative of various sects. This sectarian conceptualization of the history of Buddhism was replicated by Chinese scholars.<sup>34</sup> Vietnamese scholars then translated some of these Chinese works, such as a certain Huang Shifu's 黃士復 *General Outline of Buddhism* (*Fojiao gailuan* 佛教概論).<sup>35</sup> Then, finally, Vietnamese scholars produced original

<sup>29</sup>Đông Châu [Nguyễn Hữu Tiến], "Khảo về Khuất Nguyên" [Examination of Qu Yuan], *Nam Phong* 119 (1927), 4–14.

<sup>30</sup>Đông Châu [Nguyễn Hữu Tiến], "Văn học sử Nước Tàu" [Literary history of China], *Nam Phong*, published in eight installments from 56 (1922) to 64 (1922).

<sup>31</sup>Đông Châu [Nguyễn Hữu Tiến], "Khảo về phong tục nước Tàu" [Examination of the Customs of China], *Nam Phong*, published in eight installments from 111 (1926) to 118 (1927).

<sup>32</sup>Đông Châu [Nguyễn Hữu Tiến], "Khảo về học thuật tư tưởng nước Tàu" [Examination of Chinese scholarly thought] *Nam Phong*, published in five installments from 163 (1931) to 167 (1931).

<sup>33</sup>Đông Châu [Nguyễn Hữu Tiến], "Lịch sử Phật giáo nước Tàu" [History of Buddhism in China], *Nam Phong* 178 (1932), 492–98; 180 (1933), 19–30; and 183 (1933), 357–67.

<sup>34</sup>Erik Schicketanz, "Narratives of Buddhist Decline and the Concept of the Sect (zong) in Modern Chinese Buddhist Thought," *Studies in Chinese Religions* 3.3 (2017), 281–300.

<sup>35</sup>Học Tăng Mật Thế, trans., *Phật giáo khái luận* [General outline of Buddhism] (Hue: Tôn Thất Tùng, 1939).

writings that followed this sectarian model of Buddhist history, such as scholar Đoàn Trung Còn's (1908–1988) *Buddhist Sects (Các tông phái đạo Phật)*.<sup>36</sup>

This same scholar, Đoàn Trung Còn, also produced what can be considered a modern history of Tang Dynasty monk Xuanzang's 玄奘 (602–664) journey to India to obtain Buddhist texts and learning. Published in 1931, Đoàn Trung Còn presented Buddhism in contrast to Western history and his book in contrast to popular writings on Xuanzang's journey. In particular, Đoàn Trung Còn noted that the sophisticated and influential teachings of the Buddha emerged in India at a time when in France there was little more than warring and uncultured Gaul tribes. Meanwhile, Đoàn Trung Còn criticized the historical distortions that popular accounts of Xuanzang's journey had introduced and presented his work as a corrective to those widely known works.<sup>37</sup>

The popular accounts of Xuanzang's journey can be attributed to the sixteenth-century novel, *Journey to the West (Xiyou ji 西遊記)*. At roughly the time when Đoàn Trung Còn wrote his more academic study of Xuanzang's journey, there were numerous versions of this story in circulation in Vietnam.<sup>38</sup> Beyond this tale, there was an astonishing quantity of translations and adaptations of Chinese popular novels published in Vietnam during the colonial era and continuing into the post-colonial period in South Vietnam, where martial arts novels by the likes of Jin Yong 金庸 (1924–2018) became popular as well. In the case of Jin Yong, or Kim Dung, as his name is written in Vietnamese, the craze for his novels began in the early 1960s with the publication of *The Heaven Sword and the Dragon Saber (Yi tian tu long ji 倚天屠龍記)*.<sup>39</sup> While the translation of such popular and martial arts novels may not constitute Sinology, they nonetheless deserve mention as they have played a very important role in establishing a foundation of cultural and historical awareness about China among Vietnamese in general. Indeed, Đoàn Trung Còn felt that the knowledge about Xuanzang that came from popular novels was so prevalent that he needed to counter it with a more scholarly account.

Finally, alongside the new categorizations of bodies of knowledge created by Japanese and Chinese scholars that were introduced at this time were many other works by Chinese scholars which introduced various aspects of what Vietnamese at the time referred to as Western Learning. In the 1920s, the leading Vietnamese intellectuals tended to be proficient in either Literary Sinitic or French. While the number of those who were proficient in French increased over time, in the 1920s and even into the 1930s, scholars proficient in Literary Sinitic played an enormous role in introducing Western ideas, often by translating works written by Chinese scholars into the Vietnamese vernacular.

<sup>36</sup>Đoàn Trung Còn, *Các tông phái đạo Phật* [Buddhist sects], 2nd ed. (Saigon: n.p., 1943).

<sup>37</sup>Đoàn Trung Còn, *Văn minh nhà Phật qua Tàu ... (Thấy Huyền Trang đi thỉnh kinh)* [Buddhist civilization made it to China ... (Master Xuanzang's trip to seek sutras)] (Saigon: Agence Saigonnaise de Publicité, 1931), 3 and 5–7.

<sup>38</sup>See, for instance, Hoàng Minh Tũ, trans., *Tây du diễn nghĩa 西遊演義* [Journey to the West translated], 16 vols. (Bến Tre: Phạm Đình Khương, n.d.); Nguyễn Ngọc Xuân, *Tây du truyện 西游傳* [Account of the Journey to the West], 3rd ed. (Hanoi: Nguyễn Ngọc Xuân, 1925); Anonymous, *Tây du diễn kịch 西游演劇* [Journey to the West drama], 2 vols. (Hanoi: Phúc Văn, 1929); Lạc Khố, trans., *Tây du ký, phê bình theo tâm lý học và triết học* [Journey to the West, critiqued following psychology and philosophy], 77 vols. (Hanoi: Trung Ký, 1933–34), Hoàng Minh Tũ, trans., *Tây du diễn nghĩa 西遊演義* [Journey to the West translated], 16 vols. (Bến Tre: Phạm Đình Khương, n.d.).

<sup>39</sup>Từ Khánh Phụng, trans., *Cô gái Đồ Long: truyện dã sử võ hiệp Trung Hoa* [Maiden of Đồ Long: A Chinese martial arts historical tale] (Cholon: Tân Thế Kỷ, 1964).

Historian Đào Duy Anh, for instance, established a publishing initiative in 1928 to introduce Western knowledge to Vietnamese by commissioning translations and summaries of Chinese writings that had been published in 1923 as part of a series called the Eastern Library (Dongfang wenku 東方文庫). Some of the works that were selected for this initiative included Wang Pingling's 王平陵 (1898–1964) *Collected Discussions on Psychology* (*Xinxulue luncong* 心理學論叢), a two-volume work entitled *A Critique of Western and Eastern Cultures* (*Dongxi wenhua piping* 東西文化批評) that was compiled by a scholar writing under the name of “The Rustic” (Cangfu 儻父), a collection entitled *The Women’s Movement* (*Funü yundong* 婦女運動), and two speeches by Sun Yatsen 孫逸仙 (1866–1925) on economics. Meanwhile, there were other titles in this series that did not make explicit the source of their information, but which seemingly came from other titles in the Eastern Library series.<sup>40</sup>

While such works were not Sinology, in that their goal was not to understand China, nonetheless they were part of a serious effort to learn from Chinese scholars about the modern world. Through them many new ideas were introduced to Vietnamese readers, contributing to intellectual transformations that culminated in what I would refer to as a kind of global or cosmopolitan Sinology in the 1930s and 1940s.

### Towards Global Sinology in the Late Colonial Period

Exposure to the new ways in which traditional knowledge was being presented and talked about by Japanese, Chinese, as well as French scholars led to the production of increasingly new forms of scholarship in Vietnam. A classic example of this is a work on Confucianism that was written by educator Trần Trọng Kim 陳仲金 (1883–1953) and published in three volumes in the 1930s. Usually referred to in English as *Confucianism*, the title of the work was actually written in three languages as 儒教 *Nho giáo: La doctrine des Lettrés*, and it was subsequently revised and published in four volumes and an appendix in 1943.<sup>41</sup>

*Confucianism* consists of nineteen chapters that cover the history of Confucian thought from the time of Confucius to the period of the Qing Dynasty, followed by one chapter that discusses the history of Confucian thought in Vietnam. Like Đoàn Trung Còn's history of Buddhism, this work demonstrates a new approach to writing about Chinese thought that had developed in East Asia starting in the late nineteenth century when Japanese scholars attempted to demonstrate that there were philosophical traditions in Asia that paralleled the history of Western philosophy. Hence, from Matsumoto Bunzaburō's 松本文三郎 (1869–1944) late-nineteenth-century *History of Chinese Philosophy* (*Shina tetsugaku shi* 支那哲學史) to Xie Wuliang's 謝無量 (1884–1964) 1916 *History of Chinese Philosophy* (*Zhongguo zhexue shi* 中國哲學史) to Hu Shi's 胡適 (1891–1962) 1919 *Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy* (*Zhongguo zhexue shi dagang* 中國哲學史大綱), and culminating in Feng Youlan's 馮友蘭 (1895–1990) 1934 *History of Chinese Philosophy* (*Zhongguo zhexue shi* 中國哲學史), a series of surveys of Chinese thought was produced that sought to present Chinese thought as a philosophical tradition on par with Western philosophy.

<sup>40</sup>Trần Đình Nam, comp., *Trí Khôn: Tâm lý học nhập môn* [Intellect: A psychology primer] (Hue: Tiếng dân, 1928); Nghi Đạm, trans., *Đông Tây văn hóa phê bình* [A critique of Western and Eastern cultures], 2 vols. (Hue: Tiếng dân, 1928); Dã Lan Nữ Sĩ, trans., *Phụ nữ vận động* [The women's movement] (Hue: Tiếng dân, 1928); and *Chính trị nước Trung Hoa* [Economy of China] (Hue: Tiếng dân, 1928).

<sup>41</sup>Trần Trọng Kim, *Nho giáo* [Confucianism], 2nd ed., 5 vols. (Hanoi: Lê Thăng, 1943).



Trần Trọng Kim's *Confucianism* fits perfectly into this effort to explain Confucian thought in comparison to, and in dialog with, Western philosophy. Indeed, in his introduction, he compares and contrasts the ideas of ancient Greek philosophers such as Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Pythagoras with ideas in the *Classic of Changes*, just as Hu Shi and other scholars in China did at that time. We can also see Trần Trọng Kim's *Confucianism* as contributing to a broader process of vernacularizing traditional knowledge. Just as Feng Youlan wrote in a more vernacular style than Xie Wuliang had earlier in the century, so was Trần Trọng Kim's explanations of Confucian thought more colloquial than the earlier attempts in Vietnam to present traditional ideas in the written vernacular.

French scholar Émile Gaspardone reviewed the first volume of *Confucianism* in 1930 and recognized its contribution in vernacularizing traditional knowledge by saying that in transcribing and explaining Sinitic terms, the book offered a kind of useful "comparative vocabulary."<sup>42</sup> At the same time, however, Gaspardone dismissed Trần Trọng Kim's introduction, stating that the author had merely followed a fashion of citing as many names of foreign philosophers as possible.<sup>43</sup> In this comment we can see a disconnect between the objective of Gaspardone, who was interested in producing knowledge about "the Orient," and that of Trần Trọng Kim, who wished to demonstrate that Vietnam possessed a philosophical tradition that was as rich as that of the West. In doing so, Trần Trọng Kim was both following and contributing to an effort among some intellectuals in East Asia to examine traditional ideas in comparison to, and in dialog with, Western philosophy. As such, Trần Trọng Kim's *Confucianism* was innovative, and it was so in no small part because it engaged with the same ideas that Chinese intellectuals were considering at that time.

We can see this phenomenon even more clearly in the work of historian Đào Duy Anh who published a history of China in 1943 entitled *An Historical Outline of China, From Distant Antiquity to Today* (*Trung Hoa sử cương, từ thái cổ đến ngày nay*).<sup>44</sup> A decade before this book was published, Chinese historians had engaged in a drawn-out debate about how the five Marxist modes of production could be applied to the periodization of Chinese history. In his introduction, Đào Duy Anh discussed the positions of several of the historians in this debate, such as Tao Xisheng 陶希聖 (1899–1988), Li Ji 李季 (1892–1967), Lü Zhenyu 呂振羽 (1900–1980), and Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892–1978), as well as Sano Kesami 佐野袈裟美 (1886–1945) in Japan.<sup>45</sup> Đào Duy Anh then offered his position on this issue. Finally, while most of the work covers periods of Chinese history for which there is textual information, Đào Duy Anh also included chapters on geography, the Paleolithic, and the

<sup>42</sup>Émile Gaspardone, Review: "儒教 *Nho giáo*: *La doctrine des Lettrés*" [儒教 Confucianism: the doctrine of the scholars], *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 30 (1930), 156.

<sup>43</sup>Gaspardone, Review, 155.

<sup>44</sup>Đào Duy Anh, *Trung Hoa sử cương, từ thái cổ đến ngày nay* [An historical outline of China, from distant antiquity to today] (Hue: Quan hải tùng thư, 1943).

<sup>45</sup>The works Đào Duy Anh cites are as follows: Tao Xisheng 陶希聖, *Zhongguo shehuishi lunzhan, di ba ji* 中國社會史論戰第八輯 [The debate on Chinese social history, the eighth collection], Li Ji 李季 *Zhongguo shehuishi lunzhan pipan* 中國社會史論戰批判 [Controversies and critiques in Chinese social history], Lü Zhenyu 呂振羽, *Shiqianqi Zhongguo shehui yanjiu* 史前期中國社會研究 [A study of prehistoric Chinese society], Guo Moruo 郭沫若, *Zhongguo gudai shehui yanjiu* 中國古代社會研究 [A study of ancient Chinese society], and Sano Kesami 佐野袈裟美, *Zhongguo lishi jiaocheng* 中國歷史教程 [Course in Chinese history].



Neolithic, and for the geography chapter, Đào Duy Anh relied heavily on a work by French scholar René Grousset (1885–1952).<sup>46</sup>

Đào Duy Anh's *An Historical Outline of China* is thus a very cosmopolitan and contemporary work in the way that it engaged with Marxist ideas, as filtered through the writings of Chinese historians, as well as with the work of a European scholar. We can see a similar approach in some writings that were produced in the 1940s on Ming Dynasty philosopher Wang Yangming. There were various schools of thought (*học phái* 學派) that developed in the late imperial period in China around Wang Yangming's ideas, and his ideas also inspired reformist Japanese during the Meiji period. Reformist Chinese who then visited Japan at the turn of the twentieth century, like Liang Qichao and Sun Yatsen, were then exposed to this interest in Wang Yangming's ideas and introduced his ideas to their contemporaries in China.

Vietnamese intellectuals gradually became aware of the influence of Wang Yangming's ideas on the Japanese and Chinese reformist movements, and when some obtained copies of his collected works, in the 1930s, they produced extended writings. Trần Trọng Kim, for instance, wrote a long essay in which he discussed Wang Yangming's life and philosophy in more detail than he had in *Confucianism*. He also introduced the various schools of Wang Yangming thought and concluded with a very brief chapter on the interest in Wang Yangming in Japan.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, journalist and writer Phan Văn Hùm (1902–1946) produced a study of Wang Yangming's life and philosophy while under house arrest in the early 1940s. In this work, Phan Văn Hùm went into more depth than Trần Trọng Kim did in his writing, and he also engaged in some innovative comparative analysis. He has, for instance, a brief but fascinating chapter that places Wang Yangming's life in a global perspective by indicating what was happening at that time in Europe, China, and Vietnam. He then points to the ways these worlds were connected by noting that in suppressing an uprising, Wang Yangming had employed “Frankish” (Phật lang cơ 佛郎機) guns that were modeled after Portuguese firearms.<sup>48</sup> Meanwhile, in other chapters, Phan Văn Hùm discusses Wang Yangming's philosophy in dialog with comparative ideas in Western philosophy.

Finally, another journalist and writer Đào Trinh Nhất (1900–1951) wrote a series of articles on Wang Yangming in 1942–43 for a newspaper and then compiled those articles into a book in 1944.<sup>49</sup> In these writings, Đào Trinh Nhất took a more colloquial approach in discussing Wang Yangming's life and philosophy, as befit the context of the newspaper where he published his writings. The following year, in 1945, Đào Trinh Nhất published a book on Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–1086). In the preface to this work, he stated that Wang Anshi was one of the few Chinese historical figures who had not been written about yet in Vietnam. He claimed that everyone from Confucius and Laozi to Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927) and Liang Qichao, to Gou Jian 句踐 (496–465 BC) and Yang Guifei 楊貴妃 (719–756), had either been written about, critiqued, exalted in verse, or had their lives performed on stage.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>46</sup>René Grousset, *Histoire de l'Asie—II. L'Inde et la Chine* (Paris: G. Crès, 1922).

<sup>47</sup>It is not clear when this was first published, but a posthumous version was published in Saigon in 1960. Trần Trọng Kim, *Vương Dương Minh* [Wang Yangming] (Saigon: Tân Việt, 1960).

<sup>48</sup>Phan Văn Hùm, *Vương Dương Minh: thân thế và học thuyết* [Wang Yangming: his life and teachings] (Hanoi: 1943), 287–89.

<sup>49</sup>This work was republished in Saigon in 1960. Đào Trinh Nhất, *Vương Dương Minh* [Wang Yangming] (Saigon: Tân Việt, 1960).

<sup>50</sup>Đào Trinh Nhất, *Vương An Thạch* [Wang Anshi] (Hanoi: Đại La, 1945), 1.

Therefore, by the early 1940s, a great deal of information had been produced in the Vietnamese vernacular about Chinese history, philosophy, literature, and culture. Further, while many of these works simply transmitted information, there were some, such as the writings of Đào Duy Anh and Phan Văn Hùm, that went a step further and attempted to reconceptualize received information. These scholars did so by engaging with scholarship and ideas from East Asia and Europe, and in the process, they produced what we can categorize as a global or cosmopolitan form of Sinological scholarship. As we will see in the next section, other scholars produced such works in the 1940s as well.

### The Demise of Vietnamese Sinology in War and Revolution

World War II came to Vietnam in the fall of 1940 when the Japanese began to occupy French Indochina just a few months after the collaborationist state of Vichy France had been established in the metropole. For the next four and a half years, the Japanese allowed the Vichy French officials in Vietnam to continue to govern over the colony. However, in March of 1945, the Japanese imprisoned the French officials and had Nguyễn Dynasty emperor Bảo Đại (保大) (1913–1997) reject his kingdom's status as a protectorate of France and declare Vietnam independent. From March until August 1945, Trần Trọng Kim, the author of *Confucianism*, served as the prime minister of this nominally independent state. However, in August of 1945, Trần Trọng Kim relinquished control of the country to the revolutionary forces of the Việt Minh, under the leadership of communist revolutionary Hồ Chí Minh (胡志明) (1890–1969), an event known as the August Revolution. Hồ Chí Minh declared Vietnam to be independent, however, the French were intent to retake their colony, and negotiations between Hồ Chí Minh's government and the French broke down in late 1946 leading to the outbreak of the First Indochina War.

While one might logically assume that life under a colonial ruler and an occupying power would be oppressive, on an intellectual level the early 1940s was quite vibrant. The Vichy French colonial government was concerned that Vietnamese intellectuals would be attracted to Japanese calls for pan-Asian unity and allowed for a degree of Vietnamese nationalism to be expressed to counter that potential. We can see this new tendency reflected in some of the articles published in two scholarly journals that were established during the war years. One of the journals was called *Knowing the New* (*Tri Tân* 知新), a name that was inspired by Confucius's instruction in the *Analects* to “review what you have learned and know what is new” (*wengu er zhixin* 溫故而知新). The opening article of the first issue was written by a scholar by the name of Nguyễn Văn Tố (阮文素) (1889–1947) who encouraged readers not to use the name “Annam” (Chn., Annan 安南) to refer to the country, a name that was in common usage at that time, as he argued that this was a term that the Chinese had created for Vietnam in the past when it was under their control and that it had submissive connotations.<sup>51</sup>

In subsequent issues of *Knowing the New*, as well as in the other new journal, *Just Commentary* (*Thanh Nghị* 清議), Nguyễn Văn Tố published numerous articles that examined Sino-Vietnamese historical issues, and a definite pro-Vietnamese sentiment

<sup>51</sup>Ứng Hòe Nguyễn Văn Tố, “Quốc hiệu nước ta không nên gọi là An Nam” [Our country should not be called Annam], *Tri Tân* [Knowing the New] 1 (1941), 1 and 17.

can be detected in these writings.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, we can see another notable development in Nguyễn Văn Tố's examination of historical issues between Vietnam and China. Whereas earlier scholarship had focused on translating Chinese writings and ideas into the vernacular, Nguyễn Văn Tố produced original, and analytical, scholarship. Other scholars who published in these journals did the same. Historian and literary scholar Hoàng Thúc Trâm (1902–1977), who wrote under the name of Hoa Bằng, produced a study of diplomatic relations between the Qing Dynasty and Vietnam in the late eighteenth century.<sup>53</sup> Trần Văn Giáp (1902–1973), another historian and literary scholar, wrote about the influence of certain Chinese writings on medieval Vietnamese stories.<sup>54</sup> Finally, Phan Văn Hùm published a comparative article on the dragon in Chinese and Vietnamese thought.<sup>55</sup>

In other words, we can see in *Knowing the New* and *Just Commentary* the emergence of what we can consider truly modern historical and literary scholarship. Indeed, while Hoa Bằng wrote an article that explained and provided a translation of Li Bai's 李白 (701–762) poem, “Resentment” (*Yuanqing* 怨情) for a section on “Selected Excerpts from Literary Sinitic Writings” (Hán văn trích diễm) in the inaugural issue of *Knowing the New*, that section was soon discontinued as the journal focused on scholarship that was more comparative and analytical nature.<sup>56</sup> This is a trend that was evident in the early 1940s beyond these two journals as well. Phan Văn Hùm's study of Wang Yangming in dialog with Western philosophy is one such example. That book was published as part of a series of books on Western and Asian philosophy published by the “New Việt” (Tân Việt) publishing house in Hanoi. Called “Philosophy Bookshelf” (Tủ sách triết học), this series included works devoted to Bergson, Kant, Nietzsche, Einstein, Descartes, Bacon, Aristotle, and Comte, while Phan Văn Hùm contributed his work on Wang Yangming as well as a volume on Buddhist philosophy.<sup>57</sup>

Meanwhile, there was another book series that was published at this time in Hanoi that produced similar works. Called the “Scholarship Bookshelf” (Tủ sách học thuật), this series was published by the National Learning Publishing House (Quốc học thư xã 國學書社). Among its titles was an introduction to philosophy that discussed Han Feizi 韓非子 (d. 233 BC) and Laozi alongside Plato and Socrates.<sup>58</sup> Another volume focused on the philosophy of Mozi 墨子 (ca. 470–ca. 391 BCE) and contained a section that compared his concept of universal love (*kiêm ái* 兼愛) with the charity (*bác*

<sup>52</sup>Ứng Hòe Nguyễn Văn Tố, “Nước Nam ta về đời Tiền Lê (theo tờ tấu của sứ Tàu)” [Our country of the South during the period of the Former Lê (according to a memorial by a Chinese envoy)], *Tri Tân* No. 3 (1941), 9; “Sứ Tàu đối với Hưng Đạo Vương” [The Hưng Đạo prince according to Chinese histories], *Tri Tân* No. 17 (1941), 17–18; “Vua Lê Thái Tổ đánh đuổi quân Tàu” [King Lê Thái Tổ fought off the Chinese troops], *Tri Tân* No. 65 (1942), 2–4 and 7; and “Sử liệu: sử ta so với sử Tàu” [Historical sources: our history compared with Chinese history] *Thanh Nghị*, published in 12 installments from No. 60 (1944) to No. 105 (1945).

<sup>53</sup>Hoa Bằng [Hoàng Thúc Trâm], “Một đoạn lịch sử ngoại giao giữa ta và Tàu hồi cuối thế kỷ thứ XVIII” [A period of diplomatic history between us and Chinese at the end of the eighteenth century], *Tri Tân* No. 152 (1944), 2–3 and No. 153 (1944), 20–21.

<sup>54</sup>Trần Văn Giáp, “Lược khảo về tiểu thuyết Tàu, phụ thêm tiểu thuyết Việt Nam xưa” [A brief examination of Chinese stories, with added discussion of old Vietnamese stories], *Thanh Nghị*, published in seven installments from No. 8 (1942) to 19 (1942).

<sup>55</sup>Phan Văn Hùm, “Rồng trong tư tưởng người Tàu và người Việt Nam” [The dragon in the thought of Chinese and Vietnamese], *Tri Tân* No. 194 (1945), 4–5.

<sup>56</sup>Hoa Bằng, “‘Oán tình’ của Lý Bạch” [Li Bai's “Resentment”], *Tri Tân* No 1 (1941), 9.

<sup>57</sup>Phan Văn Hùm, *Phật giáo triết học* [Philosophy of Buddhism] (Hanoi: Tân Việt, 1943).

<sup>58</sup>Lâm Giang, *Triết học đại cương* 哲學大綱 [Outline of philosophy] (Hanoi: Quốc học thư xã, 1943).

ái 博愛) of Jesus Christ. Published in 1942, this study was written by journalist and writer Lê Văn Hoè (1911–1968).<sup>59</sup> In a preface to the book, Nguyễn Văn Tố stated that in writing this work, Lê Văn Hoè had consulted studies by Liang Qichao, Hu Shi, and French missionary and Sinologist Léon Wieger (1856–1933).<sup>60</sup>

In that same year of 1942, scholar Ngô Tất Tố 吳必素 (1893–1954) also published a work on Mozi.<sup>61</sup> Two years before that point, Ngô Tất Tố published translations and explanations of Tang Dynasty poetry.<sup>62</sup> In his preface to that work, Ngô Tất Tố could see that war was engulfing the world, and he mused that it was preferable to engage in research on timeless literature than to be bothered with the transience of contemporary affairs. Perhaps such a philosophical perspective is what propelled him to delve into the study of Mozi. In doing so, he consulted not only contemporary Chinese scholarship on Mozi, of which he found Hu Shi's to be the most insightful, but traditional commentaries as well. Ngô Tất Tố together with a colleague then published a similar study that same year on Laozi.<sup>63</sup>

These works were published as part of a series called the “Philosophy Collectanea” (Triết học tùng thư 哲學叢書) under the Mai Lĩnh Publishing Company (Mai Lĩnh tu thư cục 梅嶺修書局) in Hanoi. The same publisher produced an annotated translation of the *Doctrine of the Mean* and a work entitled an *Outline History of China* by a scholar named Phan Khoang (1906–1971).<sup>64</sup> An advertisement at the back of the volume on Laozi indicates that there were plans to produce works on Confucius, Mencius, Zhuangzi, Han Feizi, the disciples of Confucius, Wang Yangming, Han-era Confucian scholars, and Song-era Confucian scholars. However, none of those proposed works appear to have been published. Indeed, as World War II came to an end and the August Revolution brought political change to Vietnam, it is clear that various Sinological projects went unfinished. In 1945, for instance, Lê Văn Hoè began to publish a series entitled *The Teachings of Confucius* (*Khổng giáo học thuyết* 孔教學說).<sup>65</sup> A first volume presented a detailed discussion of the history of the textual transmission of Confucian teachings, while a second volume explained key terms in the Confucian tradition. Three additional volumes were proposed but apparently never published.

The work of a prolific literary translator by the name of Mạc Bảo Thần, who wrote under the pen name Nhuận Tống (1904–1949), encountered a similar fate. In 1944 alone, Nhuận Tống published translations of the *Zhuangzi*, the *Historical Records* of Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 86 BCE), the “Lisao” (Encountering Sorrow) poem from the *Songs of Chu*, poems of Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770), and the *Romance of*

<sup>59</sup>Lê Văn Hoè, *Học thuyết Mặc tử* [Teachings of Mozi] (Hanoi: Quốc học thư xã, 1942).

<sup>60</sup>The specific works mentioned were Liang Qichao's *Scholarly Biography of Mozi* (*Mozi xue'an* 墨子學案), Hu Shi's *Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy* (*Zhongguo zhexueshi dagang* 中國哲學史大綱) and Léon Wieger's *History of religious beliefs and philosophical opinions in China* (*Histoire des croyances religieuses et opinions philosophiques en Chine*).

<sup>61</sup>Ngô Tất Tố, *Mặc tử* [Mozi] (Hanoi: Mai Lĩnh, 1942).

<sup>62</sup>Ngô Tất Tố, *Đường thi: phiên dịch và khảo cứu thơ Đường* [Tang poetry: translations and examinations of Tang poems] (Hanoi: Tân Dân, 1940).

<sup>63</sup>Ngô Tất Tố, Nguyễn Đức Tịnh, *Lão tử, triết học khảo cứu* [Examination of the teachings of Laozi] (Hanoi: Mai Lĩnh, 1942).

<sup>64</sup>Phan Khoang, *Trung dung chú giải: triết lý của Khổng giáo* [Doctrine of the Mean annotated and explained: the philosophy of Confucianism] (Hanoi: Mai Lĩnh, 1943) and *Trung Quốc sử cương* [Outline of Chinese history] (Hanoi: Mai Lĩnh, 1943).

<sup>65</sup>Lê Văn Hoè, *Khổng tử học thuyết* [Teachings of Confucius], 2 vols. (Hanoi: Quốc học thư xã, 1945). The first volume contains a preface by Phạm Quỳnh.

the Western Chamber.<sup>66</sup> In 1945, he was working on translations of the *Strange Tales of Liao Zhai* and the *Dream of the Red Chamber*. However, those works were not published. Finally, Phan Văn Hùm was planning to publish a work entitled *Mencius—Dialectics (Mạnh tử—biện chứng pháp)* and another entitled *The Philosophy of the Classic of Changes (Triết học Kinh dịch)*, but neither of those works were published either.<sup>67</sup>

With the August Revolution and then the First Indochina War, some publishing houses stopped operating. In addition, several of the scholars mentioned above were killed by one side or the other. Phạm Quỳnh and Nguyễn Bá Trác, the founding co-editors of *Nam Phong*, were assassinated in 1945 by the Việt Minh. Their colleagues at *Nam Phong*, Nguyễn Hữu Tiến and Nguyễn Đôn Phục, died of natural causes in 1941 and 1954, respectively. Trần Trọng Kim left the country and stayed out of the limelight for a few years, before passing away in Dalat in 1953. Nguyễn Văn Tố sided with the Việt Minh and was killed by the French in 1947. Phan Văn Hùm was killed in 1946. There are differing accounts as to who killed him. Nhượng Tống was assassinated by a Việt Minh agent in 1949. Đào Trinh Nhất died in 1951. Ngô Tất Tố died in 1954, the year the First Indochina War ended. Finally, Đào Duy Anh lived until 1988, however for reasons we will discuss in the next section, the only additional work that he produced on China was a 1974 translation of the *Songs of Chu*.<sup>68</sup>

The period from 1945 to 1954 thus brought to an end two phenomena. First, French colonial rule came to an end. Second, an emerging effort to produce a modern, cosmopolitan, analytical Sinology came to an end as well. To some extent, as we will see below, there was an effort in South Vietnam to continue this Sinological tradition; however, as we will also see, that effort was cut short in 1975. Meanwhile, in the North, Sinological scholarship took a new turn.

### Revolutionary Sinology in North Vietnam

The First Indochina War lasted for eight years. It quickly reached a stalemate as the French maintained control of urban areas while the Việt Minh controlled the countryside. The French tried to gain the political upper hand in 1949 by allowing former emperor Bảo Đại to declare Vietnam independent and to establish what was called the State of Vietnam as a constituent state in the French Union. However, the obvious contradiction of an independent state in a larger union was not lost on Vietnamese who wished to see an end to French control and influence, and as a result, the war continued. Ultimately, following their defeat in the Battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, the French agreed to leave Vietnam under the conditions of an agreement known as the Geneva Accords which stipulated that the country be temporarily divided for three years until national elections could be held. In the interim, Hồ Chí Minh governed over the northern half of the country while an anti-communist Catholic by the name of Ngô Đình Diệm (1901–1963) came to govern over the southern half. In the end, the

<sup>66</sup>Nhượng Tống, trans. *Trang Tử, Nam Hoa Kinh* [Zhuangzi, Nanhua jing], *Sử ký Tư Mã Thiên* [Historical Records of Sima Qian], *Ly Sao* [Lisao (Encountering sorrow)], *Thơ Đỗ Phủ* [Poetry of Du Fu], *Mái Tây (Tây Sương Ký)* [Romance of the Western Chamber] (Hanoi: Tân Việt, 1944).

<sup>67</sup>See the advertisements at the end of Nguyễn Anh Nghĩa, *Triết học nhập môn* [Introduction to philosophy] (Hanoi: Tân Việt, 1944).

<sup>68</sup>Đào Duy Anh and Nguyễn Sĩ Lâm, trans., *Sử từ* [Songs of Chu] (Hanoi: Văn học, 1974).

elections were never held. Instead, two states, North and South Vietnam, developed side by side and eventually went to war.

In the 1950s and 1960s, North and South Vietnam both participated in the processes of decolonization and nation-building. Their approaches differed dramatically, however, and these differences can be seen in the sphere of Sinological scholarship. In the case of North Vietnam, there was a very strong effort to de-link culture and knowledge from both the colonial period and what Vietnamese Marxist scholars referred to as the “feudal” (*phong kiến* 封建) era that had preceded it. Here, the issue of historical writings in Literary Sinitic became the topic of debate. During the First Indochina War, intellectuals who supported the Việt Minh reportedly agreed that writings in Literary Sinitic should not be considered Vietnamese literature because they were composed in a foreign language. However, in 1955, Khuất Duy Tiển (1909–1984), a communist revolutionary who now served on the editorial board of a new journal devoted to historical and literary scholarship, and who wrote under the name Minh Tranh, published an article in which he made the case that patriotic writings that had been written in Literary Sinitic should be considered part of the nation’s literary heritage, as their content was more important than their form.<sup>69</sup>

This idea was immediately countered by multiple scholars, including Đặng Xuân Khu (1907–1988), a leading communist cultural theoretician. Đặng Xuân Khu wrote under the name Trường Chinh, meaning “long march” (Chn., *changzheng* 長征).<sup>70</sup> Earlier, in 1943, Trường Chinh had produced a roadmap for the future of Vietnamese culture called the *Thesis on Vietnamese Culture* (*Đề cương văn hóa Việt Nam*). In this work, Trường Chinh argued that the growth of Vietnamese culture had been stunted by feudalism, colonialism, and Japanese fascism, and more specifically, by the various philosophical ideas that supported these regimes of power, from Confucianism to Western philosophy. In his thesis, Trường Chinh called for the creation of a new culture, one that would be shaped by the three processes of “nation-ization” (*dân tộc hóa* 民族化), “masses-ization” (*đại chúng hóa* 大衆化), and “science-ization” (*khoa học hóa* 科學化).<sup>71</sup>

Several scholars contributed to this debate, and it was eventually decided that patriotic writings in Literary Sinitic could be considered part of Vietnamese literature.<sup>72</sup> As for what was considered patriotic, the writings that were mentioned in these discussions consisted primarily of passages from historical texts that were produced during times of conflict with China, where the texts could be interpreted as indicating resistance to

<sup>69</sup>Minh Tranh [Khuất Duy Tiển], “Một vấn đề về văn học sử Việt Nam: Có thể liệt những bài văn yêu nước do người Việt Nam trước kia viết bằng chữ Hán vào văn học dân tộc của ta không?” [A problem concerning the history of Vietnamese literature: Can we include in our national literature the patriotic writings written by Vietnamese in Hán?] *Tập san nghiên cứu văn-sử-địa* [Journal of research on literature-history-geography], 6 (1955), 9–19.

<sup>70</sup>Trường Chinh, “Bản góp vào vấn đề ‘Có thể liệt những bài văn yêu nước do người Việt Nam trước kia viết bằng chữ Hán vào văn học dân tộc của ta không?’” [Contributing to the question “Can we include in our national literature the patriotic writings written by Vietnamese in Hán?”], *Tập san nghiên cứu văn-sử-địa* 11 (1955), 70–74.

<sup>71</sup>Kim Ngọc Bao Ninh, *A World Transformed: The Politics of Culture in Revolutionary Vietnam, 1945–1965* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 26–36.

<sup>72</sup>Văn Tân, “Đã đến lúc tạm kết thúc cuộc tranh luận về vấn đề ‘Có nên liệt những bài văn do người Việt Nam trước kia viết bằng chữ Hán vào văn học dân tộc của ta không?’” [It is time to provisionally close the debate on the question “Can we include in our national literature the patriotic writings written by Vietnamese in Hán?”] *Tập san nghiên cứu văn-sử-địa* 23 (1956), 10–23.



China. Meanwhile, at the same time that such writings were accepted as Vietnamese literature, even though they were written in Literary Sinitic and produced under the conditions of feudalism, the North Vietnamese government was politically on extremely good terms with the government of the People's Republic of China. This amicable relationship was at times reflected in scholarship, such as in a 1954 article by Minh Tranh in which he argued that the Chinese and Vietnamese peoples were “friends in battle” in that they had historically always risen in rebellion against the feudal ruling class.<sup>73</sup>

In these politicized conditions, it was impossible for the kind of cosmopolitan Sinological scholarship that had been produced in the early 1940s to continue. However, what we might call “revolutionary Sinology” was welcomed. Just as there had been a concerted effort to translate Chinese scholarship from the Republic of China in the 1920s and 1930s as a means to modernize knowledge in Vietnam, so were many Chinese works from the People's Republic of China translated or written about in North Vietnam in the 1950s and into the 1960s. For example, around the time that the debate on patriotic literature written in Literary Sinitic took place, Chen Boda's 陳伯達 (1904–1989) 1951 article, “Mao Zedong Thought is the Combination of Marxism-Leninism and the Chinese Revolution” (Mao Zedong sixiang shi Makesi Liening zhuyi yu Zhongguo geming de jiehe 毛澤東思想是馬克思列寧主義與中國革命的結合),<sup>74</sup> Hu Qiaomu's 胡喬木 (1912–1992) 1951 *Thirty Years of the Communist Party of China* (*Zhongguo gongchandang de sanshi nian* 胡喬木 中國共產黨的三十年),<sup>75</sup> and essays by Mao Zedong 毛澤東 (1893–1976) himself were published, such as his “Analysis of the Social Classes in Chinese Society” (*Zhongguo shehui ge jieji de fenxi* 中國社會各階級的分析), written in 1925, and “How to Analyze Rural Social Classes” (*Zenyang fengxi nongcun jieji* 怎樣分析農村階級), written in 1933.<sup>76</sup> Meanwhile, Vietnamese authors produced works on such topics as the struggle against the Rightist faction in China and the history of the Chinese Red Army.<sup>77</sup> Finally, a history of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) that was published in China in 1962 was immediately translated and published in Vietnam that same year.<sup>78</sup>

Beyond works that dealt with the CCP and related issues, some Sinological publications were produced in North Vietnam that dealt with other issues. For instance, Marxist historian Lü Zhenyu's 1949 *Simplified General History of China* (*Jianming*

<sup>73</sup>Minh Tranh, “Nhân dân Trung Quốc bạn chiến đấu của nhân dân Việt Nam trong lịch sử” [The Chinese people are historically friends in battle of the Vietnamese people] *Tập san nghiên cứu văn-sử-địa* 1 (1954), 50–56.

<sup>74</sup>Trần Bá Đạt [Chen Boda], *Bản về tư tưởng Mao Trạch Đông: Sự kết hợp chủ nghĩa Mác Lê-nin với cách mạng Trung Quốc* [On Mao Zedong thought: The combination of Marxism and Leninism and the Chinese Revolution] (Hanoi: Sự Thật, 1955).

<sup>75</sup>Hồ Kiều Mộc [Hu Qiaomu], *Ba mươi năm của Đảng Cộng sản Trung Quốc, 1921–1951* [Thirty years of the Chinese Communist Party, 1921–1951] (Hanoi: Sự thật, 1957).

<sup>76</sup>Mao Trạch Đông [Mao Zedong], *Phân tích các giai cấp trong xã hội Trung Quốc, và phân tích các giai cấp trong nông thôn như thế nào* [Analysis of the social classes in Chinese society, and how to analyze rural social classes] (Hanoi: Sự Thật, 1953).

<sup>77</sup>Nguyễn Ngọc Kha, *Giới thiệu cuộc đấu tranh chống phái hữu và cao trào thi đua tự cải tạo tư tưởng ở Trung Quốc* [Introduction to the struggle against the Rightist faction and the climax of the effort at self-thought reform in China] (Hanoi: Sự Thật, 1958), and Anonymous, *Truyện Hồng quân Trung Quốc* [Story of the Chinese Red Army] (Beijing: Waiwen, 1959).

<sup>78</sup>Vương Thực [Wang Shi 王實], Mã Kỳ Bình [Ma Qibing 馬奇兵], and Vương Kiều [Wang Qiao 王翹], *Lịch sử Đảng Cộng sản Trung Quốc giản yếu* [Concise history of the Communist Party of China] (Hanoi: Sự thật, 1962).

*Zhongguo tongshi* 簡明中國通史) was translated and published,<sup>79</sup> while the writings of Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881–1936), a writer favored by Chinese communists, were published as well.<sup>80</sup> The scholar who translated Lu Xun’s writings was Phan Khôi, the journalist and writer who, as we saw above, had promoted a new approach to learning Chinese in 1932. Phan Khôi was a prolific writer who had commented on a wide range of social and cultural issues over the years, including critiquing individuals who tried to perpetuate reverence for Confucian teachings.

At the time his translations of Lu Xun’s writings were published, Phan Khôi was serving as the editor of a journal called *Humanities* (*Nhân Văn* 人文). That journal, together with another periodical called *Masterpieces* (*Giai Phẩm* 佳品), published writings that urged the authorities in North Vietnam to allow for more creative freedoms. Just as the CCP followed the Hundred Flowers Campaign at this time with the Anti-Rightist Movement, so were these calls for reforms met with repression. A sign of what was to come came in the form of an article in 1958 that reported on “the struggle against revisionism” in the historical profession in China, an article that detailed the supposed crimes of various scholars, such as archaeologist Chen Mengjia 陳夢家 (1911–1966) and historian Lei Haizong 雷海宗 (1902–1962).<sup>81</sup>

In the following issue of this same journal, Phan Khôi was denounced for being an imitator of Hu Shi. In particular, he was charged with earlier having replicated the ideas of Hu Shi in his writings. That was considered a crime as Hu Shi was characterized in this piece as a foot soldier for the “capitalist pragmatists,” John Dewey, William James, and Ernst Mach.<sup>82</sup> Hence, Phan Khôi was guilty by association, and he lived out his life under house arrest, passing away the following year, in 1959. Historian Đào Duy Anh was also implicated in this “Nhân văn Giai phẩm Affair,” as it is known, and only played a peripheral role in the world of scholarship from this point onward. Meanwhile, Phạm Quỳnh was posthumously denounced.<sup>83</sup> Finally, as North and South Vietnam went to war in the 1960s and early 1970s, much of the scholarly focus in the North turned to the production of works that could help mobilize the population and develop a strong sense of nationalism.

### Nostalgic Sinology in South Vietnam

In contrast to the North, where there was a deliberate effort to move away from the scholarship of the colonial era, scholars in South Vietnam worked to create a post-colonial society that built upon the scholarly foundation that had been established during the colonial period. In the case of Sinology, while many of the scholars who had

<sup>79</sup>Lữ Chấn Vũ [Lü Zhenyu 呂振羽], *Giản minh Trung Quốc thông sử* [Simplified general history of China] (Hanoi: Nhân dân xuất bản xã, 1956).

<sup>80</sup>Phan Khôi, trans., *Tuyển tập Tập văn Lô Tấn* [Selections from the collected writings of Lu Xun] (Hanoi: Văn nghệ, 1956).

<sup>81</sup>Nguyễn Lương Bích, “Cuộc đấu tranh chống chủ nghĩa xét lại trong công tác sử học ở Trung Quốc” [The struggle against revisionism in historical work in China], *Tập san nghiên cứu văn-sử-địa* 40 (1958), 14–34.

<sup>82</sup>Nguyễn Đồng Chi, “Quan điểm phản động, phản khoa học của Phan Khôi phải chăng là học mót của Hồ Thích” [Are not the reactionary and anti-scientific standpoints of Phan Khôi in imitation of Hu Shi], *Tập san nghiên cứu văn-sử-địa* 41 (1958), 7.

<sup>83</sup>Hồng Hạnh, “Sự thống nhất về tính chất phản động của Phạm Quỳnh trong lĩnh vực chính trị và văn học” [Agreement about the reactionary character of Phạm Quỳnh in the realms of politics and literature], *Tập san nghiên cứu văn-sử-địa* 48 (1958), 60–81

produced Sinological knowledge during the colonial era had died, some new scholars took up the task of maintaining and developing this field of scholarship. Many of these individuals were northerners who decided to migrate to South Vietnam following the signing of the Geneva Accords in 1954, while some were from the southern half of the country. Through the works of these scholars, we can gain a sense of the stark differences between the intellectual worlds of North and South Vietnam.

Let us consider, for instance, the case of a scholar by the name of Nghiêm Toàn (1907–1975). Raised and educated in the north, Nghiêm Toàn served as a school teacher and university instructor before migrating to Saigon in 1954 where he took up a post teaching Vietnamese and Chinese at the University of Humanities and Sciences (Đại học Văn Khoa), a university that had been established by Bảo Đại's State of Vietnam in 1949.<sup>84</sup> While still in the north, Nghiêm Toàn had produced a three-volume supplementary textbook to help middle and high school students improve their writing by emulating examples of good prose. The examples that Nghiêm Toàn chose for this textbook came from a variety of authors, such as Vũ Trọng Phụng (1912–1939), an author who had produced works of insightful social critique in the 1930s, as well as French writers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Gustave Flaubert.<sup>85</sup> This work was reproduced in South Vietnam, whereas in North Vietnam, French authors were largely anathema and Vũ Trọng Phụng's writings were denounced following the Nhân Văn Giai Phẩm Affair.<sup>86</sup>

The intellectual environments of North and South Vietnam were, therefore, radically different, and the environment in the South was much more conducive for the perpetuation of the Sinological scholarship that had been produced during the colonial era. Indeed, one can discern a clear line of knowledge transmission from the colonial period to South Vietnam in two ways. First, publishers in the South reproduced works that had been published during the colonial period. Hence, texts like Trần Trọng Kim's *Confucianism*, Đào Duy Anh's *An Historical Outline of China*, and Phan Khoang's *Outline of Chinese History* were all republished in the South, as were several of Nhượng Tống's translations and a massive four-volume translation of the *Strange Tales of Liao Zhai* that Đào Trinh Nhất was working on when he died in 1951.<sup>87</sup> Further, important works by Chinese authors were also published, such as Feng Youlan's *History of Chinese Philosophy*.<sup>88</sup>

Second, scholars in the South produced new Sinological works, such as translations, that continued practices that had been established in the colonial period. Nghiêm Toàn, for instance, published a translation into Vietnamese of the *Daodejing* in 1961 and

<sup>84</sup>Trần Hữu Tá and Phạm Thu Hương, “Nghiêm Toàn—Suốt đời tự học” [Nghiêm Toàn—a life of self study], *Người Lao Động* [Laborer], November 17, 2015. <https://nld.com.vn/giao-duc-khoa-hoc/nghiem-toan-suot-doi-tu-hoc-20151117214907612.htm> (accessed on November 20, 2021).

<sup>85</sup>Nghiêm Toàn, *Việt luận* [Việt discourse], 3 vols., 3rd ed. (Hanoi: Sông Nhị, 1951).

<sup>86</sup>Peter Zinoman, “Vũ Trọng Phụng's *Dumb Luck* and the Nature of Vietnamese Modernism,” in *Dumb Luck: A Novel by Vũ Trọng Phụng*, trans. Peter Zinoman and Nguyễn Nguyệt Cẩm (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 22.

<sup>87</sup>Nhượng Tống, trans., *Nam hoa kinh* [Classic of Nanhua] (Saigon: Tân Việt, 1962), *Mái tây (Tây sùng ký)* [Romance of the western chamber] (Saigon: Tân Việt, 1963), *Sử ký Tư Mã Thiên* [Historical Records of Sima Qian] (Saigon: Tân Việt, 1964), and Đào Trinh Nhất, trans., *Liêu trai chí dị* [Strange tales of Liao Zhai], 4 vols. (Saigon: Bốn Phương, 1954).

<sup>88</sup>Nguyễn Hữu Ái, trans., *Trung quốc triết học sử* [History of Chinese philosophy] (Saigon: Khai Trí, 1966).

completed a French-language translation of the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.<sup>89</sup> Meanwhile, in that same year of 1961, southern scholar Nguyễn Duy Cần (1907–1998) also published a translation of the *Daodejing*. He then went on to translate parts of the *Zhuangzi* and to produce original studies of the ideas of Laozi and Zhuangzi.<sup>90</sup> Numerous other scholars produced individual translations or works of scholarship, such as a certain Hoàng Khôi who produced a translation of the three main commentaries on the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, the Zuo, Gongyang, and Zhuliang commentaries and Nguyễn Mạnh Bảo (d. 2004), an adherent of the Cao Đài Religion, who produced a seven-volume study of the *Classic of Changes*.<sup>91</sup> Finally, new translations were produced for many of the Confucian classics. Some of these were published by individual presses.<sup>92</sup> Others were published by the Ministry of Education.<sup>93</sup>

That the government was involved in the publication of the Confucian classics points again to the stark differences between the intellectual environments in South and North Vietnam. Indeed, in the South in the 1950s to 1970s, traditional Sinitic learning was not merely a subject of scholarly inquiry, but was for some still a lived culture. There were, for instance, various associations and organizations that were devoted to the promotion of Confucianism. Meanwhile, there were scholars like Nguyễn Đăng Thục (1909–1999) who both promoted Confucianism as a philosophy for life and examined it as a scholarly subject. Born and raised in the north, Nguyễn Đăng Thục pursued higher education in Europe. In 1954, he migrated to South Vietnam and took up a position as a professor of Eastern philosophy at the University of Humanities and Sciences. Over the following two decades, Nguyễn Đăng Thục published extensively, but his most notable work was arguably his five-volume *History of Eastern Philosophy (Lịch sử triết học phương Đông)*. Meanwhile, Nguyễn Đăng Thục also interacted with his contemporaries in Asia, welcoming, for instance, modern Neo-Confucian scholar Carson Chang (Zhang Junmai 張君勱) to South Vietnam in 1958.<sup>94</sup>

As impressive as Nguyễn Đăng Thục's scholarly output was, arguably the most prolific producer of knowledge about China in South Vietnam was Nguyễn Hiến Lê (1912–1984). Originally from the north, Nguyễn Hiến Lê appears to have learned Literary Sinitic largely on his own when he was young before moving to the south for work in the 1930s. Remembered today primarily as a translator, Nguyễn Hiến Lê did indeed

<sup>89</sup>Nghiêm Toàn, *Đạo đức kinh: quốc văn giải thích* [Daodejing: explained in national prose] (Saigon: Khai Trí, 1961) and Nghiêın Toàn and Louis Ricaud, trans., *San guo zhi yan yi, Les trois royaumes* [Romance of the Three Kingdoms] (Saigon: La Société des études indochinoises, 1958–61).

<sup>90</sup>Nguyễn Duy Cần, trans., *Đạo đức kinh* [Daodejing], 2 vols. (Saigon: Khai Trí, 1961), *Nam Hoa Kinh: nội thiên* [Classic of Nanhua: inner chapters], 3 vols. (Saigon: Khai Trí, 1962), *Lão tử tinh hoa* [Essence of Laozi] (Saigon: Khai Trí, 1963), and *Trang Tử tinh hoa* [Essence of Zhuangzi] (Saigon: Khai Trí, 1963).

<sup>91</sup>Hoàng Khôi, *Xuân thu tam truyện* 春秋三傳 [Three commentaries on the Spring and Autumn (Annals)], 4 vols. (Saigon: Bộ Giáo-dục, Trung tâm học liệu, 1969–71).

<sup>92</sup>See, for example, Tạ Thanh Bạch, trans., *Tứ thư: Đại học* [Four books: Great learning] (Saigon: Khai Trí, 1960), and *Tứ thư: Trung dung* [Four Books: Doctrine of the Mean] (Saigon: Khai Trí, 1960).

<sup>93</sup>Examples include Thẩm Quỳnh, trans., *Kinh thư* [Classic of documents] (Saigon: Bộ Giáo Dục, 1965); Tạ Quang Phát, *Thi Kinh tập truyện* [Collected commentaries on the *Classic of Poetry*] (Saigon: Bộ Giáo Dục, 1969); Lê Phục Thiện, trans., *Luận ngữ* [Analects], 3 vols. (Saigon: Bộ Giáo dục, 1962–1967); Nguyễn Thượng Khôi, trans., *Mạnh tử* [Mencius], 2 vols. (Saigon: Bộ Giáo dục, 1968); and Phạm Ngọc Khuê, trans., *Đại học* [Great learning] (Saigon: Bộ Giáo dục, 1970).

<sup>94</sup>This topic is treated in detail in Nguyễn Tuấn Cường, "The Promotion of Confucianism in South Vietnam (1955–1975) and the Role of Nguyễn Đăng Thục as a New Confucian Scholar," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 10.4 (2015), 30–81.

translate an astonishing array of texts, from Dorothy Carnegie's *How to Help Your Husband Get Ahead in His Social and Business Life*, to Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, to Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.<sup>95</sup> In between these diverse translation projects, Nguyễn Hiến Lê also introduced Chinese literature, philosophy, and history to Vietnamese readers. In doing so, Nguyễn Hiến Lê went far beyond simply translating, as he strove to provide contextual information so that readers could gain a full appreciation of Chinese writings and ideas.

Nguyễn Hiến Lê's first major work in this vein was a three-volume *Outline of the History of Chinese Literature*.<sup>96</sup> Published in 1955–56, it contains a preface that Nguyễn Hiến Lê wrote at the end of 1953, just a few months before the Battle of Dien Bien Phu and the end of French colonial rule in Vietnam. In this preface, Nguyễn Hiến Lê noted that while there were people who had translated Chinese literature, such as Tang poetry, into Vietnamese, they had not written about the Tang Dynasty period itself, its characteristics, or its intellectual and artistic culture. As a result, Nguyễn Hiến Lê stated that one could read hundreds of pages of such translations and still come away with a very limited understanding of Tang-era poetry. Indeed, he stated that trying to learn about Chinese literature from the extant works in Vietnamese was like trying to learn about France by staring at a statue of Joan of Arc.<sup>97</sup>

In his writings, Nguyễn Hiến Lê thus endeavored to provide more contextual information so that readers could better understand Chinese literature. Beyond this three-volume survey of Chinese literature, Nguyễn Hiến Lê later produced a two-volume work on Ancient Chinese literature, as well as a volume on Modern Chinese literature.<sup>98</sup> Additionally, he also published a work that focused on the writings of Song Dynasty scholar-official and poet Su Shi. In writing this work, Nguyễn Hiến Lê relied heavily on two works. The first was Lin Yutang's 林語堂 (1895–1976) study of Su Shi, *The Gay Genius: The Life and Times of Su Tungpo*. The other was a collection of Su Shi's writings that was published by the Commercial Press (Shangwu Yinshuguan 商務印書館) in Shanghai in 1958.<sup>99</sup> Hence, like the Vietnamese scholars who wrote in the 1930s and 1940s, Nguyễn Hiến Lê produced knowledge about China by engaging with both primary sources and international scholarship.

We can see this same approach in works that Nguyễn Hiến Lê produced in collaboration with Nguyễn Hữu Văn (1904–2005) a colleague who wrote under the name Giản Chi. A fellow northerner, Giản Chi moved to South Vietnam in 1954. Working together, these two produced translations of Sima Qian's *Historical Records*, *Han Feizi*, *Xunzi*, and the *Strategies of the Warring States* (*Chiến quốc sách* 戰國策),

<sup>95</sup>Nguyễn Hiến Lê, trans., *Giúp chồng thành công* [Help your husband succeed] (Saigon: Nguyễn Hiến Lê, 1956); Nguyễn Hiến Lê, trans., *Chiến tranh và hoà bình* [War and peace] (Saigon: Lá Bối, 1968); and Nguyễn Hiến Lê and Hoài Khanh, trans., *Quê hương tan rã* [The homeland broken apart] (Saigon: Cadao, 1970).

<sup>96</sup>Nguyễn Hiến Lê, *Đại cương văn học sử Trung quốc* [Outline of the history of Chinese literature], 3 vols. (Saigon: Nguyễn Hiến Lê, 1955–56).

<sup>97</sup>Nguyễn Hiến Lê, *Đại cương văn học sử Trung quốc* [Outline of the history of Chinese literature], Vol. 1 (Hồ Chí Minh City: Tổng hợp, 2012), 8–9.

<sup>98</sup>Nguyễn Hiến Lê, *Cổ văn n Trung Quốc* [Ancient Chinese literature] 2 vols. (Saigon: Tao Đàn, 1965–66), and *Văn học Trung Quốc hiện đại, 1898–1960* [Modern Chinese literature, 1898–1960] (Saigon: Nguyễn Hiến Lê, 1969).

<sup>99</sup>Lin Yutang, *The Gay Genius: The Life and Times of Su Tungpo* (New York: John Day Company, 1947) and Su Shi 蘇軾, *Su Dongpo ji* 蘇東坡集 [Collected (writings of) Su Dongpo] (Shanghai: Shangwu, 1958).

while Giản Chi translated the works of Lu Xun. Beyond translating works, however, Giản Chi and Nguyễn Hiến Lê also produced a two-volume survey of Chinese philosophy, which relied heavily on the writings of Hu Shi, Feng Youlan, Yu Tong 宇同, Jiang Weiqiao 蔣維喬 (1873–1958), and Xiao Gongquan 蕭公權 (1897–1981).<sup>100</sup>

Yet another scholar who engaged with the work of international scholars was Lương Kim Định (1914–1997). Raised in a Catholic village in the north and trained as a priest, Kim Định, as he is commonly known, journeyed to France in the late 1940s where he studied Western philosophy and Sinology. He then returned to Vietnam where he worked in various universities in South Vietnam in the 1960s and early 1970s and published extensively. While the content of his writings was deeply Sinological, Kim Định's works were not about China. Instead, he sought to develop ideas in Chinese philosophy into a new philosophy for the society of South Vietnam. This was not a conservative initiative, for Kim Định's writings engage extensively with Western philosophy and theory. As such, one encounters in his writings references to a wide range of scholars from social scientists like Marcel Granet and Claude Lévi-Strauss, to Sinologists like Herrlee Creel and Joseph Needham, to philosophers like Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault. Finally, Kim Định also developed what can perhaps be labeled an ultranationalist view that what Vietnamese scholars usually referred to as "Han learning" was originally developed by the ancestors of the Vietnamese. Through this argument, Kim Định claimed works like the *Classic of Changes* for Vietnamese culture and thus employed Sinitic knowledge to create a modern Vietnamese philosophy.<sup>101</sup>

This effort to create a place for Han learning in the contemporary world is one that the scholars who translated the Confucian classics into the vernacular in the 1920s had engaged in as well. That said, the efforts of scholars like Lương Kim Định, Nguyễn Đăng Thục, and Nguyễn Hiến Lê to keep Han learning alive in the 1960s had a different feel to it. In the 1920s, traditionally trained scholars could see that their cultural world was gradually disappearing. In the 1960s, however, much more was at stake. Not only was what remained of Han learning threatened by the modernizing drive of the post-colonial nation-building project in South Vietnam but the land that these men associated with Han learning, their home in the north, was being lost as well.

In the introduction to his three-volume work on Chinese literature, Nguyễn Hiến Lê wrote in 1953 that compiling that book brought him back in time to a wonderful period in his youth when he had visited relatives in the countryside outside of Hanoi. There along the banks of the Red River in a small house in the shade of bamboo trees amidst the vast greenery of rice fields, he would listen to the sounds of bamboo flutes and the village Confucian scholars chanting verse. That ideal image of Vietnam and the place of Han learning in it, I would argue, haunts the Sinological scholarship of South Vietnam. Scholars like Nguyễn Hiến Lê, Nguyễn Đăng Thục, and Lương Kim Định were emotionally very attached to Han learning. That attachment, however, was not, I would argue, an attachment to China. Instead, it was more of a form of nostalgia for a lost home and the world associated with that home.

<sup>100</sup>Giản Chi and Nguyễn Hiến Lê, *Đại cương triết học Trung Quốc* [Outline of Chinese philosophy], 2 vols. (Hà Chí Minh City: Thanh Niên, 2004), 11.

<sup>101</sup>Lương Kim Định published more than 30 books. For an example of one of his more philosophical works see *Chữ thời* [Time] (Saigon: Thanh Bình, 1967). For an example of work that developed the idea that Confucian texts were created by the ancestors of the Vietnamese, see *Cơ cấu Việt Nho* 機構越儒 [Viet Confucian structure] (Saigon: Nguồn Sáng, 1973).



## Diasporic Sinology

Just as revolution and war brought to an end a period of Sinological scholarly activity in the 1940s, so did this happen again in the 1970s as the Vietnam War came to an end. Nghiê m Toa n died in 1975, the year the war ended. Luô ng Kim Đ ịnh migrated to the United States. Meanwhile, Nguyê n Đ a ng Thụ c, Nguyê n Hiê n Lê, and Giã n Chi all remained in Vietnam, but became inactive. Finally, works that had been published in the South before 1975 were banned.

Amazingly, however, many of the pre-1975 publications from South Vietnam quickly started to be reproduced overseas. Following the wave of migrants and refugees who left South Vietnam in the 1970s, publishers established publishing houses in places in North America like California, Texas, and Toronto, as well as in other countries like France and Australia. In the second half of the 1970s and through the 1980s, virtually every single title mentioned in this article from South Vietnam, as well as some of the earlier works produced during the colonial period, was published overseas. For one of the most productive publishing houses, Xuâ n Thu Publishing in Los Alamitos, California, copies of books published in South Vietnam were made from holdings at Cornell University Library and then painstakingly reproduced and published in runs of 500 copies.<sup>102</sup>

Additionally, scholars who immigrated both republished their works and produced new writings. For instance, a scholar by the name of Trã n Trö ng Sa n (1930–1998) who had worked at the University of Humanities and Sciences and had produced numerous translations of Chinese literature for a publisher called Bắ c Đ a u 北斗, or “Northern Star,” migrated to Toronto where his works were published again under the Bắ c Đ a u name.<sup>103</sup> Luô ng Kim Đ ịnh also had his works republished and produced a considerable body of new scholarship. Indeed, this topic of what we might label “diasporic Sinology” is massive. In addition to publishing books, overseas Vietnamese established numerous journals and newspapers that also contained Sinological writings. This is a topic, however, that is beyond the scope of this article. Nonetheless, I make note of it here to indicate its importance.

## Vietnamese Sinology in the Sinosphere

While the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 terminated Sinological scholarship in South Vietnam, events in 1979 brought an end to all serious Sinological scholarship in the now unified country of Vietnam. In that year, relations between Vietnam and China turned extremely sour when the Chinese invaded Vietnam in what is known as the Sino-Vietnamese War. In the years that followed, virtually all knowledge that was

<sup>102</sup>Sonni Efron, “Pressing a Dream to Publish in Vietnamese: An Immigrant fulfills a dream by building a publishing company that informs and entertains his countrymen in their native language,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 8, 1990. [www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1990-04-08-me-1866-story.html](http://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1990-04-08-me-1866-story.html) (accessed November 20, 2021).

<sup>103</sup>His works published before 1975 include *Thơ Đường* [Tang Poetry] (1957), *Lược khảo Kinh thi* [Brief examination of the Classic of Poetry] (1958), *Lý Bạch, Đỗ Phủ, Bạch Cư Dị* [Li Bo, Du Fu, Bai Juyi] (1962), *Thơ Đường II* [Tang Poetry II] (1962), *Hán văn* [Writing in Hán] (1963), *Văn học Trung Quốc đời Chu, Tần* [Chinese literature of the Zhou and Qin] (1969), *Chu Tử gia huấn* [Master Zhu’s family instructions] (1973), and *Thơ Đường III* [Tang Poetry III] (1974). Works published in Toronto include *Thơ Tống* [Song poetry] (1991) *Lý Bạch, Đỗ Phủ, Bạch Cư Dị* [Li Bo, Du Fu, Bai Juyi] (1994), *Đường Tống từ tuyển* [Tang Song poems and lyric poetry] (1994), *Cổ văn Trung Quốc* [Chinese ancient style writings] (1998), *Kim Thánh Thán phê bình thơ Đường* [Jin Shengtan’s critique of Tang poetry] (1990).

produced about China in Vietnam was negative. Books and academic journals, for instance, featured writings that highlighted past conflicts with China.<sup>104</sup> It took many years for this sense of outrage to dissipate enough for neutral writings about China to begin to re-emerge.

Changes eventually came in the 1990s. As the animosity toward China started to diminish, so did antipathy towards overseas Vietnamese and to the culture of South Vietnam. Gradually, articles that did not excoriate China started to appear, works that had been originally published in South Vietnam began to be republished, and articles by overseas Vietnamese scholars started to find their way into Vietnamese academic journals. These developments began as a trickle but have now washed over the society like a wave. Indeed, by now many of the titles mentioned above from the colonial period and those that were published in South Vietnam have been republished. One can now find in Vietnam recent publications of everything from Phan Văn Hùm's study of Wang Yangming to Nguyễn Hiến Lê's survey of Chinese literature. Add to this the fact that the Internet has made information about the work of overseas Vietnamese scholars accessible and that the National Library of France has digitized and made freely available a countless number of publications from the colonial era, and we can safely say that virtually all of the Sinological knowledge that was produced in Vietnam in the twentieth century, with the possible exception of some of the revolutionary writings from the 1950s, is for the first time readily accessible to anyone who wishes to learn from it.

That said, it is unclear what kind of scholarship this novel availability of extant knowledge will lead to. First, there is a structural limitation that inhibits the production of Sinological scholarship in Vietnam. Literary Sinitic is the domain of scholars in a field called Sino Nôm (Hán Nôm) Studies, a field that focuses primarily on the philological study of texts. Scholars of history, philosophy, and literature, on the other hand, have more leeway to engage in analytical scholarship, however, comparatively fewer scholars in these fields are proficient in Literary Sinitic, but rely instead upon vernacular translations, which limits their ability to produce insightful scholarship. Second, there continues to be a bifurcated view of Sinological knowledge in Vietnam in that although certain knowledge is recognized as "Chinese," it is learned and employed to study Vietnam. Hence, one can find extensive evidence of Sinological knowledge in an excellent recent study about the civil service exams under the Nguyễn Dynasty, for example, but that study is nonetheless about the civil service examinations in Vietnam rather than China.<sup>105</sup>

That said, over the past decade, a new generation of Sino Nôm scholars has emerged that is bringing Sinologically informed scholarship on Vietnam into dialog with scholarship on other countries in East Asia. In particular, the past decade has seen the emergence of a growing interest among some scholars around the world to examine places outside of China proper that historically used Literary Sinitic, such as Korea, Japan, and

<sup>104</sup>For example, see, among countless other publications, Viện Văn Học [Institute of Literature], *Văn Học Việt Nam trên những chặng đường chống phong kiến Trung Quốc xâm lược* [Vietnamese literature on the path of resisting feudal Chinese invasions] (Hanoi: Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1981), and Hồng Nam, et al., *Những trang sử vẻ vang của dân tộc Việt Nam chống phong kiến Trung Quốc xâm lược* [The glorious pages of history of the Vietnamese nation's resistance to feudal Chinese invasions] (Hanoi: Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1981).

<sup>105</sup>Đình Thanh Hiếu, *Văn chương khoa cử triều Nguyễn (thi hội, thi đình)* [Documents of the Nguyễn Dynasty civil service exams (metropolitan, palace)] (Hanoi: Đại Học Quốc Gia Hà Nội, 2021).

Vietnam, or what they refer to collectively as the “Sinosphere.” The development of this scholarly interest has emerged at the same time that a new generation of Sino Nôm scholars with international exposure and training has come of age. These scholars not only can read Literary Sinitic, but are often proficient in one or a combination of foreign languages, such as Mandarin, Japanese, and English. As a result, they have contributed to efforts to develop a comparative understanding of certain historical practices in the Sinosphere.

For instance, Sino Nôm scholar Nguyễn Tuấn Cường has participated in various collaborative projects with scholars who focus on other areas of the Sinosphere to produce writings that examine a variety of topics, from the adaptation of Chinese Confucian primers in Vietnam to the development of private academies to (with Nguyễn Hoàng Thân) the practice of engaging in brush talks (*bút đàm* 筆談).<sup>106</sup> Meanwhile, Sino Nôm scholar Nguyễn Tô Lan has recently collaborated with a specialist on Chinese popular religion, Rostislav Berezkin, to produce a series of works that examine the historical transmission of Buddhist tales, such as the Miaoshan story, into Vietnam.<sup>107</sup> This is a trend that will likely continue and expand in the years ahead. Finally, Vietnamese scholars are active in producing translations of international Sinological scholarship, with a recent example being a translation of French Sinologist Anne Cheng’s *Histoire de la pensée chinoise* (History of Chinese Thought).<sup>108</sup>

## Conclusion

As should be evident by now, to trace the history of Sinology in Vietnam is to trace the history of modern Vietnam itself. That modern history contains a good deal of turmoil, and that turmoil is reflected in the history of Sinology. It emerged as a form of knowledge that was severed from society as Western learning came to dominate Vietnam under the colonial rule of the French. It then grew and expanded as scholars engaged with ideas from East Asia and the West. With war and revolution, it all but passed away, but was then somewhat resurrected to serve revolution in the North and slowly nursed back to health in the South only to be dismissed and exiled in 1975 and called upon to serve politics in 1979.

<sup>106</sup>Nguyễn Tuấn Cường, “The Reconstruction and Translation of China’s Confucian Primers in Vietnam: A Case Study of the Pentasyllabic Poetry for Primary Education,” in *Reexamining the Sinosphere: Transmissions and Transformations in East Asia*, edited by Nanxiu Qian, Richard J. Smith, and Bawei Zhang (Amherst: Cambria Press, 2020), 113–46; “Private Academies and Confucian Education in 18th-Century Vietnam in East Asian Context: The Case of Phúc Giang Academy,” in *Confucian Academies in East Asia*, edited by Vladimir Glomb, Eun-Jeung Lee, and Martin Gehlmann (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 89–125; and Nguyễn Hoàng Thân and Nguyễn Tuấn Cường, “Sinitic Brushtalk in Vietnam’s Anti-Colonial Struggle against France: Phan Bội Châu’s Silent Conversations with Influential Chinese and Japanese Leaders in the 1900s,” *China and Asia: A Journal in Historical Studies* 2 (2020), 270–93.

<sup>107</sup>Nguyễn Tô Lan and Rostislav Berezkin, “From Chinese Precious Scrolls to Vietnamese True Scriptures: Transmission and Adaptation of the Miaoshan Story in Vietnam,” *East Asian Publishing and Society* 8.2 (2018), 107–44; “The Hanoi Reprint of the Precious Scroll of Incense Mountain (1772) and the Printing of Buddhist Works in Northern Vietnam at the End of the Eighteenth Century,” *East Asian Publishing and Society* 11.1 (2021), 1–33; and *Phật Bà bể Nam: Truyện Quán Âm Diệu Thiện tại Việt Nam* [Buddhist Lady of the Southern Sea: the Miaoshan-Guanyin legend in Vietnam] (Hanoi: Đại học Sư Phạm, 2021).

<sup>108</sup>Anne Cheng, *Lịch sử tư tưởng Trung Quốc* [History of Chinese thought], trans. by Nguyễn Thị Hiệp, et al. (Hanoi: Thế giới, 2022).

Today, Vietnam is, fortunately, free of the trials and tribulations it experienced in the past, and the Sinological knowledge that was produced in the past has returned. Further, there are scholars today who are extremely well-versed in Sinological knowledge and skills, and who make use of that knowledge and those skills to research and write about Vietnam. In their efforts, I would argue that we can identify a constant that has persisted through the trials and tribulations of the twentieth century, namely, an emotional attachment to what Vietnamese refer to as Han learning. In the 1920s, scholars felt a direct connection to Han learning, viewing it as the national essence. In the 1960s in South Vietnam, while some scholars still felt this way, others harbored fond nostalgic associations between Han learning and the days of their youth. Today, I would argue, the scholars who work with texts in Literary Sinitic also feel a genuine attachment to those texts and to the people who created them. They are proud of the role Han learning played in the Vietnamese past and admire the generations of scholars covered in this article who strove to explain and share their knowledge of Han, or Sinological, learning.

**Competing interests.** The author declares none.